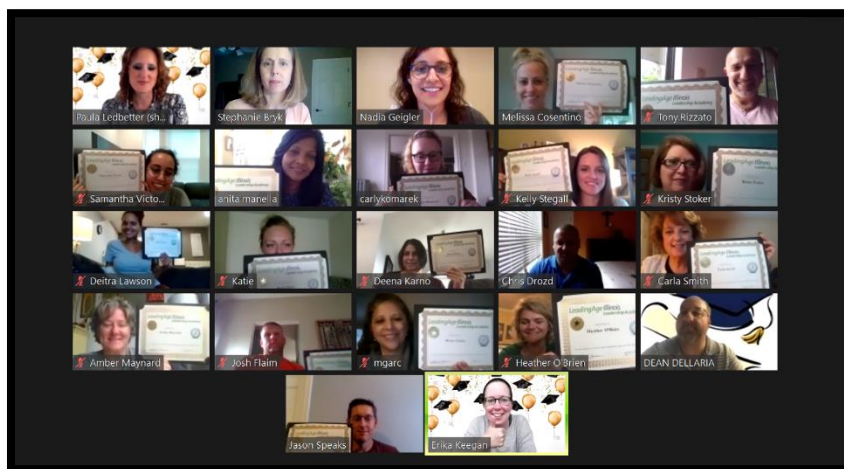


LeadingAge Illinois Leadership Academy

Creating a new era of excellence in aging services



Action Learning Plans (ALP's) 2019-2020

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 session #4.

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

**MELISSA COSENTINO, MSW, CDP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE GRAND AT TWIN LAKES**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for doing it?

The ALP I have selected is to cultivate an extraordinary culture at my community. Changing the culture of an organization is not an easy task, nor can it be accomplished quickly. It will require a multi-step approach, which I will build upon through strategic planning and regular evaluation and optimization. Today, for step one, I'm focused on improving our culture by reforming our hiring selection process and boosting employee retention rates.

A dream of mine is that every employee at The Grand at Twin Lakes feels seen, heard, respected, and empowered to bring their best hard-working selves to work. When staff feel valued, spreading joy becomes contagious and it impacts our residents in a positive way.

I'm a believer that you can hire someone who is inexperienced, but who is willing to learn and has the right attitude and work ethic – someone who cares about building relationships with our residents. That's why I'm developing a screening tool for our multi-step hiring interview process that evaluates candidates' values and behaviors to make sure they align with those that are important to our leadership team, such as dependability, flexibility, integrity, and professionalism. When they have a passion to serve the older adult population, that's the cherry on top!

A recent [article](#) reports that average cost to recruit and train a new employee in senior care ranges from \$3,500-\$5,000. For the purpose of this calculation, I'll assume The Grand at Twin Lakes falls in the middle of that range, at \$4,250 per new employee. We had an average of 27 employees leave each year in 2018 and 2019, meaning our turnover costs were \$114,750 annually. My goal is to limit 2020 turnover to 19 people, roughly a 30% decrease. If we hit our goal, turnover costs would be no more than \$80,750, saving us at least \$34,000.

To improve employee retention, I have opened my door for mentoring and active listening to anyone who needs emotional support, direction, or a confidential safe space to vent. I am also training supervisors to show more appreciation to their direct reports, as well as encourage their employees' personal growth through consistent communication in order to increase productivity, efficiency, and motivation. I am implementing a formal "stay conversation" tool for managers to use in between yearly reviews to discover what makes valued employees feel most engaged and wanting to keep working at The Grand. I am also encouraging supervisors to conduct stay interviews at a regular cadence, such as during regular one-on-one meetings, to eliminate the pressure of this type of conversation.

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

From an organizational standpoint, I would like to be known as a top workplace recognized by the Chicago Tribune by the end of 2021. The energy and value we put on our employees will increase overall quality of care and impact satisfaction of our residents' experience as measured by our annual staff and resident engagement survey. My goal is to improve and grow by increasing our survey results by 10% to show off our uniqueness. In terms of dollar value for our organization, being recognized as a top workplace will contribute to the recruiting and training savings previously identified, but beginning in late 2021.

During these tough times in the labor market, finding great people to work in our industry can be challenging. The ability to keep current employees happy and support their success is invaluable. I am slowly uncovering what my team values most about themselves, their work, and our organization and what key elements boost their morale and collaboration. For now, we're celebrating small victories and amplifying what IS working.

