

LeadingAge Illinois Leadership Academy

Creating a new era of excellence in aging services



Action Learning Plans (ALP's) 2017-2018

ACTION LEARNING

Action learning is an adult learning theory based on the ideas of Professor Reginald Revans back in the 1940's in the United Kingdom. It is a learning-by-doing approach which encourages people to work together to solve a problem or improve performance. Importantly, the group spends time reflecting on what they are collectively learning during the process. The method stands in contrast with traditional teaching methods that focus on the presentation of knowledge and skills.

Each fellow was asked to create an Action Learning Process of interest to them, and of benefit to their organization. As a leader, it is vitally important to learn how to facilitate the group process, and inspire/motivate others to achieve goals and improve quality within the organization.

Each fellow in Leadership Academy created a presentation that described what their Action Learning Process is, why they selected it and how it benefits their organization. They worked with their coaching teams to provide and receive counsel, guidance and feedback. The presentations were made during the last session in February.

Here are the Action Learning Processes in alphabetical order by first name.

ALICIA N. LESZKO
CDM, NUTRITION, & DINING MANAGER
THE GARLANDS OF BARRINGTON

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

With many older adults wanting to maintain a healthy active lifestyle, nutrition plays a huge role in their ability to stay youthful. I have chosen to incorporate a new Nutritious light snack option for our Garlands' members. This is not a new concept to our industry but would be a new engaging nutritional approach at The Garlands. My reason for selecting this added amenity is to provide another choice to our members for those who do not regularly dine at one of our venues. During my nutrition interviews, I discovered many cases elders have the inability to cook, or someone else prepares meals for them. Many members shared a desire to maintain, gain, or lose weight but were not sure on what steps to take. As a result, while the members reported the desire to avoid unhealthy, processed snacks, they needed options for alternatives. Thus the idea was born to offer members a simple, easy to use program that could address the concerns.

These small individually portioned and packed snacks will provide a nutritionally sound light meal, approved by our dietitian that can be individualized as needed. Members will be first nutritionally screened, and a personalized snack plan will then be developed just for them. During this screening process, all needed information will be gathered to calculate appropriate snack needs. Members will then choose their preferred snack options, for example; a member looking to gain weight who typically skips breakfast might go with a High Calorie build-your-own Breakfast Parfait of portioned Greek yogurt, granola, fresh-diced fruit, and a peanut butter cookie. The snack packs are prepared in our kitchen with fresh, natural foods that can be preordered for delivery or pick up weekly.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your Organization or the field of senior living?

I am personally hoping to make a difference in many of our members' lives by providing nutritional education on ways to adopt a "Food First" approach. This can be accomplished by encouraging members to eat frequent, small portion, high energy and protein meals and snacks, in place of prepared store-bought meals, snacks, and nutritional supplements. Our light snacks provide just another option to change our members' nutritional status and to engage in an overall better lifestyle. If our Nutritious snack packs are consumed, we can hope to prevent insidious weight loss, while also increasing oral intakes, and producing a positive change in our members' nutritional status. This plan ties in to The Garlands mission of inspiring our community's members to live an active engaging lifestyle.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on your ALP?

This ALP process has forced me to reflect on all of the skills, videos, books, and group exercises we have experienced during our journey in leadership academy. During the process of picking a relevant topic that would provide self-gratification as well as making a difference for others, I used the skill of mind mapping. This skill has been a valuable tool I use frequently to troubleshoot problems, invent/reinvent ideas, and even resolve disagreements with peer-to-peer issues. At first, I found it difficult to put everything on paper, but once everyone's ideas take shape, the process becomes quite special and rewarding for everyone involved.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

This ALP is still a work in progress. However, my leadership academy journey has provided many tools that I have embraced and have been using on a daily basis to further my critical thinking skills and professional development. I frequently use mind mapping to plan project ideas at work, while using this process to plan future home improvement ideas. I am humble and fortunate to have been guided on the journey by exceptional industry leaders, while forming bonds with future industry leaders.

ALMA DIAZ
BUSINESS OFFICE MANAGER
PATHWAY TO LIVING

Briefly describe you ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My action learning plan is to find ways to improve team member retention. High turnover in the past years has long plagued our senior living organizations. The financial cost in recruiting and training is taking a toll on our communities. In addition to cost, turnover affects senior living resident's relationships with the team members they interact with, sometimes leading to dissatisfaction and even distrust. Retention of team members is important in senior living because it impacts the quality of resident's lives. In senior living we have to be very cautious because change in quality of service can have a negative impact in their lives. High turnover also increases a negative effect on our community's morale. Retaining a positive and motivated team member is vital to an organization's success. We should implement retention strategies to manage team member turnover and attract quality employees into our communities. Our retention program should focus on:

- Opportunities for professional growth
- Supervisory training for managers to learn coaching techniques
- Team member involvement in decision-making
- Team member recognition- gift cards, lunches, birthday celebration's and team member of the month
- Meetings with departments on a monthly basis
- Building relationships with our team members
- Making sure everyone has sufficient orientation
- Improving our hiring process by being consistent and look for our cultural fit

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have in your organization or in the field of Senior Living?

The long term impact I hope this ALP presents is to decrease turnover rate. By retaining positive and motivated team members that enjoy what they do and the atmosphere in which they work are more than likely to remain with the organization. Retention strategies are important because they help create a positive work environment and strengthen team member engagement, such as team builders and community involvement and increase the community morale. Also give team members a sense of pride in what they do. You have to find team members that mesh with our VIVA culture in order to hire long-term team members. Hiring consistent, knowledgeable and caring team members that has come to know the resident as a valued person and not a task will provide the kind of care that encourages a desire to live and nurture relationships with others. Also consistency creates a positive environment for team members and who enters this field with a desire to serve and genuinely care for others. Team member and resident longevity exist when leadership and staff values relationships and respect. This is found only in an organization that is committed to a vision and philosophy of service "CARE TO KNOW-THEN MAKE IT MATTER" where the vision lives in the daily life of all of our communities.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

Throughout this journey there have been many leadership lessons learned. When implementing this ALP my greatest lesson was that I needed to be more vulnerable, thinking more outside of the box, and working on coming together as a team. We will incorporate team building activities on our monthly all staff meetings. With the retention program we have put in place it should improve in the following areas:

- Retention
- Team member motivation
- Enhances loyalty
- Improves morale
- Helps to build a supporting work environment
- Let's team members know that their work is appreciated and valued
- Gives team member a sense of ownership and belonging within their workplace
- Will increase resident satisfaction

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

By developing effective leadership directly impacts retention and engagement. As a manager, you have the greatest impact on how your team members will engage with their work. Not only do you need to establish yourself as a trusted leader, you need to ensure that you develop you team member talents so that they can be the most effective at their jobs. Creating a workforce where team members value their own work will help boost productivity, moral, and involvement.

