Enabling Connections

BY ANKUR DESAI

Sue Crawford likes to keep herself busy. With what little time she has between working as a registered nurse at Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH), completing her master's degree at the University of Calgary, teaching pediatrics at Bow Valley College, and assisting as a director for a Between Friends summer camp, Crawford runs her own startup, a social enterprise called Enable.

Working as a registered nurse, Crawford created her startup after too often seeing the lack of support young people with disabilities were receiving from their community and parents. Frustrated and stressed caregivers in need of respite would often drop off and leave patients at ACH emergency to be temporarily cared for by hospital staff.

"There has to be something more for health promotion that we can do to support families and the community before they reach a point of breakdown," says Crawford who, identifying a gap in service for families and communities, took action.

Enable is a service that connects people with disabilities affordable and reliable support workers who provide simple social services such as pickups, drop-offs, respite work and hang-outs. Connections are made by Enable's matchmaking team who look at each party's shared interests, activities and availability.

The goal is to not only create meaningful partnerships but to also create lasting friendships between support workers and persons with disabilities.

By getting more people out and enjoying accessible activities, Enable is helping to foster a stronger sense of belonging and community for persons with disabilities.

"This area within the disability community is quite collaborative in nature," says Crawford.

Crawford has received support from various organizations including the University of Calgary, Innovate Calgary and organizations such as Between Friends, providing Enable with clients and support workers.

Crawford has also taken advantage of government funding to help pay for the support workers' wages, which helps pass on savings to families signing up with Enable. Crawford hopes that with Enable's growth, it will allow the company to accept lower-income families.

In 2017, Crawford won an Innovation Development Award through the University of Calgary, and won scholarships for innovation development in 2016 and 2017, along with several other awards.

Crawford's next step is to switch Enable's matchmaking service from a manual to an automated system, and to work towards expanding the service to a national level.

To learn more about Enable, visit enablecommunity.ca. To learn more about Innovate Calgary and how it supports new and emerging entrepreneurs, visit innovatecalgary.com. B

ABOVE: SUE CRAWFORD.
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