



# Person-Centric Strategies<sup>©</sup> Series

A Comprehensive Response to  
Social Assistance Renewal

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## Contents

About the Authors .....	4
Person Centric Strategies <sup>©</sup> .....	5
Overview .....	5
The Culture Shift in Social Assistance, Skills Training and Employment .....	6
A Knowledge-to-Action (KTA) Approach .....	9
PCS Programs.....	11

## About the Authors

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**John Howley** is the principal of Labour Market Partners Inc. Following his career as an employment counsellor, manager and director, John has worked across Ontario and internationally in designing curricula and delivering a broad range of programs, not only in the social services sector, but also in policing and community development. Hailing originally from Cape Breton Island, John is a resident of the City of Toronto.

In addition to curriculum design and delivery, John and Marianne also consult in social assistance policy development, employment program development, change management, anti-racism and human rights training, anti-oppression strategies, community development, and capacity-building for teams, organizations, and communities. Their work includes Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Children's Services and Social Housing organizations across Ontario. They continue to design and deliver workshop programs for social assistance service users. Their consulting also has engaged agencies as diverse as community economic development organizations, workforce planning and development boards, community colleges, not-for-profit organizations and international police-community relationship building.

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## Person Centric Strategies<sup>©</sup>

### Overview

Person-Centric Strategies<sup>©</sup> (PCS<sup>©</sup>) is a comprehensive, strategic series of targeted professional development programs designed to prepare staff, teams, organizations, related service systems and those they serve to respond effectively to wholesale provincial changes to social assistance and employment services. These changes are outlined in the provincial initiative entitled Social Assistance Renewal, including Employment Services Transformation (EST)<sup>1</sup>. Changes directed specifically towards child care and social housing are further outlined in provincial Community Housing Renewal and Child Care Modernization documents.

In addition to provincial program delivery changes, government departments at all levels and community service providers have found it necessary to adapt programs and delivery systems to respond to the continually changing needs of people served, including needs arising from the pandemic and the economic impacts of rapidly rising costs, especially in food and shelter.

Known formerly as Client-Centric Strategies<sup>©</sup>, the PCS series has been retitled from 'client-centric' to 'person-centric.' This change captures the important fact that the concepts, principles, practices, competencies and tools in the series are applicable to working not only with clients, but also with co-workers, community service providers, tenants, families, program participants and any other individual or group engaging with professional human services staff.

For similar reasons, we have incorporated the term "service user" in place of "client" or alternative terms. We define service user as any person seeking or receiving service from the organization or individual staff, such as applicant, client, tenant, resident and family.

Service user success in stability and employment supports, as envisioned by the Province, is dependent on an integrated, collaborative approach to working with service users throughout the service system.

In social assistance programs, for example, wholesale changes already underway in selected prototype regions (soon to be province-wide) involve critical Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and Employment Ontario (EO) infrastructure: program funding, program design and the program delivery system. In practical terms, this process must also engage municipal human services programs in Children's Services and Housing. Key stakeholders

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<sup>1</sup> For information: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/programs/est.html>

PCS provides a unique and unprecedented opportunity to engender a collaborative effort to create an inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible (IDEA) system of integrated programs, services and resources to address the stability and employment supports needed by system users as they progress along the pathway toward greater stability, employability and employment.

## **The Culture Shift in Social Assistance, Skills Training and Employment**

There lies much promise in the Province's Social Assistance Renewal and Employment Services Transformation initiatives. Moving employment programs solely under provincial auspices; centralizing initial intake and ongoing eligibility at the provincial level; and focusing on stability support at the municipal level are among the components that support a more holistic, wrap-around approach to helping multi-barriered service users achieve greater employability and financial independence.

The changes underway for service providers and service users constitute a wholesale culture shift in OW, ODSP and EO, as well as other programs accessed by Ontario Works and ODSP service users. They introduce a scale of change that will be challenging to successfully implement without attending to the requisite re-tooling of the workforce involved in serving service users' needs along a continuum of stability support, employability improvement, skills training and employment. This necessarily involves municipal staff, including Ontario Works, Housing and Children's Services; ODSP; Employment Ontario agencies; and other community services providers. The culture shift must be achieved in individual organizations and among organizations to achieve an integrated, coherent service system that is engineered to meet the objectives of Social Assistance Renewal and Employment Services Transformation.

