



School of Social Work:
Center for Aging & Disability Education & Research

Vermont Learning Enhancement in Aging Program (LEAP) 2025

**Evaluation Report from the Center for Aging & Disability
Education & Research
Boston University School of Social Work**

June 2025





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School of Social Work:
Center for Aging & Disability Education & Research

Evaluation Report

I. Introduction

The Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER) at Boston University School of Social Work is dedicated to bringing evidence-based research into practice through workforce innovation in the aging and disability fields. CADER programs and courses apply a competency-focused approach to comprehensive training, committed to enhancing the skills of practitioners in the field at all levels of experience.

The Center on Aging at the University of Vermont (UVM), the UVM Department of Social Work, and the Dementia Family Caregiver Center (DFCC) at the University of Vermont Medical Center partnered with CADER to pilot a curriculum that prepares health and social service professionals to support the growing needs of Vermont's aging population. Through their partnership, UVM and CADER developed the Vermont Learning Enhancement in Aging Program (LEAP), with the goal of increasing the age-friendly workforce of health and social service professionals that serve older adults in the rural communities of Vermont.

II. Certificate Overview

The Vermont LEAP Certificate is a self-paced, online, five-course certificate program created by CADER that is focused on the biological, psychological, and social aspects of aging through a strength-based approach. The certificate consists of the following courses:

1. Core Issues in Aging and Disability
2. Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities
3. Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias
4. Mental Health and Aging Issues
5. Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults

After completing each course, learners participated in a 75-minute virtual facilitated group session led by trained facilitators. The purpose of these sessions was to deepen knowledge and understanding through additional materials, group work, and discussing how to apply new skills in their communities.

In addition to developing the online program, CADER provided course management support, which included technical support, course completion reminders, and learner tracking. CADER provided weekly learner progress reports to leadership at the UVM Center on Aging.

III. Program Participation

Between January 6, 2025 and June 20, 2025, 15 learners completed the VT LEAP Certificate. One learner completed courses 1-4.

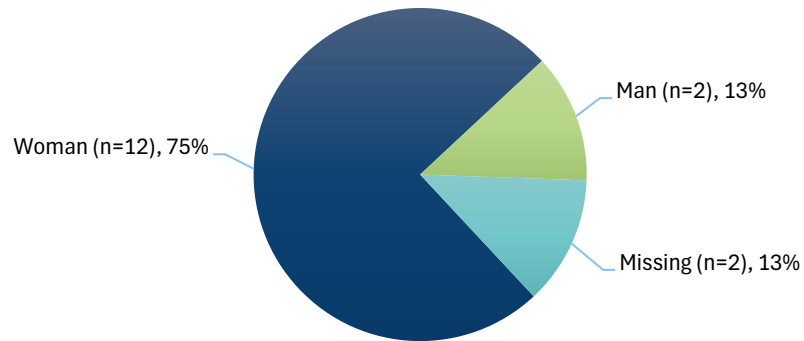
IV. Learner Demographics and Work Information

Participants in the VT LEAP Certificate self-reported demographic and work information when registering for the program. Responses are displayed below.

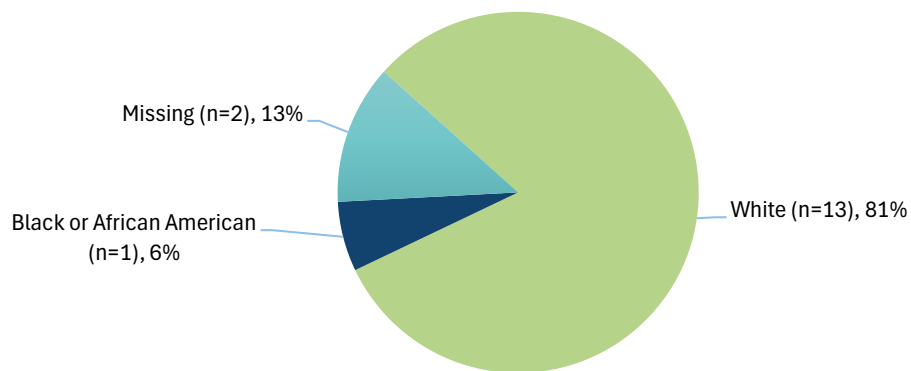
1. Demographics

The following charts show a breakdown of learners by gender, race, age, and educational attainment.

