

A Happy Caregiver Makes for a Happy Client

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Lisa Williams, Founder, UniCare Home Health Care Inc.

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With a vision to educate, support and assist families in maintaining quality of life in their homes, **Lisa Williams** founded UniCare Home Health Care Inc.

It's a home support agency that serves mostly seniors. UniCare provides personal care by highly qualified professionals in the Miramichi region.

A teacher by profession, Lisa taught in Northern Canada but gained much of her experience overseas. While on an assignment in the Middle East, Lisa realized that teaching just wasn't what she wanted to do. Spurred on by her father – who asked her to think about when she was most happy working – she realized she was happiest helping build a home-care/support business, something she did between overseas teaching assignments. Her dad then suggested Lisa go into the home-care sector for herself and launched her business in March 2008. Clearly father knows best.

In the last five years, Lisa has grown UniCare from two employees to over 90. She is also heavily involved with the education and training committee for the province of New Brunswick, which is working to establish a standardized training curriculum for all home support caregivers.

Our conversation started by me asking what it was about the home-care industry that appealed to Lisa

A: Growing up I was very close to my grandmother. She was like an extra parent in my life – I was always at her house. She was independent and always had a very good quality of life. I realized if I could give that independence and good quality of life to someone else, I would feel like I would make a difference.

Q: So, your grandmother was your inspiration?

A: She's actually this whole business. In my brochure, there's a picture of her with a message: "Dedicated to Scotty Murphy." So this business was really all about her.

Q: I know the home support industry can be a tough industry to work – and build a business within – what motivates you to be involved?

A: This can be a very stressful environment. Our industry is not just maintaining client quality of life, we help make them feel like they're a part of the community.

We get great feedback from family members "Oh, you really helped my mother and we love it." It's a good feeling to know you're helping people. What drives me to grow this business is to focus on our quality of service.

Q: So you have a strong client focus?

A: Well, it is not just a client focus but also a focus on our caregivers and their health.

If you don't have happy people working for you, it's very difficult to motivate them to do a good job.

Q: How do you support your caregivers?

A: I'm committed to investing in employee training and education because it creates a stronger workforce which, ultimately, benefits our clients. We invest a lot of time and effort in the HR part of the business – we do a ton of training.

We had 50 caregivers this year that were grandfathered into our new training program. I brought a trainer in and they had weekly courses. They trained for six months. They are now all qualified personal support workers.

Q: Sounds like a happy caregiver makes a happy client?

A: It's more about what you're offering to help the caregivers to improve themselves and be up to date on training in their field.

Q: What do you find most challenging about being an entrepreneur?

A: There are a lot of challenges right now in our industry. Sometimes I feel like my credibility is judged because I'm a woman. I think there's been a positive change in how people actually perceive women in business and it's improving for me but it can always be better.

Q: What do you feel is contributing to the positive change in how women are perceived in business?

A: More women are in higher-profile jobs now. That helps. I'm on various boards – the chamber of commerce, the Rotary and more. I hear men say, "It will get done if a woman does it." Men obviously are valuable here too. I just think women are really focused on getting the job done and doing it right.

Q: What are some other challenges that are specific to your industry?

A: Most of our funding comes from the provincial government. The economic state of the province is not very good at the moment, so there have been cutbacks in what we're receiving.

Q: What do people need to know about the home support industry?

A: Keeping people out of the hospitals is a big deal. It costs the government \$1200 a day to keep someone in the hospital. It costs \$300 a day for us to provide 24-hour service at home – and that's one-on-one care. There's a huge cost saving if we have the opportunity to deliver our service. We're the most cost-efficient service available.

Q: What are the ways you're trying to overcome some of these industry challenges?

A: Well, I'm on the board of the New Brunswick Home Support Association. I've been on the board since I started this business. We're working all the time with government. We're working on sustainability; we're trying to standardize the industry. We're trying to create a standard of care by doing training across the province so caregivers are all taking the same training.

Q: What does the future hold for your company?

A: UniCare will branch out and be more than a home-care company. We're now looking at creating other revenue streams. We're going to get into networking with other people that could be partners to improve the service. You see clients that need more than just home care.

They need someone to do their lawn. They need someone to paint. Maybe they need someone to wash windows and do the heavy house cleaning. I'd like to be the one-stop place where they come and get all the services they require.

Q: Where else do you see business opportunities?

A: There's a lot of technology that needs to come into the home support field. There's an opportunity to create another company to provide technology to improve efficiencies within the government system and within our system.

Q: So you're a true entrepreneur who's always looking for ways to innovate, grow and develop?

A: There are so many opportunities in the health-care field – the possibilities are pretty much endless.

Q: What advice would you give to someone who's sitting on the edge of an idea, like you were, about just going for it?

A: If you're not working to your full potential, if you have an idea and you think it's going to work, it's worth the risk.

Q: What do you do to keep yourself sharp?

A: This year was a big growing experience. I was accepted into the Wallace McCain Institute's Entrepreneurial Leaders Program and graduated in June. ELP gave me the opportunity to think outside

the box. Participating in ELP helped to refocus both on me and my business. This year I was pushed way outside my comfort zone.

Q: How would you finish the following sentence: 'A leader's job is to '

A: A leader's job is to support staff and help them lead.

Dave Veale is a leadership coach and founder of Vision Coaching Inc. in Saint John. He can be reached by email at Dave@VisionCoachingInc.com or via Twitter [@Dave_Veale](https://twitter.com/Dave_Veale).
