

Leader of Tomorrow: Dawn Harsch

Company: Exquisicare Inc.

When Dawn Harsch graduated from university and went to work at an extended care facility for the elderly, little did she know that her experiences there would change the course of her life. "I was just shocked that that's how we care for our elderly," she says. "These are vulnerable people who have oftentimes built this country, fought in wars, and I thought that we could be doing something better." A little over a decade later, her dream of "something better" had become a reality. Westcliff Place, the first Exquisicare home, is a residential estate home of almost 7,000 square feet in a residential neighbourhood. "We have two staff 24/7 for 10 clients, one of whom is a professional nurse. In a traditional facility you have one nurse for 100 clients."

While her vision of a kinder, gentler future for our most senior citizens is fuelled by love and respect, there's another future that Harsch, who earned an MBA in addition to her nursing degree, is very cognisant of. That of the long-term care industry itself. "It's a growing population and there's a huge demand for it. The Baby Boomers, as they age, are becoming less accepting of that institutional model of care."

Harsch says that the best advice she ever received was from a friend who told her to quit her day job. "You need to follow your passion. So that's what I did." That passion knows no bounds, evidently. While pursuing her goal of opening more homes in Edmonton and expanding to additional cities in Western Canada, Harsch somehow also finds time to volunteer with a number of community leagues and charities. She's also a member of the Edmonton Rotary Club, the Alberta Association of Gerontology, both the Alberta and Canadian Gerontology Nurses Associations and the Society on Aging.

