



NWT Personal Support Workers touch the lives of NWT residents every day



Louise McLeod (left) and Kristin Gordon-Arey (right) enjoying the sunshine at Boot Lake with the Inuvik Regional Hospital in the background.

Continuing Care Workers such as Home Support Workers, Personal Care Aides and Personal Outcome Support Workers are the backbone, the heart, the eyes, ears and hands of community-based health care. In recognition of NWT Personal Support Worker Day, let's meet Louise McLeod and Kristin Gordon-Arey, both Home Support Workers (HSWs) in Inuvik.

Kristin Gordon-Arey spent a lot of time with her grandparents and other elders in her community of Aklavik when she was growing up. "It made me realize" she says, "how much knowledge the elders have and I realized I wanted to be around them, so I started as a Care Attendant at the Joe Greenland Centre in Aklavik. Later I moved to Inuvik to be with the Home Care."

Louise McLeod also was around elders when she was young. "I lived with my Jijii and Jjijuu (grandfather and grandmother) in Aklavik and helped take care of them," she explains. "When I finished school I decided to get into the health care field because I knew I would enjoy that kind of work and felt I would be good at it."

When asked, "What do you like about Home Care?" Kristin and Louise both say without hesitation, "We love working with the elders, and every day is different!"

Louise says, "To me, it's rewarding. It is a career where I can work with and learn from my elders: I am thankful I can work with them and listen to them and also gain what knowledge they have to share with me through their stories. The elders," she says, "are so grateful to have home care providers in their home to help them to live at home safely. Interacting and socializing with our elders cheers up their day."

Kristin adds, “When you’re working with the elders, helping them, making them comfortable, you know you are doing something worthwhile that they really appreciate.”

Personal Support Workers are GNWT employees with an indispensable role in providing quality health care in the home setting. Their work fits within the Department of Health and Social Services mandate to provide integrated, responsive, and effective health services and social programs in the right place and at the right time, and supports “Aging in place”, an objective articulated in the Department’s strategy document, *Our Elders Our Communities*.

Jennifer Picek is Manager of Continuing Care for the NTHSSA Beaufort Delta Region, and previously worked three years in Home Care. Jennifer says, “The Inuvik Home Support Workers are a hard working team who have challenging jobs. They work well together on to provide consistent care while promoting client independence.”

Louise says she was fortunate to be able to take her Personal Support Worker training in her home town after she took the northern nursing access program. “I started out working at Inuvik Hospital’s Long Term Care taking care of my elders from the surrounding communities, then I switched to Inuvik Home Care in 2010.” “On-the-job training has been really good,” adds Kristin, who says, “We have workshops and training and we also learn so much from the elders. And what we learn from working with one elder might also work well with another.”

The biggest challenge, Louise says, is gaining the trust of a new client. “I see what they can do,” she says, “and find out what they want to be able to do, and help them to gain their independence. I have to share with the clients to be able to connect with them.” She adds, “I am there to help in any way I can and encourage them to be as independent as possible.” Agrees Jennifer, “Louise is calm and compassionate. The elders enjoy and respect the effort Louise makes to provide great care.”

According to Kristin, encouragement is a big part of it. “You can’t just go in there telling them what to do. The elders know a lot. They have their preferences. You have to show respect and help them feel comfortable, and that’s how you get them to try things and do things.” Jennifer says this is a good example of how you need initiative and professionalism to be a personal support worker. “Kristin is adaptable and very self-directed when faced with challenges on the job.”

Louise and Kristin describe their work as both a cultural and a professional experience.

“I learned so much about my culture and traditions from my elders, when I was growing up, and I keep learning on the job even now,” says Kristin. “For example,” she says, “I sometimes cook for them or help them eat. There are a lot of traditions around food and the preparing of food because food is central to our culture and to health, and it seems there is always more to know.”

Home Support is also a professional experience. “We are bound by rules of confidentiality just like any other member of the health care team and if somebody asks us about their relative, we always say, you’ll have to ask them yourself,” says Louise. Kristin adds, “I always assure clients that what they say and do is between them and me, and that information is shared with others only when they want and when they are ready.”

“The continuous efforts of all the Inuvik HSWs is so appreciated,” says Jennifer, “Kristin, Louise and their coworkers communicate so well with their clients and with each other. It allows for different ideas to come together when they are planning and implementing best care practices for each of the home care

clients. Thank you to Kristin, Louise, Mandy, Eric and Natasha for promoting our client's safety and independence in their homes!"

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