Someday, I would love The Grand to be a trailblazer in our industry and share tools with other senior living organizations struggling to build solid team. I also hope that our employees inspire others, especially the younger generation, to go into this rewarding field!

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

I reread the book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* for leadership academy the week I began my new role and the timing of it was perfect. It was a great reminder of the importance of vulnerability and trust, and how conflict on a leadership team may be challenging yet encourages open-mindedness when we are aiming towards the same goals and objectives. It's also been important while working on my ALP to understand the positives of having a leadership team with different "thinking hats" because sometimes, the best decisions have come from changing the way we think about problems, and examining them from different viewpoints.

Laila Island was a good reminder that everyone has something valuable to share, and the importance of clear direction and communication.

We learned that Ernest Shackleton had strong perseverance and refused to give up in his journey no matter what challenges were thrown his way. As leaders, we have to remember that it is not about us. First, it's important that we create a circle of safety and sacrifice, genuinely caring for the people who follow our lead and helping them out whenever possible, learning what is important to them on a personal and professional level and customizing their experience.

I am grateful to have been given a platform and a vault to share and practice my fears of failure and of success. I have become much more confident in my skin while becoming an authentic and genuine leader and feel re-energized about using my growth mindset and creativity.

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

It's important to note that at times it takes courage to articulate or push for change, and to maintain the high standards and expectations required. If you commit to staying the course of your true north or internal compass, it's possible to achieve great results in a short amount of time.

To me, an extraordinary culture is embodied by a trusted staff who are passionate, engaged, inspired, and see the larger picture of what we're aspiring to be on an organizational level. They will be 100% committed to what needs to take place strategically in order to meet our mission, vision and goals. The Grand is on a path to become the grandest environment where older adults can thrive and live a well and meaningful life with staff who support them along the way.

**JOSH FLAIM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
DIRECTOR, HUMAN RESOURCES
FRIENDSHIP SENIOR OPTIONS**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

I have selected to implement a Mentoring program in our two communities. I have found that one of the main reasons new hires either separate from us or are dissatisfied with their positions within the first thirty days is related to their onboarding. Over the years we have utilized a preceptor program to bring on associates in our HealthCare Center but it has always had limited success due to turnover, management changes or participants dropping out of the program. The idea of having a formal mentorship program is that the associates chosen to be mentors will have a special interest in helping someone else learn, develop and succeed. Utilizing a program like this vs. a preceptor program would that we would allow all departments to take advantage of this and then also give our mentors the ability to be recognized and rewarded all the time for their contributions to the success of it.

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

I am anticipating that after this program gets implemented that our retention rates for our new hires will increase and their overall satisfaction will improve. By providing a mentor to all new associates, we will be able to facilitate a transfer of knowledge from the mentor to the mentee to improve the way we onboard them. The mentor will be available to the new associate to assist in their orientation, offer their knowledge to them to get them up to speed quicker, serve as their social support as they meet new co-workers and contribute to a positive learning environment for all to excel. In addition to the increased support to the mentee, I would anticipate an increase of job satisfaction from the mentor as they will be directly able to take part in the way new staff serve our residents on a daily basis.

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

While working on the ALP, I have learned that you need to be able to challenge the norm of your organization to force others to think outside of the box. In the ever changing workplace, leaders are needing to challenge the status quo to stay successful. Many of the old programs that worked a few years ago are becoming irrelevant. The new workforce researches employers before applying and when they accept a job, they are expecting a lot more than just money. They want work life balance, great benefits and lots and lots of training. With a program like this, we will not just improve the new hire experience but will also improve our current staff retention by training them to be the leaders of tomorrow.

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

Creating the ALP was not as easy as I thought it would be. Every organization needs work but coming up with an idea that is achievable and that will produce measurable ROI is sometimes more challenging than most people would think.

**MARIA GARCIA
DIRECTOR HUMAN RESOURCES
BROOKDALE LAKE SHORE**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My ALP looks at improving the cash handling process for the Convenient Store and Bistro. Currently there is no process being followed, too many associates have access to the cash, there is no accountability, and when discrepancies occur, we are not able to determine what transpired and it takes labor hours to review the discrepancies that are not necessary.

