

Creating Integrated Employment Jobs for People with Acquired Brain injury

Dr. Drew A. Nagele and Katie Carnevale 23 March 2017

Summary

People with moderate to severe acquired brain injury (ABI) have difficulty obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment due to cognitive impairments from their brain injury, which affects their daily performance, behavior, and social abilities. It is our strong belief that it is important for every individual, regardless of the extent of their disability, to have the opportunity for productive daily activity. There are benefits to society and improving one's financial situation, contributing to taxes and participating in consumerism, but also benefits in terms of an individual's sense of self image, self-confidence, and overall sense of self-worth.

Woods Services has launched several social enterprise businesses in response to the shortage of community-integrated job opportunities for people with disabilities. In the past year, BeechTree transformed from being a volunteer "Work-Unit" in the Stabler NeuroRehab Clubhouse into a social enterprise that employs people with brain injury to work in a community-integrated

business.

The beautiful drawings on the BeechTree product labels will catch your eye. The luscious scents of the line's body washes, body lotions, hand sanitizers, and soaps will awaken your senses. BeechTree's line of bath and body products is produced, bottled, labeled, packaged and shipped by individuals who have acquired brain injury who are receiving services at Beechwood NeuroRehab, a program of Woods Services located in Langhorne, PA.

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For any of us, work gives us a sense of who we are in relation to the world. Supported work ensures that the work is a good match to the skills a person has, and provides additional training and support to ensure that the individual will be successful in that work. Our goal in operating BeechTree is to provide a variety of work opportunities that ensure that every individual, even the most severely impaired, can participate in work and thereby feel their role in society.

Simply stated, social enterprises apply commercial strategies for social good. In the U.S., according to data from the 2012 Great Social Enterprise Census, the social enterprise movement is catching on with 60% of the responding businesses being created after 2006 and 29% since 2011.¹ Social enterprises are created to solve a social problem. Beechwood NeuroRehab needed to provide work experiences that helped to prepare people with brain injury for community employment, thus BeechTree was born.

As part of their brain injury rehabilitation, employees with and without disabilities work alongside BeechTree Manager Chris Rushforth to prepare and ship orders of bath and body products all across the country, and attend events where they market their products, such as farmer's markets and street fairs. "Coming to work every day is an

inspiration. Our workers put their heart and soul into each batch of BeechTree product," said Rushforth. "Their attitude is always positive and it shows in what they produce."

The artwork on the product labels are designed by the employees and the scents, their names and product colors are selected by them as well. Their products carry names such as "Proper Gentleman," "Pleasant Sail," and "Panda's Paradise." The body lotion consistently receives excellent reviews on the company's website and social media pages.

Making a high-quality product was important to BeechTree's employees from the start. They knew that they might have to charge a little more than what one can purchase at the local mall, but they felt that the mission behind the products would help to sell them. They ensure that all their products are made with the highest quality natural ingredients.

The lotion's main ingredient is sunflower oil. Many bath, body and beauty products are made using palm oil or one of its many derivatives. Woods Services, in partnership with the Philadelphia Zoo, promotes the use of products made from sustainably-sourced palm oil (palm oil grown on existing cleared land using sustainable farming) or alternatives to palm oil. As demand for palm oil grows, habitat for extraordinary wildlife continues to disappear because rain forests are destroyed to make way for new

palm oil plantations.

Because of Woods' advocacy in this area, Rushforth knew that he had to be careful about the ingredients selected for BeechTree's products and guided the employees toward using sunflower oil.

The supplier for BeechTree's sunflower oil lotion base is a certified B Corporation. B Corps are for-profit companies that are certified by the nonprofit "B Lab" when they meet certain standards of environmental and social ethics, accountability and sustainability. The sunflower oil supplier is a small, family-owned operation that has done many things to promote a healthy environment for future generations, such as installing solar panels to produce up to 11% of their own energy and using bicycles for local deliveries when possible.

BeechTree relies on its inspiring story and social mission as the driving force behind its sales. Its in-person sales at special events are particularly effective when one of the BeechTree employees tells his or her personal story. The company sells most of its products through its website, www.beechtreeproducts.org.

They've made in-roads with health food stores and are selling their products in three stores in the Langhorne area in addition to stocking their products at the Yellow Daffodil Flower and Gift Shop (another Woods' social enterprise) located in the Pine Watson Shopping Center in

Langhorne.

BeechTree has an ambitious business plan that includes a move to a larger work space in the community and expansion of businesses selling their products. They also plan to share the results of their business model with other organizations wanting to establish social enterprises.

References

1. Ben Thornley, "The Facts on US Social Enterprise," The Huffington Post (November 8, 2012), accessed March 20, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-thornley/social-enterprise_b_2090144.html.

About Beechwood NeuroRehab

Beechwood NeuroRehab was established in 1979 as a community-integrated program for individuals with acquired brain injury (ABI) and other neurological disorders. One of the first brain injury treatment programs in the country, Beechwood NeuroRehab responded to the growing need to provide specialized services for vulnerable individuals who had sustained an acquired brain injury, and could no longer live or work in the same manner they did before their injuries. The program provides a comprehensive continuum of rehabilitation, vocational, and residential services for medically stable adults, age 18 or older, in need of

post-acute rehabilitation and life-long living supports. Since its inception, the program has grown and evolved in response to the needs of individuals served, and in response to the resource environment supporting these services. The addition of a Brain Injury Clubhouse program in 2012 and a Supported Employment program in 2014 further enhanced the wide array of services for which Beechwood NeuroRehab has come to be known.

About the authors

Dr. Drew A. Nagele, PsyD, CBIST is the Executive Director of Beechwood NeuroRehab, a Woods' post acute, community integrated program for people who have an acquired brain-injury. Dr. Nagele is trained as a NeuroPsychologist with a 30+ year career in creating and running brain injury rehabilitation programs for children, adolescents, and adults with acquired brain injury. Dr. Nagele has provided leadership in the field of brain injury, and has served on the Board of Directors of the Brain Injury Association of America, and was the Founding President of the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania, where he still serves as Treasurer. He is also the Treasurer for the International Brain Injury Clubhouse Alliance (IBICA). Currently, he is Co-Chair of the National Collaborative on Children's Brain Injury and Co-Chair of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine's Pediatric and Adolescent

Task Force. He is a Certified Brain Injury Specialist Trainer and serves on the Board of Governors of the Academy for the Certification of Brain Injury Specialists (ACBIS). Dr. Nagele is a Clinical Professor at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine's where he teaches doctoral and post-doctoral trainees in Neuropsychology, Neuropathology, and Cognitive Rehabilitation. He is a frequent speaker on a wide range of topics related to brain injury prevention and rehabilitation around the country. Dr. Nagele received his BS in Psychology from Ursinus College, his MA in Community Psychology from Temple University, and his PsyD in Professional Psychology from Central Michigan University. He is a Licensed Psychologist in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Katie Carnevale is the Communications Manager at Woods Services and manages the organization's websites, social media pages, and marketing and communication initiatives. She has a master's degree in broadcast journalism from Syracuse University and several years of experience in writing, editing, and marketing coordination.