

*LeadingAge® New York*

**IGNITE  
YOUR  
FLAME**



Leadership Academy



**2024-2025 IGnite Leadership Academy**



At the conclusion of the program, the graduating Fellows were asked to consider:



*How has participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy impacted you, and what do you hope to bring back to your organization as a result?*



see how they responded on the following pages.....



## **Rita Adrian**

### **Assistant Director of Human Resources**

*Ozanam Hall of Queens  
Nursing Home, Inc.*



Being part of LeadingAge has been one of the best experiences I could have had in my professional career. At first, I was skeptical about learning to be a leader through a Leadership Academy because being a leader always felt like common sense; however, I was proven wrong after attending this academy. LeadingAge has given me the tools to manage my emotions, self-awareness, and self-care.

Despite this, I recognize that becoming a good leader is still a work in progress for me for various reasons. For example, I learned that I have to work on building my confidence, dedicate more time to my self-care, and find a way to communicate better.

Additionally, it was exciting to meet and work with people from many backgrounds who had unique experiences, to work with the coaches, and to hear the guest panel speakers – everyone created a welcoming environment.

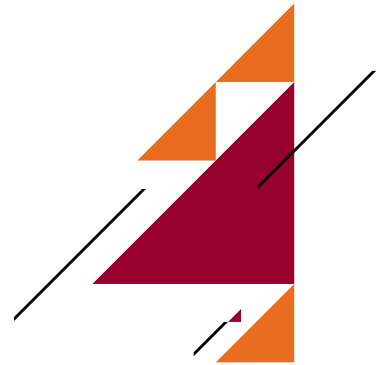
Interacting with all these people has allowed me to implement their experiences in my career. From them, I learned what to do and not to do because, as a group, we learned that we are not perfect and we have to continue to become the best leaders we could be.



## **Justin Amrhein**

**Practice Manager -  
Medicine**

*Parker Jewish Institute*



Over the past year, my thoughts on leadership have evolved significantly. I've started to critically assess how I utilize my staff, designing task delegation to best fit their talents and focus on meeting strategic goals. Introspectively, I've obtained clarity regarding my career direction, to having the most impact on long-term care. My strengths lie in global strategy, process improvement and business development, not operations. I plan to pursue a role pivot in respect of this.

My approach involves continuously asking how we can scale, improve, streamline, automate, consolidate, redesign, and tweak processes to meet our goals. Long-term care is today demanding such approaches.

Ignite Academy has solidified my observations that there is much opportunity in coalition formation to help other teams transform their processes and improving tools with mutual crossover, we can resolve challenges beyond our team's direct control, focusing interdisciplinary bandwidth, and eliminating redundancies.

My interactions with peers, mentors, and participating industry leaders have reinforced my confidence that I have a lot to contribute to this industry. There is such importance in our work and mission. I look forward to continuing that journey with my peer graduates in the future



## **Gregory Beckwith**

### **Fleet Manager**

*Nascentia Health*



Learning to be an effective leader is a constant challenge. Participating in the Ignite Program challenged me to rethink my leadership style. Throughout the program I have had the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the other fellows. The time spent on our check-in calls, with my group, were some of the most impactful moments. Application of the concepts we learned in the reading material and sessions was a key piece of the learning process. Having a place where we could candidly share our leadership experiences was invaluable. We were able to learn from our group members' successes and failures.

Another key takeaway is the need to innovate. There were so many great examples from the fellows and host facilities. It has shown me that the best way to serve our members is to continue to innovate. My goal is to get more involved in the innovative process at our agency.

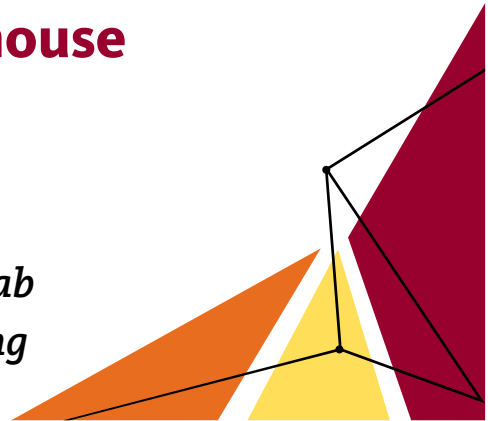
Overall, this has been an excellent experience.