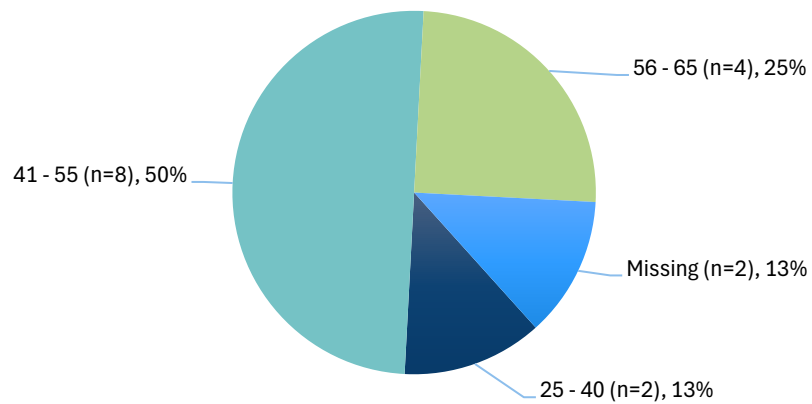
Learners by Gender



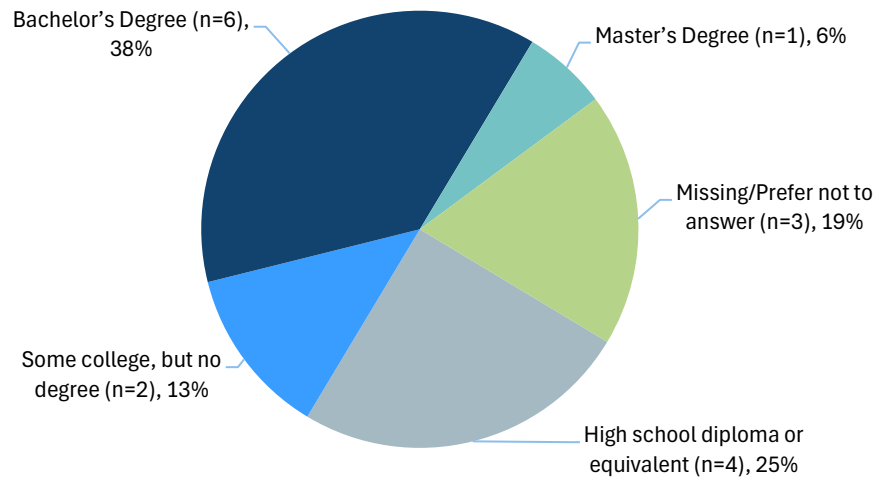
Learners by Race



Learners by Age



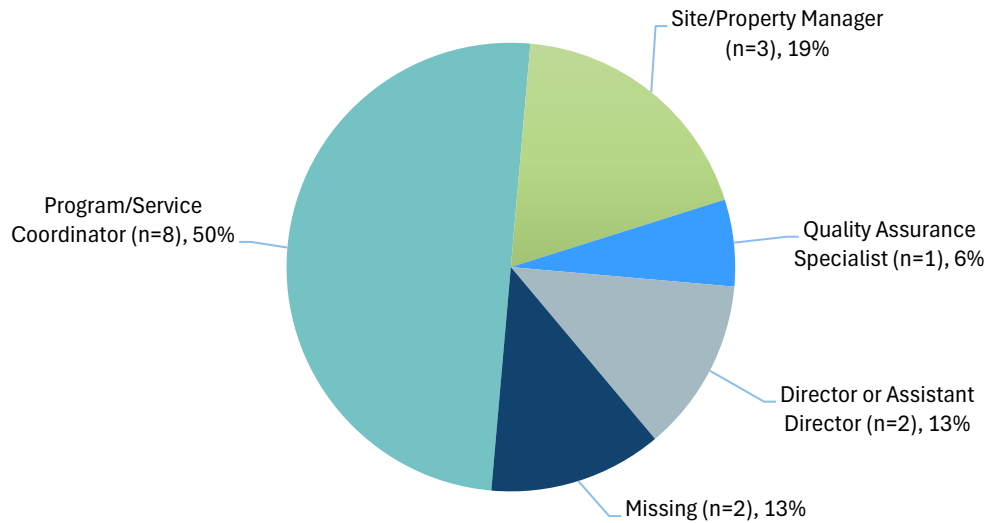
Learners by Education



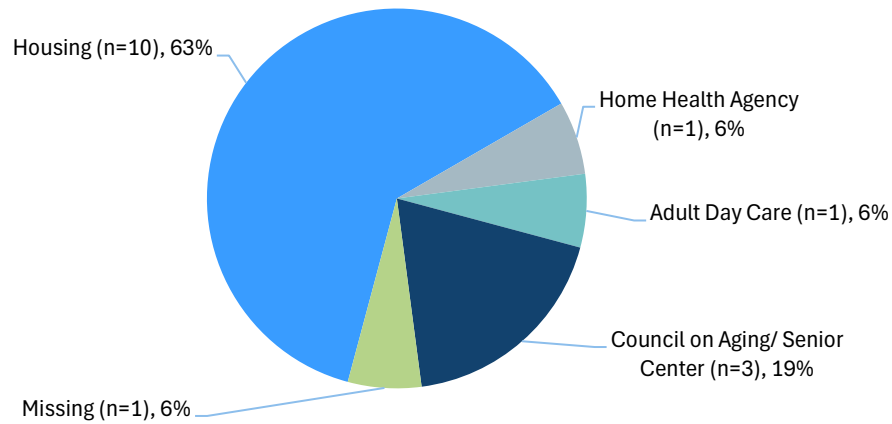
2. Work Information

Learners were asked to report their occupational role, their work setting, their experience in providing care, and how much prior training they have received.

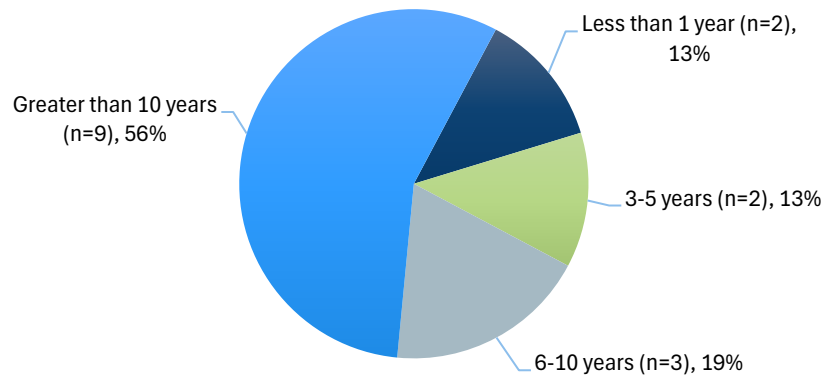
Learners by Occupational Role



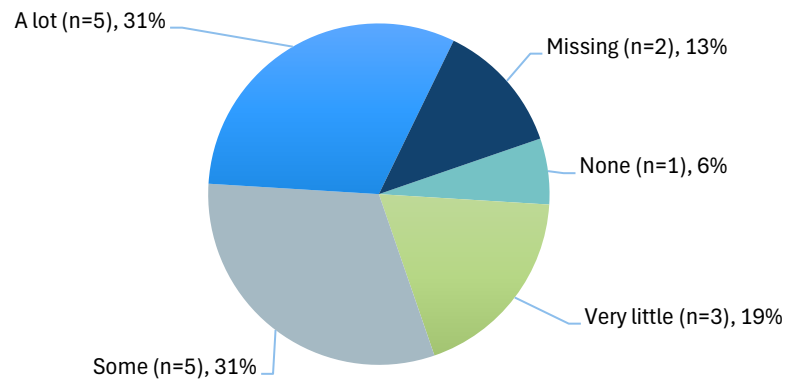
Learners by Work Setting



How many years of experience do you have in providing care to others?



Have you received any prior training or education in providing care to others?



V. Course Results

The following sections provide evaluation results by course. The results include:

- **Competency Results:** At the beginning and end of each course, learners were asked to rate their skill level on competencies using the following scale: 0 - Not skilled at all; 1 - Beginning skill; 2 - Moderate skill; 3 - Advanced skill; 4 - Expert skill. A paired t-test was used to compare means for each competency (the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used when the distribution of the differences between the paired values was not normally distributed).
- **Learner Feedback:** Learners answered three open-ended questions upon completion of each course. Key responses and themes are provided for each course.
 - What changes do you anticipate making after taking this course?
 - What did you find most helpful about this course?
 - Your feedback is very important to us! Please share any comments about this course with us in the space provided.
- **Course Evaluation Results:** At the end of each course, learners were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of course evaluation statements using the following scale: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly agree; Not-applicable.

1. Core Issues in Aging and Disability

This course describes demographic changes related to aging and how key laws and policies – such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Americans with Disabilities Act - have shaped the lives of older adults and people living with disabilities. The course outlines common medical and mental health concerns that can impact healthy aging, as well as how person-centered care and available resources can support independent, community-based living.

