

## Excelsior mother develops video game BrainyAct to help children overcome learning disabilities

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Twin Cities families who have a child with a learning, sensory or motor disability can now turn to the newly-developed video game, BrainyAct, as an affordable and beneficial treatment option that strengthens children's motor, physical and learning skills.

Dolly Lowery, Excelsior mother and CEO of the Minnetonka company Kinuu, developed BrainyAct after seeing a need for an affordable treatment for children who have an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, sensory issues or emotional behavior disorders.

"I have a son with severe dyslexia and I spent about 10 years in clinics where I noticed that there wasn't an affordable and effective way for families to access care," Lowery said.

After 1,200 clinic visits to help her son, Lowery, who's a researcher and IT sales professional, began thinking of ways to find more affordable options for children with learning disabilities. Then one day, while cooking dinner, she suddenly thought a video game could be the solution.

In 2014, Lowery launched the company

Kinuu and sought the help of Dr. Nelson Mañé D.C., M.D., an orthopedic doctor from Tampa, Florida. Dr. Mañé has a specialty in neurobehavioral and vestibular disorders and functional medicine.

Together Lowery and Mañé developed BrainyAct, which is a series of interactive video games that help improve children's brain imbalances and motor-sensory abilities, leading to classroom success.

BrainyAct is a game for 6-14 year olds but could also be used by teens and adults.

BrainyAct stimulates under-connected pathways in the brain and creates synchronization between the body and brain through repetition and frequency.

"The whole thing about brain training is that insurance will only cover once a week, but kids need this training three times a week in order for those changes to integrate," she said. "It's like with any learning. We have to do it repetitively in order to really learn it."

The game works by stimulating children's upper and lower brain functions by testing their balance, gross motor skills, timing, rhythm, vision, perception, visual and auditory memory and cognitive, behavioral and academic

skills.

"By repeatedly playing the games, kids improve their cognitive abilities, which has resulted in better language skills, improved handwriting and stronger gross and fine motor skills along with better balance and coordination," Lowery said. "One in 15 kids face ADHD and dyslexia and one in 68 face autism spectrum disorders. BrainyAct offers hope for these kids and works the undeveloped portion of the brain that is critical to their growth and development."

Children use BrainyAct for up to 40 sessions. The full-body, motion-sensory game does an initial test to examine a child's motor, physical and learning skills. Then the games in BrainyAct are specifically tailored to help the child in areas where they may be struggling.

BrainyAct is also competitive and allows children to compete against their own scores or other children involved in the program.

"BrainyAct is a very interactive and instantaneous and the children enjoy playing BrainyAct because of the graphics and competitive features," said Lynae Peterson of Minnetrista, Kinuu's customer experience and marketing manager.

Lowery said that BrainyAct helps improve overall academic performance, speech, self-confidence, handwriting, motor planning, social skills, memory recall and concentration.

"The difference between popular therapies out there is that they focus on the academic and behavioral...whereas we work out the whole body and all motor and sensory skills,"

Lowery said.


Ten-year old Brayden has been using BrainyAct for the past month to help improve his learning skills.

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(SUN SAILOR STAFF PHOTO BY PAIGE KIEFFER)

Kinuu Coach Lindsey Jansen helps teach and cheers on 10-year-old Brayden July 19 as he plays the video game BrainyAct.




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**Health**

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connect with their family practitioner/doctor, as such professionals are skilled in assessing mental health and often will provide a referral as needed and additional community supports.”

Mothers suggested solutions at the meeting, including a mandatory mental health course every semester for all students in the district, stress management options, mental health training for staff and selected students, on-line counseling sessions with psychiatrists so students won't have to leave school and more counselors, resources and programs. They also requested that the Compass Support Groups, which assist students who are struggling with day-to-day activities in school, be expanded. The program is currently, and consistently, full with space for about 15 students.

“I joined the group because I have a daughter with mental health challenges,” said mother Amber Bullington. “She is especially good at advocating for herself and she still didn't get anywhere in the school system, and neither did I. It's possible to build these support systems for our kids. I want more resources for the kids, no matter what that might be.”