## Defining the Culture Shift

<b>FROM</b>	<b>TO</b>
Program-Centric	Person Centric
Paper	People
Rules	Relationships
Authority	Collaboration
Staff Power	Service User Empowerment
Deficit-based Approach	Asset-based Approach
Policing	Coaching
Discrete Programs	Integrated, wrap around service system
Social Assistance as Program Gateway	Social assistance as one tool in the municipal staff toolbox
Supports to Ontario Works recipients	Supports to all social assistance service users and the general public

## Observations from Employment Services Transformation (EST) Prototype Sites

Notwithstanding the very positive elements inherent in the renewal and transformation initiatives, there are strong indicators that success is not guaranteed and that serious obstacles to service users' success are already being encountered within the new model.

Observations made by municipal social services leaders engaged in the Employment Services Transformation prototype sites and from prototype municipal and EO first-line staff who have participated in PCS for Staff<sup>2</sup> workshops include the following:

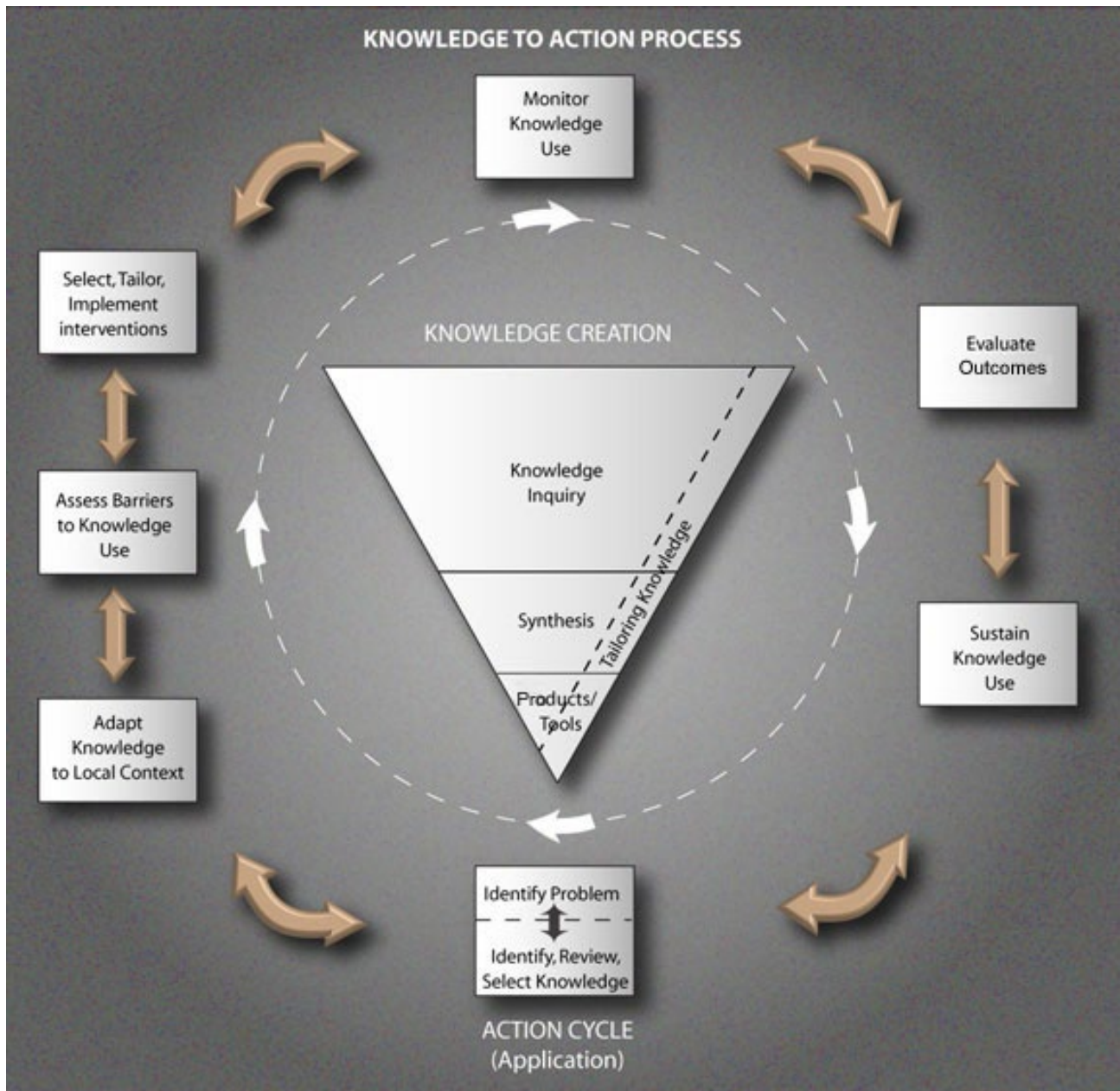
- EO has yet to shift their delivery in response to the social assistance service user demographic and do not seem to have plans underway to do so.
- 'Who Does What' remains a problem. Service users are often shuffled between municipal and EO offices, creating frustration and confusion for both service users and staff.
- There is insufficient funding and inadequate resources to meet service users' stability support needs, especially in areas of high demand, such as housing, children's services, addiction and mental health services, home care and access to physicians.
- Reporting requirements are extensive, based on short turnaround times, do not measure relevant data and fail to capture quality of service/outcomes.
- Funding models are inconsistent and constantly changing, based on outdated data, offer no revenue stability to municipalities beyond a single year, and do not reflect demands placed on municipalities in the new system. Funding changes and rising expectations result, in effect, in downloading of provincial responsibilities.
- Social assistance rates are woefully below service users' survival needs, especially in light of the rapid and substantial increase in rental costs, food costs and overall inflation.
- Municipal budget reductions associated with EST resulted in a decrease in funds available for service users to support them with their goals.
- While integrated case management is a key facet of Ontario Works working with EO to support service users, the concept and practices are not well defined.
- Service System Managers need to better understand Ontario Works and help clarify expectations of staff.