ANDREW KAZMIERCZAK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ST. PAUL'S HOUSE

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My ALP was to try and build a better development program for our team members, so they are better prepared to grow with the organization. I wanted this development program to focus on the “soft skills” that are necessary to be successful. Communication, professionalism, hospitality, and willingness to innovate, are all abilities that become even more important in leadership roles. My goal was to design and implement a training plan so that any employee can learn these skills and our organizations expectations of leaders. These skills would also be helpful to employees even if they never changed roles. The program will help us identify who our strongest and most ambitious team members are. The training program will be voluntary and will develop naturally a “bench” of qualified, prepared team members.

The three objectives identified were:

- 1 – Better prepare staff for advancement opportunities.
- 2 – Better identify who on the staff is ready, and able for advancement.
- 3 – Identify as an organization the skills that are important to us.

I chose this ALP because I felt it had the potential to positively impact our residents through improved recruitment and retention. If we have more stable leadership, and can better retain staff, resident care is more consistent. And with consistency comes higher quality, and satisfaction.

What long-term impacts do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or in the field of senior living?

I hope that we are able to improve recruitment and retention at our organization. I hope we have many long tenured employees who have stayed with our organization and succeeded as a result of this program. I hope that our residents and their families notice a change in how prepared new leaders are, and how their preparation positively affects care. I believe a program like this can also help attract people to the field of senior living. If we do a good job of teaching people these skills, they will grow with us. We want to make sure we capitalize on individuals who have a strong passion for senior living. Passion is absolutely needed to succeed, but the other skills that can be learned through this program are important to be effective. Hopefully being better at retaining and then capitalizing on our most passionate team members will have a positive impact on the industry overall, as they develop new ideas or recruit even more people into the field.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

I have learned again just how important it is to get a variety of inputs when working on a project this large. Most people have experience with training and promoting team members. And almost all have experience going through it themselves. Listening to their insights and ideas helped shape this training program. It looks a lot different than what I started with in my head, but still has the same goals in mind. I believe it will continue to change and grow as we implement it, and as more individuals go through it.

I also learned how hard it can be to scale something down to a manageable size, especially when everyone is excited about an idea. That you need to pick out the best parts, those that will have the most immediate positive impact, and focus on those. At the same time acknowledging the other good ideas that are raised and keeping track of them for potential future implementation.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

My ideas for what we should teach, and how we should teach it, evolved numerous times throughout the process of working on the ALP. I think that is one of the biggest takeaways I have, is the openness to future changes. As we see how the program evolves once implemented. I hope that through this project we can inspire members of our team to continue to grow their own skills, pursue their own career dreams, while at the same time improving the care for all our residents.

Working on this ALP forced me and others to think more deeply about what exactly we are looking for in our leaders. What skills we want them to have, and how we want them to behave. We also had to look back on positive and negative transitions from the past, and identify where we think they succeeded or failed.

BECCA GALUSKA
DIRECTOR OF LIFE ENRICHMENT
CENTRAL BAPTIST VILLAGE

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

When I joined a new team at Central Baptist Village (CBV) in November 2017, one priority was to get to know each of the nearly 20 members of the Life Enrichment staff and learn about the work that they do. The Life Enrichment staff are spread across five different locations across our community and there was a need for them to find time to spend together as a team. This led me to focus on supporting a sense of teamwork and team empowerment for the department. The ALP that I chose was to focus on building collaborative creativity and decision making and a sense of connectedness within the Life Enrichment team. We started by developing a group Why Statement over the course of several Life Enrichment staff meetings. This Why Statement is a collection of all team members' voices and ideas formulated into an agreed upon statement of purpose for this team. It is starting to become and will continue to serve as a foundation and driving force for the ongoing process of enhancing the quality and meaningfulness of the programs that we provide.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

Developing the Why Statement in this way, has set a tone and a standard for decision making, idea creating and program development as a collaborative process. Nurturing this type of group process has created an environment where all voices are heard, and opinions are invited. It has also started to help the team build a foundation of connection to their own individual visions and purposes, to one another and to the greater purpose of the work that we do together. Long term, my hope is that creating a space where we are all equals in the creative process will lead to individuals on the team feeling increasingly empowered and inspired to create and grow in their own unique ways. I also hope that it will continue to lead to the filtering through of the *most* creative, intentional, passion driven and inspired ideas and development of activity programs for the residents. Lastly, my hope is that continuing to work with this process and utilizing a living statement of purpose for the department will be a meaningful and authentic way to communicate about the department with residents, their family members, prospective residents, and potential Life Enrichment staff and in our community outreach and marketing materials.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

Over the course of this project I was continuously mindful of differentiating between decisions that could be improved on by bringing them to the team to be addressed collaboratively and decisions that just needed to be made and implemented. At times, it was a challenge to dedicate and create space to go through this time consuming process with the team. However, I observed that when asked to share their opinions and given space for idea generation and development team members became more invested in the project, idea or program and more easily changed their own daily life and routines to align with it. Additionally, starting a new project or idea with our Why Statement served as a bridge to create an emotional connection for the team members to get onboard with a new project or change. By involving team members in the decision-making process and encouraging them to give input along the way, they became more emotionally invested and more likely to put themselves outside of their comfort zones in order to work toward a change.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

My experience at Leading Age Leadership Academy and at CBV has shown me that taking the time to develop, create and understand my own personal Why Statement has proven to be an extremely powerful tool for me both at work and in my personal life. It has been a gift to provide opportunities and to serve as a guide for others to continue to bring focus to their own purpose and the meaningfulness of why they do the work that they do both within the Life Enrichment team and also as individuals.

BRIAN CELERIO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ST. JOSEPH VILLAGE OF CHICAGO

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

I joined Franciscan Ministries in May of 2011 as the healthcare administrator at Addolorata Villa, a CCRC in Wheeling, IL. By the end of June of 2015, I was promoted to Executive Director at St. Joseph Village of Chicago. Throughout my career in healthcare and senior services, I have always used a “traditional” model of clinical leadership relative to skilled nursing, i.e. a Director of Nursing, an Assistant Director Nursing and so on. In fact, my healthcare career revolved around skilled nursing until I joined Franciscan Ministries and became more familiar with assisted and independent living. St. Joseph Village offers skilled nursing, short-term rehabilitation, long-term care, assisted living and memory support. When I assumed the leadership role at the community, I was fortunate to have a Director of Nursing overseeing skilled nursing services and a Director of Resident Services overseeing assisted living and memory support. Since then, much has changed as well as members of the leadership team and with that have come opportunities to think about things differently, to do things differently. After a year and several months at the community, I was faced with replacing clinical leadership in both skilled nursing and assisted living. However, during my time thus far, I had noted that transitions for our residents across service lines were not always smooth and at times disconnected. I then saw an opportunity with these vacancies to start making changes.

