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***ENHANCING THE
QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE
PEOPLE THEY SERVE***



ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE PEOPLE THEY SERVE

By Heather Navarra, The Write Type

Seven years ago, Ellen Silbernagel envisioned a company that could change the healthcare industry by providing high-quality services, uniquely customized to the individual needs of each client. As the President of Abbey Therapeutic Services, Inc. (ATS), Ellen has developed that concept into reality. A contract care services provider, ATS is on the leading edge of healthcare in British Columbia, providing complex care, assisted living and home support services. Ellen's ability to visualize and develop an innovative core philosophy has formed the foundation for the company's success.

This dedicated professional has always had an interest in the healthcare industry. She met husband Wade in 1985 while attending the Nursing program at Douglas College. In 1994, Ellen began working with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) as a caregiver/contractor. She joined Abbey Therapeutic Counselling as a partner in 1998. The name was changed in 2000 to Abbey Therapeutic Services, Inc. (ATS); in 2001, she purchased the company. At that time, staff and employees numbered approximately 20.

"After becoming the sole proprietor of

ATS, my vision was to go into long-term care," shares Ellen. "I foresaw a great need for complex care staffing and I felt I could make a difference in the care provided. Our mission, vision and philosophy were updated to reflect our long-term goal for the company: enriching the lives of others through care."

From 2001 to 2004, company policies and the basics for the clinical requirements were developed: work practices, expectations of Registered Nurses, industry safeguards, staff education programs, and a focus on auditing and maintaining service excellence.



Contributing significantly to the company's success are ATS's dedicated management team, including Ellen's husband Wade, her sister Chari and her friend since high school Verla, along with Gayle, Shannon, Louise and Mara.

Today, ATS has grown to over 400 employees, comprised of highly competent professionals such as RNs, LPNs, Recreation and RCAs. "Our employees are dedicated, loyal and caring individuals," says Ellen. "Management is focussed on ensuring quality care while maintaining strong communication with employees. Our company is dedicated to creating a strong team atmosphere."

As a residential care service provider, ATS offers services on a contract basis, either to individuals through assisted living programs or in a care facility. Stakeholders range from a wide variety of organizations: ATS's largest stakeholder is Retirement Concepts, a Canadian company providing a full range of services to seniors and their families, and one of the largest private owners of long-term care facilities in BC; ATS provides residential care contracting to four of their sites.

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ATS also works with three regions of the health authority, ICBC, Work Safe BC and MCFD, as well as a number of private clients, including those recently released from the hospital who continue to require care. Specializing in Acquired/Traumatic Brain Injury, ATS often works hand-in-hand to support a plan of care as recommended by physicians, occupational therapists, rehabilitation coordinators and case workers. Services vary and are adapted to meet the needs of the client or contract. "We're not rigid in our approach," Ellen notes. "Contracts usually include a six-month trial period to ensure a good match of skills to needs. We respect the policies and procedures of the facilities we contract with, sharing our knowledge to assist in improving each site's operational efficiency." Reliable and responsive, the company is able to address

critical needs around the clock through a 24-hour emergency pager system that provides immediate access to qualified support.

ATS's core beliefs form the cornerstone for the company's success. "We believe in respect for the dignity and worth of individuals, whether they are residents, families,

employees or other service providers," says Ellen. "Every individual has the right to receive healthcare based on their unique needs and clinical diagnosis, regardless of creed, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion or economic status. We understand that the health of an individual is holistic and includes physical, emotional, spiritual and social well-being, and that residents must be afforded personal and informational privacy. Evaluating the quality of care services on an ongoing basis is a focus for us, and we cooperate with, promote and assist any health-related agency or association with similar objectives in furthering healthcare."

From the beginning, Ellen recognized the value of continuing education for staff, in order to afford them career development opportunities while also providing ATS's clients with specializations not readily found elsewhere. For example, training to care for patients with dual and/or triple diagnoses along with aging allows caregivers to provide a higher level of care and understanding.

"Our company is innovative and proactive in developing solutions for staffing requirements in the healthcare industry," shares Ellen. "We offer incentives for staff to continue their education. We are currently working alongside Koininia College on a pilot program to increase the education of



Resident Care Aides, specifically in long-term care facilities. One of our goals is to reduce the number of staff accessing a resident's room, giving more accountability and continuity in care, which results in a higher standard of care for residents."

The company actively encourages feedback from clients/residents, family members, stakeholders and employees by promoting open lines of communication. Periodic surveys are conducted and any concerns are addressed promptly and

apart from its competitors.

ATS is proud to have received accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, an independent, not-for-profit body promoting quality, value and optimal outcomes of service. Ellen has been a member of the Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Professionals since 2002.

With ATS's exponential success and widespread industry recognition, word-of-mouth referrals abound, with little need to advertise for business. Indeed, organizations posting RFPs for healthcare services will often contact ATS, inviting them to bid. Recognition from stakeholders

and other health regions. Another 'vision' of Ellen's would be to partner with the Ministry of Health in formulating industry standards for companies like hers and for nursing agencies to be accredited, in order to provide accountability and basic standards across the province before being allowed to provide services that are paid by government funds.

Dedicated to enhancing the lives of the people that ATS provides services for, Ellen loves what she does. It's clear that she is significantly impacting many lives in a profoundly positive way. "It's what we contribute that gives meaning to our lives," says Ellen. ATS's quest for excellence has placed them at the forefront of the industry, enhancing the quality of life for both their staff and the individuals they serve.



confidentially. Regularly-scheduled audits identify opportunities and demonstrate accountability for the level of care.

Honest and trustworthy, the company provides precedent-setting guarantees not normally available in the industry: ATS provides a written summary of hours worked versus hours paid and, if service is below the contracted amount, ATS credits back the hours. This is unique in the industry and of great value to clients. There are no 'cost plus' situations where amounts can vary substantially and budget control can be lost. This combination of accountability and high quality of service clearly sets ATS

has been very satisfying, but Ellen quickly credits success to the dedication of her management and staff. "I have the 'vision' but my team really has the drive to make it happen," she says. Contracts are for a set number of years with a renewal option, providing stability to the company and employees but most importantly for the residents and their families. ATS is one of very few companies that has never lost a facility at contract renewal.

Long-term goals include growth that provides services to an increasing number of clients, along with expansion in current

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