



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

YMCA Chicago Cohort 2: Foundations in Aging & Disabilities

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

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

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Executive Summary

A second cohort of YMCA Chicago learners completed the *Foundations in Aging & Disabilities Certificate*, a three-course certificate program developed by the Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER). Mean course competency ratings increased for all course competencies from the pre-course assessment to the post-course assessment. Percent increases ranged from 6% to 200%, with very large increases on many competencies. All learners said that the training helped them feel more confident in their job role and will enable them to provide high quality care and services to older adults. In their feedback, learners highlighted the importance of offering programming at the Y that is tailored towards the needs of older adults, including offering resources in partnership with other local organizations.



School of Social Work:
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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.

After noticing an increase in older adult members with higher needs, YMCA Chicago partnered with CADER to offer CADER's *Foundations in Aging & Disabilities Certificate* to two staff cohorts. The goal was to provide staff with essential knowledge and skills that would allow them to more effectively assist older adults and individuals with disabilities. Training was offered to all staff but not required. This report presents results from the second training cohort.

II. Certificate Overview

Learners completed CADER's *Foundations in Aging & Disabilities Certificate*, a self-paced, online, three-course certificate program providing the foundational and essential knowledge and skills needed to support older adults and individuals with disabilities. Learners explored key issues, best practices in assessment, and developed strategies for navigating complex service systems. The certificate consists of the following courses:

1. Core Issues in Aging and Disability
2. Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities
3. A Guide to the Aging and Disability Networks

CADER provided course management support, which included an orientation webinar, technical support, course completion reminders, and learner tracking. CADER provided weekly learner progress reports to YMCA Chicago leadership.

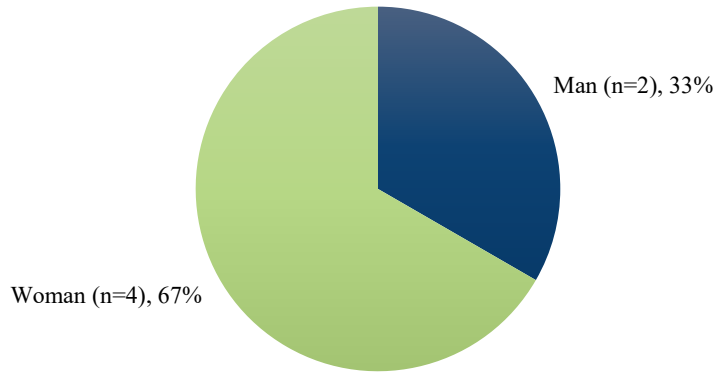
III. Program Completion

Between October 1, 2025 and January 15, 2026, 12 learners enrolled in the program and six of these learners completed it.

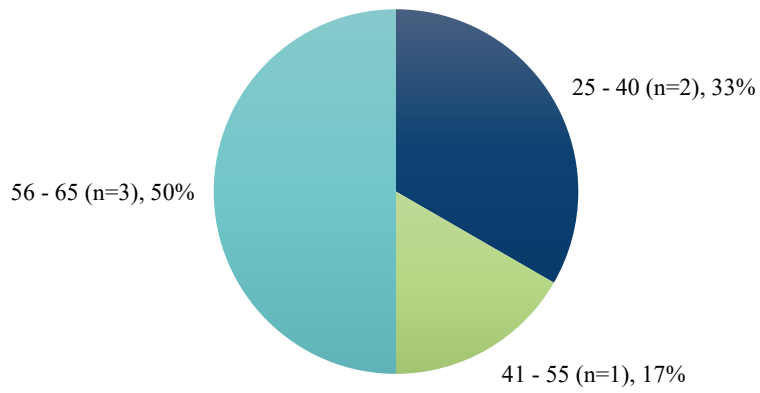
IV. Learner Demographics and Job Role

Learners self-reported demographics and job roles when registering for the program. Responses are displayed in the following charts.

