

With CUPE 503 help, Champlain CCAC becomes first in province to engage in Healthy Conversations

When your role in the community is to interact with citizens in need and connect them with the support services that will give them the proper care to lead a more fulfilling life, effective communication skills are essential. Which is why CUPE 503 recently endorsed an innovation grant proposal submitted by the Champlain Community Care Access Centre to support its health care workers in the field who frequently have to engage in difficult conversations with clients.

The grant received from Health Force Ontario was utilized to create the Healthy Conversations project, a valuable tool for staff and service providers alike. A CUPE 503 member served on the design committee for the project, which aims to boost the effectiveness of interpersonal communication not just between staff and clients, but co-workers, friends and family as well.

“We applied for the grant under the category of respect in the workplace,” said Patrice Connolly, Vice President of Human Resources, Organizational Development and Communications at the Champlain CCAC. “We were the only CCAC in the province who received such a grant.”

Connolly explained that the better the CCAC takes care of its staff, the better the staff will be able to support positive change on those they serve in the community. The project consists of a day-long workshop for all CCAC staff, and the selection of a group who will receive further training. Of the staff (who are split into teams for training), one volunteer from each team becomes a coach, or 'champion', who will meet with a facilitator once a week, ensuring a bottom-up flow of information.

“There are 30 CCAC champions and nine service provider champions, and they give us constant feedback,” said Connolly. The facilitators the champions meet with share the stories they've heard with the CCAC's senior leadership team.

Karen Rainboth, the CCAC's CUPE 503 representative who serves as a Team Assistant and Wait List Coordinator, explained that “quite a few managers and administrative staff from the service providers we work with wanted to be involved in the project,” making the Healthy Conversations initiative an even wider-reaching asset to the community.

“CUPE knew the climate was right to get support for the project,” said Rainboth. “Being able to have a good conversation to work things out results in better solutions.”