## **Jessica Burkhouse**

### **Administrator**

*Heritage Park Rehab  
and Skilled Nursing*



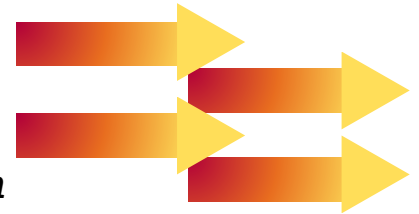
There is so much to take away from this journey, but the biggest impact is still, a work in progress, using what I learned. The leadership academy highlights your strengths and compels you to acknowledge your weaknesses, however, it isn't just my weaknesses but that within my team. Being able to be honest and vulnerable has allowed me to return after each session with confidence of how to handle the team, how to work with the team, how to empower the team, but mostly how to lead the team. Leadership is personal. I have gained so much from listening to others and feel a renewed confidence in who I am as an individual and a leader. Thankful to be part of such a well-presented program with coaches and participants that are worthy of being leaders in each respective role.



## Matthew J. Chrisphonte

**Assisted Living Nursing  
Supervisor**

*The Grandview at The Osborn*



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been a transformative experience. It pushed me to engage in deep self-reflection, helping me better understand my strengths, areas for growth, and the impact I have on those I lead. This personal insight is critical as I strive to become a leader who is not only effective but also approachable and respected by my team. I now recognize that implementing change is rarely easy—people naturally cling to familiar routines. However, I've learned that earning the trust and buy-in of a few key individuals can spark broader momentum. I'm excited to bring back a renewed sense of purpose, greater self-awareness, and the tools to inspire change, even when it's difficult. Most importantly, I hope to foster a culture where growth, collaboration, and leadership are shared values.

The IGNITE Leadership Academy is an eye opening, and world changing experience. I truly feel that I am able to be as effective a leader as can be, due to the teachings and values that have been instilled upon me during my time with the Design team, coaches, and other fellows of the program.



**Lisa Comeau**

**RN**

**Director of Nursing**

*The Nottingham*

*Loretto*



After attending the Ignite Leadership Academy 2024-2025, I was pleasantly surprised to find a group of wonderful people who are passionate about what they do and why they do it. I have always been very introspective, but after completing the academy it allowed me to see things from other people's perspectives. Listening and sharing with others has helped me to grow in my current role. Learning from others experiences and advice is like opening up a world of solutions. Ignite has taught me that we are never alone, and that there are others out there climbing and overcoming the same obstacles as I face.

Forever grateful for attending.



## **Morgan Holsopple**

**Operations Manager**

*St. John's Living*



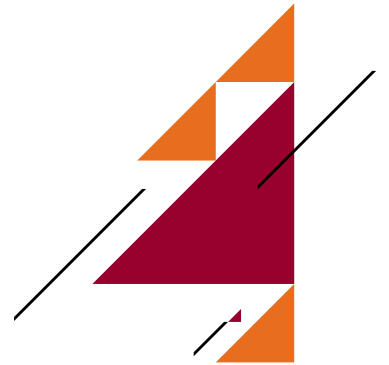
The IGNITE Leadership Academy helped me to gain confidence as a young leader. I will admit that I was intimidated going into the first session because I am new to leadership. Within minutes of joining the group, I realized that we were provided with a comfortable and safe atmosphere. LeadingAge provides so many opportunities for leaders in our industry to come together which can be very eye opening if you don't often have those chances. The academy provided me with a network of people that I know I can call or email for advice or help any time. I am leaving the academy with a sense of strength, growth, and confidence as a young leader in my field.