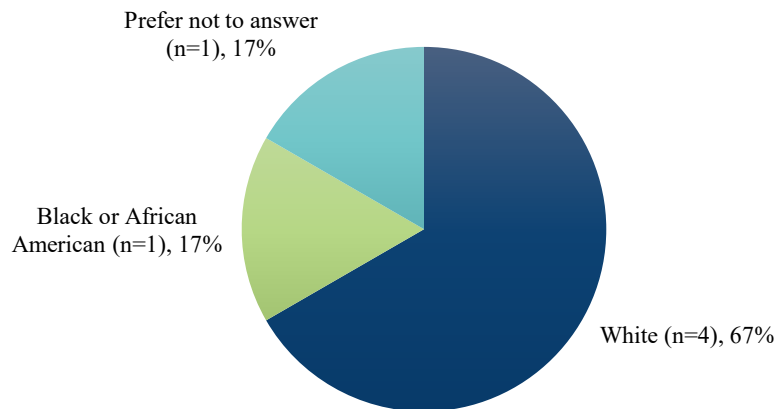
Gender Identity



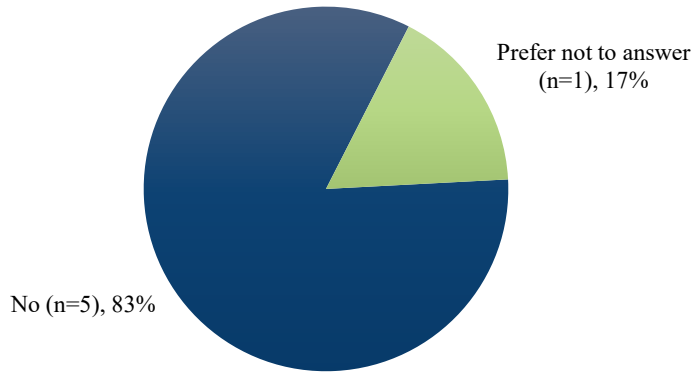
Age



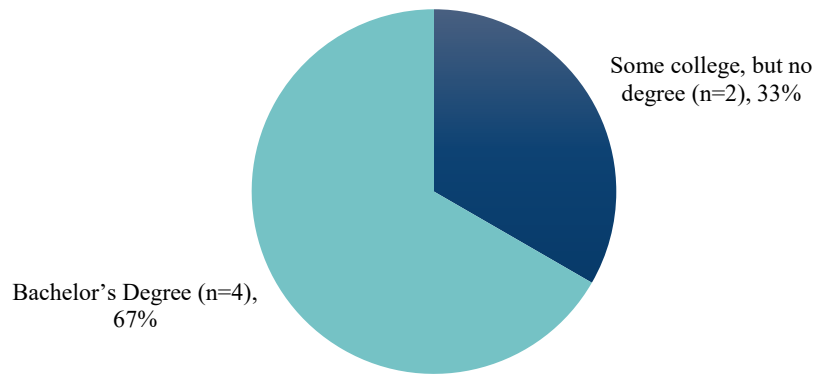
Race



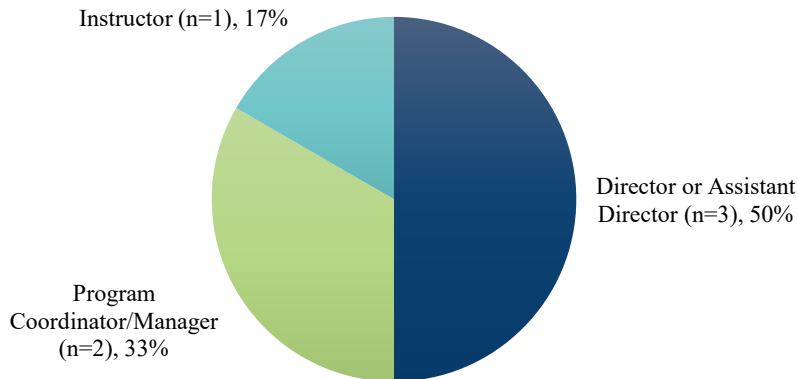
Hispanic or Latino/a/x



Education



Job Role



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.
- **General Learner Feedback:** CADER’s standard course evaluation includes 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.*
- **Key Takeaway:** For this program, the following question was added at the end of each course: *What is ONE key takeaway from this course that is most relevant to your work at the Y?* Key responses and themes are provided for each course. A full list of responses can be found in the Appendix.
- **Improving Programs and Services:** For this program, the following question was added at the end of each course: *Based on what you learned in this course, what are TWO suggestions for improving programs or service delivery at the Y? How might these changes make an impact?* Key responses and themes are provided for each course. A full list of responses can be found in the Appendix.
- **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

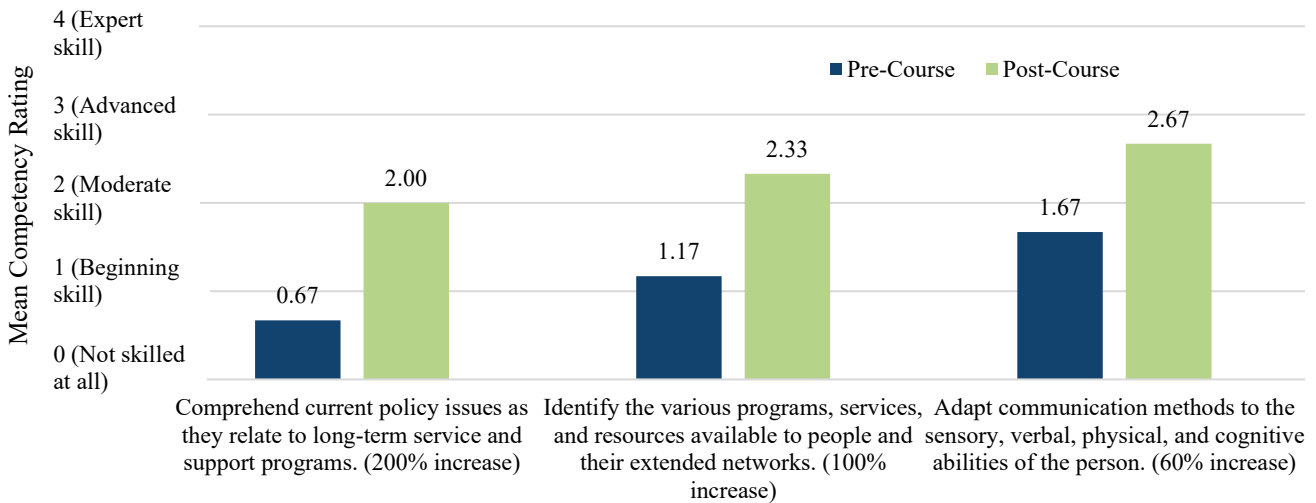
For all competencies, mean competency ratings increased from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 6% to 200%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase
Understand the scope of physical, psychological, and social challenges that occur throughout the life cycle.	1.67	2.50	50%
Identify the various programs, services, and resources available to people and their extended networks.	1.17	2.33	100%

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase
Comprehend current policy issues as they relate to long-term service and support programs.	0.67	2.00	200%
Adapt communication methods to the sensory, verbal, physical, and cognitive abilities of the person.	1.67	2.67	60%
Respect and promote self-determination, consumer choice, and participation during interactions with people and their extended networks.	2.67	2.83	6%
Respect diversity and address cultural values and beliefs of people.	2.67	3.00	13%

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

**Core Issues in Aging and Disability:
Mean Competency Ratings**



B. General Learner Feedback

Learners appreciated how the course thoroughly covered the complex and diverse issues that older adults may face.

“I liked that it covered so many various topics - opened my eyes to the multi-layered issues that Seniors face.”

“I feel the material covered was interesting and relevant. I have more understanding and empathy with the experiences of both the older population and individuals living with mobility, disability and mental illness.”

