

Franchise Mentor: Becoming a Brain Balance Franchisee Was a Personal Decision for Mother of Four (Part 2)

Franchise Chatter

This post is the second of two parts. To read Part 1, please click [here](#).

No Prior Educational Experience

Thomas said prior experience in education and working with children with special needs is not a requirement to be a franchisee. That expertise will come from the staff that is hired. Employees also go through a rigorous training period before working directly with children, she said. Neuro-academic teachers and sensory-motor coaches are required to have more than 20 hours of hands-on, supervised, in-center training.

Thomas said employment fluctuates at her center in the summer when she hires additional staff, but she generally has about 10 employees, including a center director, two assistant directors, a program director, two sensory-motor coaches, and two teachers. There is also a nutritionist for the center, who works as an independent contractor.

Finding qualified staff has not been a problem, she said, because funding cuts in local school systems have created a surplus of special needs teachers who are looking for work. Plus, Thomas was familiar with many educators and therapists who worked with her son before she discovered Brain Balance.

“I have found in my experience that employees find me,” she said. “I had a lot of people approach me.”

Marketing Brain Balance

Thomas has also had success attracting parents and children to her program. She is one of only two centers now open in Ohio and her business in Canton attracts customers from all over Northeast Ohio and from as far away as Columbus, several hours away.

She orders any print advertising and promotional materials, which are customized for her market, directly from a corporate website, but most of her business is generated through referrals from parents who have seen their children succeed with the program.

“Locally, we do a lot of grassroots marketing because our biggest source is parent referrals,” she said.

Thomas will partner with organizations such as Autism Speaks for special events where she will set up a booth to talk with parents and disseminate information about the Brain Balance program. She also attends kindergarten fairs when parents are enrolling their children into a school system at the beginning of the year to



be sure they know about her business. She also does a lot of lecturing in her community to professional organizations such as chiropractors and pediatricians to educate them about the Brain Balance approach.

Paying It Forward

One of her best practices that has been particularly successful is handing out “admit one” tickets to parents whose children have successfully completed the program or are currently enrolled. Those parents pass the coupons on to other parents in need who receive a free assessment for their own child, a \$295 value. If the child enrolls in the Brain Balance program, the parent who passed along the ticket gets a \$100 gift card.

“The parents don’t even do it for the monetary value,” Thomas said. “For them, it’s just paying it forward.”

Building relationships with schools is also important and Thomas said her center has connected with at least 50 schools throughout her region. Often personal relationships forged with principals and teachers are helpful in receiving referrals. She markets her program according to the school calendar, running promotions right after report cards are issued. Some teachers will also place fliers for the business in students’ backpacks for them to take home.

Thomas estimates that her initial investment to become a Brain Balance franchisee was \$225,000 and she attained positive cash flow during her first two years in business. She suggests that potential franchisees can estimate on turning a profit after about two years.

Superior Customer Service

She attributes her success to superior customer service that makes her staff accessible to parents for questions, help, and guidance.

“These parents really become a member of the Brain Balance family when they come on board,” she said. “We work really closely to support them in every aspect.”

Equally important, Thomas said, is implementing the Brain Balance program as consistently and precisely as possible and measuring a child’s progress to make sure they are achieving the appropriate levels of functioning.

That process includes regular meetings with parents to keep them apprised of their child’s progress.

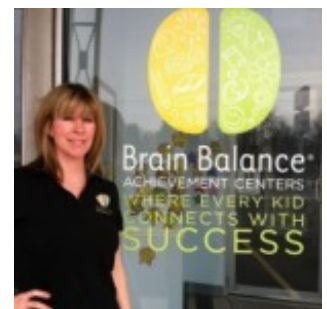
“It’s the hardest work you’ll ever do, but it’s the most rewarding work you’ll ever do,” Thomas said.

And how has son Louie benefited from his mom’s business?

“He’s now in fourth grade in a normal classroom and holding his own,” she said.

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