## **Rachel Jendrowski**

**Dietary Director**

*Bristol Village*



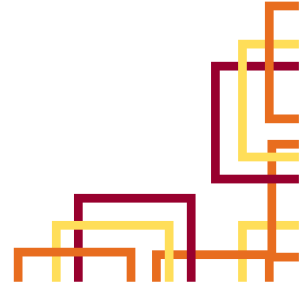
The Ignite program has been a transformative experience, not just in my professional life but in my personal life as well. This journey has deepened my understanding of empathy, teaching me to meet people where they are, rather than where I assume they should be, especially when it comes to change. It has shown me that while difficult conversations are necessary, they should not be viewed as confrontations, but rather as opportunities for team growth. The program emphasizes the importance of empowering employees and embracing diversity within a team. It has also highlighted the significance of self-care, reminding me that I can only give my best when I am fully engaged and present. I am truly grateful for the invaluable life skills this program has provided.



## **Avneet Kaur-Anand**

### **Director of Nursing**

*Rutland Nursing Home-  
One Brooklyn Health*



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been an inspiring and eye-opening experience that has significantly shaped my growth as a leader. One of the most impactful aspects was the opportunity to reflect deeply on my leadership style and recognize the importance of leading with authenticity and intention. I've become more aware of how my values influence my decisions and how empathy and self-awareness are essential to effective leadership.

The Academy also gave me a fresh perspective on team dynamics. Through collaborative sessions and peer interactions, I gained valuable tools to improve communication, build trust, and encourage collaboration within my team. I'm returning with a renewed energy to foster a more cohesive and engaged workplace culture—one where every team member feels heard and supported.

What surprised me most was how empowering it felt to connect with leaders from across the state. Their diverse experiences and insights reminded me of the value of shared knowledge and community. I'm excited to bring that same spirit of connection and collaboration back to my organization.

Ultimately, The IGNITE Leadership Academy has given me not just tools, but the confidence to lead with purpose—and to inspire that same sense of purpose in those around me.



## **Jenee Kawejsza** **LNHA, MHA, BSPT**

**Vice President of  
Skilled Nursing**

*Community  
Wellness Partners*



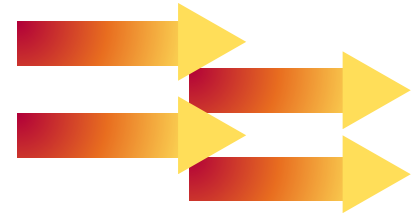
The Ignite Leadership Academy has provided me with a deeper understanding of my leadership style. Throughout the sessions, I was challenged to step out of my comfort zone and learn new techniques on building stronger communication and collaboration skills. I am excited to bring these new skills and techniques I have learned to my team. By helping me to create a culture of trust and collaboration, these new skills will help foster an improved teamwork environment during both challenging and calm periods.



**Irene Liu**

**Communications Director**

*The New Jewish Home*



Being part of LeadingAge New York’s IGNITE Leadership Academy has been a true gift—both professionally and personally. It was incredibly inspiring to be surrounded by individuals who care deeply about older adults and are committed to improving the aging experience. Our skilled facilitators and coaches created a safe, welcoming space that allowed our diverse group to build trust, speak openly, and lean into moments of discomfort and growth.

Participating in the “lunches with leaders” series helped shift my perspective on networking. What once felt daunting became an opportunity to connect, learn, and grow alongside others who share a common purpose. One of my biggest takeaways from the program was the value of applying a growth mindset when facing change. Through our group’s presentation on Our Iceberg is Melting, we explored how change is not only inevitable but necessary. I learned the importance of taking the time to understand what matters most to each stakeholder, rather than reacting immediately.

Lastly, I will always treasure the strong, supportive bond formed with my IGNITE group, “Journey.” I’m deeply grateful to The New Jewish Home and to Alyssa Herman, Chief Development and Marketing Officer, for nominating me for this inspiring experience.



## **Carrie Mosley**

**Manger of ProCare, Policy Analyst**

*LeadingAge New York*



The Leadership Academy has profoundly supported and accelerated my growth, instilling a deep sense of inner confidence. It helped me recognize that “imposter syndrome” is something we all experience and just understanding this was a breakthrough in overcoming it. While I had already been working on public speaking before joining the academy, the open, candid discussions and immersive experience took my confidence to an entirely new level.

