

A mother who cares for, holds the hands of kids with special needs

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Kolkata: When Minu Rudra's younger daughter, Prachi, was diagnosed with low IQ and ADHD, her world crumbled as she grappled with crippling depression and suicidal thoughts. With assistance, a mentality change happened, but it also brought a realisation—that Kolkata did not have an existing infrastructure to help someone with similar need. It was from a deep-rooted desire to fill such a gap that Caring Minds, iCanPsy and Café iCanPsy, which now help hundreds of persons with special needs, were formed.

With help from her psychiatrist, Minu was able to pull herself out of a 'bottomless'



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void. Her journey, however, started with her daughter. They travelled across the world, seeking assessment and therapy in the hope of finding but in vain. While on this journey, Minu realised how important her own well-being was to her daughter's well-being. "One day, I realised my daughter is happy if I am happy. She will never be happy if I am not in her care," Minu says. "That day was the last I spent in the company as a caterpillar, that day was the death of a caterpillar and the birth of a butterfly."

Minu returned to Kolkata and began to pursue her long cherished dream of becoming



Minu Rudra (top) founded Caring Minds, iCanPsy and Café iCanPsy, which now help hundreds of persons with special needs

My son had a learning disability. Caring Minds was of the greatest help. The first day I left the clinic, I was a tension-free mother. My son's special educator has been extremely helpful, available even during vacations and the lockdown. Along with my son, I am a completely changed person. His academic results have changed drastically. His anxiety has also reduced

— Mother of 14-year-old Debajani (name changed)

a doctor. On completing her course, she began to work as a student counsellor at JIBHU and St Xavier's College, along with operating a clinic out of Belle Vue Clinic. She used to refer her patients to different specialities. "I would

not want to come up obtained a stay order, fearing visits from 'mad people'. But Minu remained undeterred. Caring Minds started out of a single room in her house in BBI, and was later shifted to its current spacious location on Serris Bore Road. Today, it offers a whole range of services. The mental health clinic has three wings and offers counselling, group therapy. Along with the clinical wing that has trained mental health professionals, Caring Minds also has an 'academics wing' that conducts workshops and offers Jadavpur University-recognised psychology courses. It also houses an 'outreach and awareness wing' that works to spread mental health awareness across the country, especially training educators to recognise potential red flags.

iCanPsy started in 2016 to provide a space for children with special needs after their schooling, and now caters to all age groups. The institution engages them in academic activities and different kinds of hobbies. Café iCanPsy started in 2017, was intended to empower special needs children. A 50-seater café, it engages children with special needs in service and is open to everyone.

To help, Minu asks people to be sensitised, especially those pursuing a career in clinical psychology. Those wanting to help can also become a special educator. "The biggest barrier is the stigma behind mental health issues," she says. "People are still not aware, especially in second- and third-tier cities. They are only concerned with 'big boy language' (what will people say). I want people to spread awareness about mental health so we can move forward to a much more aware society."