Working with clinical leadership from our home office, we developed a nursing position to oversee both skilled nursing and assisted living at our community. With a clinical director overseeing the nursing services of the campus as well as supervising a manager for assisted living, my vision is to have a smoother transition across our service lines by unifying nursing services of both lines to enhance the continuum of care for our residents. By starting with the largest departments at the community, I would in turn work with the other smaller but equally important departments to continue to make these changes happen and ultimately enhance the work experience of our associates by increasing their familiarity with our residents and vice versa. The ALP I have selected is to continue to work with the management team at St. Joseph Village of Chicago with this model to live up to our vision of celebrating life and serving with joy.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

My community has a total of 94 beds, 54 in skilled nursing and 40 assisted living apartments. Although it is not considered a large community, it does provide the opportunity for this type of change. Our industry has recently faced challenges in the work force and those challenges are going to continue as more and more providers open their doors and hospitals vie for the same employees. For those of us in senior living, we must think “outside of the box” in terms of recruiting and retaining our associates as well as marketing our services to the senior community. By unifying our nursing services with one director and cross-training clinical associates, we can enhance the experience of a resident transitioning from assisted living to skilled nursing or a short-term rehab resident to assisted living through consistent and continuous clinical care. This has been and will continue to be an area of learning and training for our clinical staff so they are better able to provide care throughout our continuum and eliminate phrases like, “I only work in skilled or I only work in assisted living.” Because the likelihood of our community to face staffing shortages in the future, especially in nursing, is high, my hope is that this this

model, will assist us in providing a better care continuum and developing stronger relationships not only with the residents but with their families. As residents remain in the community longer, their opportunities to develop relationships with associates in other departments such as Social Services, Dining, Therapy, and Housekeeping for example increases and ultimately raises their living experience.

What leadership lessons have I learned as a result of working on the ALP?

This ALP is an on-going project. I have been working through this in conjunction with my participation in the Leadership Academy. I have learned that change is not easy and never is if you are working towards something worthwhile. As far as being an Executive Director charged with moving my community forward, I know I have to have the right people or leaders around me. My first assignment with my team after my second session was having them read The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. This was an eye opener for the leadership team as we worked towards improving our communication with one another to become a more cohesive and successful team. Since I had recently brought on board some newer directors and managers, I felt the time was right to address some team dynamics by getting to know each other better as they had in the book and start developing trust and respect for one another. You cannot build a successful team without trust and clear communication.

I worked closely with one of my directors to administer the Briggs personality test and analyze the different types of personalities of the members of my team. This was a significant lesson for me as I also learned about the Emotional Intelligence of Groups. I understood that having the ability to understand, manage, and effectively express my feelings as well as navigate through the feelings of others was only going to enable me to be a better leader. This exercise was invaluable in helping me learn more about the personalities around me and what it would take to lead them through not only this change in clinical leadership and model but in other changes in the future.

Our team, Team Delta, coached by Dean Dellaria, presented the book Switch. This book made a lasting impression on me as it addressed Riders and Elephants and what it takes to direct a team, finding those “bright spots” to ensure a change will occur, making that change a habit and ultimately maintaining that change. Moving from two separate directors for skilled nursing and assisted living to one director has come with its fair share of challenges and therefore, stresses the importance of finding the right hires and/or making the necessary transitions of members of the team to ensure a successful change will happen.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

I am very grateful for my participation in this year’s Leadership Academy. It has given me the opportunity to meet new people and work with other leaders in senior services and long term care. I believe the experience has made me a more valuable asset to Franciscan Ministries and I am looking forward to sharing what I’ve learned (without spoiling the experience for someone else in my organization) with my peers and members of our senior leadership. I will utilize the resources I have attained in my journey with the Academy to continue the work I have started in my ALP. As a leader, I have learned that it is okay to fail but I must also be courageous to successfully navigate through those failures in order to better enhance the lives of our residents and work experiences of our associates at St. Joseph Village of Chicago.

CASEY PUDWILL
ADMINISTRATOR
GREENFIELDS GENEVA

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My goal as a long term care professional is and has been over the last decade, to continue to push forward the ideals that resident centered care afford us. Resident centered care focuses on the relationships between the resident and those that care for them, exemplifying the need for a strong and well-rounded work force. Nearly every long-term care professional that I work with has expressed similar concerns regarding staffing, retention, and the professional development of our associates. Our associates' impact on resident centered care is tremendous. Our staff is directly responsible for the success of any resident centered initiatives that may be implemented and the overall satisfaction of our residents. The success of any resident centered program depends upon the relationships between the resident and the staff, thus increasing the importance of maintaining a high-quality, stable associate pool.

The goal of this ALP is to create and implement a sustainable and meaningful program for recognition of associate excellence. The recognition program should not have a complex structure, rather a simple one aimed at having a positive impact on the associate receiving the recognition. I have seen many different programs come and go over the years, and I would like to see one that is sustainable, one that truly means something to the associate receiving the recognition. The recognition should be known publicly, and the associate should be proud to receive the acknowledgement for their positive actions or impact on the residents.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or in the field of senior living?

My aim through this ALP is to improve upon associate satisfaction, which will serve to meet a variety of strategic plan initiatives: reduced turn-over, increased associate recognition and acknowledgement, improved retention rates, enhanced engagement of frontline staff. My hope is that the improvement in staff retention and engagement will have a synergistic effect on the quality of care provided and our overall resident satisfaction measures.

I would like to see a program designed to meet the needs of the associates. My hope is that the program design is simple, meaningful and sustainable. I would like to see a program design that is reproducible, one that can cross over to other service lines of the FSO family.

The good work that we strive to provide for our residents daily is only accomplished when we have a strong and stable work force. Aside from the obvious cost savings as a result of reducing staff turn-over, improvement in team dynamics, continuity of care and the quality of care could lead to greater accomplishments.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

There are 3 distinct lessons that I have learned as a result of this ALP.

1. Taking a relatively simple concept such as improving associate recognition and acknowledgement from idea to reality and design to implementation can be very time consuming and difficult to do. It can be very easy to become overwhelmed at the scale of what

needs to occur within the organization to bring this to reality. Utilizing Mind-Mapping to clarify the different facets of the program was instrumental in determining the unseen relationships between the company, the associates, and the residents.

