
LeadingAge® New York

**IGNITE
YOUR
FLAME**



Leadership Academy



2025-2026 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.....



Carrie Burns

Environmental Services Manager

Woodland Pond at New Paltz



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has provided me with a better understanding of my leadership skills and helped build my confidence. 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.

During the whole experience I had the opportunity to listen and learn from the experiences of the other fellows. It was great to meet so many different people throughout the journey, to work with the coaches, and hear the guest speakers at each facility. They all created a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

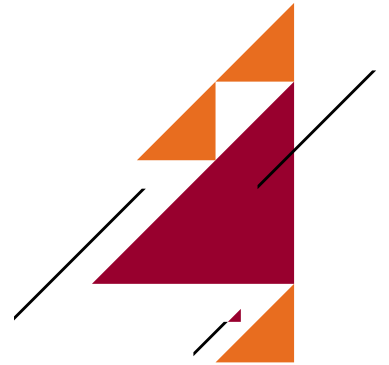
I am most excited about bringing the techniques from the academy back to my facility. My goal is continually use these techniques or tools and find ways to share these with as many people as possible.



Christine Caplan

**Assisted Living
Administrator**

St. John's Living



Throughout my participation in the IGNITE Leadership Academy, I found myself shifting my focus from leading the work to developing the people behind it. I've become more intentional about growing my team's leadership capabilities—not just to strengthen performance today, but to ensure long-term sustainability beyond my direct involvement. At the same time, the experience reinforced for me how critical it is to consistently model strong leadership values, regardless of circumstance, and the impact that has on a team's culture and trust.

This experience also reshaped how I view failure. After facing a disappointing outcome while pursuing an internal opportunity, I was challenged to reframe failure as a natural result of taking meaningful risks. That perspective shift strengthened my resilience and reinforced the importance of creating an environment where others feel empowered to step outside their comfort zones.

I've come to see leadership not as being indispensable, but as enabling others to lead with confidence and ownership. I'm most excited to continue building a team that is empowered, self-sufficient, and prepared to lead.



Terika Carney

**Director, Digital
Solutions**

Nascentia Health



What stood out to me most from the IGNITE Leadership Academy wasn't just the sessions (which were excellent!). It was what I learned from the other fellows and the leaders who joined us to share their experiences.

During the sessions and our team check-ins, I found myself reflecting on how I currently lead. I was reminded that the most effective leaders focus on listening and supporting others. It also made me realize how important it is to understand yourself and how that shapes the way you lead. I've started to be more intentional in how I show up for my team, especially in how I communicate and engage with them.

One of the most meaningful parts of this experience was working on the penguin iceberg presentation with my team, the Ignitors. Initially, we had a lot of ideas and were all over the place. But through the assignment, we learned to "trust the process" and each other and were able to create something really impactful.

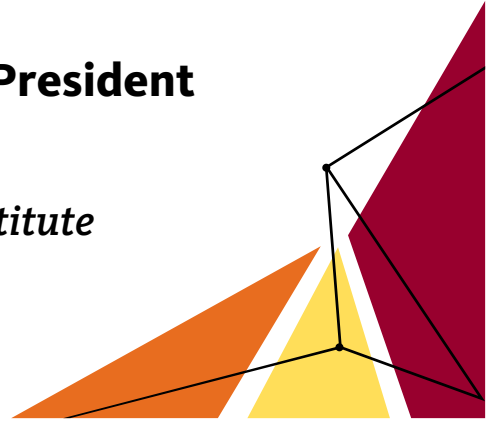
I'm leaving this experience with a better understanding of the kind of leader I want to be, and a stronger awareness of how I show up in that role every day.