The academy provided invaluable tools in an open-minded and positive environment, fostering internal growth in both personal and professional aspects. One of the most impactful lessons I’ve gained is the importance of embracing my true, authentic self—both as a leader and in all areas of life.

I am most excited to bring the techniques and insights from the academy into the healthcare field, where so many individuals are experiencing burnout and could benefit from this kind of support and community. My goal is to find innovative ways to share these lessons with as many people as possible. Paying this forward is the best way to express my gratitude for the opportunity to be part of the Leadership Academy. I now feel fully equipped, inspired, and supported to take this mission forward, and I look forward to collaborating with others to make a meaningful impact.



**Tasha Petrutoni**

**BSN, RN**

**Assistant  
Director of  
Nursing**

*NYS Veterans Home Oxford*



The Ignite Leadership Academy has broadened my critical thinking skills outside of clinical skills. I have learned that I can be a successful leader without giving up true values. Vision goals are an important aspect of leadership. In order to lead others within your vision, I believe it is important to find leadership qualities in the ones you lead. Team building can be seen as single, individual puzzle pieces built together to create the bigger picture. I have learned that I enjoy the balance for knowing both sides of a presentation or story. My decision-making qualities prefer time and research for facts and not judgements. Ignite has changed my perspectives on being a leader to lead, to take your team with you, and ignite the spark for new leaders to come.



## **Noemi Rivera Perez, MSW**

**Lead Social Worker**

*Elizabeth Seton Children's Center*



At the beginning of my training with the IGNITE Leadership Academy my goal was to be able to obtain the tools necessary to become a transformational leader and create meaningful change within the organization. However, during this experience I have learned so much more than leadership skills, I have learned about my authentic self, my personal values and how they align with my professional path.

Understanding my own strengths and weakness as a leader has allowed me to be more authentic and approachable, while being better equipped to give guidance to others through challenges. In the past, I had viewed mistakes as issues to be avoided, I now see them as learning opportunities for improvement. I have also learned that leading with empathy and self-awareness goes a long way.

Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been transformative for my practice as a Social Worker, creating valuable connections between leadership principles and the core values that define the Social Work profession. The academy's emphasis on empathetic communication, and inclusive decision making directly complements social work's commitment to self-determination, dignity of all of the different vulnerable populations that we serve, and social justice. As I return to my organization, I'm committed to integrate these leadership principles into our advocacy efforts at multiple levels for those who we serve in long term care. I am incredibly grateful to be part of the IGNITE Leadership Academy and for the Elizabeth Seton Children's family to allow me the opportunity to be part of this amazing journey.



## **Enrique Vargas**

**Director of Food  
& Nutrition**

*Cabrini of  
Westchester*



I'm so excited on my journey, as I have fallen in love with advocating as well as being a strong leader within this field. I've also decided to take my career further by pursuing my administrative license. Being able to realize just how important it is to establish a great networking system and the importance of having an amazing team in and out of work helps to balance life in general.

I've discovered that I can be more than just what my title states, I am able to make a major difference throughout my facility.

I'm finally able to see my path, to exceed my role and the change that I can make for the betterment of not only our precious residents, but for the entire workforce that carries our facilities on their shoulders. I will continue my journey and embrace this growth and look forward to the future, my future within this beautiful much needed field.

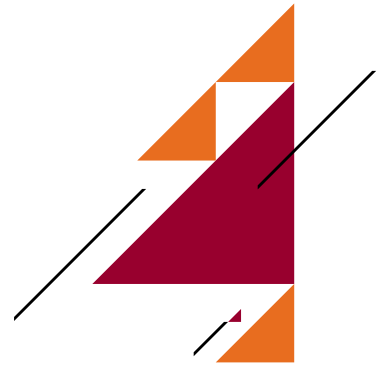
We are the shields to protect our residents as we advocate for their future care, for our future and career within this industry.



