



Leading by Example

Facilities Management Computer Literacy Project

Omer Suleman is a member of the Employment Equity Council representing Nova Scotia Government Employees Union (NSGEU, Local 99). Omer has been working for Facilities Management at Dalhousie for 28 years. Through his work and his leadership within the union, Omer noticed a big gap in computer literacy within his department, but he also noticed a desire from his colleague to learn and develop in that area. Omer presented his idea at the Employment Equity Council and to Facilities Management administration. As a result of Omer's leadership and advocacy, the Computer Literacy Program for Facilities Management was developed.

Colleagues from different departments came together to support this initiative including Facilities Management, Faculty of Computer Science, Financial Services, and People and Culture. Colleagues in Facilities Management did their best to organize seamless scheduling to ensure the availability of staff interested in the program.

Dr. Christian Blouin, the Acting Dean of Computer Science, Laura Nelson, Benefits Coordinator, Kristin Hewlett, Career Development Consultant from People and Culture, and Silvia Behrens-Kelleher- HR Manager and Marcia Munroe- HR Lead, from Facilities Management came together to make this program happen.

Kristin Hewlett mentioned: "The success of this program shows that we need to do it again. It gave Facilities Management staff the autonomy and independence from relying on their supervisors to help them access and process sensitive matters such as benefits. That helps them get comfortable using computers in general." Kristin added: "The success proves that people will come and join if you give them the chance."

Omer, who was the creative force behind this initiative mentioned: "Some of us at Facilities Management may not have a strong voice sometimes. Having someone like Christian and other colleagues helped amplify our voice to make it happen. We used to rely on supervisors who may be too busy to help at times. Now we can do things by ourselves."



Blouin shared his experience collaborating to deliver this program: "Being able to collaborate with Facilities Management was a great experience. There is a stigma in saying you have no computer literacy. Computer knowledge is an invisible barrier, people assume that everyone knows it."

Behrens-Kelleher mentioned that most of the staff at Facilities Management feel unequal due to the academic hierarchy we have at Dal: "I think this literacy program is only the beginning of a needed change to break that hierarchy. It is a first step for Facilities Management staff to receive acknowledgment and receive what they are entitled to. I hope someday there will be more cooperation between these two worlds: academic and Facilities Management. I feel that a lot of what we do on equity, diversity, and inclusion is checking boxes, but we need more than that to make real change for our community."

As a positive result of this program, Laura Nelson mentioned that: "It was helpful to meet folks in person: "After that program, people from Facilities Management recognize me, say hi, and ask questions related to benefits."

This initiative is a great example of advocacy and collaboration. The program created helps with developing much needed skills for individuals to belong and thrive in the workplace. This kind of collaboration may help illuminate the blind spots people with privilege have. These blind spots usually stop or stall real change. Therefore, creating a safer space for staff from equity-deserving groups is essential, so they feel comfortable communicating what they need to be more successful. Attendance exceeded expectations with 32 employees from Facilities Management attending each session (the full capacity of the computer lab!). Due to the uptake, plans are in motion to offer future computer training sessions on a regular basis. Organizers of the program wanted to thank everyone who collaborated to make this program a success including Amy Pulsifer- Finance services, Stephen Ellis- Environmental Health and Safety, Ken MacDermid, Marcie Nixon, and Mike Hendsbee- People and Culture.