

A Word From the Executive Director



A ray of hope for the hopeless;

I would like to introduce someone who needs no introduction: Dr. Hildegard Messenbaugh! She is the founder of Third Way Center, its Medical Director, and an inspiration to continue striving to meet the needs of the most vulnerable youth in Colorado and beyond. We call her Hildegard, and she is a force beyond nature. As a result of Hildegard's commitment, mentorship, and guidance, we continue to do whatever it takes to meet the needs of our future generations in this ever-changing, crazy residential treatment culture. She continues to research and find ways to make Third Way Center outcomes brighter.

From our founder, Hildegard Messenbaugh

For many, many centuries, everyone around the world believed that the brain was an organ that did not regenerate, i.e., "Use it or lose it" was the saying we all believed. Once the brain was injured, abilities were irrevocably lost. We believed that sometimes, other parts of the brain could be trained to take over the functions lost. Then came the era of stem cell research and the possibility of regenerating organs; however, not yet the brain, because we still hung on to the belief that there were no stem cells in the brain. But of course, we were wrong - and with that new research, hundreds of years of belief systems were overturned with the concept of neuroplasticity. The researchers were the first to make use of this new information, and stroke victims were the first to benefit. Then came the focus on TBI among famous athletes, which led to great strides and the development of programs to benefit more people. Knowledge of neuroplasticity is the 21st century's greatest leap forward in treatment and the brain.

It is interesting that at the same time, the treatment of adolescents with behavioral illnesses was in crisis. Treatment Centers were closing due to legislative changes and a belief that all teens needed to be in family settings and not in jail or placement. Seems reasonable, however, there was and is an increasing number of those teens who just could not respond to any care given; not placement, not love and care, not CBT, not DBT, not talk therapy, not behavior therapy, nothing seemed to work. Suicide and delinquency rates continued, and still continue to increase amongst the adolescent population. We began to see more treatment-resistant

clients. Many already had neurological testing, which showed "Cognitive Neurodevelopmental Deficits." When further evaluated, we found they had brain injuries from various sources; genetics such as FAS/FAE, significant birth trauma, TBIs from accidents, abuse, and sports, etc. The question became: why not apply the same cures being done to the elderly stroke victims? Why couldn't neuroplasticity work on young people's brains, as well as adults?

We consulted with Craig Rehabilitation, which was doing astounding work, added medications we had learned were helping neuroregeneration, studied Dr. Norman Doidge's work, and developed a protocol for our Third Way Center clients. We started with one unit at Lowry, trained staff, and successfully applied our brain protocol! As we learned, we discovered an increasing number of teens who have been in the "system" for many years, are severely aggressive and impulsive, and have not responded to other approaches, despite the efforts of many clinicians and placements. We are getting better at diagnosing the problem and recognizing the ongoing need for this treatment with our current population. We are in the process of integrating the protocol across all our Third Way Center facilities and making it available to clients with Cognitive Neurodevelopmental Deficits. This protocol has given hope to our clients, their families, and the staff, who at one time felt like the only option was to send them away.

Every morning, I read articles about research into the workings of this marvelous computer organ, the brain. This research will markedly change our approach to mental illness, because we will need to stop thinking only in terms of changing behavior and start thinking about treating Behavioral Illnesses.