

Excel Learning program targets those with learning difficulties

By Tabitha Wells

One of the most difficult things we can experience in life, whether personally or as a parent, is struggling with the ability to learn due to a potentially uncontrollable factor in our lives.

Whether it is simply a struggle to understand, a disorder like dyslexia, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), autism, sensory processing or anything else that affects our learning, an even bigger struggle can be to find the support to combat it.

Excel Learning is a program designed specifically with that in mind. The organization, which operates under the name Excel Strategic Learning Centre, pursues the goal of helping both children and adults overcome an array of learning difficulties through programs in neuroplasticity.

Juanita Pomroy-McLeod, a recent addition to the area, explained that the program isn't a tutoring tool, but rather is designed to help change the way one thinks.

"The programs are designed to remap your neural pathways," she said. "When babies learn to talk, listen, copy, it's mapping their pathways as they go. If there is something that impedes that, such as if the child has lots of ear infections so they don't hear right, that impacts their learning capabilities. This is built all around neuroplasticity, which is basically brain training."

A former teacher, Pomroy-McLeod witnessed many children falling through the cracks because of their learning hindrances. While there were all kinds of services and special classes for kids with different learning disabilities, none of them really focused on developing their abilities to help them learn in school.

"Every year, more kids are integrated into classrooms with major problems and no proper support," she explained. "The parents are lost and the teachers are lost. After so much of it, I decided it was time to stop complaining and do something."

Excel learning employs three "methods" or programs, which can be tailored, based on the needs of the person receiving services. The techniques include Tomatis, Cellfield and the Interactive Metronome Method, which are utilized through a computer or tablet, and are designed to focus on different types of training.

These programs have been around for 30 to 40 years, and despite not becoming a highly known about or popular method, have never seen a negative outcome. They have been used to help students deal with everything from dyslexia, anxiety, stress, sensory processing disorders, developmental delays and even ADHD, through helping the student learn to focus on an individual task.

"There is always some form of improvement in the individual, and it's usually pretty dramatic," Pomroy-McLeod said. "The program is not just for kids either, but designed to help adults as well."

Her family recently moved to Orangeville from Montreal, which has program centres dedicated to this kind of learning. They also exist in B.C., but in Ontario, it is still very grassroots. Despite the challenge of not being well-known, Pomroy-McLeod is determined to help both students and adults locally who may be struggling because of a learning disability. So far, with everyone she has worked with, their progress has been significant.

"I've started with a little girl locally who has quite a few challenges, and she has already made huge strides," she said.

Pomroy-McLeod's daughter has also experienced issues with learning, and she has been working on the different programs based on her learning needs.

"The differences in my daughter are like night and day," she added.

Each client is evaluated before they begin any of the programs, and testing is done in the client's home on their own schedule, allowing flexibility for anyone to be able to benefit from it. Each of the three methods has specific evaluations, which are designed to help pinpoint strengths and weaknesses, as well as target the appropriate learning program.

"One of the really nice things about this program is the results tend to be fast," Pomroy-McLeod observed. "Usually, we see results in about three days, and the programs last about three months. The results and changes are permanent."

The programs can range from something as simple as identifying shapes and colours, to following patterns and instructions. Each training program is developed through the three techniques, and includes support through the process of regular progress reports, recommendations for schools and teachers, and parental support.

"The main thing about this is that it is not a tutoring program," Pomroy-McLeod said. "It's actually a therapeutic learning program. I go to clients' houses, and provide in-home assessments and program access so it's easy for parents and adults who have busy schedules."

She added that the programs are designed to be able to help a number of issues outside of learning disabilities as well.

"They've been proven to help with people who have depression, anxiety, brain injuries, as well as adults who have never been able to fully develop skills like reading well," she said. "A lot of adults don't like to admit it, but they struggle with reading and it can

affect their work. The programs can also address organization of tasks, especially for people who have to manage in a high pressure environment.?

To find out more about Excel Learning or to request an assessment, visit www.excellearning.ca

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Excel Learning is the only Ontario College of Teachers-certified and legally licensed practitioner in the region.