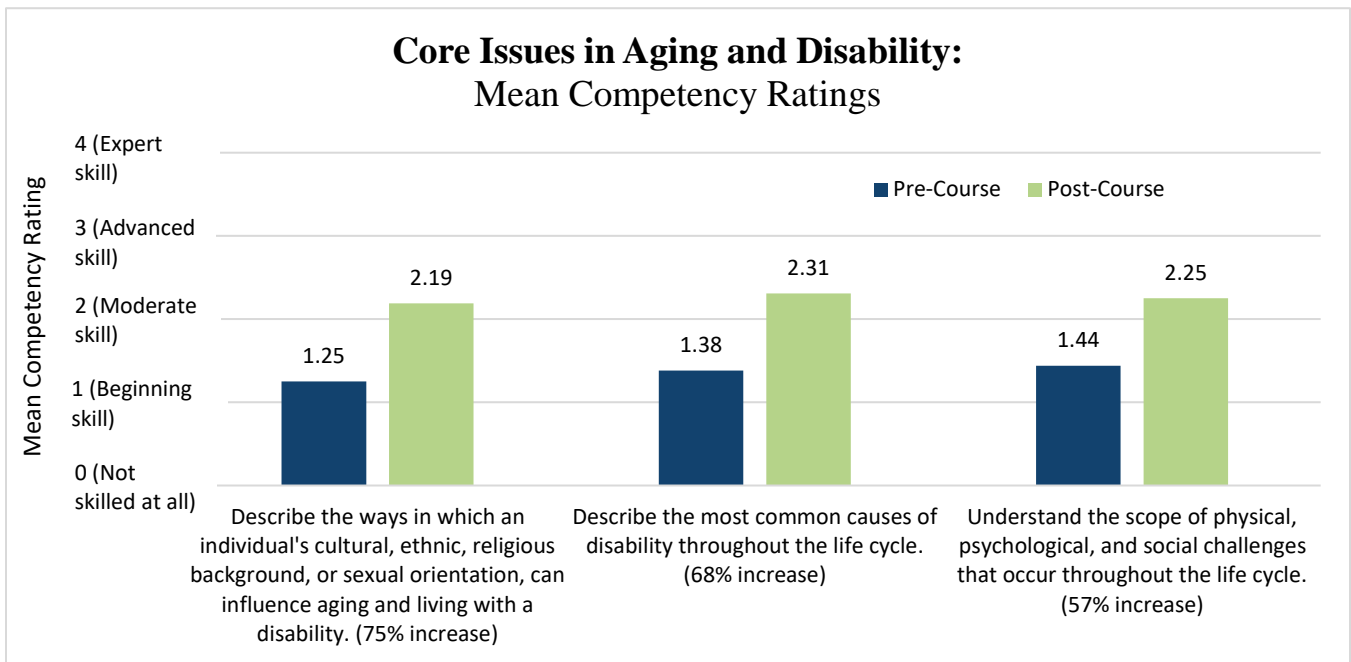
A. Competency Results

For all competencies, mean competency ratings significantly increased ($p < .05$) from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 36% to 75%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase	P-value
Adapt communication methods to the sensory, verbal, physical, and cognitive abilities of the person.	1.56	2.13	36%	<.05
Describe the most common causes of disability throughout the life cycle.	1.38	2.31	68%	<.001
Describe the ways in which an individual's cultural, ethnic, religious background, or sexual orientation, can influence aging and living with a disability.	1.25	2.19	75%	<.001
Understand the anxiety, stress, and fear that older adults and people with disabilities may face when communicating with workers.	1.63	2.31	42%	<.001

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase	P-value
Comprehend demographic shifts related to aging and disability in the United States.	1.44	2.25	57%	<.001
Understand the scope of physical, psychological, and social challenges that occur throughout the life cycle.	1.44	2.25	57%	<.05

The three course competencies with the greatest percent increases are shown in the following graph.



B. Learner Feedback

Learners gained knowledge in many areas pertaining to aging and disability and indicated that they will use this knowledge to inform their practice.

“I'll be more knowledgeable about what older adults and older adults with disabilities are emotionally and physically having to deal with every day, which will mean I will better know what questions to ask them so that I can better assist them.”

“Making sure my approach is more person-centered.”

Multiple learners said that the course will help them be more mindful and understanding of the individuals they work with.

“To be more mindful of people and their needs.”

“I will be more mindful of my participant's individual needs.”

Learners also appreciated that the course included resources for older adults and people living with disabilities and intended to compile these resources for their clients.

“More options for people to reach out and get better services for them.”

C. Course Evaluation Results

The percentage of learners who agreed or strongly agreed with each course evaluation statement is provided in the table below.

Evaluation Statement	Percent of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
This training expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	94%
This training will help me apply practice skills in the topic area.	94%
I would recommend this course to my colleagues.	94%

2. Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities

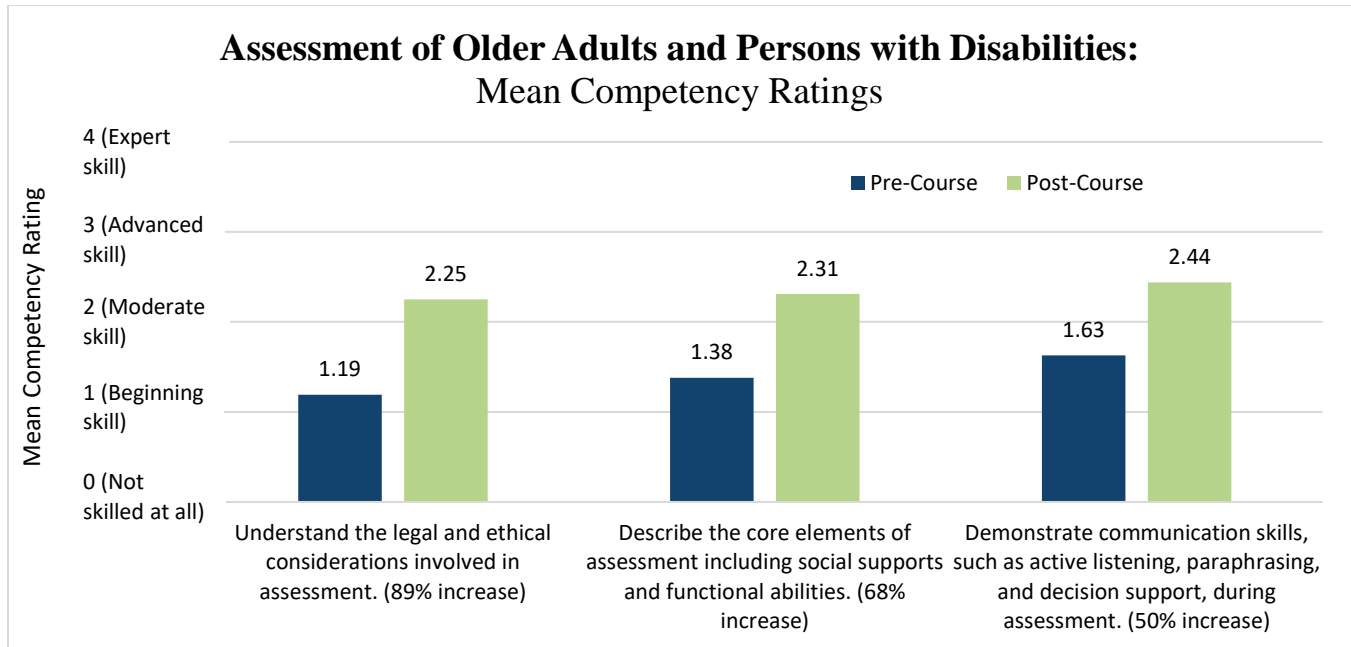
This course equips learners to conduct assessments and to work with consumers to identify services and supports. The course explores the physical, mental, social, and emotional factors that may limit an individual's ability to live a full and productive life. The course illustrates ways to establish trust with a consumer and examines legal and ethical considerations involved in assessments.