C. Key Takeaway

Regarding their key takeaway, learners said that the course improved their understanding of the unique needs of older adults. Learners highlighted the importance of getting to know each older adult individually.

“The Y serves many aging adults, and it's imperative that we have the best understanding of those that we serve. Having a deeper understanding of the aging population, helps the Y do its best to meet their needs.”

“The one key takeaway from this course that is most relevant to my work at the Y is to treat people as individuals - with respect and without bias, since it's unlikely I know the whole scope of their lived experience, pain, disabilities, or mindset.”

D. Improving Programs and Services

When asked how the Y can improve programming and services, multiple learners noted that programming should be intentionally tailored towards specific needs. Other learners said that creating opportunities for older adults to interact socially is important.

“Find a way to take individualized programming even further. Provide more ways to meet the mental health needs of this population. Both of these changes will help provide a more well-rounded approach to supporting this population and many others.”

“Encourage use of the common areas to socialize before and after class. Somehow to learn each other’s names and encourage interacting. People are lonely and a group of regular exercisers who know each other, even if just by seeing each other, encourages interaction.”

E. 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	Percentage of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
The course expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
The course will enable me to provide high quality care and services to older adults.	100%
The course will enhance my practice skills in the topic area.	100%
The course will help me feel more confident in my job role.	100%

2. Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities

This course equips learners to conduct assessments and to work with people to identify services and supports that fit their needs. 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 person and examines legal and ethical considerations involved in assessments.

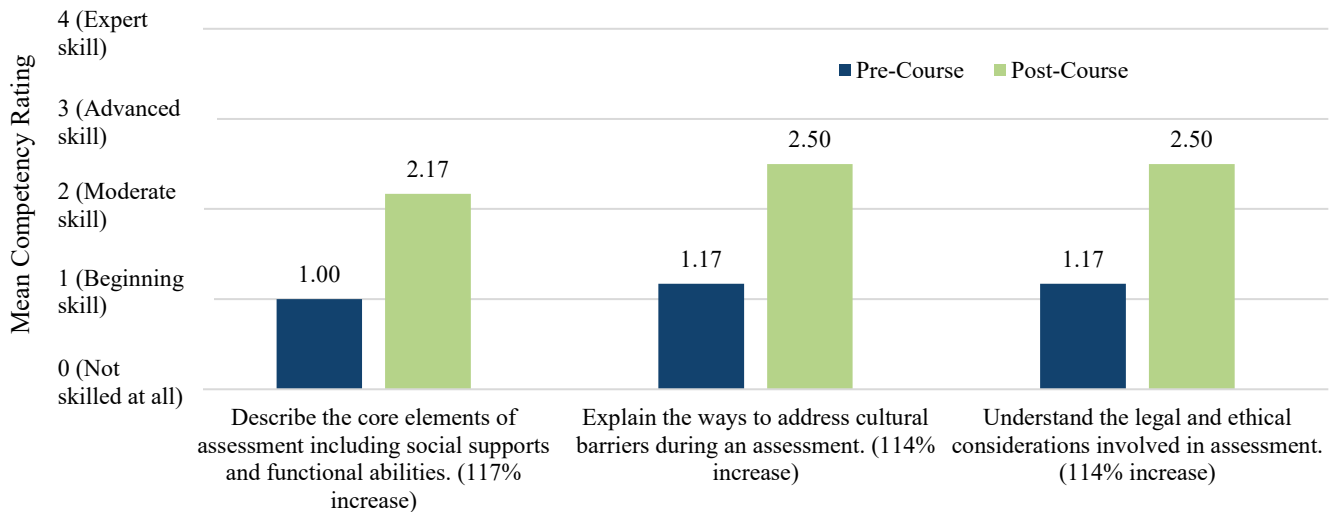
A. Competency Results

For all competencies, mean competency ratings increased from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 25% to 117%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase
Describe the core elements of assessment including social supports and functional abilities.	1.00	2.17	117%
Understand the legal and ethical considerations involved in assessment.	1.17	2.50	114%
Demonstrate authentic communication during assessment.	1.50	2.50	67%
Explain the ways to address cultural barriers during an assessment.	1.17	2.50	114%
Recognize one's own attitudes and the impact of your attitudes on assessment.	1.83	2.67	45%
Respect the consumer's right to choice and self-determination throughout the assessment process.	2.00	2.50	25%