Ferris said that the high school currently has nine full-time school counselors, with one walk-in counselor always available. There is also additional support staff, including school social workers, a school psychologist, a Americans with Disabilities Act 504 coordinator and co-located mental health therapists from an outside mental health clinic.

“To students I would say, we want to know that you are struggling,” Ferris said. “We care and we want to help. Please reach out to a caring adult in your life, to a staff member, if you are comfortable doing that, and most importantly, talk with your parents and families, if you are able to do that. No matter what, know that you are not alone, and we will support you through this difficult time.”

“Don't give up,” Bullington said. “Keep pushing, keep advocating for yourself, don't be afraid to go to people and ask for help and don't be afraid to push for more resources for you

or your friends.”  
 “Reach out,” Toni said.  
 “Don't give up.”  
 Overall, the Tonka Mental Health Navigators group is working towards creating an open dialogue in the community to end the stigma on mental illness.

“I think that there is a real need for dialogue between children, parents, the district and the community,” said mother Kelly Callinan. “This will help end the stigma on mental illness. It has touched everyone. I don't feel like we're doing enough. People are talking about it more, but the school hasn't done enough.”

Parents are also advocating for changes in the community, across the metro and statewide.

“Mental health is extremely complicated and there's not just one answer,” Toni said. “It's going to be ongoing and a topic that we're going to have to continuously address.”

Toni is encouraging parents to participate in the annual American Foundation For Suicide Prevention: Out of Darkness 5K Walk at 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 16 at Como Park's picnic pavilion, 1199 Midway Pkwy., St. Paul. All of the funds donated go to suicide prevention, research, legislation, mental health education and assistance.

To learn more about the walk, visit bit.ly/2NTYBs3. To donate to Team Ana for the walk, visit bit.ly/2mR3ab6.

If you're a Minnetonka parent, mental health professional of a staff member in the district, and would like to join the Tonka Mental Health Navigator Facebook group, visit bit.ly/2OsJN4W.

For mental health resources from the Minnetonka School District, visit bit.ly/2OsjYSI.

For immediate mental health assistance, call 911, or get someone to take you directly to an emergency room or contact the National Suicide Prevention 24-hour hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or the local number at 612-873-2222.

Other crisis hotlines: Acute Psychiatric Services (612-873-3161), Carver/Scott County Mobile Crisis Services (952-442-7601) and Hennepin County Mobile Crisis Services for Children (612-348-2233).

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**Game**

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“BrainyAct is really fun and challenging,” he said. “It has really helped me focus more.”

“Seeing how far our kids, who have used BrainyAct, have come gives you hope for all the other families out there and we have the potential of making a difference for all or them,” said Peterson.

BrainyAct has already done three pilot studies in Waconia, Chicago and Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. The video game is now going to market.

At the Kinuu headquarters in Minnetonka, they have six game stations and five coaches. Many of the coaches joined the company with the desire to help



(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

Kinuu CEO Dolly Lowery.

children with learning disabilities after seeing friends or family members struggle with similar disorders.

“It has been very rewarding to see kids who have learning disabilities grow, advance and really believe in themselves,” said Coach Sam Kroening of Plymouth, who

will be a junior at St. Louis University in Missouri.

Lowery's son Christian, who's a junior at Marquette University in Milwaukee, said he was inspired to join Kinuu as a coach after attending his brother's clinic visits for dyslexia. “I really enjoy coming into this clinic

and seeing these kids make real strides and changes to their lives,” he said.

Lowery said that she is hoping to modify the BrainyAct game to help Alzheimer's and dementia patients. The company would also like to expand by adding more locations and providing the game in homes and schools.

Kinuu is currently looking for 125 families to be a part of its BrainyAct's program at the Kinuu headquarters at 16202 Hwy. 7, Minnetonka.

BrainyAct costs \$895 for 40 sessions or approximately \$23 a session, with installment payments available.

To learn more, visit kinuu.com or call 952-444-2808.

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