Christopher Cassata

Assistant Vice President of Finance

Parker Jewish Institute



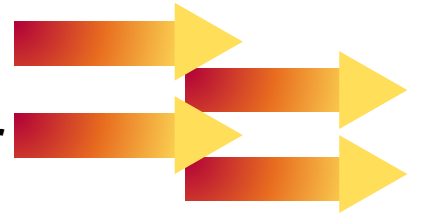
One of the biggest lessons I will take away from the Ignite program is how to approach change within an organization. Breaking down a daunting task such as implementing a new system, program or leadership change into small, attainable goals creates a sense of progress and accomplishment without feeling overwhelmed. The Ignite program emphasized the importance of celebrating small victories while working toward a larger goal. This approach helps teams stay focused, maintain morale, and avoid frustration or burnout. I've also learned one of the biggest obstacles to change is often our attitude toward it. Remaining positive, adaptable, and focused on the task at hand is essential for successful and sustainable change implementation.



Nabrasca Casterlin

Assistant Administrator

Finger Lakes Center for Living



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy changed how I think about leadership in a more personal way. I've spent time reflecting on who I am as a leader and realized that being authentic—honest, intentional, and grounded in my values—helps build confidence and trust with others.

Throughout IGNITE, I have gained a stronger appreciation for relationships. Taking time to listen, collaborate, and include others leads to better teamwork. I now feel more comfortable creating space for others to contribute.

This experience shifted how I approach challenges, making me more open to trying new ideas and learning along the way. The focus on wellbeing was also a great reminder of the importance of supporting both myself and my team, in the field and outside it. I'm excited to bring back a more balanced, people-focused approach as I continue to grow as a young leader.



Lindsay Constantine

Acting Administrator

Heritage Ministries



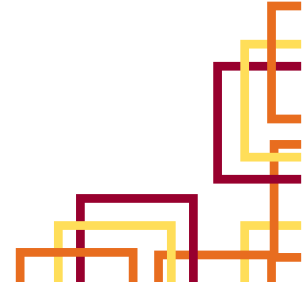
While being honored to be a part of the Ignite Leadership Academy, the program has impacted me in many positive ways. I have grown by being able to dive with self-reflection throughout the sessions. It has given me the ability to own my accomplishments/skills and turn it to a larger scale and apply them to grow as a leader. The sessions helped me understand that there are multiple leadership styles which have given me the ability to broaden the leadership I want to lead in. I learned a lot about myself throughout the academy and was able to grow my self-confidence with the readings, groups, projects, and the coaching that was provided. What surprised me the most was having a true understanding that I am not alone in growing as a leader. Learning to be a listener has given me the ability to help others grow. What is most exciting is being able to take my experience and apply it for myself and bring it back to the organization to make positive changes.



Kelly DePonto, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Lead Nurse Practitioner

*Elizabeth Seton
Children's Center*



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been a transformative experience, fundamentally shifting my perspective on how to drive both personal and organizational success. I have come to see that it's less about managing people and more about empowering them.

Gaining a clear understanding of my leadership strengths and growth areas has made me a more authentic and approachable leader, better prepared to mentor others through complex challenges. I've shifted my mindset to view mistakes not as setbacks to be avoided, but as essential learning opportunities. Ultimately, I've found that leading with high self-awareness and empathy is a powerful driver of team success. In addition, I have gained essential tools to strengthen communication, trust, and collaboration within my team. I have a renewed commitment to cultivating a cohesive workplace culture—one where every individual feels heard, valued, and empowered to succeed.

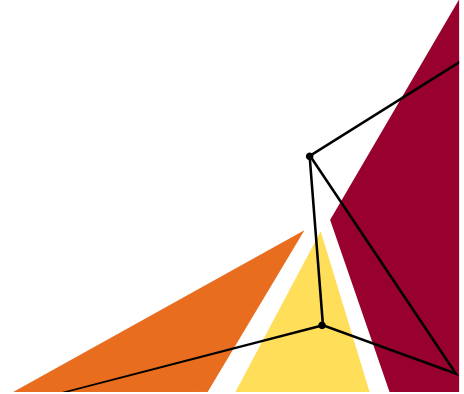
I am deeply appreciative of the evolutionary experience provided by the Leadership Academy. The insights I've gained have already begun to reshape my professional approach, and I am eager to continue this journey of development and discovery.