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

**Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities:
Mean Competency Ratings**



B. General Learner Feedback

When asked how the course will impact their practice, learners said that they will now have more self-awareness and will reflect on how their biases may be impacting their practice.

“More reflection on my assessment process.”

“More self-awareness, understanding before serving others.”

“Practicing cultural humility and confronting my own biases.”

C. Key Takeaway

The course highlighted the importance of cultural humility, as well as guidance for providing person-centered care.

“The importance of practicing cultural humility when dealing with consumers from different backgrounds and cultures than my own.”

“The importance of the consumer as a partner in the assessment process as a means to person-centered care.”

D. Improving Programs and Services

Learners discussed how staff should be empathetic and utilize cultural humility when working with older adults.

“It is imperative that practitioners are empathetic and have an ability to walk in someone else's shoes. It is also important that staff members understand the various resources and support mechanisms for seniors.”

“Encourage social gatherings and discussion so that we can understand the perspectives of other. Create social support. Practice cultural humility and learn from each other.”

E. 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	Percentage of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
The course expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
The course will enable me to provide high quality care and services to older adults.	100%
The course will enhance my practice skills in the topic area.	100%
The course will help me feel more confident in my job role.	100%

3. A Guide to the Aging and Disability Networks

This course describes the range of agencies and programs available to support older adults and people with disabilities. It outlines various federal, state, and private agencies, including the resources they provide, eligibility requirements, and laws governing funding. By the end of the course, learners are prepared to locate appropriate resources for their clients and to navigate the aging and disability networks.

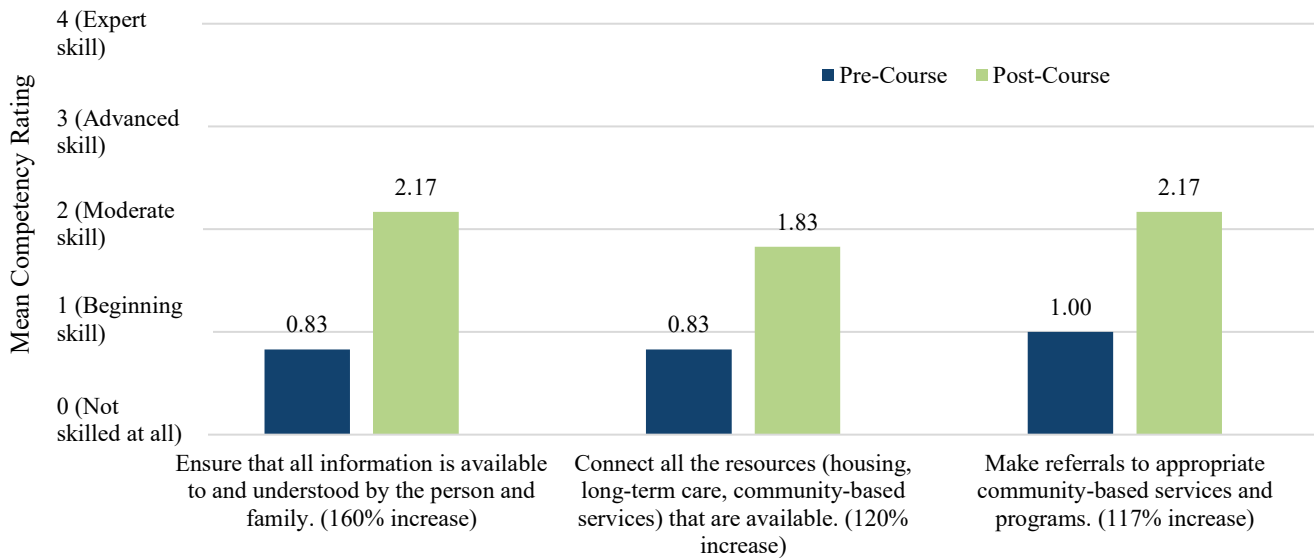
A. Competency Results

For all competencies, mean competency ratings increased from the pre-course competency self-assessment to the post-course competency self-assessment. Percent increases ranged from 25% to 160%.