**Rachel L. Williams**

**Clinical Director**

*Veterans Homes*



Participating in the Ignite Leadership Academy has been a transformative experience that reshaped how I view leadership-not as a title or position, but as a responsibility to inspire change, foster collaboration, and lead with authenticity. The academy challenged me to reflect deeply, engage vulnerably, and connect intentionally with others who share a passion for service.

Through this journey, I have grown more confident in leading with purpose and more committed to listen and really hear, before acting. I've learned that transformational change does not begin with sweeping reforms, but with consistent, value driven leadership that you share with others to empower them to be part of the successful change.

The academy has helped me realize the importance of emotional intelligence, adaptive leadership, and systems thinking. I feel more prepared now that I have this information and will be using these skills during every conversation and decision that I make. As I look ahead, I envision making a lasting impact in the field of veteran's services by championing a model of care that honors the whole person- their history, service, trauma, and resilience.

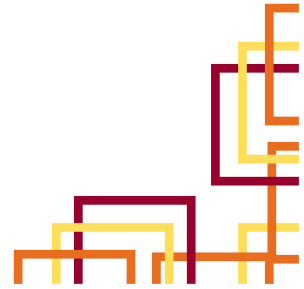
I believe that change begins when leaders are willing to disrupt the status quo with compassion, courage, and a clear vision. Thanks to the Leadership Academy, I am ready to be that leader.



## **Robert Wimler**

**Assistant VP, Business  
Analytics**

*Nascentia Health*



Before IGNITE, I spent time with leaders across different backgrounds. Different fields of expertise. I saw that, despite different positions, much of our roles were the same. Much of my role as the head of data & analytics is the same as the role of the head of facilities; as the director of nursing. As we grow in our careers, we more than ever need the skills of leaders. The skills learned in a program like this. I hoped to push my boundaries through my IGNITE journey and was not disappointed. Rather than trust my memory, I've used our time, conversations and exercises together to develop a framework on best practices for me.

There are big themes. Delegate. Advocate. Work with your partners. LISTEN. There are small, concrete lessons and insights as we go.

- People who disagree with you are interested in the same things you are
- The perfect is the enemy of the good
- Get feedback!

The key is, it gave us a chance to step back. Take a breath. Take perspective. Observe, take insights, personally and professionally.

Next up, applying what we've learned.

Good luck to all other Fellows, and thank you LeadingAge.

# TEAMS

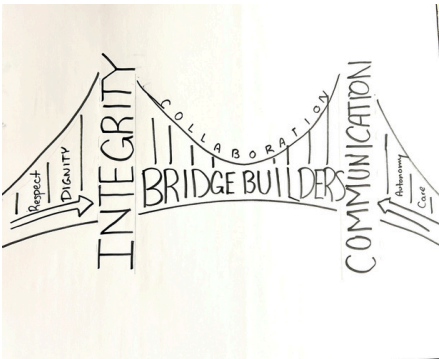
## DJ Ram



From Left: Rita Adrian, Robert Wimler, Rachel Williams, Avneet Kaur-Anand, Morgan Holsopple, Jennifer Drofenik (coach)



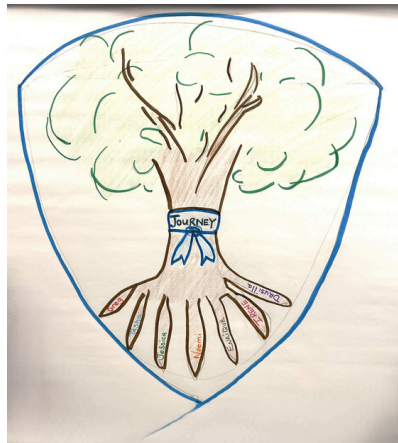
## Bridge Builders



From Left: Matthew Chrisphonte, Carrie Mosely, Lisa Comeau, Jenee Kawejsza, Jason Santiago (coach), Justin Amrhein, Rachel Jendrowski