I would like to work on improving this process. Working with the Director of Finance, Security Manager, and the associates that handle the cash handling process. My goal is to establish a standard that is implemented and followed daily.

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

My hope would be that by implementing the structured process and training the associates on how to manage the cash transactions that this would increase the accountability and a secure process is followed daily.

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

In creating this ALP there are a few Leadership Tools that I am drawing on and continue to learn from. For example, collaborating with the Director of Finance and Security Manager to outline and identify the areas of concern and where we could improve. In addition, have an open transparent communication with the associates involved to determine the steps and get their buy in to the changes. In preparation to establish the process will be working with the managers involved by using this problem to mind map the structures needed for the process.

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

It is my hope that in working on this ALP I will be able to continue to grow as a leader and implement a well outlined process that will benefit the community and the finance department to avoid loss in revenue. In addition this will implement a consistent process that anyone that handles cash is required to follow enhancing their skills and tracking for cash transactions.

DEENA KARNO
SOCIAL WORKER / PERSONAL CARE MANAGER
CJE SENIORLIFE, WEINBERG COMMUNITY

Briefly describe ALP and reason for selecting it.

My goal is to implement leadership training in my assisted living/memory care community. Currently, with the volume of work that must be done there is not much time or opportunity for leadership training, and in turn, sharpening leadership skills. Through the LeadingAge fellowship program I have learned numerous new skills to apply to my role as Social Worker/Manager of Personal Care, and believe that sharing this knowledge with the entire management team will result in many benefits.

The management team meets on a weekly basis to discuss facility business and concerns, so my proposal is to take 10-15 minutes to of each meeting and present an acquired idea or skill, and, in addition, if time allows, practice skills via applying to real facility situations or manufactured case studies.

I am lucky to have a very supportive supervisor who shares my views regarding promoting further learning of the team. She is very invested in enhancing the experience of both residents and staff, which is the ultimate goal of my ALP, so I believe I will have full support. This plan I am proposing will not require any financial resources, nor will it require many other costly resources.

I will begin by proposing my ALP to my Executive Director and ask for support and feedback. I will then identify 3 leadership concepts I have learned through the fellowship program that I believe will most benefit our facility management team. Finally, I will implement my plan and begin presenting the first concept at a team meeting.

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

We have a very strong management team in my facility. The majority of the managers have been here many years and work well together. The team currently problem-solves together, however, no particular strategies are employed to work through issues. I believe that applying the various methods I have learned in the leadership program could further the skills of the team tremendously. I believe my fellow managers would be very willing to learn new information and would embrace finding new ways to problem-solve. Using some of the methods, I am hoping to have an effect on employee turnover, employee satisfaction, resident satisfaction, productivity – and ultimately resident/family quality of life. Eventually if all goes well, there may be opportunity for me to branch out and teach other areas of the organization some of the skills.

Currently on of my organization's strategic goals is to become an employer of choice. Passing on the important information I have learned through the fellowship, I believe, will greatly contribute to CJE becoming and employer of choice.

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

Working on my ALP has allowed me to develop my planning skills by mapping out a plan that can easily be executed. In the future I can replicate my process when the need for a new initiative comes my way.

It has also allowed me to re-visit many of the concepts learned in Academy and determine which of them I believe will be most beneficial to my team. Presenting them to my team will reinforce these methods, and help me to become a better leader.

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

It has been very exciting participating in the Academy and I am enthusiastic about using what I have learned to better my leadership skills and my organization. Through all the activities and discussions, I have gained I know that I will utilize these new skills and I will become a better leader for it.

I recognize that the material selected for the Academy was carefully considered and brought forth with intentions of fellows actually applying learned concepts. I feel it is very important that I continue to practice what I have learned after graduation. My ALP will allow me to continue to employ the many concepts discussed while passing this knowledge on to others.

CARLY KOMAREK

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My ALP has to do with addressing and combatting the stigma in which is associated with skilled nursing facilities, and at residents possessing higher levels of acuity through education, increased blended socialization opportunities, and a new volunteering initiative for residents residing independently on the residential side of the community.