2. Creating a recognition program in accordance with budgetary constraints and strategic planning considerations, while maintaining the simplistic and sustainable design of the program remains difficult. One distinct lesson learned here was that engaging the team, specifically the associates themselves, to meet these goals would have been much more effective than trying to take this project on independently. Relying on the team to meet these deliverables would be much more successful than any individual taking on a project of this magnitude.
3. Analysis paralysis is a real thing. While the aim may be to have a perfect program, doing something would be more effective than doing nothing. The ideas from “Switch” would apply here. Creating the destination post card and then scripting the critical moves would definitely move the program forward, even if the resulting program is not perfect. Small changes can still have a big impact.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

This program and ALP will become a reality during 2018. The importance and impact that it could have on the organization could be great. My belief in the need for this program and its potential impact on the residents substantiates the need to continue its development. I understand and accept that the outcome may not be exactly what I had hoped it would be, however that does not diminish its success.

Having the opportunity to be a part of the Leading Age Leadership Academy has given me the opportunity to learn and grow on a personal and professional level. I feel as though I am becoming a “visionary leader” and am becoming more proficient utilizing many of the strategies that I have learned through the academy. I understand that it is ok, and even normal, to fail at times. I have taken the idea of the “peacock feather” to heart, and try to frame everything that I work on and accomplish through that lens. Even though my ALP is not where I hoped it would be at this point, I can see where we are headed and know that the end result will be well worth the effort.

COLLEEN KOWALEWSKI
LIFE SERVICES DIRECTOR
FRIENDSHIP SENIOR OPTIONS

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

To develop a Wellness Pathway for residents that will connect various departments within the organization towards working on a common goal of providing enhanced services to residents. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, members of the Dining department, Case Management, and Fitness will provide educational large group sessions, 1:1 consultations, and small group meetings to provide recommendations and support to Pathway participants within each area of wellness. Information is tracked and shared with other IDT members to enhance overall understanding of the residents' progress and participation.

This will improve staff understanding of common chronic disease and issues among the elderly population with an emphasis on higher education and knowledge at all levels promoting greater quality of care, customer intimacy and relationships between staff and residents.

The Wellness Pathway program will allow for new concepts and ideas to be developed from various disciplines with a focus upon creating interventions and interactions that are holistic and address wellness in its entirety.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or in the field of senior living?

As our organization continues to focus on new strategies with an emphasis on customer intimacy, the workplace of tomorrow, and population management, this program can provide opportunity for both residents and employees. When we address all dimensions of wellness-physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive, we are addressing the whole person. This allows for a better understanding of our population, fostering relationships and the ability to better provide for their needs at an enhanced level. The better we understand one another, the higher quality of care we can provide.

The Pathway is also an opportunity to open alternative areas of interest to the staff. In closer collaboration with one another we become increasingly in tune with the focus and demand of other departments-what their strengths are, how we best assist one another, and productive, positive changes that can be made for the benefit of all.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

I've learned that being a productive leader is more than creating an idea and implementing that idea as quickly as possible. The interest, input and support of those that I work with are integral to successful changes. Together we are accomplishing something that is significant and meaningful to many. It is so important to provide others with an opportunity to broaden their knowledge base and give them a change to step back and see how each of our roles affects the other. The importance of doing a good job isn't just for a single person, but rather for the greater group and the population as a whole.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

The concept of a wellness pathway and utilizing a holistic approach to better understand one another and those that we serve are not new concepts, the idea of bringing it to front line staff in all departments is something that our organization has not attempted. How we interact with each other,

how we understand the positions of one another, how we get down to the “who, what and why,” is so significant. It is an opportunity to develop successful interventions, exciting ideas, and greater leaders.

DARLA SCHALL
NEW TEAM MEMBER LIAISON AND EDUCATION COORDINATOR
CLARK-LINDSEY VILLAGE

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My ALP was to focus on enhancing the dining experience of our Skilled Care unit. In the past six months we have transitioned to a universal worker model in our skilled care unit (traditional long term care) at Clark Lindsey. In combining roles and creating the universal worker, we have experienced some struggles with our dining program. Understanding the importance of a positive dining experience, it had more recently felt that dining was being approached more as a task than an experience. A group of primary caregivers from the skilled care unit met on a weekly basis for about 2 months to explore the dining experience. The group identified the areas they felt were most troublesome in the overall dining experience. They identified areas that impacted both residents and team members and potentially family and visitors. The team then ranked the items as high, medium and low priority, focusing primarily on the high priority items to begin with. During the time together the team brainstormed ideas as possible solutions. They met with the dining services supervisor and dietician to discuss struggles they were having. The team took the information that they had gathered and developed a couple of tools, processes, and an education plan to share with the rest of the team.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

The hope is to enhance the dining time as an experience that is enjoyable to residents and team members as well as families/visitors. To create a well-organized, calm, pleasing environment where the team members work together to execute the dining task but create an enjoyable experience. To have a greater understanding of the dining experience and the impact it has on the well-being of the residents which can have an impact on the well-being of the team members as well.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

It reconfirms the importance of including the team members that a situation impacts the most and including those team members that directly can have the most control over the success of a new idea or process. Including the team members most directly impacted helps with buy in; the team has a sense of ownership and accomplishment. It creates empowered staff. The team members involved are able to clarify and answer any questions from others that come up. They can help support their co-workers. They can identify immediately any areas that may not be working as planned and know if maybe the intervention chosen isn't working or if it is not understood. The concept of "tight loose tight" can be very effective with this change. During the planning, education and execution process it was closely monitored (tight). Team members were educated and monitored and then left to function with the education and tools that they were given (loose). So either after time or as concerns arise, it can come back in to observe, coach, or educate (tight).

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

This is an on-going process that has recently been implemented and will continue to be monitored moving forward.

DIANA SUBACIUS
DIRECTOR OF DINING SERVICES
THE BIRCHES ASSISTED LIVING

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

As the director of dining services at The Birches Assisted Living, I've decided to decrease the amount of frozen, packaged and processed foods that we serve. Instead, I've started embracing the farm-to-table movement by incorporating more fresh, homemade and local foods into our menu. We make our soups, pies and bread from scratch. We buy produce from a local farm. We maintain our own beehives, have three chickens, and have two small vegetable gardens. But I'd like to take our commitment to the farm-to-table movement even further. For my ALP, I plan to develop a food service approach that incorporates fresh, local food as much as possible. More specifically, I'd like to:

- Make more menu items from scratch.
- Source more food from local farms.
- Create a larger vegetable garden, and involve residents in planting, caretaking and harvesting.
- Figure out how to comply with local regulations so we can serve our own eggs, honey and produce.
- Involve residents in other aspects of our fresh, local food initiative, like having them collect and wash the eggs from our chickens and cook with the foods we've grown in our Gourmet Club.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

