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[TBO.com](#) > [News](#) > [Carrollwood](#)

Students Learn To Clown Around

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As a part of Hillel School of Tampa's community service initiative, seventh-graders are learning the art of clowning.

Once the students complete their training, they will perform clown acts in assisted living homes, children's wings in hospitals and city-run day care centers.

Daisy the Clown, Carol Berg, trains the students Sunday afternoons at the school, 2020 W. Fletcher Ave.

"First the children have to come up with a clown persona and a name," said Amy Wasser, head of the school. "Then we will visit places in the community to cheer people up."

Hillel School is a Jewish Community Day School for kindergarten through eighth grade. Students learn a regular curriculum along with Jewish studies to help them learn about their Jewish heritage.

As a part of their studies, seventh-graders are learning how to be Mitzvah clowns. Wasser said the Mitzvah teachings show students they have an obligation to do good for others.

"The school is committed to having the students out helping in the community," Wasser said. "We show them they have a responsibility beyond themselves."

The school applied for a grant for a community service project from WFTS, Channel 28.

After receiving the \$1,000 grant, the school spent half on balloons, air pumps, wigs, makeup kits, gloves, noses and some costumes and accessories for their clowns in training.

The other half of the grant will go to a future community service project.

Seventh-grader Rebecca Wolf said she is excited about going out to hospitals and nursing homes to try to bring joy to the people there.

"Throughout Hillel, we learn how to be a good person," Wolf said. "It will be nice to go out into the real world and do good things for others."

Brett Doliner, also a seventh-grader, said he thinks it will be neat to make up acts and see how people react to them.

"At Hillel, we are told to be Mitzvahs and this is the way to follow through," Doliner said.

Before the seventh-graders can perform their clown acts, they have to learn how to put on clown makeup, make balloon animals and create their own clown personality.

Students learn what it means to be a clown from the eight clown commandments.

The most important rule in clowning is to entertain the audience, not to make fun of them. Other rules include being professional and staying in character.

“So much of being a clown is trying to make people feel good about themselves,” Wasser said.

“Students need to open up a dialogue with people and make them smile.”

Many students in the class are excited about making up a clown personality. Shaina Linsky said she already knows what her name and her gimmick will be.

“I will wear a different colored dress and my name will be Rainbow,” Linsky said. “My personality will be perky, and I am going to always walk sideways.”

Shira Wasser and Katie Reisman are going to be twin clowns with the names Silly and Milly.

Lauren Saady-Saxe said she is looking forward to going out in the community as a clown. “I am excited to go out as a character,” Saady-Saxe said. “I don’t need to be embarrassed, I can just be silly and have fun.”

The class hopes to begin giving performances in December.

For more information about the school or to request a clown performance, call 963-2242 or visit www.hillelschool.com