Laughter as Healing: How RED NOSES Palestine impacted Rehabilitation Centres for Children with Disabilities

A creative intervention by RED NOSES Palestine and the Palestinian Circus brings relief, strengthens resilience and professional capacities of caregivers and mothers at the rehabilitation centres.

In a heartfelt effort to bring joy and psychological support to three rehabilitation centres in Ramallah, RED NOSES Palestine (RNPS), in collaboration with the Palestinian Circus (PC), has completed thirty innovative relief sessions. This initiative, known as the Marah Project, is funded through the Innovation Fund and supported by RED NOSES International (RNI), in collaboration with the Palestinian Circus (PC).

As a first phase of the Marah Project, RNPS and PC conducted a five-day Training of Trainers (TOT) preparatory workshop. The workshop brought together healthcare clowns from RNPS and circus artists from the PC to collaboratively design creative and dynamic sessions for mothers and caregivers of children with disabilities. Over the five days, participants

developed a series of interactive workshops that would later form the foundation of the relief sessions. A psychologist also provided specialised training on working with people with disabilities, ensuring the interventions were sensitive, inclusive, and therapeutically sound.

Play, Laughter & Therapy: Evidence from Research

Research consistently highlights the transformative power of laughter and clowning for children with disabilities. A 2022 study published in the Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities involving 52 children with intellectual disability showed a significant increase in playfulness after six months of healthcare-clown-led interventions[1]. Another pilot study reported that therapeutic clown visits led to increased smiling, reduced grimacing, and overall positive mood changes, even among children with profound disabilities[2].

These findings align with broader research on hospital-clowning: In clinical settings, such interventions help reduce anxiety, support resilience, and enhance social engagement in children with various conditions[3]

Recognising this, Marah project employed these insights by training staff in creative, playful techniques—like clowning games, magic tricks, circus arts, exaggeration games, and ball play—to strengthen emotional bonds, manage challenging behaviours, and support children's developmental needs.

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[1] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10100092/

[2] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51531094_Physiological_and_Emotional_Responses_of_Disabled_Children_to_Therapeutic_Clowns_A_Pilot_Study

[3] https://www.rednoses.org/fileadmin/international/4_What_we_do/3_Scientific_Research/Research_Nugget_Mental_health_of_hospitalised_children_and_their_parents.pdf

Interactive Relief Sessions

Thirty interactive relief sessions were conducted at three rehabilitation centres from November 2024 to May 2025, including Nahda Women's Association, Jasmine Charitable Society, and Star Mountain Rehabilitation Centre, where the staff and caregivers explored a range of creative tools aimed at reducing anxiety and panic—using playful diversion techniques, enhancing attention and engagement—through improvisation and games, and boosting emotional connection—by engaging in laughter and shared joy.

"*The sessions helped us to respond better to the children with disabilities—for example, if a child has a panic attack, I found a way to handle it through the games I learned*," remarked a caregiver. "*We also got a lot of ideas and developed them to suit our children with disabilities*."

The Impact of Laughter on Children

The impact was evident: caregivers reported that laughter helped break emotional barriers, evoke social interaction, and promote emotional regulation.

"*You could see it in their body language—less tension, more movement, more eye contact. Even the quieter children began to smile or clap. That kind of breakthrough is incredibly rare in our day-to-day work*."

Neuroscientific insights show that laughter triggers endorphin release, reduces cortisol, supports immune function, enhances mood, and improves social cohesion—a powerful combination of therapeutic benefits [4].

Emotional Release for Caregivers

The sessions were also a relief space for the staff members:

"*You helped us face the challenging atmosphere and became a source of emotional release for us*," shared a staff member at Star Mountain Rehabilitation Centre.

"*I used the exaggeration game with the children as a way to convince them to stay longer in the session… This encourages me to improve and use it more often*," noted a caregiver at Jasmine Charitable Society.

Celebrating Family Through Performance

To conclude this emotional and educational journey, there will be a final creative performance honouring caregivers—both mothers and staff—at rehabilitation centres.

The performance highlights love and resilience, and their vital role in healing and supporting children with disabilities. The performance will be presented by a group of circus artists from the Palestinian Circus and healthcare clowns from RED NOSES Palestine, featuring a blend of circus arts and clowning.

[4] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27439375/

A Model for Healing Through Creativity

Marah Project exemplifies how art-based, evidence-informed interventions can create meaningful change in rehabilitation environments. By equipping caregivers with playful therapeutic tools grounded in laughter research, RNPS and PC have established a replicable model that bridges emotional care with practical support.

With backing from RED NOSES International and the dedication of local artistic and healthcare communities, **Marah project affirms that even in the most difficult settings, laughter, creativity, and connection can be powerful tools for healing and hope.**

Read more on Marah project : https://www.rednoses.org/news-stories/news/detail/innovation-fund-spotlight-the-marah-project-joyful-inclusion/