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

I hope to see this initiative take hold within my own community, and set the example for how to bring about change and decrease stigma on a much broader scope throughout the field of senior living. An unfortunate truth in which I have observed across many communities is that ageism and bullying is not just a young man's game. It is a sad truth that some able-bodied residents see older adults in wheelchairs and perceive them as targets simply because of their disability. What makes this issue even more challenging is the fact that many seniors do not even realize they are being 'bullies', and are not cognizant of how their negative words and body language can impact other people. I am hoping to see all of this change over time by putting into effect three key interventions:

1. **Resident Education:** (lectures, speaking engagements, small group discussions, team-building exercises that promote understanding of the aging process, encourage dialogue on ideals such as empathy and kindness, and promote a more tolerant and accepting culture within the community.)
2. **Blended Socialization Opportunities:** (encouraging SNF residents to join in residential side programming, inviting residential residents over to the Health Center to partake in new programs, and providing accommodations during programming so that residents of all skill-levels are able to engage in a group program with peers regardless of any limitations or additional support that is needed.)
3. **New Volunteering Initiatives:** (Encouraging and inviting residential residents to volunteer in the Health Center in order to decrease their internalized stigma around SNFs by spending time in one, while building connections with residents they may not have given a chance to prior. This would also provide positive benefits to the volunteers by feeling as though they are making a difference in their community and in the lives of the residents they are supporting.)

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

The first thing I realized about the Health Center was how much of a difference we could make in the lives of the residents. Residents in the apartments had a level of autonomy and ability that many residents in the Health Center no longer had. Activities in the Health Center were not supplemental as much as they were a necessity; providing purpose, support, socialization, and fulfillment that in some cases meant the difference between life and death. I realized that the issue of stigma in the Health Center will not go away overnight. However, the fact that I am seeing small incremental changes take place overtime, and the fact that I have observed a decline of instances of senior bullying as a result of these interventions, it makes me feel very hopeful that this is not an impossible problem to fix.

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

I have been captivated by the way that the residents are so eager to change and so willing to learn about how their words have such power over others. Residents have not met the educational component of this ALP on any type of defensive front, but rather from an ignorance that they are beginning to grasp and deconstruct in order to be kinder and more patient with older adults regardless of disability.

**DEITRA LAWSON
CORPORATE ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE DIRECTOR
CHICAGO METHODIST SENIOR SERVICES**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for choosing it.

My project was implementing the Four Disciplines of Execution as a way to help CMSS improve strategic planning. I was looking for a project that would build upon the teamwork within the organization.

Several of the departments work in silos and the individual departmental goals have clashed with one another over time. This is an opportunity to have the departments come together for one common goal, to advance the organization as a whole.

What long-term impact do you hope your ALP will have on your organization?

One of the biggest impacts that I hope will flourish within the organization are new innovative ideas or programs that will help CMSS to become a leader in the aging services industry. A leader that innovates and flexes with the changes within the industry instead of reacting to changes. The other impact is to build upon the culture within the middle and executive leadership teams. One where the teams utilize every team member's strengths, build trust, and holds each other accountable. A culture where vulnerability and creativity are empowered and celebrated.

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

The biggest lesson that I've learned is that keeping the projects small but impactful instead of a big extensive to do. In the beginning, it was hard to get a team lead on one of the WIG teams. Learning to step into the groups to help and ensure that they are successful before the next Leadership meeting is key. In the past, I might have just assumed that they knew what to do. Guiding the group in the beginning helped to make sure they were enthusiastic to get results.

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

I wasn't sure how the group would respond when I made the presentation to introduce The Four Disciplines of Execution. But I was surprised with how much the group really liked the idea. I believe that leaders within CMSS are eager to share their ideas and these meetings provide an avenue to be heard and to test out those theories. The next leadership team meeting showed a creative amount of ideas that the groups provided as probably solutions towards the goals. Being able to bring their ideas when they are in an opposite department helped the team feel appreciated and heard all while helping the company stay innovative and prosper as a whole.

**ANITA MANELLA
HEALTHY LIFESTYLES DIRECTOR
EMBARK AT NILES SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for doing it?

Working in a senior living community you see the transitional changes an individual or a couple goes through when they move into a senior living community. Many go through stages of confusion, lose their sense of security and independence.

Most residents move from their homes and town that they have lived in for years, possibly even raised their families there. Leaving behind the comfort and familiarity of their surroundings is challenging and sometimes leads to depression, anxiety and multiple physical and mental ailments.

