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HEALTH CARE: Brainworks grew from observing best practices Rehab service picks through best ideas

By Christopher Clark
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It's been five years since Arden McGregor and her husband, Russell Temple, took a leap of faith and launched a business dedicated to helping people with brain injuries, chronic pain and behavioural disorders. They were the only staff members at the time. They called their creation Brainworks.

Next week, they will celebrate an amazing five years of growth and treatment. From two employees, Brainworks has grown to 37, spread across Southwestern Ontario. But the number that matters most to McGregor is the hundreds of people she and her team have treated in those five years, fulfilling her initial goal of providing the best possible service to people often in personal crisis.

"The whole thing started because we wanted to offer top-notch services that were client-focused," says McGregor, 42.

She has been interested in brain injuries and treatment for many years, including her time at university. She earned both a bachelor's and master's in psychology and later became a member of the College of Psychology at the associate level and a certified brain injury specialist and trainer.

She worked for the Ministry of Health through Parkwood Hospital for several years, during which time she often toured healthcare facilities in Ontario and the U.S., observing and consulting to augment local knowledge of brain injury treatment.

When she travelled, she made two mental lists - practices of which she approved and those she did not. Five years ago, she and Temple began offering treatment that adhered exclusively to the list of positives she had seen in her travels. To this day, she continues to drop in and learn from healthcare facilities, even when she's on vacation.

"I never take a vacation without searching out some place where we can stop in and have a look around," she says with a chuckle.

With the chance to create something from scratch, she set it up exactly how she wanted it. That meant hiring employees, not contracting with associates. Every counsellor, social worker and rehab therapist at Brainworks is a full-fledged employee. Many work in small towns across Southwestern Ontario, but their practice is entirely Brainworks.

"That was very important to me," says McGregor. "I wanted to create a culture

here, where we work as a team. We often see people dealing with trauma, people who are going through hell on earth, so all our people are clinicians and they work together to support our clients and each other. It can be a difficult time for everyone.”

Nearly 80 per cent of Brainworks clients have brain injuries of some kind, the majority from a motor vehicle collision. Treatment is not covered by OHIP but often is paid by insurers, which brings up another point about which McGregor was adamant from Day One.

“We’re not affiliated with any insurance company; we’re not on any lists,” she says. “We do what’s best for our clients, period.”

That kind of independent thinking has also shaped the way Brainworks has grown. It has been approached many times by large health companies to merge or sell.

“It’s been tempting at times,” she admits. “But when it comes down to it, unless an organization has a philosophy in keeping with ours, in keeping with our vision, we can’t do it.”

Instead, with Temple guiding the business and financial side, the plan is to continue expanding province-wide. That’s as big as McGregor wants to get.

She recently opened a Huntsville office, where she spends at least half her time. With family in the area and a history of spending time there, she plans to retire in the area. Working from there is the first step toward achieving that goal.

But that is many years down the road. In the meantime, Brainworks will celebrate its 5th anniversary with a party November 10. Anyone is welcome at the Best Western Stoneridge Inn from 4-6 p.m. In conjunction with the party, Brainworks staff will be contributing a total of \$5,000 to five of their favourite charities. To attend, simply RSVP through the company’s website.

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