



How the Toronto Centre of Learning & Development Empowered Learners and Improved Efficiency with NeonTrain



Key Stats

40+ years

of empowering newcomers through inclusive, community-based education

2 rounds

of custom training completed: Building in Brightspace and Facilitating in Brightspace

2 full programs

transitioned to Brightspace, each with multiple courses and modules

100% of learners

onboarded and actively using the platform in the first cohort

Interviewee Bio

Layla Zia is the Manager of Operations and Strategic Initiatives at the Toronto Centre of Learning & Development*. With a deep focus on strategic partnerships, systems adoption, and inclusive program delivery, Layla has led the Centre's successful transition from a previous learning management system (LMS) to NeonTrain's Brightspace platform.



Layla Zia,

Manager of Operations and Strategic Initiatives, Toronto Centre of Learning & Development*

*Layla held this position at the time of success story development. We thank Layla for her valuable insights and contributions to this story.



Executive Summary

Supporting community learners with purpose-built programming

The Toronto Centre of Learning & Development has supported newcomers and immigrants for over four decades. Through employment-focused programs like the Immigrant Women Integration Program and Academic Upskilling, the Centre helps learners build critical workplace skills, including digital literacy.

The right platform — and the right people behind it

When the Centre transitioned to Brightspace with NeonTrain, the organization gained a partner that offered a powerful platform, as well as expertise and steady support. NeonTrain's Concierge support model provided ongoing technical guidance and strategic learning support that made the Centre's team stronger course creators and facilitators.

Double learning, deeper engagement

With NeonTrain's support, the Centre launched multiple courses across two major programs. Learners are now not only gaining targeted knowledge; they're also building lasting digital literacy through everyday interaction with the platform. That double learning empowers program participants to succeed in the workplace and beyond.

Introduction

A trusted hub for community-based education

Founded over 40 years ago, the [Toronto Centre of Learning & Development](#) supports newcomers and immigrants from the GTA. Its programming focuses on literacy, employment skills, and social sector integration, built for learners who often face systemic barriers upon entering the job sector or higher education.

The Centre operates three main programs all year round, two of which actively use NeonTrain and Brightspace for hybrid delivery. It also offers several community engagement events and courses throughout the year.

“We mainly support newcomers and immigrants, so those are our primary learners,” says Layla. “One key program is the Immigrant Women Integration Program, specifically for women-identified newcomers who want to work in the social sector. The other is Academic Upskilling, which is a full-time program for newcomers and immigrants who want to upskill their language literacy, digital literacy, numeracy literacy, and more.”

Led by Layla Zia, the organization supports program innovation, partnership development, and learner success through accessible, inclusive education. With a team of 12 core staff, plus instructors and student placements, the Centre needed digital systems that would scale with its mission.



Challenge

Looking for a better platform — and better support

Toronto Centre of Learning & Development had previously used another LMS but found it lacked interactivity and was difficult to navigate. Learners were mostly skimming static files like PDFs and slides, without meaningful engagement. Instructors couldn't build or modify content themselves, which slowed down course development.

“With our previous LMS, we had mostly uploaded PowerPoints and PDFs, and people would go through them, but we didn't want that,” says Layla. “We wanted learners to interact and be active online learners, not just passively sitting and watching videos.”

Support response times from the previous provider were lagging, often leaving instructors stranded on the day of a course.

“If something was happening and our instructor couldn't fix it, I'd go into the admin view, and likely still couldn't fix it,” says Layla. “When we'd reach out to support, we wouldn't get a response for 24 hours. We'd get to the day of the course and have to change the plans.”

The Centre needed a solution that was user-friendly, allowed for co-creation, and included hands-on support. As a nonprofit, the team had to balance the need for a high-quality platform with tight budget realities. Most importantly, the Centre wanted learners to be active participants, not passive recipients, in a hybrid learning environment.



“Even a friendly chat with NeonTrain is valuable. There's always more understanding afterward, and that makes the whole experience more useful, more strategic, and more human.”