The senior living communities and companies have programs and care set in place to keep the residents engaged and to live a meaningful life. My question is: Do these programs engage our residents at the core level to really give them a true sense of contentment, and the feeling of security and comfort in the community setting. Do the residents have the skills to face challenges and feel that they are in control of how they manage the challenges that come at them?

I would like to introduce this ALP to my community residents, management team and associates from all departments: Programs, Dining, Maintenance, "Here for you" (caregivers). This ALP's purpose is to highlight skills and tools of positive thought and positive self-talk, which researchers time and again believe makes a real difference at the core level in experiencing life in a positive and meaningful light. Using these positive tools will give back a sense of control, independence and come to an awareness that they have the power in them to experience and deal with everyday life's challenges in a less stressful manner.

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

The long-term impact would be that positive thoughts, positive self-talk and positive actions will create an optimistic outlook on daily life and experiences.

A positive outlook...focuses on the best outcome as opposed to a negative outcome. Focusing and practicing positive thinking with the community residents, associates and management team will better understanding and interactions, help deal with daily living in a healthy manner. It may lower depression, promote better coping skills and stronger mental muscle.

It will lead to a greater participation in programs, which in turn livens up the community with positive energy and shows well when tours are conducted.

The energy of the community will be enhanced to an inviting atmosphere. The community will showcase as an aware and intelligent community of residents.

A community that works well with diversity of people they live with and encounter every day.

A community of people who have taken the time to self-study and to meditate to see within themselves and learn of their true power to change a negative experience to a positive outcome. Here are a couple of examples:

1. The Marketing Director at our community believes the reason a tour prospect decided to move in is because of what prospects saw and felt while they toured. They saw lively interactions amongst our community residents as they gathered to socialize and play games in the Library. Having one positive tour with a resident move in raises our revenue by .0003 percent.
2. In our “Tech Basics” program we introduced “How to write Positive Reviews” about the community they live in. Once their reviews were entered in Google reviews, the community’s Google ratings jumped for 3.5 stars to 4.4 stars within a month.
3. Our Mindful and Relaxation Meditation classes are gaining momentum with practice and focus. The residents are seeing the results of a clear mind and mindful interactions with others.

The goal for Residents is to measure the number of resident participants and their responses to having a positive experience. The responses will be in a written format and on a contentment scale #1 being most content and #5 being the least content.

I would like to give at least eight months to clearly measure the outcome of the project.

The goal for the Managers and for department associates is to attend programs (Tai Chi, Yoga, Laughter Yoga, Meditation sessions, aroma therapy sessions, creative art project breaks, creative writing project breaks, positive self -talk mini workshops). For each department to attend when held according to the program calendar. And get feedback have unscheduled programs set up in a room (Arts and Crafts room) for associates use during their breaks if they want to. They will be asked questions in regards to their experience in attending these programs and if it made any difference in how they perceive their daily life.

At each of the “Positivity is Healthy” programs there will be different ways to highlight positive self-talk and optimistic outlook in dealing with daily life challenges. These programs will open up areas for self-awareness, self-talk, assess what is working for an individual and what is not.

What leadership lessons have I learned from working on this ALP?

The challenge will be when programs introduced may make some individuals or groups a bit uncomfortable. Using the strategy to introduce my ALP project in programs that are already in place such as the “Meditation”, “Ted Talks Discussions Sessions”, “Tech basics” and the introduction “Positivity is Healthy” (program which has been implemented a few months back) has helped in taking away the skepticism you would get from introducing the new and the unfamiliar.

- Learning to work with what I already have in place and introducing new concepts in a relatable fashion has been a good process.
- I learned the concept of Rational vs. Emotional plays an important role in rolling out my ALP. The focus will be on the “feel good” theory. Catering to the emotional side of the group to produce positive results of my ALP subject.

At each of the “Positivity is Healthy” programs there will be different ways to highlight positive self-talk and optimistic outlook in dealing with daily life challenges. These programs will open up areas for self-awareness, self-talk, assess what is working for an individual and what is not.

