

Next gen steps up at Renfrew Center

In the nearly 20 years since Sam Menaged opened the Renfrew Center, it has become the world's largest network of eating disorder treatment centers. Renfrew, founded in 1985 as a single residential treatment facility in Philadelphia, now has more than 500 employees at 14 locations in 12 states. The center gets its name from the 27-acre Renfrew Farm, its flagship location.

Sam's children Vanessa and Daniel Menaged spent a lot of time at the Renfrew Center while they were growing up. During vacations and days off from school, they helped with odd jobs such as filing paperwork, making copies and landscaping the grounds. "They grew up hearing about the center around the dinner table, and they spent a lot of time here," says Sam, 66, "but I never expected them to come into the business."

Today Vanessa, 32, is vice president of marketing and professional relations, and Daniel, 29, is a business systems analyst. Both worked elsewhere before joining the center.



"I've always been very interested in the work that Renfrew does and felt very passionate about the mission," says Vanessa. "I have memories of running into people who would tell us about how the center saved their lives. It was very impactful as a child to grow up and hear that. It made me proud of what my family was doing."

Prior to entering the family business seven years ago, Vanessa worked as the executive assistant to U.S. Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-Pa.) on Capitol Hill. Daniel, who joined the Renfrew Center in 2012, also worked in Washington, D.C., for a software company after he graduated from college. Vanessa and Daniel have two sisters who do not work at Renfrew.

For Sam, that outside work experience was an essential part of developing the next generation of Renfrew leaders. "I never would have let them come into the business right after college," he says. "I was really glad that they had experience in other businesses before coming here. I didn't want Renfrew to be a crutch."

Both Vanessa and Daniel started out in human resources. "It was a way for them to get familiar with the business at the ground floor," Sam says. "It was also important for them not to work for me directly. I didn't want to be their father and their boss."

Eventually Daniel and Vanessa found their niches in separate departments—Vanessa in marketing and Daniel in operations. Today, they both use skills acquired in their previous positions to bring new energy into the company. Vanessa explains that the fast-paced environment she encountered on Capitol Hill helps her adapt quickly and think outside the box when it comes to Renfrew's marketing and outreach efforts. She also assists with the clinic's lobbying efforts through the Eating Disorder Coalition, an advocacy organization. Daniel has been using his software background to streamline Renfrew's electronic health care record system and standardize care across all locations as the company grows.

"It was fortunate that our skills and interests really pushed us into different directions naturally," says Daniel. "Even in a company this size, we were able to find our different spheres."

With Renfrew's growth over the years and its leading stature in the world of eating disorder treatment facilities, private equity groups have offered to buy the business. But Sam Menaged has turned down all offers. "This is something I'm very proud of," he says. "I want this to continue as a family business so that we can protect the quality of care."

"I think what has been created here is so incredible and unique," Vanessa says. "When it's your family business, you take such pride in it and want it to improve and grow. I certainly wouldn't want to see anybody else running it."