

# Learning Circles: From Cooperative Learning Strategies to Quality Continuing Care Workplaces



## Rationale

Continuing care environments reflect growing complexity when balancing the needs of those requiring care with the capacity of those delivering care services. This complexity highlights both the importance and challenges in supporting staff with effective continuing learning strategies. This project focuses on supporting staff through the use of Learning Circles (LCs) which are a form of cooperative learning that brings practitioners together in workplace learning groups to identify and address practice priorities.

The use of LCs in long term care (LTC) and supportive living (SL) sites creates an opportunity to address barriers to workplace learning and advance benefits, already demonstrated within LCs piloted at Bethany sites:

- ◆ Sharing information and ideas
- ◆ Acknowledging experience and knowledge of direct care providers
- ◆ Reducing feelings of isolation and “going it alone”
- ◆ Using a variety of learning methods
- ◆ Creating a safe space for problem solving
- ◆ Producing new knowledge that is owned by participants
- ◆ Developing a group of peers who will support each other beyond the life of the circle



## Project Overview

Ensuring best practices and quality care with regulated and unregulated direct care providers in LTC and SL facilities requires access to continuing education opportunities. Covenant Health awarded funding to this project through the *Network of Excellence in Seniors' Health and Wellness Innovation Fund* to further explore the usefulness of staff LCs. The purpose of this project is to establish and evaluate LCs that support clinical practice changes and effective workplace learning for direct care providers. This is a 12 month project which began in September 2014. LCs will be developed and evaluated across sites in 7 organizations: AgeCare Sagewood, Bethany Calgary, Bethany Airdrie, Bethany Collegesside, Capital-Care Kipnes Centre for Veterans, Excel Society Balwin Villa, Excel Society Grand Manor, Lifestyle Options Whitemud, St. Michael's Vegreville Manor and Wing Kei Nursing Home. The LCs are small groups (6-8 people) who meet regularly (monthly for 1-1.5 hours), and are led by clinical leaders or educators (facilitators) who use strategies to help adult learners work together, analyze current practice challenges, and develop common solutions. The evaluation of these LCs will be framed by a participatory action research approach and the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The goals of the evaluation of the LCs will be to 1) document how LCs are established and 2) monitor successes, challenges, and outcomes.

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## Deliverables

The following deliverables are anticipated:

- ◆ LC toolkit for facilitators, site administration, management and frontline staff, to ensure the documentation of the necessary knowledge, structures and resources for sustaining LCs
- ◆ An evaluation approach that explores the inclusion of CC sites, as central to the evaluation process and outcomes
- ◆ A Learning Circles Forum for CC providers to share experiences and best practices about new and emerging LCs
- ◆ Strengthened processes and practices within an existing collaborative network (i.e., ICCER) to share best practices and provide continual support for LCs beyond the project timeframe
- ◆ Integrated knowledge mobilization approach with post-secondary institutions, resulting in the pilot of a simulation-based seminar for students

## Project Investigators

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