



Co-founders Colleen Brierley (left) and Jen Conley (right) started Journey to Parenthood, an organization that provides assistance to families struggling with infertility, after facing the issue in their own lives.

COURTESY PHOTO

Infertility brought to the forefront

Sam Nickerson

Staff Reporter

Two Norwood residents are organizing to help families deal with infertility.

Co-founders Colleen Brierley and Jen Conley started a non-profit, Journey to Parenthood, after having personally dealt with the issue in various ways themselves.

According to the group's website, Journey to Parenthood's mission is to "help couples and individuals dealing with infertility achieve their dreams of becoming parents by providing financial and emotional support along their journey, as well as to provide education and resources."

While the World Health Organization defines infertility as a disease, only 15 states have mandates for insurance coverage of the condition. And while Massachusetts is one of the more progressive states on the issue, Brierley said the unforeseen costs of treatment and the emotional effects can still be devastating for families.

"Growing up you plan for your college, you prepare to buy a house, you save money for a lot of things; but you kind of get blindsided by things like infertility problems emotionally and financially," Brierley said. "You don't plan to be going through four IVF cycles at \$15,000 or facing adoption costs that can run as high as \$50,000."

This year, Journey to Parenthood is aiming to award two \$10,000 gifts by January 2015 to individuals or families struggling with infertility. Applicants must submit an application and are considered in need of assistance by the group's board of directors.

The group receives donations from all over the world, including Ohio and Australia. And while Journey to Parenthood is based in Norwood, anyone may apply for its grants.

In addition, Brierley also said Journey to Parenthood wants to make discussion of infertility less taboo and to create a network of support. The or-

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ganization hosts meet-ups and walking groups, and posts resources from other infertility groups like Resolve to its website.

"There's a stigma about it. It's a very personal issue for women. You just sort of expect growing up that you're going to be able to have a baby and live your life and you're not going to have these problems," Brierley said. "It's a very lonely place to be. It's a roller coaster ride."

Brierley and Conley have known each other since childhood. Brierley discovered she and her husband were affected by secondary infertility, which occurs when a couple cannot carry a pregnancy to full term after already having one or two children.

Conley dealt with several terminated pregnancies and IVF treatments of her own, as well as failed adoption, before her husband's twin sister offered to be their surrogate.

According to Brierley, the idea for a nonprofit was hatched at a Jimmy Buffet concert.

"Jen approached me at this concert and said 'I've been thinking about giving back and paying it forward,'" Brierley said. "We started talking about our journeys to parenthood, basically the financial struggle, the emotional struggle and pain."

From there, the two women used their educations in business and law, along with a few guidebooks on starting nonprofits, to get the organization

off the ground. It received nonprofit status from the IRS in September 2013 and already has a dedicated board of directors.

Journey to Parenthood is hosting its first big fundraiser, the Don't Stop Believing Gala, on November 1 at the Dedham Hilton Hotel. Tickets are \$75 each and the evening includes live and silent auctions, live music, fine dining, and keynote speaker Rachelle Friedman, author of "The Promise."

Journey to Parenthood is still looking for auction item donations, Brierley said. Already included among the donations are two trips to Las Vegas.

For more information, visit the group's website: <http://www.journeytoparenthood.org>