Joshua Dineen

IT Operations Manager

Jewish Home



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been an energizing experience for me. It provided structured time and space to step back from the day to day demands of working in New York State's aging services environment and reflect on how I lead, why I lead the way I do, and where I want to grow next. What stood out most was not learning a completely new version of leadership, but gaining clearer awareness of my own patterns, strengths, and blind spots, and learning how to lead more intentionally in a field where change, complexity, and competing priorities are constant.

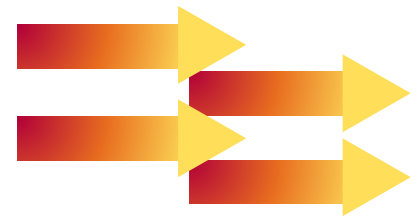
The Academy also changed how I approach collaboration and change within our highly regulated, people-centered industry. I gained a deeper appreciation for the human side of change and the importance of trust, partnership building, and clear communication across roles and disciplines. I plan to bring back a more intentional and balanced approach to leadership, while staying grounded in our mission to serve older adults and the teams who support them.



Erica Gentile

Assistant Administrator

Canterbury Woods



The IGNITE Leadership Academy has been such a privilege and an experience I will reference for the rest of my career. When I reflect on what impacted me the most I reflect on the amazing cohort. We are brought together as leaders, all achieving a similar goal but the diversity among the group is what cultivates us into leaders.

IGNITE Leadership Academy provides a safe environment for fellows to work through real work life problems. This environment promotes collaboration, bonding and long-lasting relationships.

When I reflect on my personal experience throughout this academy I reflect on the themes of each session and what my takeaways were. I was constantly reminded by three themes that have altered my way of thinking as a leader.

- Assume positive intent
- Don't confuse having a seat at the table with having a voice
- Failure is an expectation

These three ways of thinking have changed the way I have approached situations and show up as a leader. More importantly they have made me into a more confident leader.

The timing of this leadership academy could not have been more appropriate as I received my nursing home administrator license two weeks before starting IGNITE. This academy has given me the tools, the connections and empowerment I did not even know I needed. I am beyond grateful to be apart of IGNITE and for Canterbury Woods to allow me the opportunity to grow as a leader.



**Lakshmi Gopalan
Poranki, DPT**
Director of Rehabilitation
UHS Senior Living at Ideal



Participating in IGNITE Leadership Academy has been an incredible experience and pivotal in my career. Prior to the program, I viewed leadership through responsibility and results, focusing on problem-solving, efficiency, and task completion. My perspective has since shifted from directing to influencing—empowering and advocating for others. A key takeaway from the “Crucibles of Leadership” was the importance of active listening and fostering an environment where individuals feel safe to share ideas.

One of the most impactful lessons was understanding diversity in thinking and teamwork. I previously associated diversity with visible differences, but now value varied perspectives in driving stronger, more innovative solutions. I have also become more intentional in my communication style, emphasizing clarity, transparency, and emotional intelligence, especially during times of change and uncertainty.

An African proverb states, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” This reflects my evolved perspective that collaboration drives meaningful success. I now see leadership as purpose-driven influence built through trust, authenticity, and a commitment to continuous growth. Overall, I am hoping to be a more reflective, collaborative, and growth-oriented leader to my organization.



Allie Hammonds

**Administrative
Services Manager**

Canterbury Woods



IGNITE has given me the confidence to be the leader that was always inside me. Not having on-the-job experience has always made me feel unprepared. IGNITE showed me that who you are matters more than what you know. Being my authentic self in a professional setting has more advantages than disadvantages, and I can inspire change and innovation simply by being myself.

Working with the other fellows and having Mary Wassel as my coach has been such a blessing. They have taught me so much and given me perspectives that I will carry with me throughout my professional career.

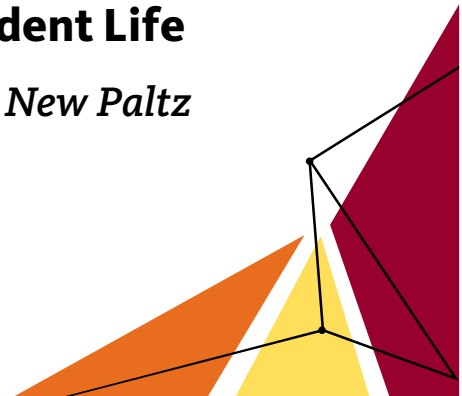
I will bring back to my organization rejuvenation, focus, and, most importantly, my authentic self. Thank you to everyone who makes IGNITE possible.