A. Competency Results

For all competencies, mean competency ratings significantly increased ($p < .05$) from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 39% to 89%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase	P-value
Demonstrate communication skills, such as active listening, paraphrasing, and decision support, during assessment.	1.63	2.44	50%	<.001
Describe the core elements of assessment including social supports and functional abilities.	1.38	2.31	68%	<.05
Recognize one's own attitudes and the impact of your attitudes on assessment.	1.75	2.50	43%	<.05
Understand the legal and ethical considerations involved in assessment.	1.19	2.25	89%	<.001
Respect the consumer's right to choice and self-determination throughout the assessment process.	1.75	2.44	39%	<.05

The three course competencies with the greatest percent increases are shown in the following graph.



B. Learner Feedback

When asked what content they found helpful, learners said that they appreciated the guidance on conducting assessments.

“A better understanding of how assessment developed and the ethical principles behind assessment.”

“Keys to good assessment.”

Learners will apply what they learned by viewing assessments as partnerships and by being more mindful of their clients’ needs during assessments.

“I will approach assessments with more perspective on ‘partnering’ with participants and also view ethical considerations with a different eye.”

“To be more mindful of meeting people where they are at.”

Many learners stated that they found the information on culturally informed practice useful and said that they will pay more attention to culture during assessments.

“Being more mindful of cultural differences.”

“Being more aware of cultural assumptions I may bring to the assessment and alter my approach.”

C. Course Evaluation Results

The percentage of learners who agreed or strongly agreed with each course evaluation statement is provided in the table below.

Evaluation Statement	Percent of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
This training expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
This training will help me apply practice skills in the topic area.	100%
I would recommend this course to my colleagues.	100%

3. *Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*

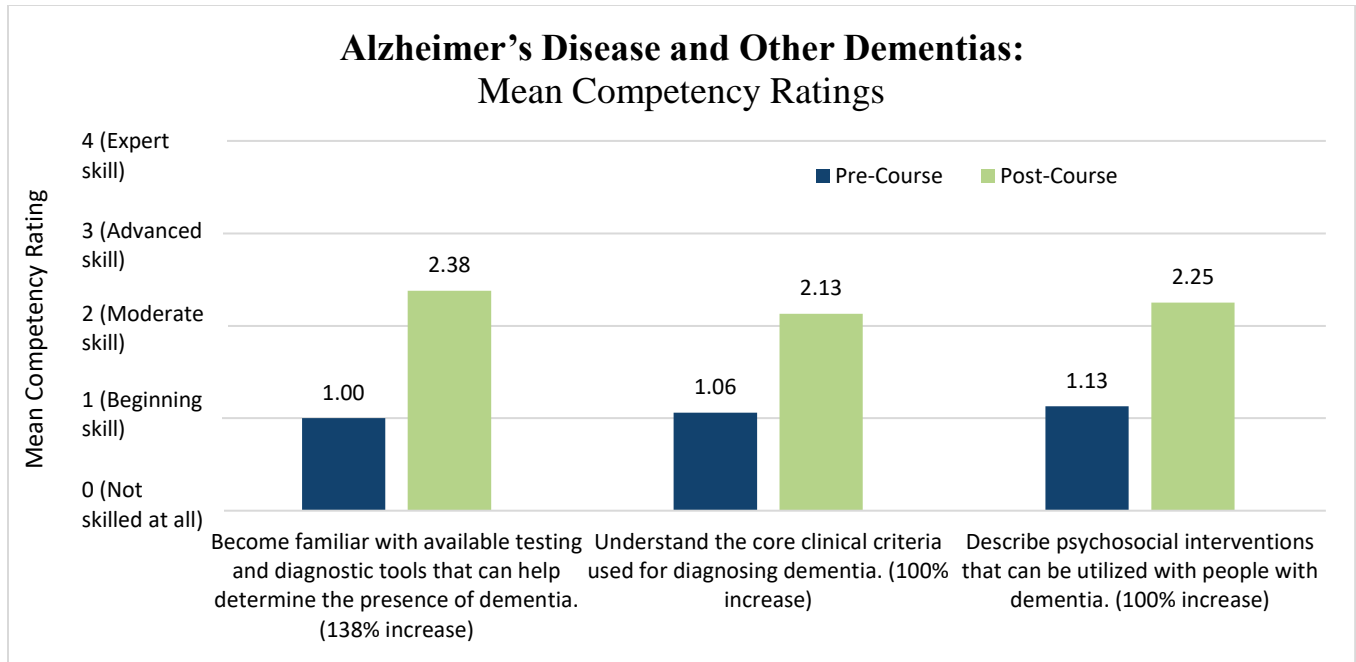
This course offers a comprehensive look at Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, investigating the impact on individuals, families, caregivers, and communities. The course explains risk factors, prevention, the stages of Alzheimer's disease, and strategies for working with individuals living with dementia.

A. *Competency Results*

For all competencies, mean competency ratings significantly increased ($p < .05$) from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 61% to 138%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase	P-value
Become familiar with available testing and diagnostic tools that can help determine the presence of dementia.	1.00	2.38	138%	<.001
Describe psychosocial interventions that can be utilized with people with dementia.	1.13	2.25	100%	<.001
Identify the most common types of dementia.	1.44	2.31	61%	<.001
Understand common legal and ethical dilemmas that may affect people with dementia and their caregivers.	1.19	2.31	95%	<.001
Understand the core clinical criteria used for diagnosing dementia.	1.06	2.13	100%	<.05
Understand the stages of Alzheimer's disease.	1.31	2.44	86%	<.001

The three course competencies with the greatest percent increases are shown in the following graph.



B. Learner Feedback

After completing the course, learners stated that they are better prepared to adjust the care and services they provide to fit the needs of clients living with dementia.

“Tailor my approach to folks I interact with that have a dementia diagnosis.”

“This course has changed my understanding of how dementia works. I will be more equipped to handle situations that come up in my work with people with dementia.”

Learners appreciated the information on the stages of Alzheimer's disease and communication strategies.

“Clearly explaining and showing examples of the stages of Alzheimer's.”

“Strategies for communicating with those who have dementia.”

Overall, learners enjoyed this course, as it helped to strengthen their understanding of dementia.