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<sup>2</sup> Delivered under the title Client-Centric Strategies.



## A Knowledge-to-Action (KTA) Approach



### Knowledge Creation

Our professional development team has synthesized and adapted the Knowledge-to-Action (KTA) model into a staff curriculum that includes training and tools to support person-centricity in all workplaces delivering services and supports to service users. We are also proposing a curriculum to properly equip the people served in stability support and employment programs with the knowledge they require to function effectively. Two PCS programs (as described further below) are

available to address the knowledge requirements for staff and service users: *PCS for Staff*© and *PCS for Service Users*©.

## Action Cycle

The action cycle includes a range of activities needed to implement knowledge. "The action cycle is iterative and includes the deliberate application of knowledge to cause change in behaviours and/or attitudes. Note that action steps may not be sequential, and one can start at any phase of the cycle. One can also move between the knowledge creation phase and the action cycle in an iterative fashion."<sup>3</sup> In short, the KTA model is non-linear and highly adaptable.

Our work in knowledge creation and the action cycle has included not only the staff and service users' curricula mentioned above, but also ongoing work to create further action (application of knowledge, akin to normalization) to identify roadblocks and further collaboration necessary to achieve the wholesale culture shift embodied in the Province's Renewal and Transformation initiatives. (See Defining the Culture Shift table on page 2).

The PCS series introduces two additional person-centric programs to implement the Knowledge-to-Action model as the pathway to achieve program goals and support service users' success: These are *PCS for Trainers and Champions*© and the *PCS for Service System Integration*©, also described further below.

## Underlying Assumptions in PCS

- The service user must remain at the centre in all planning, problem-solving and decision-making concerning a revamped stability and employment service system within the Social Assistance Renewal and Employment Services Transformation initiatives.
- Focus on the service user is the only pathway to program and service user success.
- A competency-based approach will yield better outcomes in system transformation than an authority-based or power-centric approach.
- The applied competencies embedded in Person-Centric Strategies, such as Three-Dimensional Micro-Coaching, Communications Styles in Coaching, Person-Centric Interviewing, Person-Centric Negotiating, and Four-Step Problem-Solving, lend themselves well to establishing and sustaining community-based partnerships and collaboration.
- Service user engagement is largely dependent on skilful coaching through relationship management; discovery of their circumstances, strengths,

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [The Knowledge-to-Action Framework](#), by Leah Crockett, November 2017.

resources, needs and aspirations; and effective, collaborative planning for improvement.

