Conestoga College: Helping Personal Support Workers Deliver Excellent Care

Conestoga College empowers personal support workers across Canada with online training for peer-to-peer professional development. The health-care sector moves fast, so ongoing professional development is critical to help personal support workers (PSWs) keep their skills current. Conestoga College worked with D2L to create engaging online training courses that help today’s PSWs improve resident care as well as train and mentor their co-workers.

AT A GLANCE

Learners: 14,500

Quick Facts:
- Supports a train-the-trainer model
- Needed interactive online modules to train 5,000 PSWs
- Modules were needed within 6 months
SUPPORTING AN AGING POPULATION

As Canada’s demographics continue to shift towards an older population, the resident population in long-term care has changed significantly. Over the last decade, increasing numbers of residents present with comorbidities, cognitive impairment and dementia. Increasing health complexities and competing priorities, combined with a task-oriented environment, can make it challenging for team members to provide person-centered care.

Excellence in Resident Centered-Care (ERCC) is a training program that builds capacity within homes through a train-the-trainer model to provide Personal Support Workers (PSWs) with practical skills in providing person-centered care to produce better care and better outcomes.

PSWs in long-term care homes provide vital round-the-clock care and have a direct impact on the quality of care and life that residents experience. Enhancing the skills of PSWs through a sustainable and accessible online platform can improve the quality of resident care, especially for PSWs working in smaller and rural areas.

“We wanted to empower PSWs not only to access training themselves, but to become leaders in their long-term care homes and deliver education to their peers,” said Carly Szabo

DELIVERING WITHIN TIGHT TIMEFRAMES

Conestoga College, the Schlegel-University of Waterloo Research Institute for Aging and the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care (CLRI) worked with the D2L Learning and Creative Services team to design an engaging, interactive set of online learning modules that could be used to train 5,000 PSWs within a compressed timeframe of just 6 months. Carly Szabo, Training Specialist, School of Health & Life Sciences, played a leading role in developing and delivering this new program, in partnership with D2L. She explains that “we were able to meet all of our metrics because D2L helped us respond very quickly. We were able to condense a nine-week course down to just two weeks, and there were no issues.”
The course involves 16 hours of online learning, delivered via the D2L Brightspace learning management system (LMS), followed by a single eight-hour classroom session to consolidate what the PSWs have learned. After their formal training is finished, PSWs can access course resources designed to help them train and mentor their peers.

This train-the-trainer approach has been highly successful: in just six months, more than 490 PSWs trained and certified, then in turn trained more than 5,000 PSWs at their own long-term care homes.

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BUILDING THE CONFIDENCE TO LEAD

Building the confidence to lead

In many cases, this was the first time that PSWs had been given an opportunity for professional development and it was key that the course built confidence in their capacity to act as trainers and leaders.

The Conestoga College and D2L Learning and Creative Services teams designed the course materials specifically to help learners build self-assurance. To maximize engagement, the focus was on practical, hands-on learning, teaching techniques that would be immediately useful in the PSWs’ day-to-day work.

They also employed a “choose your own adventure” structure to highlight the benefits of a person-centric approach. The lesson is that there may be more than one solution to a problem, and PSWs should feel confident in drawing on their own knowledge, skills, and specialties to improve the resident experience.

The course materials were also designed to include as much audio-visual content as possible, using video to create an empathetic response and differentiate the content from more traditional slideshow-based training that learners might have experienced in the past.

“The videos and the interactive exercises and discussions all stimulate deep-level thinking and reflection—it’s a totally different experience from traditional teaching methods.”

Carly Szabo, Training Specialist, School of Health & Life Sciences, Conestoga College

“People were logging into Brightspace from all over Ontario. The technology worked flawlessly and the courses gave our learners the confidence and capability to successfully train their peers.”

Carly Szabo, Training Specialist, School of Health & Life Sciences, Conestoga College
FOCUSING ON USER EXPERIENCE
The teams concentrated on making the navigation and interactive elements of the platform as intuitive and consistent as possible. Since the day-to-day work of most PSWs tends to be more practical than administrative, it was important to design the course materials to be easily accessible for those who are not regular users of technology.

D2L embedded tools to empower and support PSWs in their efforts to train and present materials to their peers in a smooth and engaging way. Examples include prompts and tips that only the trainer can see, as well as timers to ensure that learners will be able to get through the whole module within a one-hour session.

“The collaborative discussions with the D2L team helped us remove barriers to learning and create an intuitive user experience for our courses.”
Carly Szabo, Training Specialist, School of Health & Life Sciences, Conestoga College

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF COLLABORATION
For the majority of the PSWs who took the course, it was also the first time in their careers that they had been given an opportunity to connect with support workers from other long-term care homes. Brightspace helped them build and strengthen these relationships by providing communication and collaboration tools that allowed them to keep in touch and continue to share knowledge.

The course has also been useful in developing interprofessional learning by encouraging PSWs to interact with other professionals in the care sector. Although the course modules were designed with a focus on personal support, PSW trainers have also successfully delivered them to groups such as registered nurses, kinesiologists, and administrators. This helps to raise awareness of the crucial role that PSWs play in long-term care, as well as helping PSWs learn from other team members.

“D2L enables our trainers to create communities of collaboration that sustain learning over time,” said Carly Szabo
SPECTACULAR RESULTS
In total, 25 percent of long-term care homes across Ontario participated, and their feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

In a survey conducted after the delivery of the course, 96 percent of participants said they felt more confident in their ability to facilitate care, and 64 percent of long-term care homes agreed that the training has improved resident care outcomes.

In terms of qualitative feedback from participants, empowerment was a common theme. Many commented that the course helped build their confidence and achieve meaningful change in the everyday working practices of their long-term care homes.

Participants also noted improvements in their own self-care, morale, and collaboration, suggesting that this type of education may be effective in helping to improve workplace satisfaction, reduce burnout, and improve attrition rates within the sector.

With the success of the project, Conestoga College plans to continue working with D2L to transform the long-term care sector's access to training and professional development. Three new modules are currently in development, and PSW trainers are now contributing ideas that will be integrated into the next revision of the course.

“With D2L, we have delivered more than just education—we have empowered our learners to become leaders in their long-term care homes and deliver education to their peers.”
Carly Szabo, Training Specialist, School of Health & Life Sciences, Conestoga College