I believe my ALP can make a difference in the health and well-being of Birches residents. Studies show that eating more whole foods and less processed foods has a positive impact on health. It's tied to a decreased risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, dementia and many other diseases. This initiative will also enrich residents' quality of life by making the food they eat more flavorful. Residents have already commented that the food tastes better since we started getting some produce from local farms. If we engage residents in food-related activities like vegetable gardening, they will also get more fresh air and exercise, which will improve their health and quality of life even further. Many residents grew up on farms or lived on farms at some point in their life, so the act of growing vegetables, tending to chickens and cooking fresh food brings back good memories and emotions for them too. Beyond its impact at The Birches, I hope this approach to fresh, local food serves as an example and inspiration for other assisted living communities and healthcare businesses, so the entire industry can move toward a fresher and healthier approach to food.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

I've learned that as a leader, getting a new idea implemented takes passion, creativity, collaboration and commitment. You must have a passion for the project you're pursuing, because that will motivate you to keep going despite any setbacks. I grew up on a farm and believe strongly in the benefits of fresh food

versus processed food, so that's driven me to keep this project going at The Birches. You have to be creative in your approach, because sometimes things don't work out as planned or you come across unexpected barriers, and you need to think outside of the box to find a solution. One of the biggest barriers we've faced so far are strict local regulations about serving the foods we produce ourselves at The Birches (honey, eggs and vegetables), and we're currently working on creative solutions to meet these regulations. You need to collaborate effectively with your co-workers to get a big project like this off the ground. For example, to get residents involved in vegetable gardening, I have to collaborate with our activities staff, because it's only possible with their support. Lastly, you have to stay committed. If your commitment waivers, you can easily fall back into the old way of doing things instead of making the lasting changes you set out to make. Through this ALP, I have committed to scaling up our farm-to-table efforts, and I hope this will make The Birches a leader of the fresh food movement in the healthcare industry.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

The farm-to-table philosophy has been embraced by so many people and businesses in recent years, and I hope that I can help the healthcare industry embrace it too. I think that moving away from manufactured food and toward fresh food is important for a healthy future. I hope more people will have their own backyard gardens and a stronger appreciation for farming, because the more people know about their food and where it comes from, the better our world will be.

JEFFREY ROSE
CAFÉ MANAGER
MATHER LIFEWAYS

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

For my ALP, I wanted to think and implement ideas that could not only benefit my organization, but the senior living industry as a whole. One impetus leading me to enter this field was that I was educated and exposed to it starting at a very young age, and I experienced continued interactions and familiarity over the years to adulthood. That is why, for my ALP, I have selected an opportunity to help my organization educate and recruit the next generation into the same workforce. Labor shortages in my field are a hot topic today and will be for the foreseeable future, so for my ALP, I wanted to take a different approach to solving the problem: Looking at it from its roots, well before the hiring process comes into play. This could include approaches such as speaking to high school and college students about the industry and the opportunities it has to offer, and raising awareness about the field among universities, career counselors, and others who influence the career journeys of many people. Taking an even longer view might involve working to dispel the myths of aging among elementary and middle-school students. This ALP will take a multifaceted approach to addressing the issues at hand.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

It is my hope and vision that my organization and others in the field will become more aware of how their efforts in the communities they serve can impact the next generation workforce. From education institutions to general awareness, I think it is incredibly important for people in the field to get behind this. My goal is to help future generations discover the promise and potential of working with older adults. The fulfillment it has brought me is tremendous and I want to share that with others. As an added benefit, this discovery will hopefully help fill staffing voids down the road and bring new life to the field. If I can inspire at least one person to follow the path I have taken, then this will be a success. After all, we need all the help we can get!

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

It's about progress, not perfection. Always moving forward, never backwards. There are many lessons I can derive from book learning, and from mind mapping and beyond. But for me, the biggest influence and leadership lesson has been understanding the cycle of change, and learning about engagement and emotional intelligence. I think all of these leadership lessons played a role in not only formulating my ALP, but in understanding how to work with others on the ALP. From lessons learned within my organization to those outside of it, these concepts have had a profound impact on me and the ALP. Of course, there is much more work to be done on this project and process as it continues to grow and expand.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

This topic is a passion of mine, and it has been and will be a great opportunity to participate in something outside of my usual scope of work, and to reflect on other skills and passions I can cultivate, outside of normal day-to-day duties. The ALP has allowed me to talk with others in the industry to get thoughts and feedback, and to understand that the problem, process and struggle are not unique. In a larger organization, where oftentimes staff are very spread out, it is beneficial to have an opportunity to talk with and be involved with others whom you might not normally encounter but who could broaden

your perspective. Each one of us has a reason that we are in this field and industry, and the ALP will be an effective vehicle to capitalize on knowledge gained about those varied backgrounds and paths.

LINDA SMITH
MARKETING DIRECTOR
LUTHERAN HOME AND SERVICES

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for doing it?

As more and more seniors transition in our community to a higher level of care or are admitted as new long term residents, the hand-off from the admissions counselor to the interdisciplinary team seems to have disintegrated. This results in many questions being unanswered by the new resident and their family causing frustration on their part. It also puts our staff at a disadvantage by not having the proper information prior to admission so they are prepared for the new resident both on a nursing level as well as a social level. The goal of my ALP is to alleviate family concerns and fears while making the transition seamless for the resident and staff. Ultimately creating happy families and staff who feel comfortable caring for a new resident by being fully informed of their physical and social needs and wants.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

The goal is to develop a comprehensive admissions process that incorporates all departments to create a seamless transitions for either new residents from the community or patients transferring from rehab to long term care. In order to achieve a seamless transition, the key component will be communication and follow through by each department. One can only imagine the fear that a senior faces as they move into a new environment...will the staff know their care needs? Will they make friends? What time is dinner? Who can they ask questions of? How do they charge essentials to their account? All of these questions seem easy but when presented to a senior, it can seem overwhelming. In addition, we expect new residents to try to learn the routines and names of the staff caring for them as well as a new environment. It creates fear and anxiety for all involved. The most rewarding experience would be a well-informed new resident who feels comfortable with the changes they are experiencing and confident enough to ask the staff if they have questions. In addition, the staff awareness of a new resident needs prior to their admission will help in the transition process.

I hope to accomplish the following:

- Implement the newly created Room Readiness form making sure all aspects of the room are in good working order.
- Inform all staff for the arrival of the new resident by informing them of their physical needs, social interests and needs, religious needs. Example: Let the pastor know if there is a new resident coming who will require additional pastoral care services to make the transition easier.
- Inform the resident and family of what they can expect prior to their admission by meeting the staff ahead of time and understanding the process.
- Family to have contact information for all staff providing care including phone numbers and email addresses so they can address questions and concerns timely.
- Provide a structured welcome and transition program on the day of move so residents truly feel like they have found their new homes.

- Continue to monitor and measure resident progress for the first 30 days to ensure that questions are answered and resident and family are happy.

What leadership lessons have I learned as a result of working on the ALP?