Competency	Pre-Course Mean Competency Rating	Post-Course Mean Competency Rating	Percent Increase
Know what federal, state, and local resources are available to older adults, people with disabilities, and their families.	1.33	1.67	25%
Understand the eligibility requirements of various federal programs, such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).	1.00	1.50	50%
Connect all the resources (housing, long-term care, community-based services) that are available.	0.83	1.83	120%
Ensure that all information is available to and understood by the person and family.	0.83	2.17	160%
Make referrals to appropriate community-based services and programs.	1.00	2.17	117%
Plan services that are appropriate to the person’s cultural needs.	1.00	2.17	117%

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

A Guide to the Aging and Disability Networks: Mean Competency Ratings



B. General Learner Feedback

Multiple learners said that they will research what local resources are available to older adults and will share this information with the individuals they serve.

“Developing a local/community and state resource list that can be easily accessed and shared.”

“Look into Adult Day Care centers in our area that I can refer consumers to.”

“Look into the different websites mentioned... I am hoping to be able to help people connect with help, whether they are a family member or older adult needing services.”

C. Key Takeaway

Learners gained information on what resources are available and how to locate resources.

“Better understanding of community resources that may be beneficial to those that we serve at the Y.”

“Provided me with more background in Medicare and some of the options available to older adult members.”

D. Improving Programs and Services

Learners described the importance of having resources available to older adults and ensuring that both older adults and staff are aware of these resources. Learners made suggestions for potential local partnerships.

“Understanding individual's needs that we serve daily. Identify local community partners to best serve our consumers. These changes will help our consumers to feel seen and cared for. Supporting in providing resources or pointing them in the right direction.”

“Ask if people have their medical advance directives set up, offer access to forms or resources. Work with our local aging and disability resource center to bring additional programing to our Y.”

“Having more information sessions for navigating Medicare and maybe hosting a local lawyer to discuss the importance of Advanced Directives.”

E. 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	Percentage of Learners Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed
The course expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area.	100%
The course will enable me to provide high quality care and services to older adults.	100%
The course will enhance my practice skills in the topic area.	100%
The course will help me feel more confident in my job role.	100%

VI. Summary and Conclusion

A second cohort of YMCA Chicago learners completed CADER's *Foundations in Aging & Disabilities Certificate*. For many course competencies, there were large increases in mean competency ratings, demonstrating strong gains in essential knowledge and skills related to working with older adults and individuals with disabilities.

All learners agreed that the training will help them feel more confident in their job role and that it will enable them to provide high quality care and services to older adults. Learners described how the training will enhance their practice skills, as they will now utilize cultural humility, increase their self-awareness, and demonstrate empathy. When asked how the Y can improve programs and services, learners emphasized the importance of tailoring programming to the diverse needs of older adults. This includes gathering a list of resources that are available to older adults and working in partnership with local agencies to offer additional programming and services.

As the older adult population grows, many workers will find themselves interacting with older adults regularly, yet they may not have adequate training in aging and disability issues. The outcomes of this training initiative highlight how a targeted professional training program can prepare staff to meet the diverse needs of the aging population. CADER looks forward to a continued partnership with YMCA Chicago to help improve care and services for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

VII. Appendix

1. Key Takeaway

Below is a list of all responses to the question: *What is ONE key takeaway from this course that is most relevant to your work at the Y?* This question was asked at the end of each course.