Jason Irish

Director of Resident Life

Woodland Pond at New Paltz



I entered this leadership training without high expectations, unsure of what to anticipate. However, I came with an open mind and a desire to learn more about myself, along with strategies to make meaningful changes that would positively impact both my community and personal life. That was my mindset going into the first session. What I didn't expect was just how transformative the LeadingAge IGNITE Leadership Academy would be.

On the first day of Session 1, we were immediately placed in uncomfortable situations, asked to be vulnerable among a group of strangers. That initial hour sparked a deeper level of self-awareness than I had previously experienced. Gaining insight into not only our strengths but, more importantly, our weaknesses has been a critical step in becoming a better leader.

Through this experience, I've come to appreciate the importance of slowing down, actively listening, and leading with empathy. Creating space for others to contribute to decision-making is fostering stronger collaboration, building trust, and leading to a more cohesive team. I am also developing a greater awareness of my influence and the responsibility that comes with it. I am motivated to continue developing a culture where individuals feel valued, heard, and encouraged to grow. This academy has reinforced my belief that strong teams are built on trust, accountability, and shared mission & values.

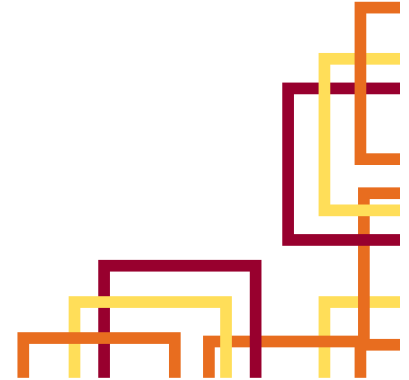
Ultimately, the IGNITE Leadership Academy has strengthened my commitment to becoming a better person & leader for all areas of my life.



Julia Joachim

Administrator

*Wartburg-Berkemeier
Living Center*



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been a truly transformative experience. The Academy has empowered me to identify and embrace my authentic leadership abilities while deepening my understanding that effective leadership takes many forms. I have come to appreciate that there is no single “right” way to lead; rather, leadership is most impactful when it is grounded in authenticity and aligned with one’s individual strengths. Through this experience, I have gained greater confidence in my ability to lead and to drive meaningful, positive changes within my organization.

Equally important, the program has strengthened my ability to recognize and cultivate the strengths of my colleagues and staff. This has fostered a deeper sense of trust, mutual respect, and confidence across our team.

One of the most significant lessons I have learned is the power of collaboration. True collaboration extends beyond one’s immediate team and can even include partnerships with competitors when united by a shared mission. When individuals and organizations work together toward a common goal, the potential for meaningful and lasting impact is greatly amplified.

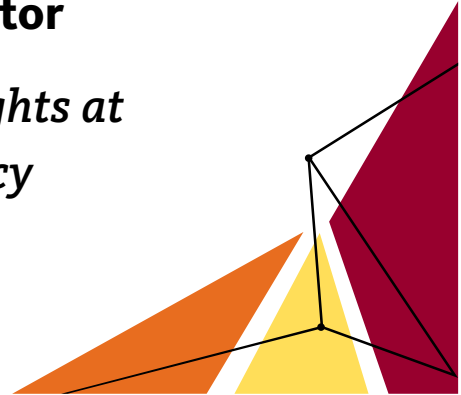
The most meaningful successes are those that can be shared.



