

SUCCESS STORY

DUBLIN VISION

More than 116,000 Ohioans will have vision impairment by the age of 40, but thinking about our vision typically happens only at an annual checkup.

In Cara Lai's case, she grew up knowing she wanted to go to school for optometry and continued to push her knowledge of vision science, especially for children. She worked for more than 12 years caring for patients in Southwest Ohio and participated in multiple externships, research teams, and committees.

Eventually, Dr. Cara decided she wanted to open her own optometry practice that would specialize in eye care for children, as well as perform vision therapy. While accomplished in her field, she needed help with the process of opening a small business in Ohio. She also needed to develop a network of professionals to assist with legal, financial, and marketing guidance.

"My mother encouraged me to find a 'Women in Business' group," Dr. Cara said. "I understood how to manage the daily running of a business, but I didn't have experience launching (one)."

Her initial internet search connected her to Small Business Development Center (SBDC) advisor Thalia Amador Lastra.

*Dr. Cara Lai, Owner of
Dublin Vision Development*



Dr. Cara Lai with a patient

They met up one-on-one, where Thalia encouraged Dr. Cara to take an upcoming BASE course.

BASE courses offer a variety of opportunities and are made to assist Ohio's entrepreneurs get their business started on the right track. The course touched on everything Dr. Cara needed to learn, from writing a business plan to legal structures and securing funding.

From that point, I enrolled in nearly every class the SBDC offered, Dr. Cara said.

She participated in any and every course she could get her hands on. She took the Social Media Course, which highlighted the platforms she could use to get her message to prospective clients. She took the Small Business Tax Workshop, which "provided an immense amount of financial knowledge" and introduced her to her future accountant.



The most valuable course for her was Marketing Your Way to Success with SBDC advisory Nancy Stoll, which she described as a “gold mine” for her business. The course took place weekly over a month and continued with one-on-one advising thereafter. It allowed Dr. Cara to hone her practice and business vision while developing a deeper understanding of marketing her business.

The courses and individual meetings Dr. Cara had with the consultants were “invaluable.” The wealth of resources she was exposed to provided the confidence she needed.



Nancy is truly gifted in her ability to deduce my ideas and make them sparkle, Dr. Cara said. Her input was so helpful that I continued meeting with Nancy for the six months after my office opened. We were able to re-evaluate new ideas and implement additional marketing initiatives.

In October 2019, Dublin Vision launched with a cohesive marketing message and brand. The effectiveness of Dr. Cara’s messaging ended up resonating with her optometric colleagues and allowed her to establish a referral network from the beginning. She was on track with her financial goals until COVID-19 hit in March.



Dublin Vision DEVELOPMENT

WE SEE THEIR POTENTIAL

Fortunately, the practice generated enough momentum in the first five months that Dublin Vision survived the mandatory business closure. She was able to convert 75 percent of her active patients to telehealth by April and May. This was a win-win; it allowed patients to continue making gains with treatment, and it provided the practice with a revenue stream it needed.

Dr. Cara said she is thankful for the SBDC, especially having survived the unprecedented times during her first year of business.

“I cannot imagine being able to pivot as effectively without having formulated a business plan, a strong brand identity, and a targeted marketing initiative through the guidance I received from the Ohio SBDC.”

For more information on Dublin Vision, visit dublinvision.com

To learn more about the Ohio Small Business Development Centers, visit clients.ohiosbdc.ohio.gov.



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