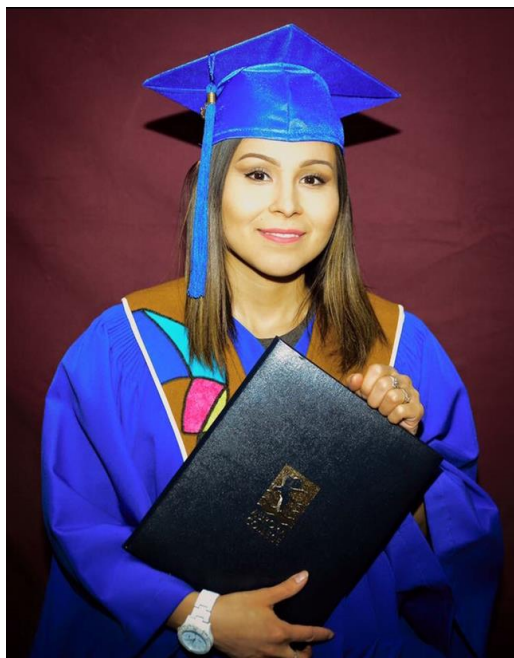




Olga Aviugana (Yellowknife)



Olga Aviugana is an Inuvialuit Home Support Worker (HSW) who loves her work. “Everything about this career is rewarding,” she says. “I’ve always had a strong passion for helping others. I became a Home Support Worker because it allows me to help others and give back to my community and my people.”

When asked what most people wouldn’t realize about her work, Olga says, “I think people don’t realize that HSWs are part of the health care team, we are on the medical side of care. Too often clients think I am the “cleaning lady” when in fact only under certain circumstance do we clean client homes. So I try to explain to them the value of my role, not only for the client’s benefit and my own benefit but for the other Home Support Workers as well.”

“We (HSWs) try our best to promote independence in the clients, to encourage them to do everything for themselves that they are able to do, and to encourage them to improve,” says Olga. “We do elders in motion exercises with them, and falls prevention exercises. We help them have a daily routine that’s more healthy.”

On the subject of independence, Olga says, “We have to be very careful to not create dependency on Home Care. It’s all about helping clients to continue living in their home, as independently as possible, instead of having to go to Long Term Care or needing hospital admissions. That’s where the HSWs really make a difference in health care.”

Fairly new to the role, Olga got her PSW training in Inuvik through Aurora College. She had worked casual in home support in Inuvik, and this experience motivated her to get her certification so she could expand her scope of practice. “I had always wanted to work in health care, and being able to take a one year course to do so was the perfect choice for me as a young mother.”

The training at Aurora College was very good, she says, taught by an experienced Community Health Nurse. “She made sure,” says Olga, “that we would know what to do and how to recognize what is normal, also to be able to communicate with nurses and doctors about the clients and to advocate for the clients. I really like working in Yellowknife,” she adds, “because there is a bigger population, more clients here and the HSWs can work more in the scope we are trained for: more health care, less housekeeping.”

Olga really appreciates that her job has so many facets and possibilities. Olga’s Manager, Karin Bucher, says, “Olga enjoys taking on added responsibilities, and is a real go getter when it comes to advocating for and supporting our clients. She jumped into helping organize the functional fitness program,” for instance, “which helps seniors improve their balance and strengthen the muscles typically used in daily activities of living. Olga takes broader view of what home support is all about: she is organized, and well respected by her peers and clients,” adds Karin.

One of the things Olga likes about home support is not knowing what the day will bring. “Every day is different and we (HSWs) adapt to different environments and situations on a daily basis. We never know what to expect: when I arrive at a client’s home, I always hope for the best but you have to be prepared for the worst.” This is not a problem for Olga, however: “I like being challenged because with challenge comes personal growth. Being a PSW allows you to become a better person – mentally, emotionally, socially.

For example people may feel uncomfortable with death, we all are, especially when it comes to the death of our loved ones. But being a home support worker allows me to bring comfort in those hard moments, it allows me to support people and families when they need it most.”

Being a PSW is definitely a good role for somebody who describes herself as, “a people person. Karin says, “Olga is so friendly and outgoing: she absolutely shines in her role as a PSW in Home Care.” “This career,” says Olga, “allows me to not just interact with others but make a connection with others on a daily basis. Some days I laugh with clients, some days we just talk, some days I listen, some days I even cry with a client. It’s all about being in the moment and being comfortable with that moment whether it brings happiness or sadness.” It’s an amazing feeling knowing you are appreciated and acknowledged even with a simple hug, “thank you” or with a smile.”

PSWs in the NWT 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*.