Ashlie Kohlhagen

Executive Director

*Montabaur Heights at
Brothers of Mercy*



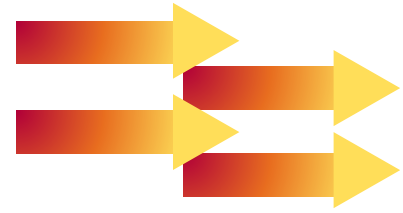
This academy has been incredibly inspirational, stimulating and refreshing. I have experienced a transformation in my leadership skills that I am excited to continue to build upon. I have become more confident in who I am as a leader and I feel more secure in my role within my organization. I also gained beneficial knowledge such as the value of innovation and active listening. I learned that teamwork and collaboration are key not only when it comes to productivity and problem-solving, but as a tool to attain high quality outcomes. The relationships I have cultivated from this academy have been enlightening and supportive. This academy has also proven to me that small wins can lead to big victories.



Andrea Lalley

**Healthcare
Administrator**

Good Shepherd Village at Endwell



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Program helped me open up and better understand how to be emotionally driven while maintaining control over my reactions. It equipped me with tools to become a more active listener and gave me the confidence to build trust. The program also increased my self-awareness, helping me recognize behaviors that may negatively impact others, such as interrupting or trying to control situations. By applying the tools I've learned, I'm now more mindful and able to correct myself in the moment.

The program provided valuable strategies for handling workplace challenges that also apply to everyday life. It reinforced that while building a successful career is important, maintaining balance is essential. Emotional and physical well-being play a critical role in overall success and fulfillment.

IGNITE pushed me outside my comfort zone, encouraging me to recognize my weaknesses and providing strategies to improve them. It also helped me take pride in my accomplishments and feel more confident sharing them with others. One of the most meaningful aspects of the program was the relationships I built, showing me that shared experiences can build confidence and strengthen connections.



Jessica Levie
**Associate General
Counsel**
The New Jewish Home



The IGNITE Leadership Academy has primarily impacted me in two ways. First, I have become more comfortable with my leadership style. Prior to IGNITE, I did not trust that my intuitive leadership style was the right way for me to lead. I tried fitting myself into other styles, which felt awkward and unnatural. I wrote about this issue in my application! Leaning into my authentic leadership style allowed me to be more confident and outspoken.

Second, it was profound for me to learn that mistakes are a part of leadership and that I should try to innovate, even if it doesn't work. Fear of failure was holding me back. But someone from the Elizabeth Seton panel said, "Failure is not an option, it is a requirement." That message was a true seismic shift for me, professionally and even personally.

Putting these together, I feel more agency and ownership in projects at work because of the IGNITE Leadership Academy. I am confident that my ideas are worthwhile, but I no longer need them to be mistake-free before suggesting them. I am looking forward to working on becoming more comfortable with failure since that concept is still so new to me.



Patricia Marques Lima Vieira, BSN, RN

Nurse Manager

Kendal at Ithaca



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has significantly shaped my perspective as a nurse leader working at a CCRC. Through Stand Out 2.0, I developed a clearer understanding of my authentic leadership style and how to lead with intention, especially in a role that requires balancing clinical oversight with team support.

Emotional Intelligence 2.0 strengthened my awareness of how my communication and emotional responses impact staff morale, collaboration, and ultimately resident care. I was surprised by how small adjustments to active listening and self-regulation improved team engagement.

The session on Our Iceberg is Melting transformed how I approach change in a healthcare environment where regulations, systems, and resident needs are challenging and constantly evolving. I have begun to view resistance and change as a natural part of the process and an opportunity to build trust, partnerships, and shared purpose among staff.

Looking ahead, I am most excited about integrating the principles from The Power of Full Engagement to promote staff well-being and resilience in a setting where self-care can be easily forgotten.

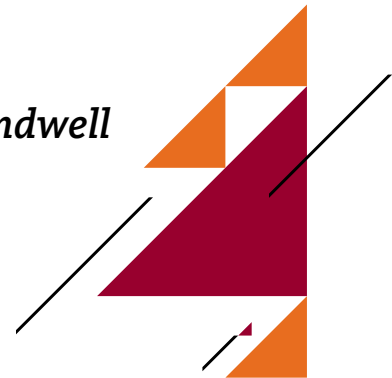
As a result, I aim to bring back a more adaptive, emotionally intelligent leadership style that supports my team, enhances collaboration, and drives sustainable, person-centered care for our residents and staff.