- Knowledge is a necessary but insufficient component; application of knowledge is crucial to program and service user success.
- These competencies are also crucial for individual, team, organizational and service system success in a person-centric service system.
- The unprecedented changes to social assistance constitute a culture shift for its service users and all of the service system delivery partners.

## PCS Programs

There are four programs in the PCS series. These are designed to address the needs of staff, trainers and champions, service users, organizations and communities.

Please note that all program durations and delivery schedules are flexible. They may be adjusted in collaboration with each organization based on individual needs and priorities.

### PCS for Staff©

Professional development for provincial, municipal, community/EO delivery partners

**Duration:** 18 hours (recommended minimum)

**Delivery Method:** Facilitator-led workshops

**Curriculum Overview:** PCS for Staff© is a professional development program especially designed for first-line human services delivery and support staff, including supervisors and managers. This program helps staff to prepare for and implement strategies to effectively serve service users who will benefit from participation in stability support and other pre-employment programs as envisioned in the Ontario Government's plan for Social Assistance Renewal<sup>4</sup> and Employment Services Transformation.

In addition to Employment Ontario and Ontario Works staff, we encourage engagement of staff from related programs and services (e.g., ODSP, Children's Services and Housing) as well as community programs with which service users engage regarding their stability and employment supports.

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<sup>4</sup> Social Assistance Renewal Highlights, Issue 2, Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. February 2022.

PCS for Staff has been extremely well-received by the hundreds of first-line staff, including those from prototype sites. To date, approximately 1,300 municipal staff and 155 EO staff have participated in this program<sup>5</sup>.

## Learning Objectives

- Provide a review of current research and thinking about human behaviour that includes the rapidly emerging and vital concept of intersectionality as well as the psychological and behavioural outcomes associated with socio-economic conditions of poverty, social exclusion, trauma and scarcity.
- Establish the service user as the central focus of every interaction through the staff application of knowledge, skills, and supporting behaviours (competencies) that promote service users' awareness and understanding.
- Analyze this research to determine and apply strategic staff competencies and workplace tools to produce the best possible outcomes.
  - Supply workplace coaching tools that bring person-centric theories and practices to life in the workplace.
- Develop a common language to capture person-centric thinking and applications.
- Normalize person-centric strategies across the sectors providing services to this group.
- Support service integration at the local level by establishing evidence-based competency standards in service delivery across programs.
- Enrich service users' outcomes through the use of a Three-Dimensional MicroCoaching Model as a foundation for a person-centric service, including for those in support roles, that can be applied in short-contact ('thin-slice') situations.
- Identify and expand upon the competencies necessary for effective MicroCoaching. Use these competencies to level power through increasing the engagement of service users in the coaching process.
- Strengthen intra- and inter-organizational relationships for more effective service delivery and results.

## Workplace Tools

### 1. Normalization Tools

There is an emphasis in PCS on applying in the workplace the theories, competencies, principles and practices found in the curriculum, a process known as normalization. The following normalization tools for staff application of the competencies in the workplace are included in PCS for Staff curriculum:

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<sup>5</sup> Delivered under the titles Client-Centric Approaches and Client-Centric Strategies.

- a) **Pre- and Post-Learning Self-Assessment:** Learners complete a self-assessment questionnaire before and after the program to record their self-assessed competencies in coaching and problem solving, and track their progress and desire for further development in each of the topics covered in the curriculum.
- b) **Skills Applications in the Workplace (SAW):** Skills Application in the Workplace is a document for learners to reflect on how they will use the competencies covered in the workshop within their individual workplace roles.
- c) **Local PCS Support Options**
  - Post-learning and interval debriefings with team leads and supervisors
  - Short refresher sessions (e.g., lunch 'n' learns)
  - Individual learning plans
  - Case conferences
  - Integration with new staff onboarding training
  - Integration with performance appraisal systems
  - Newsletter updates
  - Standing item on team meeting agendas
  - Staff-generated videos and articles
  - PCS-logo items (e.g., souvenirs, desktop item, wearables)