This project touches all aspects of Lutheran Home – environmental services, reception, nursing, social services, life enrichment, pastoral care, culinary, as well as marketing and admissions. It is important that as the leader of this initiative, I secure buy-in from all these departments in order for this to succeed. I have learned how to express to the other departments how critical each of their rolls are in relation to resident care. It is also critically important that the other Directors have buy-in and express the importance of this initiative to their teams.

I relate this to the Emotional Intelligence of Groups. Change is never easy and trying to get groups to work together for a common goal can be challenging. I will need to create a positive environment to have people become excited by the ideas and want to initiate the process. I need to play to their emotional side – what if this were you or your family, how would you want it to be handled? And then to make sure they remember those feelings going forward so the program continues to thrive.

It also plays into the Why Statement. We all need to ask ourselves why we are here and what our ultimate goal is – well cared for, happy residents as well as staff who are excited about the work they are doing and are committed to the organization. We need to refocus our efforts away from the daily tasks that can become burdensome and re-energize ourselves into the common mission of why we are here and the impact we can each have on our residents and their lives.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

The Leadership Academy has broadened my insight into other departments. It became clear to me that I can't function in my own silo of Marketing and Admissions but rather need to incorporate the entire interdisciplinary team into the admissions process. I am confident that the skills I learned in the academy can help me create a cohesive team at Lutheran Home by letting people take pride in their actions and motivate them to create the most vibrant environment for both staff and residents alike.

MARY JO PORTER
ASSISTANT MANAGER, PEACE MEMORIAL MANOR
EMBRACE LIVING COMMUNITIES

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

I have chosen Work/Life Balance as my ALP to create a better work environment for my fellow employees. Working in senior independent living housing is as rewarding as it is challenging. Peace Memorial is a large building with 149 apartments housing a culturally diverse population of 180 residents, aging in place. The demands on the time of the two managers, two maintenance men, one housekeeper, and one social service coordinators are many.

My plan is to take the lessons that I have learned from the book, “The Power of Full Engagement”, by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, and present them to members of our team in carefully-designed workshops. The theory of managing energy, not time, could go a long way to create a better work environment as we meet the needs of the residents as we go about our day-to-day duties as well as our down time at home at the end of each day.

What long term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or in the field of senior living?

As the assistant manager, I interact with the staff daily. I have worked with all my team members, save one, for over five years. I see and hear the challenges we all face due to working with a smaller staff than when I started. There is positive and negative energy being expended but not necessarily recovery time in the moment or when the day is done. I see this ALP as an opportunity to bring about changes for the better in the work place that will also follow into our homes. This is an opportunity for all of us to challenge ourselves to make small changes over a period of time that lead to a healthier lifestyle and more contentment in whatever we do.

Embrace Living Communities Mission statement is to provide actively aging adults affordable, welcoming homes in communities that embrace living. We subscribe to seven Values as well, with the third value concerning Teamwork: We value each team member and recognize that we are at our best when we work together as a team. We will be at our best if we can be in the best physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual shape. I don't underestimate why our energy levels are sometimes drained. My hope is to give my team the tools to create the right work/life balance as we meet the demands of each day by using our energy appropriately.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on ALP?

As I was reading the book, The Power of Full Engagement, it occurred to me that the ideas set forth in the book would be useful to every member of my team. Leading is sharing knowledge to make those around you better able to perform their job. At the academy, I realized that there are so many places to pull information to make a project relatable. My team will have you tube videos, lists, assessments, fun, and even food at sessions as we learn together. I will have time dedicated to my ALP at our weekly staff meetings, where everyone has a voice and there is a comfort level between us. My starting point will be revisiting our team mandala so we may focus on what our work values are to use as the foundation for Work/Life Balance. I learned in “Five Dysfunctions of a Team”, change is difficult, especially change that a person may not buy in to. Leading a team of unique individual is a process that takes time and patience. My plans will have specific topics to discuss each week with handouts/ at times to draw team members into discussions. The book has many examples that I may use as we move through process.

Since this is a project that is for a small team, I will be able to purchase the few items needed through the building's budget. I look forward to being an effective change agent for the reward is great not only for the team but for the residents that we serve.

What other observations or insights do you wish to share?

Working on an ALP is a perfect project for all the Fellows in the Leadership Academy to plan as the year comes to an end. When I knew that I wanted my ALP to be based on Work/Life Balance, I met with my supervisor to discuss my ideas on this project and gained her support. Getting her backing and insight into my ALP is beneficial to our managerial relationship, a bonus of the project. The lessons learned from the Academy, layered carefully session to session, have given me more depth, more skills, filling my "tool box". Using all the resources at my disposal, the benefits of developing an ALP is an integral step in leadership.

MAVIS KAPUMBA, RN
HEALTH AND WELLNESS COORDINATOR
BROOKDALE HOFFMAN ESTATES

Briefly describe your alp and your reason for doing it?

“It is imperative that we build a culture that works for the benefit of everyone in our team and for the organizations we work for.” These were the words of one of the leaders during our Leaders in Residence sessions. I in return asked the question, “How do I build a culture in an organization which has evolved and continues to do so over several years?”

Through the years, our organization has undergone transitions from one senior living operator to another, and has currently been under Brookdale for the past three years. The underscore to these transitions is the facts that, the majority of the direct care associates/ staff have transitioned from the old operators and continue to work for the current organization.

The challenges arise where cultures that have existed in past organizations have continued to be the trend throughout the community despite a new organization taking over and introducing new ideas to the community. This has resulted in resistance to change and frustration on the leadership and new associates/ staff. There is an attitude that is overrated, underrated, or disregarded as obstacles to the way things have always been done in the past. In the long run, my organization is experiencing a chronic lack of sustainability and employee retention. New hires get frustrated easily with the current trend and move on without warning.

My ALP focuses on a back to the basics approach. I intend to review the ways we hire, sustain, and retain associates/ staff. This entails looking into the basic needs of our organization when it comes to hiring new associates. Brookdale offers a wide range of incentives which can attract the new generation of associates. Beginning the interview process with the benefits Brookdale has to offer to a potential employee plays a major role in our sustainability and retention of new hires/ associates. I have already started utilizing this strategy and so far it is working well. New hires are coming on board with the intention of knowing they will advance in their careers by taking advantage of Brookdale benefits such as school tuition/fee reimbursement, the opportunity to work while going to school, and the promise that new hires can continue to work for Brookdale and advance in their careers.

In addition, we are incorporating our long term associates into the new hire training via a mentorship program. Our hope is to make seasoned associates open up to current trends in senior living by adapting to current trends in senior living.

I have also utilized the exit interview process with a new associate who resigned after a year with our community. It turns out the main barrier with this particular associate was communication. I relayed this to my direct supervisor and we both agreed this is a concern. We are currently looking into ways we can improve communication with the staff. We have tools in place such as shift to shift reports, 24 hour nursing reports, and a 24 hour resident associate communication log.