“I really liked the course and how much my eyes have been opened to the many layers of dementia and Alzheimer's. I appreciate that a whole course has been dedicated to this particular topic since we are all dealing with it so much in our community at large.”

“Watching the video that showed how it feels walking through life with the disease was eye-opening.”

“This section of the course was fascinating, and I felt like I learned a ton!”

C. Course Evaluation Results

The percentage of learners who agreed or strongly agreed with each course evaluation statement is provided in the table below.

Evaluation Statement	Percent of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
This training expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
This training will help me apply practice skills in the topic area.	94%
I would recommend this course to my colleagues.	100%

4. Mental Health and Aging Issues

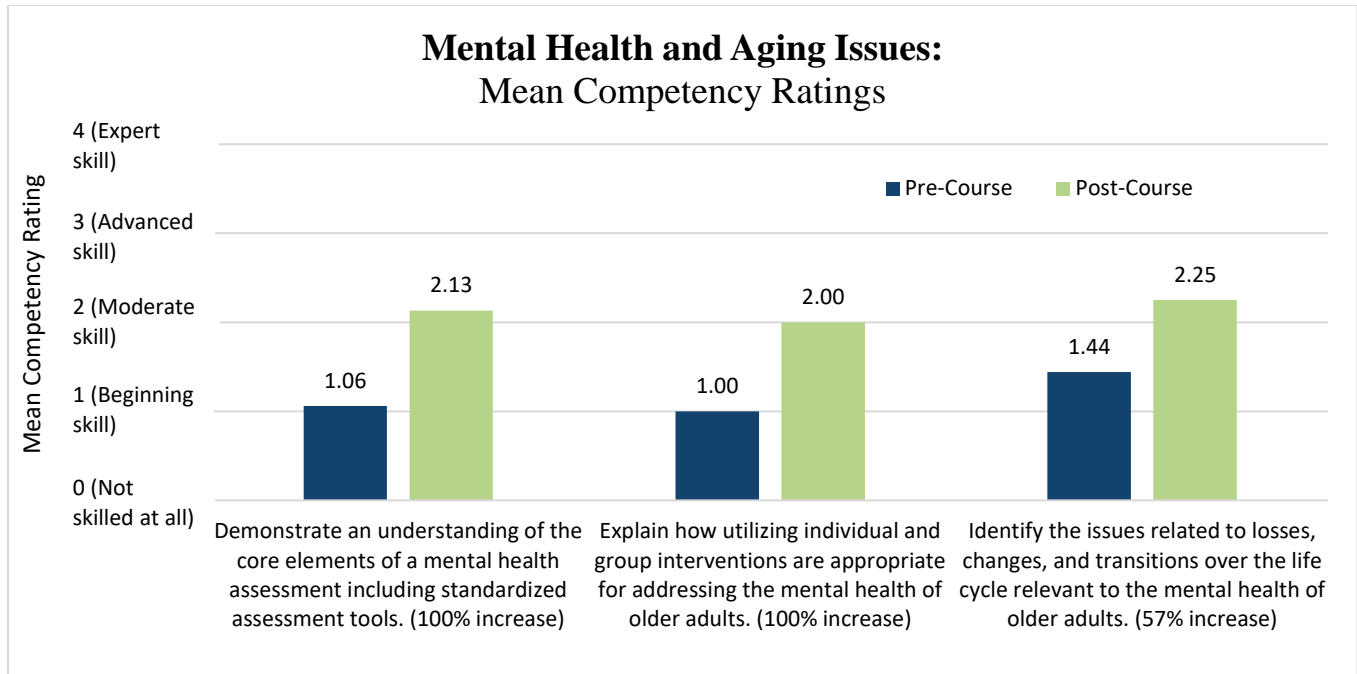
This course explores the mental health needs and challenges faced by older adults, including anxiety, depression, neurocognitive disorders, and the impact of substance use and polypharmacy on mental well-being. The course equips learners to recognize signs, perform screenings and assessments, and understand treatment options for mental health disorders. Through a strengths-based lens, the course emphasizes the resilience and capabilities of older adults.

A. Competency Results

For all competencies, mean competency ratings significantly increased ($p < .05$) from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 37% to 100%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase	P-value
Demonstrate an understanding of the core elements of a mental health assessment including standardized assessment tools.	1.06	2.13	100%	<.001
Describe the signs and symptoms of the common mental health conditions that can affect adults as they age.	1.69	2.31	37%	<.05
Develop an understanding of the impact of culture when addressing mental health issues facing older adults.	1.38	2.31	68%	<.001
Explain how utilizing individual and group interventions are appropriate for addressing the mental health of older adults (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, problem-solving therapy, psycho-educational groups, and supportive therapy).	1.00	2.00	100%	<.001
Explain the older adult's right to dignity and self-determination when addressing psychosocial and mental health issues of older adults.	1.38	2.06	50%	<.05
Identify the issues related to losses, changes, and transitions over the life cycle relevant to the mental health of older adults.	1.44	2.25	57%	<.05

The three course competencies with the greatest percent increases are shown in the following graph.



B. Learner Feedback

Multiple learners indicated that the course will help them become more aware of mental health challenges.

“Being more aware of others’ mental health.”

“More awareness.”

Additionally, after completing the course, learners had a better understanding of the mental health resources available to older adults.

“To be able to better identify mental health concerns and offer resources.”

“Better referrals based on better understanding of range of mental health challenges.”

Learners appreciated all the materials and information included in the course, which they will use in their practice.

“LOVED the pages of resources and links!”

“All of the sample assessments.”

“The wealth of knowledge and research presented in this module has been immensely beneficial to our program and its operations.”

“This has all been very helpful.”

C. Course Evaluation Results

The percentage of learners who agreed or strongly agreed with each course evaluation statement is provided in the table below.

Evaluation Statement	Percent of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
This training expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
This training will help me apply practice skills in the topic area.	100%
I would recommend this course to my colleagues.	100%

5. Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults

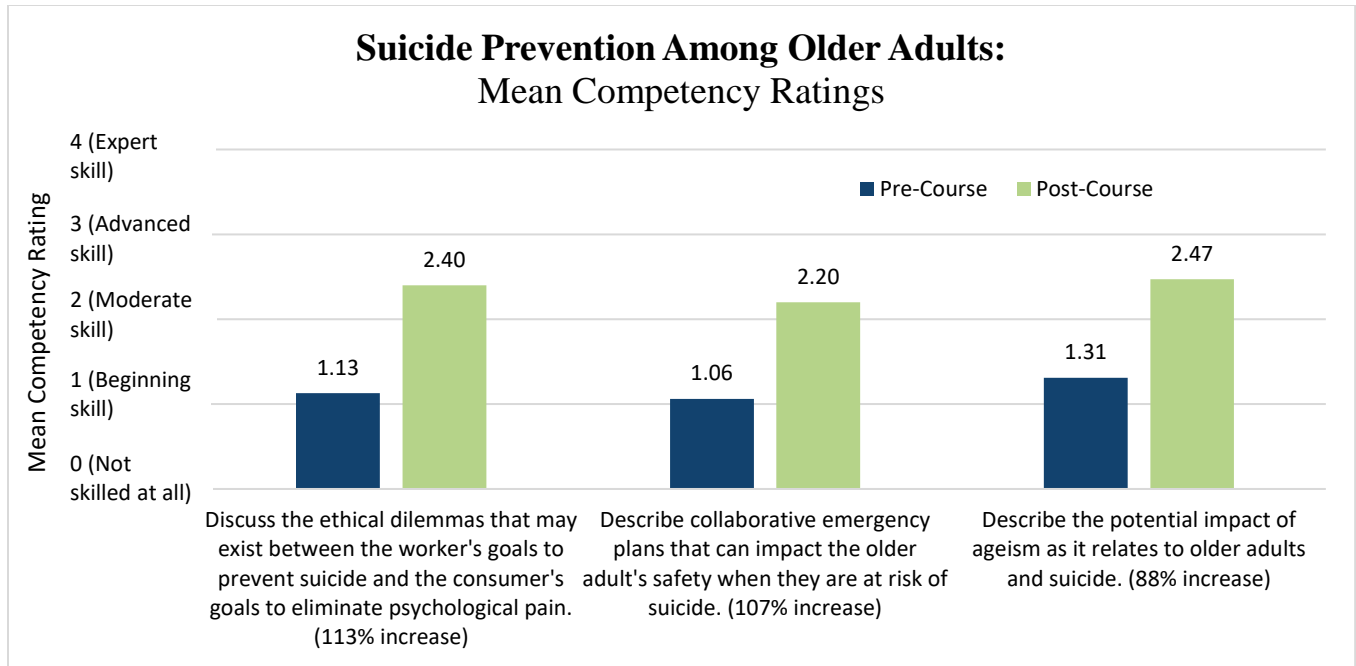
This course provides critical information on suicide prevention in older adults, including background information and statistics, risk factors, and protective factors. The course explores culturally informed, research-backed interventions, along with different views of suicide. The course also covers ethical and legal considerations for professionals working with older adults at risk of suicide.

A. Competency Results

For all competencies, mean competency ratings significantly increased ($p < .05$) from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 68% to 113%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase	P-value
Describe collaborative emergency plans that can impact the older adult's safety when they are at risk of suicide.	1.06	2.20	107%	<.001
Describe the potential impact of ageism as it relates to older adults and suicide.	1.31	2.47	88%	<.001
Describe the skills that are needed to assess and intervene with a suicidal older adult.	1.19	2.00	68%	<.001
Discuss the ethical dilemmas that may exist between the worker's goals to prevent suicide and the consumer's goals to eliminate psychological pain.	1.13	2.40	113%	<.001
Understand and manage one's own reactions to suicide.	1.38	2.40	75%	<.001
Understand the risk factors and protective factors associated with suicide.	1.38	2.40	75%	<.001

The three course competencies with the greatest percent increases are shown in the following graph.



B. Learner Feedback

Many learners noted that as a result of completing the course, they will pay more attention to mental health and the warning signs of suicide.

“To look more carefully at risk factors.”

“I will monitor the mental health of my participants more closely now.”

“Be more aware and if I suspect something I will dig deeper.”

Learners thought the screening and assessment tools provided in the course were helpful.

“The assessment tools.”

Overall, learners liked the course.

“This module was my favorite out of all of them.”

“I learned a lot of new skills to use in my current profession.”

“I have enjoyed this class very much. I have learned a great deal about the elderly and disabled population that I work with.”

“My knowledge of helping our older adults and those with mental illness has increased drastically. I feel more able to help those needing help.”

“This course was great and would highly recommend.”

C. Course Evaluation Results

The percentage of learners who agreed or strongly agreed with each course evaluation statement is provided in the table below.

Evaluation Statement	Percent of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
This training expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
This training will help me apply practice skills in the topic area.	100%
I would recommend this course to my colleagues.	100%

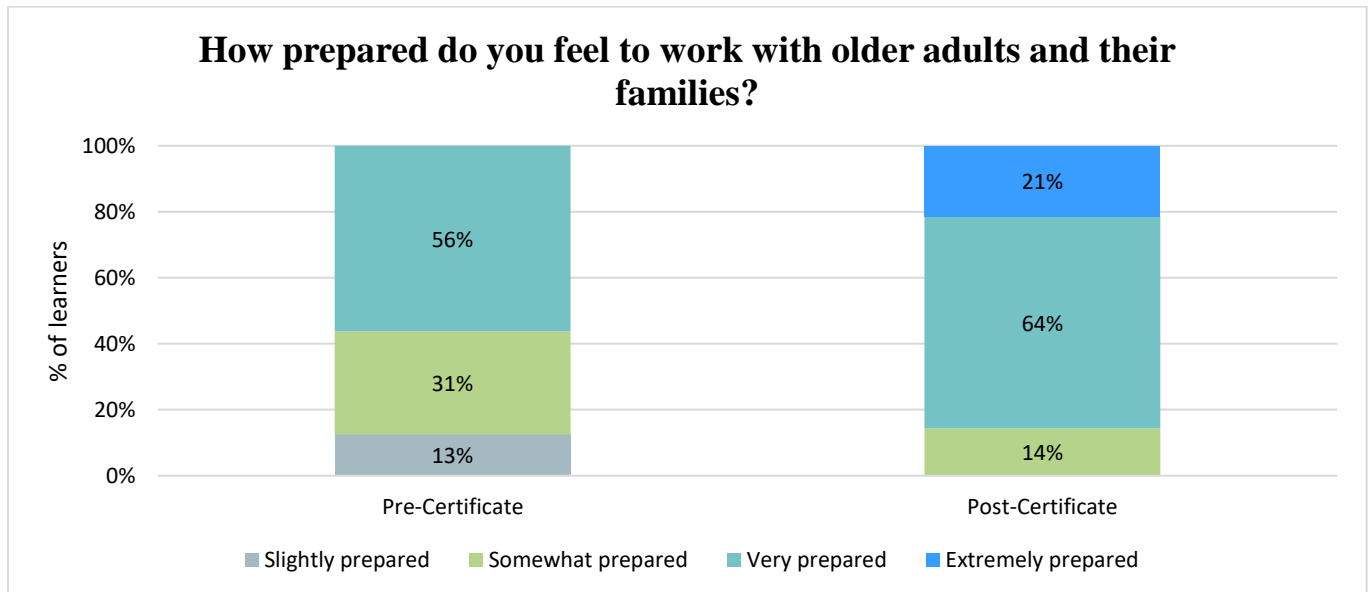
VI. Certificate Results

1. Workforce Readiness

Before starting the certificate program and after completing the entire certificate program, learners were asked a series of questions pertaining to workforce readiness.