## 2. MicroCoaching Tools

- Learners receive modernized job aids which provide a 'mind map' or guide for using each person-centric competency effectively. Each tool contains a summary of the competency and prompting questions/items that illustrate how the skill may be used in staff roles.
  - Tool 1: Understanding Behaviour
  - Tool 2: The 3-D MicroCoaching Model
  - Tool 3: Communication Styles in Coaching
  - Tool 4: Currencies
  - Tool 5: Person-Centric Interviewing
  - Tool 6: Stages of Change
  - Tool 7: Consensus Building
  - Tool 8: Four Step Problem Solving
  - Tool 9: Person-Centric Negotiating
  - Tool 10: Conflict Management
  - Tool 11: Moving to Collaboration
  - Tool 12: Systems Thinking – POPSAC Assets and Resources
  - Tool 13: Team Agreement

## **PCS for Staff II: Advanced Applications©**

An advanced applications follow-up program to examine post-training application of person-centric competencies

**Duration:** 2 days (recommended minimum)

**Delivery Method:** Facilitator-led workshops

**Curriculum Overview:** Organizations where staff have completed the PCS for Staff program may also choose to engage in a follow-up module which applies the Knowledge-to-Action (KTA) model to advanced applications in the action cycle. This module engages staff and their teams/organizations in examining post-professional development application of competencies. The collaborative process helps ensure effective, inclusive, integrated and coherent team/organizational person-centric services.

This advanced applications module also explores the impact of intersectionality on both service providers and users. An understanding of intersectionality enlarges our appreciation of the impacts of the social, political and economic forces that shape human experience. This module explores the PCS Intersectionality Model© as a guide to applying PCS competencies in our work with service users, co-workers and community members.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Explore a sector-specific model of Intersectionality to facilitate person-centric practices that acknowledge and accommodate service users' lived experience.
- Facilitate the shift from knowledge to action through problem-identification and problem-solving.
- Acquire knowledge of these problems at the team and organizational level.
- Assess the barriers and facilitators to knowledge use in day-to-day work (e.g., implementation of the workplace tools in PCS).
- Choose interventions to address the issues.
- Monitor the effectiveness of these measures.
- Evaluate the results.
- Sustain the necessary changes for success.

## PCS for Trainers and Champions©

A deep-dive workshop into the underlying research and applications of PCS

**Duration:** 5 days (recommended minimum)

**Delivery Method:** Facilitator-led workshops which also engages the learners in co-facilitation

**Curriculum Overview:** Conducted as a workshop for municipal, provincial, and community-based staff trainers and other person-centric champions who support knowledge translation and application of person-centric strategies in the workplace through ongoing professional development and coaching. The workshop provides a detailed, behind-the-scenes review of the PCS curriculum and its supporting tools and resources, including the curriculum syllabus and the PCS Learning Resource Guide.

### Learning Objectives

- Build internal organizational and service system capacity for ongoing staff and service users' personal/professional development in PCS by providing background, insight and resources for facilitating and-or supporting internal delivery of PCS for Staff and PCS for Service Users.
- Identify the differences between delivering training and facilitating professional development.
- Understand the importance of and process for conducting a facilitated dialogue as a primary knowledge transfer process in professional development.
- Develop personal and team facilitation learning plans.
- Identify necessary supports for effective program delivery and normalization.
- Create daily agendas for ensuring a collaborative, consensus-built decision-making process with the learning group.
- Assist learners to serve as Knowledge-to-Action (KTA) leaders in various roles: coaches, champions, change agents, culture shifters and normalizers, supporting the understanding and application of person-centric strategies in the workplace.
- Provide the opportunity to take an in-depth look at the curriculum and the supporting learning materials.
- Examine facilitation methods for curriculum delivery and workplace application of the person-centric approach.
- Establish a network and support system for delivering and supporting PCS.
- Meet individual learner's objectives.

## PCS for Service Users©

Preparing for personal, educational and career success

**Duration:** 10 half- days<sup>6</sup> (recommended minimum)

**Delivery Method:** Facilitator-led workshops

**Curriculum Overview:** Facilitator-led workshops are proposed to build service user competencies critical for preparing for, participating and succeeding in stability and employment support programs and, ultimately, employment. Currently under development, this curriculum builds on prior service users' initiatives created by our professional development team which include Movement to Learning©, Movement to Improvement© and Movement to Employment©.

**Learning Objective:** To build competencies critical for helping service users to prepare for, participate and succeed in stability support and employability improvement programs and, ultimately, employment.