What long-term impact do you hope your alp will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

The long-term impact I hope my ALP will have on my organization is sustaining and retaining associates/ staff with a sense of satisfactory that competes with other senior living communities.

Our goal is to become the number one Brookdale community where everyone turns to and looks to find out what we are doing as we endeavor in the care of our residents and making a difference in senior living care.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the alp?

When I came into the leadership academy, I didn't feel like I was a leader or ready to lead a team. Looking back now, I have learned to be a leader first before leading and I continue to grow in this role. I feel the leadership academy is my training ground as I enrolled right after taking up a leadership role in our community.

I have utilized most of the lessons learned during our last 3 sessions. I feel I am well equipped now to lead than I was before the leadership academy. Working on my ALP has been a reflection on how far I have come and as an individual as well as a team player. In summary, this is what I have learned:

1. Made me look into what change or contribution I can bring to my organization on a long term basis.
2. What impact are we having in our neighborhood as a community – our mission statement says a lot about us and the communities we serve.
3. To be a better listener – never letting work get in the way of human communication. It is vital to the survival of an organization and me as an individual.
4. To be able to lead myself before I can lead, I found my true north, now I can help others find theirs.
5. To be emotionally intelligent – this was an eye opener for me as it has changed the way I interact with my supervisors and associates.
6. To look into ways that brings out the best in others as we work as a team – finding the bright spots in other and in everything we do as a community.

I can go on and on, but the most valuable lesson is the investment my organization pours into its associates to become and be better leaders now and beyond which I am privileged to be a part of.

What other observations or insights about your alp do you wish to share?

My supervisor once said, "We are running a business and we better all be on board and do it right." I did not grasp the depth of her statement until recently. What we do matters to others and we better do it right. Being part of the Leadership Academy has offered me the opportunity to grow not only professionally, but also personally, academically and spiritually to some extent with the last reading assignment (The Power of Full Engagement). Looking back to where I was before the Leadership Academy, I can ascertain to the fact that I can see a personal growth. With the three sessions behind us, the knowledge and the skills learned are being implemented and paving the future for me on both a personal level as a professional level I as an upcoming leader in senior living. I am still open to learning, growing, failing, frustrations, and everything this journey is taking me on. I know I am ready and well-equipped to embark on being a valuable leader with a vision of being a better leader and a team player.

I have confidence my ALP will soon be the order of my community as we strive to be the best Brookdale community everyone looks to in our neighborhood.

MICHELE CLEMEN
SALES MANAGER
FRIENDSHIP SENIOR OPTIONS

Briefly describe your ALP, and our reason for selecting it.

Sales in a community is everyone's responsibility. Yes, the residency counselors and sales team hold the primary responsibility, but the whole community, from the concierge at the front desk to the housekeeper, to the wait staff is involved in the process.

Often times, during orientation, the different levels of care provided at a community might be mentioned, and maybe a member of the sales team might provide a tour, but this doesn't help the new associate who has just joined the community understand how their role plays a part in the sales process.

My ALP is to focus on creating a culture of sales. I plan to work with Human Resources to incorporate a brief presentation to be done at new associate orientation to explain how everyone is connected to the sales team. I would also like to present at other department meetings to be sure that all associates understand their role as part of the sales team.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

My hope for my ALP is to have every associate understand how their role affects a new resident moving to the community. By starting this program with new associates, it is my hope that it will create a culture of hospitality, thus creating the optimal first impression for a prospect and/or their family.

Once the program has been established with new associates, the next step is to meet with all of the service/operations teams and present the program to them. This will ensure that all associates understand how their role plays a part in the sales process, and continue to grow the culture of hospitality.

In addition, I would hope that associates would enjoy learning how they can help influence a sale by simply smiling, saying hello, or even sharing with a prospect and/or family member what they do at the community and why they enjoy their jobs. The sales team member should offer this interaction at every opportunity during a prospect tour.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

Being new to the organization, ALP is still in its idea stage, and will need the support of the Executive Director and Human Resources before taking this idea to the rest of the leadership team. However, one of the leadership lessons that is always important when starting something new is the "why" behind the change to the current process. This will be important to share with the leadership team, and one way to do that is to share the sales goals for the year and help them to understand that their teams are an integral part of meeting those goals.

Another leadership lesson that will be important to apply to this ALP, is understanding how to manage change. Part of that will require the buy-in from the leadership team as mentioned above, but also from

the associates in each department. In order to get some of the buy-in from the associates, I would like to conduct a short survey of employees to find out what they most want to know about the sales department and the community. This will help me to create the presentation for new associates as well as current associates.

Lastly, the Riders and the Elephants. Some of what I am proposing is being done, so I want to look for what the community is doing well and expand on that to get the desired outcome.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

What I will need to look for is how the program continues after its initial introduction should it be adopted as part of the orientation. It will be easy to show a new associate the right way to do something because you don't have to change a habit that they have already learned. This is the behavior that you want all of the community to learn.

The harder part potentially will be to get the associates who have been with the organization a longer period of time to adopt this new behavior. For this I keep going back to the book *Switch* and how important managing change in small pieces is to create habits. For the associates that are not new to the organization, the program will have to start with smaller changes to create the culture of hospitality and selling that is desired. The broader change can be implemented along the way and my hope is that the new associates will help to introduce the change through the behavior that was learned during the orientation process.

REBECCA SOKULSKI
DIRECTOR, DINING SERVICES
BROOKDALE NILES SENIOR LIVING SOLUTIONS

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My Action Learning Plan is to enhance the on-boarding process for new hires and create a thorough training program for all dining services team members. My reason for selecting this project was due to the absence of a formal, consistent training process in my community. In the past, new employees would go through a brief orientation process and then perform online training with little to no supervision. After their online training, practical training would begin with an existing team member, often a peer, and in three days they would be required to perform their job duties.

My goal in creating this project is to successfully implement a sound training program that will translate between departments and allow new employees to fully understand the mission of our organization, the policies with which they will be required to uphold and the specific functions and expectations of their position.

It is also a goal to create a dependable training program that can instill basic responsibilities to our young workforce that they can take with them throughout their professional lifetime.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

By building a formalized training program and giving new employees the necessary tools to be successful, our organization should be able to retain employees longer, promote within the organization and provide essential life tools for future generations.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

Throughout this process I have learned that consistency is a key factor when being an effective leader. I believe it is important for employees to receive consistent messages throughout their training in order to understand what is required of them. Not all individuals learn at the same pace and therefore training programs should have flexibility to accommodate their individual needs.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

I found it interesting that the community that I work in did not have a consistent training plan developed and lacked a thorough orientation process. Without either of these, it is difficult to hold our employees accountable for that which they do not know.