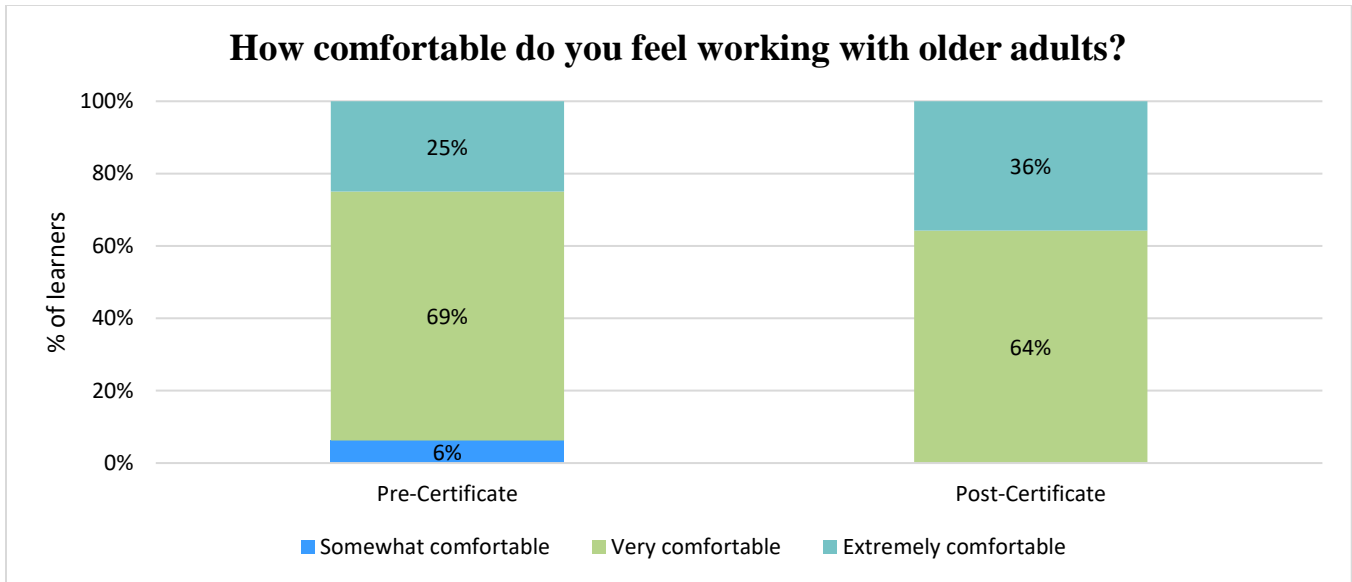
A. Preparedness

Below are learners' responses to the question: "Overall, how prepared do you feel to work with older adults and their families?" Prior to completing the certificate program, 56% of learners felt very prepared. After completing the certificate program, 85% of learners felt very or extremely prepared.



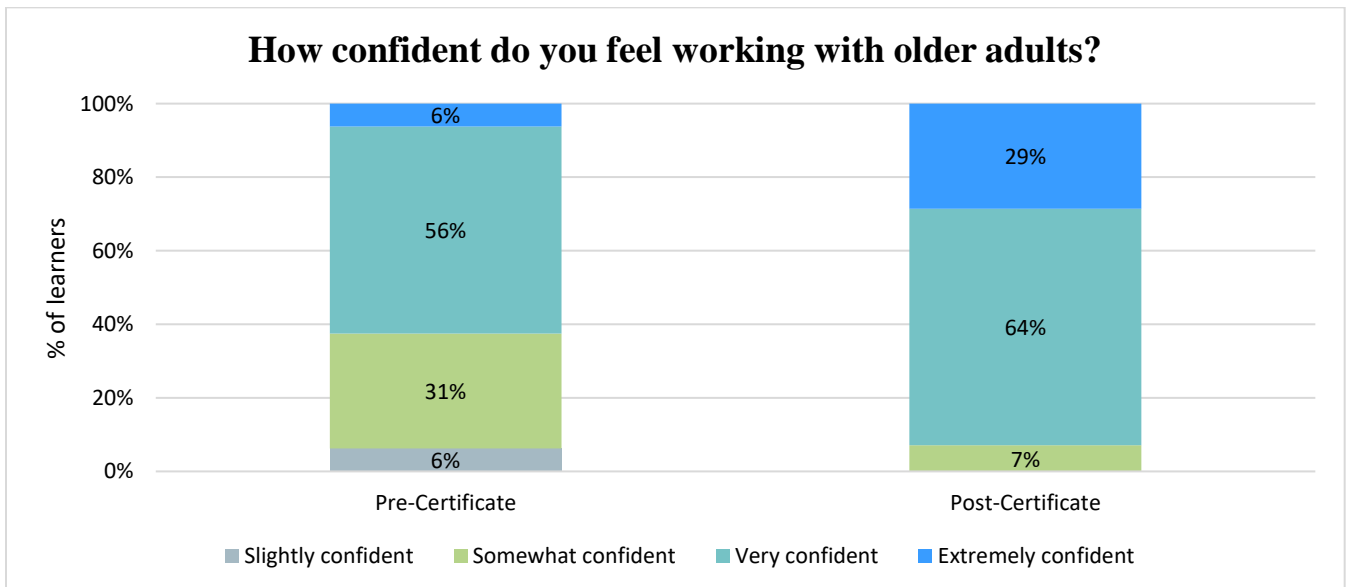
B. Comfort

Below are learners' responses to the question: "How comfortable do you feel working with older adults?" Prior to completing the certificate program, 94% of learners felt very or extremely comfortable. After completing the certificate program, 100% of learners felt very or extremely comfortable.