Layla Zia,

Manager of Operations and Strategic Initiatives, Toronto Centre of Learning & Development*



Selection & Implementation

A transition led with strategy, trust, and training

The Toronto Centre of Learning & Development selected NeonTrain, intending to deliver a high-quality experience to learners. Layla joined the organization shortly after, leading the transition from the previous LMS to Brightspace. The switch began with sandbox access, giving instructors a space to explore, experiment, and get comfortable.

“One valuable step was having a sandbox environment,” says Layla. “Instructors could try all the modules and features, and then switch to see what it looks like as a learner. That helped a lot.”

NeonTrain provided two rounds of targeted training: one on platform features and one on instructional design in Brightspace. The Centre approached implementation in phases, uploading two courses per program and testing them before onboarding learners. They prioritized a blend of admin support and instructor autonomy, allowing teaching staff to co-create content.

Monthly Concierge calls quickly became a cornerstone of the rollout, with the Centre using them for troubleshooting, feedback, planning, and creative problem-solving.

“Some insights can only be gained by learners using a program. Once our instructors felt 80% confident, we went for it,” says Layla. “We knew learner feedback would help make the rest of the journey possible.”



Solution

Daily use, deeper engagement, and confident learners

Learners at the Toronto Centre of Learning & Development log in to Brightspace daily to attend virtual classes, complete assignments, and engage with course materials. Even during in-person sessions, instructors direct students to use Brightspace, building confidence and reinforcing consistency in digital skill development.

“Even when learners are in person, we still ask them to bring their laptops and log into Brightspace,” says Layla. “We want them to get in the habit of using it daily, for everything from submitting assignments to doing surveys.”

The platform houses all learning modules, quizzes, surveys, and feedback tools in one accessible place. Instructors use Brightspace to track participation, review assignments, and collect learner data for continuous improvement. The team uses the summer break to revamp content based on learner feedback and prepare for the next academic year.

Layla continues to lead backend management at the Centre, submitting tickets and coordinating new ideas or strategy calls with NeonTrain.

“Sometimes the support calls are about a technical issue,” says Layla. “Sometimes it’s planning the year and asking, ‘What makes sense based on how Brightspace works?’ Sometimes it’s just asking for feedback, such as ‘Is this user experience okay?’ It’s whatever we need.”





Results

Engaged learners, empowered staff, and efficient operations

The Toronto Centre of Learning & Development's learners now report feeling confident navigating Brightspace and regularly engage with course materials without prompting.

"We never used to hear, 'Oh yeah, I can figure that out,'" says Layla. "Now we hear it all the time."

With better UX and more interactive tools, instructors can create experiences that help learners stay motivated and retain information. The platform contributes to double learning, meaning students improve both course-specific knowledge and overall digital literacy.

"When you present something in a friendlier way, you learn better, you learn deeper, you learn more quickly," says Layla. "It's more impactful. Our learners are more confident now using all the features."

This growing digital fluency opens doors for employment and deeper integration, especially in the social services sector. Instructors report improved efficiency, less technical frustration, and greater ownership of their content. The Centre now runs multiple courses across two programs with minimal day-to-day admin strain.

"The efficiency is everything," says Layla. "It takes time at first, but then it saves time. After that, every cohort runs more smoothly."





Future

Scaling confidently as a registered career college

The Toronto Centre of Learning & Development has officially become a registered career college, allowing it to offer ministry-approved diploma programs. As the Centre prepares to serve a broader, more diverse learner base, Brightspace will support higher credentialing and course delivery standards.

The team at the Centre plans to keep using NeonTrain for both strategic planning and new content development. They are excited to explore Brightspace's expanded student management tools to support this next chapter.

"We're using it more, for more people, and with bigger goals," says Layla. "And we're confident NeonTrain will grow with us."



SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS WITH ONLINE LEARNING



To hear more about Layla's experience working with NeonTrain, listen to her discussion with Rob Belliveau, President of NeonTrain, on All Aboard podcast: [Supporting Newcomers with Online Learning!](#)



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