



Lyla Brunette (Yellowknife)



Caption: HSW Lyla Brunette (Right) with Margaret Fillion.

Since 2008 the Department of Health and Social Services has recognized Personal Support Workers on the last Tuesday in June each year as a way to acknowledge and honour the contribution they make to NWT health services. NWT Personal Support Worker Day encompasses Home Support Workers, Resident Care Aides and Personal Care Attendants who work in Long Term Care, and Personal Outcome Support Workers who work in Supported Living environments. All provide caring, personal assistance to NWT residents who require help to meet their basic needs.

To celebrate the day, here is a profile of Lyla Brunette, a Home Support Worker in Yellowknife since 2009.

“This job has worked out so well for me,” says Lyla. “Originally I took the PSW certification at Aurora College because I wanted to work with dementia patients,” says Lyla, “and the new dementia facility in Yellowknife was opening at the time. But in the PSW program we had clinical experiences in several different settings and I ended up liking Home Care the most.”

Lyla says the college certification was a valuable educational experience. She has also found that, “On-the-job learning has been really important to keeping up-to-date with current knowledge and competencies. We have workshops and training and we also learn so much from the clients we work with. And what we learn from working with one senior might work well with another.”

In her role, Lyla has had the opportunity to develop a kind of specialty working closely with the Physiotherapists (PTs) and Occupational Therapists (OTs) by engaging with clients with specific OT/PT needs. Karin Bucher, Lyla’s Manager, explains that “Lyla has a dual role in home care working both as a HSW and rehab aid. She works closely with the OT and PT and is instrumental in obtaining equipment for clients and showing them how to use it appropriately.”

“I assist with the equipment loan program,” continues Lyla. “Home Care lends equipment to clients on a short term or long term basis—things like bedrails, bath chairs, and walkers—to help promote independence. I help the clients practice with their equipment, make sure it is fitting their needs and that they are using it safely. When they are finished with the loan, I check the equipment over to see whether it needs any repairs and make sure it is properly cleaned for the next person who is going to use it.”

“Lyla also leads Yellowknife Home Care’s elders in motion and function fitness training,” says Karin, “a physical fitness and active living program offered by the NWT Parks and Recreation Association that provides individually-specific balance exercises and strength training.”

“I am involved with teaching both the home care providers and the clients in these exercise programs. Elders in motion and functional fitness are tailored to the individual to ensure it is not too easy or too difficult for them.” Lyla explains that, “Functional fitness is focused on multi-joint activity. In regular life, you rotate your body, put a strap over your shoulder, lean down, twist and reach to put something up on a shelf ... Functional Fitness mimics these motions so that the seniors gain ability and confidence to do these motions independently and safely.”

“The over-reaching goal is falls prevention,” says Lyla. “Falls are the leading cause of unintentional injury in the NWT. While walking is good exercise, walking on its own does not reduce the risk of falls. Balance and strength training are needed to prevent falls.”

When asked what she has found to be most surprising in her work, Lyla says, “Over the nearly ten years I’ve been in this field, I have learned that social “health” is really important to the other kinds of health like mental and physical health. When seniors are socially-

isolated, it greatly affects their health in those other domains. HSWs—in a way—take on that social role for the clients, we are the stand-in family. And when we affect their social health in a positive way, we are also affecting their mental and physical health.”

Lyla’s Manager Karin says that Lyla is very suited to her role: “Lyla is kind and calm. She has an immense amount of patience. Lyla she understands how to meet the needs where the client is at: she listens to them and responds to what the client’s goals are and what they want to be able to do.”

Before going to college, Lyla had known for a long time that she wanted to work with seniors. “I grew up in a big family with quite a few seniors around—uncles, great-aunts and so on—and I always loved being around them and hearing their stories and having relationships with them. Now, in Yellowknife, I find that being around the seniors who have lived here for many decades and have streets named after them and such, it’s like being part of an extended family and it’s also like being part of living history.”