- Using the “See-Feel-Change” formula helped me to implement my ALP project. One dramatic session was the simple act of laughing and being aware of what laughter does to your body. The group of residents who attended were curious yet skeptical and some utterly shocked, until they began to see the impact and the change it created with a little bit of hearty laughter. They had more oxygen in their body (laughing aloud makes you take in deeper breaths), it kicked in the happy endorphins and all the while there were happy social interactions. At the end of this short session the change was apparent. The group was lively and asked to have this program more often.
- Leading with positive belief and positive–self-talk will help face challenges productively. This program can be implemented to all individuals and groups in our community.
- Emotional Intelligence is key to being a good leader.

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

The Leadership Academy has many strategies and lessons for me to use and implement at work and home life. It empowered me as a leader to be more open, vulnerable and to trust the team and myself to work for a successful outcome.

Encouraging my team to have honest and open conversations have led to acceptance of different styles and respectful interactions.

The acceptance of all the factors that plays in working with a diverse group.

It has encouraged my team to use their unique gifts and be empowered by them.

Concluding that diversity is empowering. Thinking out of the box and being your authentic self is excellence in the making.

**AMBER MAYNARD
CULINARY SERVICES MANAGER
THE ADMIRAL AT THE LAKE**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

Having been with The Admiral since the opening in 2012, I've been able to observe firsthand one of the most pervasive and ongoing issues to impact the community: ineffective communication. It's not only top-down that is challenging, but interdepartmental conversations, inside department, and bottom-up connections. Many staff members have other jobs, school, children, or responsibilities that prevent them from attending staff meetings held outside of their normal work times. In addition, most frontline staff do not have e-mail, which is our main mode of communication at present. We have tried paper announcements & flyers, but the number of postings often becomes overwhelming, and we end up with too many flyers in too many locations. We have also held all-Admiral meetings that are offered on more than one date and at multiple times in an attempt to reach all staff. These meetings have historically been poorly attended, and multiple meetings can lead to inconsistent messages or missed information. Also, people typically don't like to sit through meetings before or after their shift, or give up their meal break to attend. This is especially true for the larger departments like Nursing and Culinary.

My initial instinct in this process was to work toward an application that would be tailored to The Admiral at The Lake. Upon further investigation of that process, I realized that our one-man IT department was not equipped to design and roll out a proprietary app (even with my help!). After exploring available options, I then started working with a small group from the executive team on running a trial with Connecteam, an existing app designed for employee communication. After a successful two-week trial by a small group of leaders, we are moving forward with a full demo of the product. I will begin the demonstration period with the Culinary staff and several more members of the executive team. Roll out meetings will be held over a one-week period, with multiple session times to ensure I capture all Culinary staff members. With a successful demonstration period, I hope to roll out the app to all staff in the spring.

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

In Culinary Services, our challenges include operating beyond normal business hours and staff of varying availabilities, communication levels, language skills, and work schedules. It becomes increasingly difficult to deliver the exact same message to all staff. With the app's feed-style Updates, even those who cannot attend a meeting in person will receive the same message as everyone else. Even this small change can have a tremendous benefit for those staff who feel they are "missing out". This component of the app will also allow for immediate, public, peer-to-peer or leader-to-staff recognition. In addition, we will be able to inform staff of new programs or initiatives, personnel changes, the loss of a resident, or new residents moving in. Training completion rates should increase, too, as reminders around Relias and Food Handler's training can be sent, keeping it at the front of employee's minds. The Survey and Suggestion Box features will allow staff to have their voices heard in real time, as opposed to an annual satisfaction survey. My hope is that use of this app by both leaders and frontline staff will lead to a dramatic increase in top-down communication across all departments. As this occurs I hope to see a snowball effect, where, as employees feel more informed, they also become more engaged. Participation in events, committees, and department meetings will increase; my goal is to get to a point where staff will no longer say, "How come I didn't know about that?" With widespread use, this app can

become a non-traditional “benefit” for our employees. **Increased Communication → Increased Engagement → Increased Satisfaction → Increased Retention**

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

With this process still in the early stages, the most challenging part is still ahead of me. The exploration phase is the fun part; I believe the full roll-out will present me with many opportunities to use the tools I’ve picked up through Leadership Academy. Driving change is hard, even when the majority can see that the change is positive. Being creative about how to disseminate information, connect people to the idea, and get them on board will be the number one hurdle. Maintaining positivity and tailoring my communication style based on the audience will be critical to getting the buy-in of all staff.

Valuing the diversity of perspectives will remain important throughout the change process, as will keeping in mind that sometimes we each wear a different hat, and all points of view offer something and should be respected. You never know what someone else’s story is!

