GERIATRIC PSYCHIATRY COMMUNITY SERVICES OTTAWA

CASE STUDY

The Initiative: "Building the Foundation" Workshop

Challenges

- Effective Communication Strategies
- Collaborative Problem-Solving
- Confidence in Gathering Socio-Demographic Data

Benefits

Improved Caregiver Confidence:

Staff gained practical tools to navigate difficult conversations with families and provide reassurance.

Enhanced Client-Caregiver Interactions:

Strategies were developed to minimize aggressive responses and create a more positive care environment.

Strengthened Team Collaboration

Encouraged a shared approach where staff and trainers co-created solutions tailored to real-world scenarios.

Executive Summary

In February 2025, Connect2Knowledge partnered with Geriatric Psychiatry Community Services Ottawa (GPCSO) to complete comprehensive all-staff Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training. We equipped GPCSO staff with practical skills to help them better serve Ottawa's diverse population of older adults with complex mental health symptoms and dementia. This case study documents GPCSO's journey.

Background

GPCSO provides specialized mental health services to older adults in Ottawa, serving diverse communities, including Francophones, Arabic speakers, African, Caribbean, and Black communities, and a broad Asian population. Recognizing EDI as a strategic priority, GPCSO sought a structured, sustainable approach to embedding equity into its practices.

Having previously worked with Connect2Knowledge on strategic planning, GPCSO engaged them again to move beyond theory into practical implementation. This led to the development of Building the Foundation: Integrating Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at GPCSO, a comprehensive training program and full-day workshop delivered in February 2025.

Key Outcomes

- **Role Clarity and Confidence** - Staff gained a clear understanding of their role in advancing EDI at GPCSO.
- **Practical EDI Skills** – Participants developed tangible skills to recognize and address implicit bias, ensuring more inclusive decision-making.
- **Stronger, More Inclusive Teams** – The workshop fostered trust and shared ownership, embedding EDI into team dynamics rather than treating it as an add-on.
- **Equitable Client Engagement** – Employees gained concrete strategies for collecting and communicating sociodemographic data in a way that builds trust and respects diverse lived experiences.

> *“It was a great opportunity to learn, reflect, and plan for ways to become a more inclusive workplace and community program. The various exercises and discussions were rich and helped to lay out a more solid foundation to move forward with.”* - A GPCSO participant

Objectives

To turn intention into action, Connect2Knowledge designed a high-impact workshop that gave GPCSO staff the tools and confidence to embed EDI into their daily work. We did not want to be just another training. It was a transformative experience that empowered staff to lead equity efforts with clarity and purpose.

By the end of the session, GPCSO staff weren’t just more knowledgeable, they were ready to take action.

Implementation

To ensure maximum impact, the initiative followed a structured approach:

Deep Engagement:

- Annual General Meeting (AGM): Key stakeholders were engaged through presentations and discussions.
- Working Group: A dedicated working group was established to guide and oversee the initiative's progress.

Pre-Workshop Staff Survey

In Fall 2024, a pre-workshop survey was distributed to 26 staff members at GPCSO to assess their baseline knowledge and confidence regarding equity in the workplace. The survey identified existing barriers and provided insight into areas that needed focus during the training.

Supporting Materials:

- Comprehensive Materials: Fulsome, well-designed materials were prepared to facilitate learning.
- Pre-Session Handbook: A pre-session handbook was distributed to team members, introducing key concepts and setting the stage for deeper discussions during the workshop.

Key Outcomes and Impact

Increased Awareness and Understanding:

Post-workshop survey results showed a significant improvement in staff understanding of EDI principles compared to the pre-workshop assessment. Many participants appreciated the structured approach and practical frameworks provided during the workshop.

Enhanced Confidence in Applying EDI Principles:

Before the training, staff reported uncertainty about how to apply EDI in practice. Post-training, there was a marked increase in confidence in addressing biases, handling difficult conversations, and intervening in microaggressions.

Implementation cont...

In-Person Training

The training followed a strategic approach of moving from the individual to the team and then the organization, addressing specific concerns raised by staff and fostering a collaborative environment for solutions.

- **Setting the Stage**: The workshop began by collectively creating shared definitions and [Boundaries for Belonging™].
- **Self**: Participants were encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of their personal roles, emotions, and biases.
- **Team**: The team collaboratively explored and recognized workplace injustice, including issues like bias, prejudice, microaggressions, discrimination, bullying, and harassment.
- **Organization**: A deep dive into the sociodemographic data of the clients and community GPCSO serves grounded the practices in the team’s day-to-day work. Practical tools and processes were provided to help staff approach these topics with greater confidence.

Post-Workshop Reflection

Following the workshop, a post-training survey was conducted to gather feedback and measure changes in staff confidence and understanding, ensuring that the initiative met its objectives and made a lasting impact.

Key Outcomes and Impact

Improved Strategies for Collecting Sociodemographic Data

One of the primary challenges identified was the discomfort around collecting sociodemographic data from clients. The workshop provided scripts and best practices, enabling staff to engage in these conversations more effectively and respectfully.

Organizational Support and Sustainability

While the workshop was well received, several staff members expressed a need for ongoing reinforcement of EDI principles.

Recommendations included:

- Monthly discussion groups or refresher sessions.
- A dedicated internal resource hub for EDI challenges.
- Clear accountability mechanisms to integrate EDI into organizational culture.

Key Challenge Discussion

A caregiver shared a concern from a family member of an elderly individual with dementia. The family observed that their loved one became more agitated when interacting with racialized personal support workers, particularly those with accents. They were unsure how to address the issue without reinforcing biases, while still ensuring fair and respectful treatment of all workers.

Key Challenge Approach

During the training, participants explored strategies to address this challenge by focusing on empathy, clear communication, and cultural sensitivity. It was emphasized that supporting both the client’s needs and personal support workers involved understanding communication barriers and biases.

Practical solutions included providing staff with training on managing difficult interactions and offering resources for family members to better understand the diverse backgrounds of care providers, fostering respect and reducing unnecessary conflict. This discussion helped participants connect the theory of EDI with real-world challenges, creating "aha" moments and providing practical tools to handle similar situations in the future.

Key Takeaways

Start with Concrete Applications
Theoretical EDI concepts became meaningful when tied directly to daily work scenarios.

Build in Sustainability
One-time training is insufficient—ongoing reinforcement and resources are essential for long-term impact.

Measure Impact
Collecting feedback before and after the workshop helps demonstrate value and maintain momentum.

Connect to Client Experience:
Framing EDI work in terms of improved client outcomes resonated most strongly with staff.

Conclusion

The “Building the Foundation” workshop marked a significant step forward for GPCSO in embedding EDI into its culture. By prioritizing clarity, trust, and shared ownership, this initiative empowered staff with the confidence and tools needed to create a more inclusive environment. While challenges remain, the commitment of GPCSO’s leadership and staff signals a promising future for continued EDI growth.

Through strategic, sustained efforts, GPCSO is not just making EDI a policy priority but embedding it as a core value in its mission to serve diverse communities with compassion and equity.

> *I really enjoyed the mix of didactic learning as well as small group work and larger group discussions. I was engaged during the whole day! I appreciate the use of humour and the presenter’s vulnerability and sharing own experiences to open up the dialogue and provide a safe space to explore EDI work. - A GPCSO Participant*

> *Excellent Day... found the activities interesting and appropriate and raised good conversations at our table.* - A GPCSO Participant

> *I thought the presenters did a great job navigating a difficult subject, and keeping it a safe space. I also loved hearing the real-life examples.* - A GPCSO Participant