A. Core Issues in Aging and Disability

- This course helped me walk in the shoes of older adults and allowed me to better understand some of the challenges they face.
- The one key takeaway from this course that is most relevant to my work at the Y is to treat people as individuals - with respect and without bias, since it's unlikely I know the whole scope of their lived experience, pain, disabilities, or mindset.
- The Y serves many aging adults, and it's imperative that we have the best understanding of those that we serve. Having a deeper understanding of the aging population, helps the Y do its best to meet their needs.
- The importance of acknowledging and respecting members' and residents' self-determination.
- Be diligent in assessing
- I learned so much that is important, but not currently applicable to my work at the Y. I do work with an older population and the importance of being social together and creating a community that knows each other is important in keeping people engaged and also moving.

B. Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities

- The cultural competency piece is key!
- The importance of practicing cultural humility when dealing with consumers from different backgrounds and cultures than my own.
- Understanding the biases that we each individually have and how to navigate those while serving diverse populations.
- The importance of the consumer as a partner in the assessment process as a means to person-centered care.
- Assessing properly
- That I should listen and not complete sentences or assume I know what someone will say. This will help me understand someone's experience and viewpoint.

C. A Guide to the Aging and Disability Networks

- Seniors and individuals with disabilities want to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Provided me with more background in Medicare and some of the options available to older adult members.
- Better understanding of community resources that may be beneficial to those that we serve at the Y.
- Clarifying how resources are funded and how to find them.
- Educated on senior needs very competently
- That there is a website to easily start assessing benefits qualified for: benefitscheckup.org

2. Improving Programs and Services

Below is a list of all responses to the question: *Based on what you learned in this course, what are TWO suggestions for improving programs or service delivery at the Y? How might these changes make an impact?* This question was asked at the end of each course.

A. Core Issues in Aging and Disability

- We must do a better job of listening to older adults at the YMCA. We must also be more intentional in our program offerings.
- Ensuring that we are giving multiple communication methods to individuals and perhaps including more regular social gatherings for our Senior members.
- Find a way to take individualized programming even further. Provide more ways to meet the mental health needs of this population. Both of these changes will help provide a more well-rounded approach to supporting this population and many others.
- Increasing awareness and consideration of the social model of disability & the benefits of universal design. When we assess the barriers that we create and make changes to spaces and programs for the benefit of all people, we promote self-determination, participation, and consumer choice.
- All good well done
- Encourage use of the common areas to socialize before and after class. Somehow to learn each other's names and encourage interacting. People are lonely and a group of regular exercisers who know each other, even if just by seeing each other, encourages interaction.

B. Assessment of Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities

- It is imperative that practitioners are empathetic and have an ability to walk in someone else's shoes. It is also important that staff members understand the various resources and support mechanisms for seniors.
- Ensuring we are using cultural humility when advertising programming and having more social gatherings; maybe even starting a support group for members struggling with substance use.
- Don't assume what a consumer may want - offer options/resources and allow them to decide what's right for them. Empathy - we can only see what's happening "above water", take some time to try and understand what's "under the water" to best serve our consumers.
- Consumer choice - respecting an individual's autonomy to make decisions about their preferences.
- Listen and be attentive
- Encourage social gatherings and discussion so that we can understand the perspectives of other. Create social support. Practice cultural humility and learn from each other.

C. A Guide to the Aging and Disability Networks

- A) It is important to host informational sessions for seniors and individuals with disabilities so that they understand the resources available to them. B) It is imperative that case managers have an understanding of the resources available to seniors and individuals with disabilities so that they can help them navigate.

- Having more information sessions for navigating Medicare and maybe hosting a local lawyer to discuss the importance of Advanced Directives.
- Understanding individual's needs that we serve daily. Identify local community partners to best serve our consumers. These changes will help our consumers to feel seen and cared for. Supporting in providing resources or pointing them in the right direction.
- Shorter time, way too long
- Ask if people have their medical advance directives set up, offer access to forms or resources. Work with our local aging and disability resource center to bring additional programming to our Y.