Mary Kay McKinney

Executive Director

Good Shepherd Village at Endwell



I am very grateful for my participation in the IGNITE Leadership Academy. The sessions have strengthened my understanding of the importance of collaboration and teamwork in our industry. Through the speakers and panel discussions, I learned that effective leadership requires actively listening to others, respecting diverse roles, and working toward shared goals. The experiences shared by leaders demonstrated how strong collaboration leads to better outcomes for residents and staff alike. Working in small informal groups during lunches with leaders from different facilities, we gained invaluable insight how, even though they are competitors, they work together to benefit from each other's successes and challenges.

The group activities were particularly valuable because they allowed me to practice teamwork in real time. Working with individuals from different organizations challenged me to communicate clearly, remain open-minded, and adapt my approach to problem-solving. Being an active listener is a take-away I will work on and be mindful of. I also recognized how trust and accountability play a key role in building effective teams.

Moving forward, I plan to apply these lessons by fostering open communication, encouraging team input, and building stronger relationships across departments. I will be more intentional about creating an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued. By modeling collaboration and supporting teamwork, I hope to contribute to a positive workplace culture.



Ana Monteverdi

**Clinical Emergency
Preparedness Coordinator**

Ozanam Hall Nursing Home



Participating in the Ignite Leadership Academy has helped me feel more confident and intentional in how I approach my work and interact with others. It has pushed me to think beyond just getting tasks done and really look at the bigger picture—how processes connect, where things can improve, and how better communication can make a difference. I’ve also picked up practical skills in handling challenges, making decisions, and navigating change, which are all important in a busy healthcare setting.

What I hope to bring back is a more collaborative and proactive approach to my role. I want to help improve how departments work together, make processes smoother, and support my team in a way that feels organized and efficient. I’m especially looking forward to applying these ideas to emergency preparedness by helping create clearer plans and stronger communication. Overall, I’d like to contribute to a workplace that feels more connected, prepared, and focused on providing the best care possible in a more collaborative and intentional way.



Allysa Olsen, MSW, LNHA

Health Center Administrator

Fox Run at Orchard Park



Being a part of the IGNITE Leadership Academy has been life-changing, both professionally and personally. I have loved traveling to other communities and seeing in real time the amazing work our colleagues in the field do every day. The networking opportunities and relationships alone have made this a moment in time that I will be forever grateful for. I've met so many people in this program who all have unique backgrounds and perspectives, and then to have the chance to build relationships with these members that foster so much growth and community, has truly been inspiring.

Learning has always been a passion of mine, and this program has given me the opportunity to take a deep dive course on what it means to truly be a leader. The coaches and facilitators create such a safe space for everyone to really self-reflect and discover their own individual strengths. I have gained a quiet confidence that I know will undoubtedly help me lead within my own organization now and into the future. The IGNITE Academy has been a highlight of my career that I will always remember.



Jennifer Sauginas

**Community
Residences,
Site Supervisor &
Case Manager**

Loretto



Participating in the IGNITE Leadership Academy has impacted me in a positive way by strengthening my self-confidence as a leader. The opportunity to learn and hear from my peers has opened my world and made me feel less alone. The key thing I learned about myself is that I often don't trust my own instincts, and I definitely should! Creating a mandala of my core work values really had an impact on me. I've hung it in my office as a reminder of what matters most to me when it comes to my leadership style. I don't have to be like other people to learn from them. Sticking to what makes me most proud of the work I am doing is the key. This opportunity gave me a chance to pinpoint my weaknesses without judgement and find ways to strengthen them. I appreciated the opportunity to learn from people that have differing perspectives, experiences, and personality types. I believe I will bring back to my team a more centered, fair, and collaborative approach to leadership. I am more excited than trepidatious to begin the next chapter of my career!

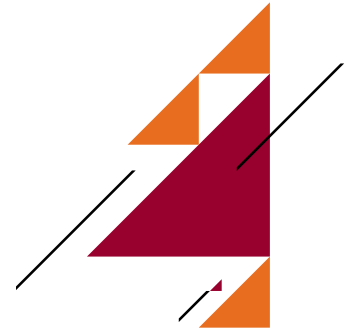
Thank you!



