



Issue 99

From Seed to Synapse: Cultivating Thinking Skills with BrainWise

"Planting a seed" is how social worker Dr. Gary Brayton describes his decades-long advocacy for teaching BrainWise and training new instructors. He recently trained 32 health care workers, including longtime instructor Melissa Hudson, in Calgary, Alberta, to become BrainWise trainers. (for background see [Hull newsletter](#), [VA Newsletter](#), [BW professional group](#).)

These enthusiastic trainers, already familiar with the program, represent agencies throughout Alberta, and include five members of the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe), a First Nation Tribe. Gary and Melissa reflected on their years of teaching and promoting BrainWise among schools and nonprofit agencies serving youth.



Dr. Brayton and Melissa Hudson Celebrate her Train the Trainer BrainWise Certificate!



BrainWise in the Workplace Class

I Had Nothing

Dr. Brayton said he moved from an intervention model that had 52 steps he could not use to teaching BrainWise. "I embraced the program because it was so powerful, effective, and easy," he said. Reflecting on his 12 years of teaching BrainWise, he [emphasized his success](#) comes from having tools that

make it easy for his clients to connect their problems with poor choices. "The explanations help them recognize and understand the consequences of their behaviors for themselves and others, and how their choices impact them now and later."

Melissa shared that she began teaching BrainWise after Gary sent her a copy of *How to Be BrainWise*. She and her colleague Jocelyn Vincelli became champions after witnessing how youth embraced the program, the ease and fun they had teaching it, and its positive outcomes. Dr. Pat shared that she, too, "had nothing that worked" as a nurse counseling patients, [leading her to develop BrainWise](#).

Teaching Approaches

Gary teaches BrainWise in his private practice and consults with schools and youth agencies whose instructors teach BrainWise predominantly to groups, not individuals. Melissa teaches BrainWise to groups, sometimes with as many as 20 participants.

Both agreed that teaching BrainWise in groups offers many benefits, including peer interaction, sharing "Wizard Brain" and "Lizard Brain" experiences, collaborative work, mutual motivation, and engaging with others.

Working with individuals, on the other hand, allows the instructor to tailor the pace of the learning and customize the lessons to the participant's unique challenges and learning style. Participants can also feel they are in a "safe place," with minimal distractions. For participants with behavioral challenges, this is important.

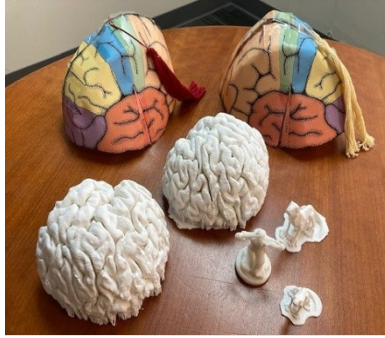
Ultimately, the best approach often depends on the specific goals, the nature of the group or individual, and the available resources.

Creativity and Repetition

In addition to their work in schools, BrainWise instructors also teach the program in facilities that provide trauma-informed care to children and youth on an inpatient and outpatient basis. Some of these agencies are in Alberta, and participants may take BrainWise for multiple years.

This continuing opportunity is welcomed by Gary, Melissa and Jocelyn, who report that their clients are excited to take ongoing BrainWise classes. They never run out of ideas for developing and offering engaging activities and are proud of the outcomes. They describe activities that range from art projects such as creating "brain caps" to brainstorming with older students on how to apply BrainWise skills in the workplace.

They even have found that changing something as simple as a class description from "BrainWise" to "BrainWise in Real Life" creates new enthusiasm. "THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS YOU CAN TEACH BRAINWISE!"



Student and Teacher Crafts Created for BrainWise Activities

The long-term retention and generalization of executive functions depend on continued practice, application in real-world contexts, and their integration into a person's daily habits and environment. The practice-dependent process varies among individuals, but its benefits are undeniable.

I Believe Our Work is Lasting!

Gary feels so strongly about BrainWise outcomes that he has no plans to retire from working with BrainWise anytime soon, if ever. He is excited to help the 32 BrainWise trainers, many of them as dedicated as Melissa, expand the BrainWise footprint in Alberta.

Gary and Melissa noted that not only are many sites using BrainWise, but also that others are requesting information on the program. They are excited by new approaches the trainers are taking and describe how a new trainer who teaches sports identified ways to integrate BrainWise into the hockey, soccer, and volleyball programs he leads.

They talked about the seeds that have taken root and how the program is growing and becoming stronger. Melissa recounted the story of a student who participated in BrainWise for three years and even returned after graduation for refresher sessions. "She was so proud of what she had accomplished!" Knowing that this is repeated with other graduates is inspirational. Melissa says we need to teach BrainWise "to support the continued growth and development of youth." Gary added, "We need BrainWise to live healthier and better lives. I will teach it as long as I can!"

A Special Welcome!

Gary and Melissa's colleague Jocelyn Vincelli welcomed her beautiful son, Lupo, on February 24, 2025. She writes that she is continually finding new appreciation for parents and is enjoying the challenge of applying BrainWise skills to real life! She predicts her passion for helping kids, teens, and parents will expand in the future.

Jocelyn's timing is perfect as she will among the first to use the forthcoming *BrainWise for Parents* manual. The manual has been vetted by several BrainWise K-5 instructors and parents, and Jocelyn's perspective as a new mother will be invaluable.



More Welcomes!

The BrainWise community sends greetings to the 32 new BrainWise trainers who attended Gary's Train the Trainer session in Calgary. We are thrilled to have your expertise in helping BrainWise reach more children, teens, and adults. You are the BEST!



**Take Care,
Dr. Pat**

On a Lighter Note

Planting Seeds.....

Last month, readers expressed pleasure watching the Pharrel Williams' YouTube video, *Happy*. Below, Malawi farmers use Pharrel's song to celebrate how they use seeds to provide food for their community.



[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!