**Topics:** May include but are not limited to:

- Intersectionality (recognizing the lived experience of individuals according to their unique social and economic identities and circumstances)
- 3-D MicroCoaching Model (coaching upward)
- Stages of Change Model (planning for change)
- Four-Step Problem Solving (informed decision-making)
- Moving to Collaboration (optimizing the coaching experience)
- Person-Centric Negotiating (collaborative problem-solving)
- Consensus Building (building agreement with coaches)
- Four-Dimensional Model of Employability (preparing for employment success)
- Conference Board of Canada Employability Skills Model (preparing for employment success)
- Gap Analysis (plotting the service plan for individual success)

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that service-user training days are generally abbreviated to maximize engagement and accommodate their needs. A typical service user training day would run from 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM with an hour for lunch. A typical half-day would run 9:30 AM to 11:45 AM with a 15-minute break.



## PCS for Service System Integration©

A locally-driven problem-solving table for partner collaboration

This is a customized program that is designed in collaboration with the municipality/department/agency engaged. Each community's circumstances and different, such that the final implementation plan is designed according to local needs, factors and circumstances.

**Duration:** 9 hours (recommended minimum)

### **Delivery Method:**

- 3 hours for facilitator-led Initial Consultation and As It was Heard Report
- 6 hours for Convening the Partners
- Ongoing from there

### **Stages of Establishing the Local Systems Integration Table**

1. Initial consultation

**Duration:** Up to 3 hours

Consultation led by OMSSA consultants with municipal and provincial representatives to identify facilitating factors and systemic barriers to achieving an effective, inclusive, integrated and coherent local person-centric delivery system that reflects the goals and objectives of Social Assistance Renewal and Employment Services Transformation.

#### **2. What Was Heard Report**

**Duration:** Included as part of the Initial Consultation

Problem Identification: A summary of issues identified in the initial consultation

Recommendations and draft Terms of Reference for establishing the Service System Integration table.

Identification of prospective stakeholders and participants

### 3. Convening the Partners

**Duration:** 6 hours

- Develop a communications strategy for internal and external engagement.
- Establish the modality/location, time, agenda and duration for an initial gathering of the stakeholders.
- Craft an invitation to key stakeholders, including community service providers.
- Table the draft Terms of Reference for stakeholder input (e.g., co-chairs, problem-statement, goals and objectives, timelines, operational procedures, roles and responsibilities, draft charter).
- Establish the competency-based framework for Service System Integration table, including the person-centric tools for implementation.
- Explore the provincial vision for Social Assistance Renewal and Employment Services Transformation.
- Adapt the vision to the local context (e.g., service users' existing and needed resources, budgetary needs).
- Establish local targets and monitoring and measurement requirements.
- Develop a work plan and benchmarks.
- Measure results and corresponding action plans.

#### **Curriculum Overview**

This program constitutes a locally-driven problem-solving table engaging the key Social Assistance Renewal and Employment Services Transformation delivery partners, including municipalities, ODSP management, EO delivery agencies, service user representatives, the Service System Managers, and provincial ministries such as the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD), and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH).

The purpose is to help ensure an effective, inclusive, integrated and coherent local person-centric delivery system.

The program is designed to operate through the use of PCS competencies, such as Communication Styles, Four-Step Problem-Solving, Moving to Collaboration, Conflict Management and Person-Centric Negotiating. An intersectionality lens is also applied to the process. The work of this collaborative body is determined through the application of the Action Cycle articulated in the KTA model.

## Learning Objectives

Following the KTA model, this involves creating and nurturing a partners' collaboration to:

- Support service delivery leaders in adapting to and effectively managing the culture shift.
- Engage key partners in building and sustaining an effective, inclusive, integrated and coherent local person-centric stability and employment support.
- Facilitate the shift from knowledge to action through problem-identification and problem-solving.
- Acquire knowledge of these problems in the local context.
- Assess the barriers to and factors that enable knowledge use (e.g., implementation of workplace tools in PCS).
- Choose interventions to address the issues.
- Monitor the effectiveness of these measures.
- Evaluate the results.
- Sustain the necessary changes for success.
- Examine system effectiveness in acknowledging and accounting for intersectionality in service delivery.