Patricia Terranova, LNHA

Administrator

St. Luke Health Services



The Leadership Academy has shaped me as a leader in several meaningful ways. One technique I've embraced is the "pregnant pause" — intentionally allowing silence after asking a question to invite deeper input from my team. It's a simple but powerful tool for creating space where others feel heard.

I've also developed a much greater appreciation for collaboration and networking. Connecting with peers who face similar challenges has been invaluable, whether for sharing solutions or simply knowing I'm not navigating difficult situations alone.

Perhaps the most significant area of growth has been in Emotional Intelligence. I've come to recognize that I tend to lead with emotion — which isn't always a weakness, as it reflects the genuine passion I have for this work. But I've learned the importance of pausing to process before responding. It's a work in progress, and I'm proud of the strides I've made.

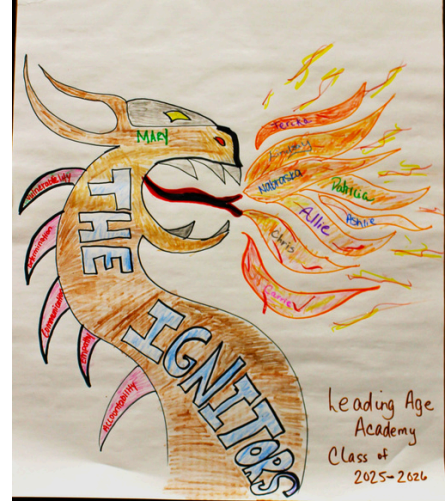
Finally, I've brought back to my team the concept of innovation and failing forward. Progress requires a willingness to try new approaches, and not every idea will succeed — but without the courage to try, we'll never discover what's possible.

TEAMS

The Ignitors



From Left: Mary Wassel (coach), Patricia Marques Lima Vieira, Allie Hammonds, Nabrasca Casterlin, Christopher Cassata, Carrie Burns, Ashlie Kohlhagen, Terika Carney, Lindsay Constantine.



Igniting Hearts

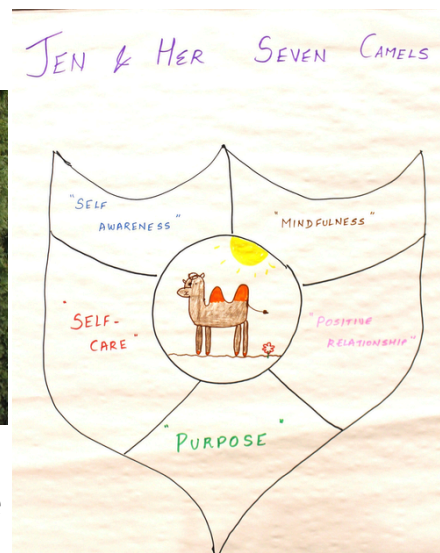


From Left: Allysa Olsen, Andrea Lalley, Jennifer Sauginas, Joshua Dineen, Ana Monteverdi, Kelly DePonto, Patricia Terranova, Desmond Jackson (coach).

Jen and Her Seven Camels



From Left: Jennifer Drofenik (coach), Jessica Levie, Erica Gentile, Lakshmi Gopalan Poranki, Jason Irish, Christine Caplan, Julia Joachim, Mary Kay McKinney.



FACULTY

FACILITATORS:

Laurie Mante, Executive Director, Kendal at Ithaca
Diane Darbyshire, Vice President of Advocacy & Public Policy, LeadingAge New York

COACHES:

Jennifer Drogenik, Director of Health Services, Peconic Landing
Desmond Jackson, Deputy Executive Health Director, Monroe Community Hospital
Mary Wassel, Chief Operating Officer, Good Shepherd Communities
Ellen Quinn, Vice President of Human Resources, LeadingAge New York



From left, top row: Ellen Quinn, Jennifer Drogenik, Desmond Jackson, Mary Wassel
bottom row: Diane Darbyshire, Laurie Mante

COORDINATORS:

Nancy Caban, Executive Assistant to the President/CEO, LeadingAge New York
Earl Gifford, Member Specialist, LeadingAge New York