VENUS M. PEREZ
DIRECTOR OF NURSING
GREENFIELDS OF GENEVA

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

Since I began my career in skilled nursing and long-term care more than 25 years ago, I have seen many changes in both the residents we care for and our caregivers. Year after year, the acuity level of care becomes more complex as we try to help our senior population age in place. As a result, I hope to foster an environment where our associates feel confident in their knowledge/skills and recognize the remarkable impacts they are making. However, I have noticed that our community has fallen short in this area with respect to our new associates.

Although some applicants are new to the field and are eager to begin a new chapter in our community, often, they do not necessarily have the extensive skill set that our facility demands per a lack of senior-focused education and experience. On the other hand, we are also confronted with experienced new hires who come to us with work habits that do not reflect our establish protocols. Other new applicants seem to lack passion in their work, as they are approaching their position as means to a greater end. Many are using their time at our facility as a stepping stone to other healthcare fields such as acute care hospitals and do not appear genuinely invested in our senior population.

Because our current on-boarding and orientation structure does not effectively teach our new hires, they are left feeling lost, unsupported, and ill-equipped to care for our residents. Likewise, a chaotic, dull orientation does little to excite new associates about their new position and contributes to poor retention, a reality that ultimately threatens the wellbeing of our residents.

A structured program focusing on enhancing senior living in our community while ensuring new associates have the knowledge and skills to meet our resident's unique needs is crucial. It will not only help with the retention of our new hires, but will give them assurance that they are a very integral part of our community and in the lives of our seniors. Providing resident-centered care is as unique as each resident, a challenge with which our associates are faced daily. For this reason, I have decided to collaborate with the Human Resources team at Friendship Senior Options to develop is a strong, organized and comprehensive New Hire Orientation and On-boarding program for our Associates (Employees). This ALP initiated will reflect current best practices, our unique resident population, and the skill sets needed to care for our seniors.

Our seniors want to be cared for in the way they care for themselves at home. The orientation and on-boarding program would center on building relationships that is increasingly resident-centered. New associates who begin their work in our households will be well equipped with the knowledge of Friendship Senior Options processes and skill sets and most importantly, a sense of belonging. Enhancing our associates' experience beginning with the interview process and being ready to welcome them as a new team member on their first day of orientation not only benefits the organization but will position us as a preferred employer.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or in the field of senior living?

In line with FSO's strategic plan, we are striving to make Friendship Senior Options the employer of choice and the *workplace of tomorrow*. As an industry, we need to nurture and support our associates to become future leaders in healthcare. The pool of candidates interviewing is small. Some candidates are right out of school and can easily become intimidated by the responsibilities they are faced when caring for our seniors. Others are changing jobs with their prior experiences influencing their behaviors and work habits. Our current orientation program is disorganized and chaotic leaving new associates to question whether our daily operations reflect this same sense of chaos and disorganization, thereby impacting retention.

By moving away from a lecture-based orientation and towards an interactive, employee-centered structure, we will engage new associates, enhance learning, and begin to build community. Welcoming new associates with a more structured on-boarding process will let them know they are not only a part of our team, but our family. With increased employee engagement, the crucial processes and skills learned during orientation will not only improve retention but will also ignite a passion to build relationships with our residents, a foundational skill needed to provide the individualized, resident-centered care we strive for each day.

Starting with the direct care staff in the skilled area of our community, this program can be utilized in all areas of our organization from independent living through skilled nursing care, from housekeeping to the concierge.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

I am honored and blessed to have been selected to be part of the Leadership Academy. This incredible opportunity has provided me resources and insights allowing me to grow both personally through self-discovery and professionally by drawing on the many leadership lessons learned.

It is not easy transferring thoughts and ideas into action. As a leader, I need to invite more shared governance from my associates. Any good idea, program, or process will take a great deal of time and energy, commitment, and support from upper management as the project itself evolves. By utilizing the lessons and concepts from the books "Switch" and "the Power of Full Engagement" as well as practicing emotional intelligence, I have been able to work with various members of the community staff to gain insight and direction as I strive to improve this program.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

The Leadership Academy has provided me the knowledge and resources to become a better leader. I have been given the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. Known as "the fixer", I have learned I cannot fix everything. It is part of the learning process to fail. Failing helps you to grow, and learn and bring you closer to answers by following the "What", "How" and "Why" questions.

Good coaching is not providing the answer, its helping to find the answer. Identifying an area of potential growth or improvement, breaking it into smaller pieces and identifying the root cause, can have a domino effect on improvement. The leadership lessons and skills I have learned and will continue to learn, and practice is going to help me to become a better leader now and in the future.

ZINA KIND
IT HELPDESK SUPERVISOR
COVENANT RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

Our IT department is currently working on a web based IT ticketing solution that will replace our current system along with the way that application onboarding requests are made. Onboarding requests are currently submitted to the IT Helpdesk in the form of a Word document. Our IT Helpdesk, HR staff, and Clinical Hiring Managers will be impacted the most when we change our current process. For my ALP, to address the inefficiencies in our current onboarding process, I have decided to focus on restructuring our onboarding form so that it meets the needs of our clinical and IT Helpdesk staff. To achieve this, I have reached out to the Hiring Managers and HR staff using a short survey to determine their pain points with the current paper onboarding form. Once I have received the requested feedback, I will begin to work with the ticketing vendor we've chosen to continue structuring a web based electronic form. This change will also make the integration of our application onboarding request process and our newly implemented HCM system, more cohesive.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization or the field of senior living?

Ultimately, this process change will have very tangible and intangible benefits. It will improve the current way we handle onboarding requests and improve our relationship with other departments by creating a more functional and less dubious application onboarding process. Thus, giving our Hiring managers, IT Helpdesk, and HR staff piece of mind. This will subsequently contribute to our campus and clinical staff providing joy and peace of mind for our residents and their families.

What leadership lessons have you learned as a result of working on the ALP?

There are several departments involved in making this change happen. Coordinating with HR staff, Hiring Managers, and my helpdesk team is critical in making this process a success. I've learned that allowing those who will be most affected by this change, the opportunity to offer insight into their experiences with it, is paramount to making the most effective changes to promote a successful outcome.

What other observations or insights about your ALP do you wish to share?

Several tools that I have found useful in my ALP process have been using Emotional Intelligence, which has allowed me to stay focused on the process and manage the emotional frustrations experienced by others where our current process is concerned; Active Listening, staying focused and concentrating on what is being said and not missing key information by formulating responses prematurely; and ACT (Assess, Communicate, Take Action). The last one is very instrumental in first truly determining what the problem is, communicating with key individuals to troubleshoot and brainstorm potential solutions, and finally taking the necessary action(s) to implement the agreed upon solution.