## Journey

From Left: Greg Beckwith, Jessica Burkhouse, Noemi Rivera Perez, Enrique Vargas, Ellen Quinn (coach), Irene Liu, Drusilla Phelps, Tasha Petrutoni



# FACULTY



## **FACILITATORS:**

**Laurie Mante**, Executive Director, Kendal at Ithaca

**Diane Darbyshire**, Vice President for Advocacy and Public Policy,  
LeadingAge NY

## **COACHES:**

**Jennifer Drofenik**, Director of Health Services, Peconic Landing

**Jason Santiago**, Chief Executive Officer, Good Shepherd Communities

**Ellen Quinn**, Vice President of Human Resources, LeadingAge NY



From Left: Jennifer Drofenik, Diane Darbyshire, Ellen Quinn,  
Jason Santiago, Laurie Mante,

## **COORDINATORS:**

**Nancy Caban**, Executive Assistant to the President/CEO, LeadingAge NY

**Earl Gifford**, Member Specialist, LeadingAge NY

# HOST SITES

Thank you to the LeadingAge  
New York members that hosted  
each session:

**Fox Run at Orchard Park**



**Shaker Pointe at Carondelet,  
Watervliet**

**Elizabeth Seton Children's, Yonkers**



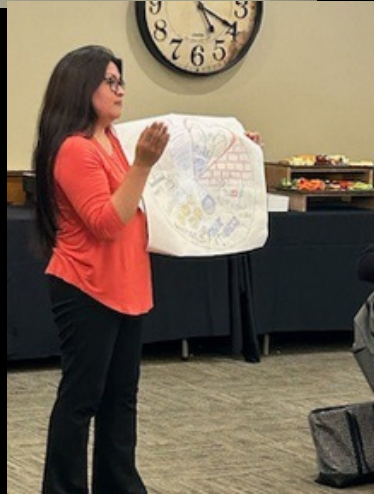
Elizabeth  
Seton  
Children's



**The Nottingham, Jamesville**









*Congratulations to the inspiring graduates of the IGNITE 2024-25 class! Our field is in good hands with these strong, dedicated and passionate leaders, who are equipped and eager to continue their leadership journey. We applaud you and support you as you share your time and talents going forward, pursuing your goals, while working to provide even better care for the residents you serve. We wish you the very best, encourage you to stay involved in LeadingAge New York, and we cannot wait to see where this journey leads you.*

*Sebrina Barrett, President and CEO,  
LeadingAge New York*











# LEADERSHIP ACADEMY 2024-25 GRADUATES

Rita Adrian

Assistant Director of Human Resources  
Ozanam Hall of Queens Nursing Home, Inc.

Jenee Kawejsza

Vice President of Skilled Nursing  
Community Wellness Partners

Justin Amrhein

Practice Manager - Medicine  
Parker Jewish Institute

Irene Liu

Communications Director  
The New Jewish Home

Greg Beckwith

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Operations Manager  
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Rachel Jendrowski

Dietary Director  
Bristol Village

Robert Wimler

Assistant VP, Business Analytics  
Nascentia Health

Avneet Kaur-Anand

Director of Nursing  
Rutland Nursing Home



*“Congratulations to our LeadingAge IGNITE Class of 2025! It is a profound honor to celebrate your accomplishments as the changemakers in aging care. Your dedication, resilience and vision reflect the very best of our field. Together, we are the architects of aging; setting the standard of excellence in defining what it means to age with dignity now and for generations to come.”*

**Pat Tursi**  
**President and Chief Executive Officer**  
**Elizabeth Seton Children’s**  
**and LeadingAge New York Board Chair**



## MISSION

To facilitate the development and growth of the next generation of senior living leaders in New York, with a focus on internal and external relationship building, the sharing of best practices, and a passion for continuous learning.

## VALUES

Collaboration  
Generous Listening  
Thoughtful Questioning  
Responsiveness  
Open Communication  
Diversity

## VISION

To create an engaged group of transformational senior living leaders who are prepared to serve their own organizations and support the goals of LeadingAge New York in an exemplary and innovative fashion.



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