HOST SITES

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

**Shaker Pointe at
Carondelet,
Watervliet**



Jewish Home of Rochester

**Elizabeth Seton Children's,
Yonkers**



**Elizabeth
Seton
Children's**



The Nottingham, Jamesville



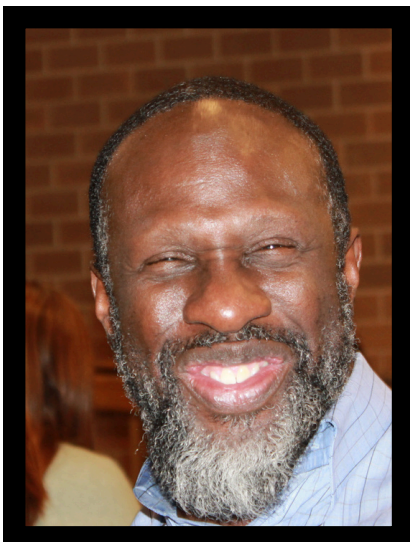
Session 1



Session 1



Session 2





Session 2



Session 3





Session 3



Welcome to
SESSION 4
Creating
a Mindset of
Wellbeing
Rest,
Renewal
& Managing Energy



Session 4





Session 4

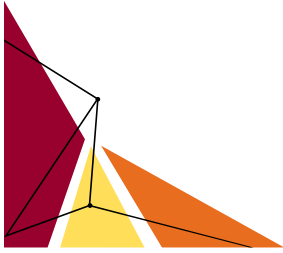




“Congratulations to the graduates of the IGNITE 2025-26 class! We are honored to be a part of your leadership journey, and we are inspired by your passion and dedication. We applaud you, and we look ahead to the many contributions you will provide in the years to come. We wish you the very best, and we encourage you to stay involved in LeadingAge New York, because we need strong leaders like you to help guide the future of long-term care.”

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





LEADERSHIP ACADEMY 2025-26 GRADUATES

Carrie Burns

Environmental Services Manager
Woodland Pond at New Paltz

Christine Caplan

Assisted Living Administrator
St. John's Living

Terika Carney

Director, Digital Solutions
Nascentia Health

Christopher Cassata

Director of Finance
Parker Jewish Institute

Nabraska Casterlin

Assistant Administrator
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Julia Joachim

Administrator
Wartburg-Berkemeier Living Center

Ashlie Kohlhagen

Executive Director
Montabaur Heights at Brothers of Mercy

Andrea Lalley

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Good Shepherd Village at Endwell

Jessica Levie

Associate General Counsel
The New Jewish Home

Patricia Marques Lima Vieira

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Ozanam Hall Nursing Home

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Fox Run at Orchard Park

Jennifer Sauginas

Community Residences, Site Supervisor & Case
Manager
Loretto

Patricia Terranova

Administrator
St. Luke Health Services



“It is a great privilege to recognize and celebrate your extraordinary achievements as leaders in aging services. Your commitment, perseverance, and forward-looking vision embody the highest ideals of our profession. Together, you are shaping the future of aging. Congratulations to our LeadingAge IGNITE Class of 2026!”

*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

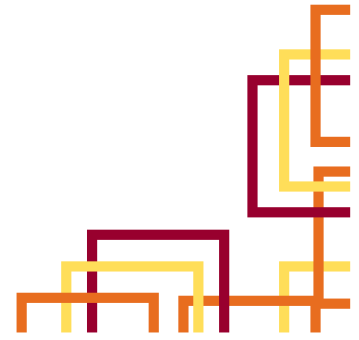
Generous Listening

Thoughtful Questioning

Responsiveness

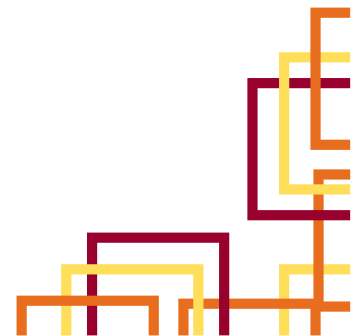
Open Communication

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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