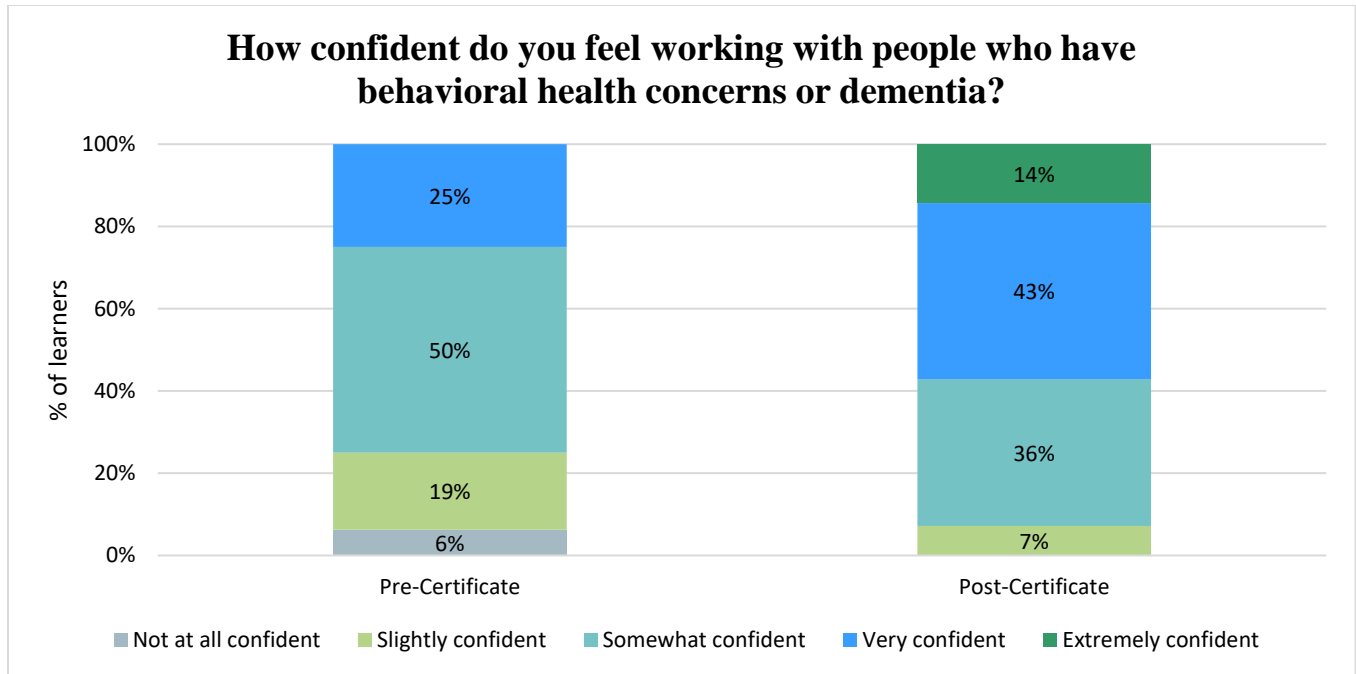


C. Confidence

Below are learners' responses to the question: "How confident do you feel working with older adults?" Prior to completing the certificate program, 62% of learners felt very or extremely confident. After completing the certificate program, 93% of learners felt very or extremely confident.



Below are learners' responses to the question: "How confident do you feel working with people who have behavioral health concerns or dementia?" Prior to completing the certificate program, 25% of learners felt very confident. After completing the certificate program, 57% of learners felt very or extremely confident.



2. Training Impact

After completing the certificate program, learners responded to a series of questions on training impact.

Question	Response				
	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely
How useful was this training?	0%	0%	7%	57%	36%
How likely is it that the information you learned in this training will have an impact on your work?	0%	0%	0%	57%	43%
How likely are you to continue working in the field of aging?	0%	0%	0%	36%	64%

After completing the certificate program, learners were also asked about the extent to which the LEAP training will impact their work.

To what extent did the LEAP training...	Response				
	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	To a great extent
Improve your work with older adults?	0%	0%	29%	50%	21%
Improve your work with people who have behavioral health concerns/dementia?	0%	0%	21%	57%	21%
Teach you valuable new skills?	0%	0%	21%	50%	29%
Teach you what to do differently when caring for older Vermonters?	0%	7%	29%	57%	7%

3. Learner Feedback

At the end of the certificate program, learners were asked a series of open-ended questions. Below are the questions and key responses.

Question: What do you think is the most important thing you gained by participating in this program?

Responses: Most learners said that the training gave them a better overall understanding of older adults and their needs. Other learners noted that the tools and resources provided were useful.

“More comprehensive understanding of foundational issues which affect older adults.”

“A deeper understanding of individual needs and feelings when working with older adults.”

“Exposure to information, issues and challenges facing older adults.”

“More hands-on tools to address issues that may arise, especially around dementia/Alzheimer's disease, suicide.”

“An introduction to all the different screening tools that are out there.”

Question: What additional training or resources would be useful to you when working with older adults and their families?

Responses: Most learners stated that the content covered in the certificate program was sufficient. A few learners mentioned additional training topics or areas where more resources are needed:

“More info on treatment.”

“Dementia trainings.”

“More support services for the elderly and disabled.”

“More mental health resources.”

Question: How did your participation in the group sessions impact your understanding and/or application of the course material?

Responses: Learners indicated that the group sessions enhanced their understanding of the course material. They also found it useful to learn how other learners address challenging situations.

“A great deal. Talking with others to understand more clearly the course material was very helpful.”

“It really just fleshed out my understanding and allowed me to have conversations that expanded upon what I learned in the reading.”

“Hearing ideas from others and what others do in different situations.”

“The group sessions definitely enhanced my understanding/application of course material by hearing others expand on the material and being prompted to articulate my own connections and reflections.”

Question: In what ways has your participation in this program impacted your career goals and expectations?

Responses: Learners indicated that the course gave them new tools, confidence, and foundational knowledge of aging that they can apply in their work and career.

“As I am new to the community health worker role, I feel this program has given me a solid foundation to continue building upon as I move forward in this unique and rewarding career.”

“It has expanded my sense of what my role needs to consider, tools I can use, issues to be concerned about.”

“I’ve been in this field for 30 years and I love this work. I plan to stay right where I am and want to grow and evolve the senior center to meet the communities needs.”

“It has given me more tools to understand older adults and better help them navigate aging.”

“I have more confidence in my ability to handle common issues and dilemmas in my work.”

“Huge impact as I am the manager of buildings and homes for people that have mental illnesses, disabilities and are older population.”

VII. Summary and Conclusion

The Vermont Learning Enhancement in Aging Program (LEAP) was well-received by learners. Learners showed statistically significant increases on all course competencies, indicating that learners gained skills in key practice areas with older adults and people with disabilities, including performing assessments, locating resources, cultural awareness, ethical and legal considerations, identifying dementia, recognizing mental health conditions, and assessing for suicide risk.

Course feedback indicated that learners found the training applicable to their work. Learners stated that after completing the training, they will be more mindful of the signs of mental health concerns and suicide risk, provide better services, be more attentive to cultural differences, and improve their communication particularly when working with individuals living with dementia.

After completing the VT LEAP Certificate, more learners felt confident working with older adults and individuals with behavioral health concerns or dementia. Despite more than 50% of learners having over a decade of experience in providing care, they reported that the training significantly enhanced their skills and would meaningfully improve their work with older adults – demonstrating both the relevance and impact of the program, even for seasoned professionals. Additionally, learners expressed that the live group sessions helped to enhance the online training by deepening their understanding of the course material and by providing an opportunity to share knowledge and ideas with other professionals who work with older Vermonters.

The outcomes of this training initiative highlight the importance of professional training and skill development. Learners who completed the VT LEAP Certificate are better equipped to serve older Vermonters, particularly those with behavioral health concerns or dementia. CADER hopes to continue our partnership with the Center on Aging at the University of Vermont to expand the age-friendly workforce of health and social service professionals that serve older Vermonters.