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

This process turned out to be a little more complicated for me than I originally thought it would. The most difficult part for me was keeping in mind that **I** don’t have to do **all** of the work; part of the process is understanding how to trust others and let them do the work. Being a leader means sometimes you’re in the weeds with the team, but it also requires being up in the trees, providing perspective and direction. #tightloosetight

**CARLA SMITH
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LIFESTYLES
FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE OF SCHAUMBURG**

Briefly describe your ALP and reasons for selecting it.

As a continuing care community with the benefit of offering many levels of service under one roof, each service area resembles a smaller neighborhood within a larger community. As residents move from one area of service to another, they are faced with new neighbors along with changes to environment, staff and routines. The prevalence of persons living with dementia within the community increases the challenges experienced by residents as they face these changes. Engagement in meaningful, purposeful and pleasurable activities is key in enhancing the quality of life for seniors, and efforts to increase involvement can positively impact adjustment, wellness and satisfaction. In a large community, challenges exist in collecting person-centered and interest based information and communicating it in a way that enables and encourages front line team members in promoting meaningful engagement.

My ALP focuses on several related processes with a goal of increasing resident engagement through increased person-centered awareness in the associates who interact with the residents within our Willows Assisted Living. I have chosen to focus on Assisted Living as the middle ground for transition, with residents moving both to and from other service areas of the community. Processes that will move us toward our goal include assembling teams to evaluate tools and resources for collecting person-centered information, designing a process for communicating specific information to team members across the continuum, and the planning and implementation of life story based programs to highlight personhood and encourage a culture that values and promotes meaningful engagement.

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

By harnessing the efforts and energy of the larger team in Assisted Living and Lifestyles, I hope to see increased resident engagement in community life that will impact overall wellness and customer satisfaction. As residents move through the continuum, the identification and communication of their life stories, interests and preferences will support service level transitions that maintain lifestyle choices, enhancing engagement and social contacts as they adjust to a new neighborhood within the larger community. Utilizing our participation tracking system, data will reflect increased involvement in lifestyle programs and leisure activities, with engagement evident within the initial two weeks of residence.

This project aligns closely with our organizational strategic goal of advancing resident centered philosophy through customer intimacy. As staff members increase their awareness of a resident's individual strengths and personhood, I hope to empower them to use that knowledge in practical ways to support resident involvement in the life of the community. As we evaluate the impact of our processes with in Assisted Living, it is the hope that we will identify other areas of application in service areas across our continuum.

What leadership lessons have you applied as you worked on your ALP?

Many of the concepts explored through the Leadership Academy experience have shaped my approach to this ALP. In choosing my project, I reflected on the lessons learned in the session which focused in finding my authentic voice; I looked for an opportunity that would harness my

strengths and was aligned with my passions. I feel that this will enhance my ability to clearly communicate the “why” of this project to those involved and build interest and commitment.

The book “Switch” offered inspiration and direction for approaching change. The implementation of life story based activities to engage and motivate the team reflects the concept of “motivating the elephant”, engaging emotions to provide momentum toward the goal. In seeking diversity of team members working on communication systems, I hope to increase buy-in by considering different perspectives and allowing each voice to be heard. The importance of the first follower, as demonstrated in the video lesson of “The Dancing Guy” was a powerful lesson that led me to structure the project to begin with cultivating buy in from a smaller group of key leaders to capitalize on contagious behavior and provide role models for change.

This ALP encompasses several related projects that focus on the means to increase person-centered awareness toward the overall goal of increased engagement. The larger process was divided into smaller steps with clear goals in order to shrink the change. This will offer opportunities to recognize accomplishment and celebrate success in order to maintain momentum as we move forward.

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

While working on this ALP, I hope to continue to challenge myself to grow as a leader by expanding my scope of experience while drawing on my strengths. I have had success within my area of expertise in creating energy around projects and building teams that focus on the “why”; this project offers the challenge of working with a larger interdisciplinary team as well as team members from across the continuum. As a project with multiple layers and diverse perspectives, it offers the opportunity to strengthen interdisciplinary relationships, identify “bright spots” of knowledge and implement best practices. Increasing the team’s knowledge and communication of personhood has the potential to make a big impact on the lives of our residents, offering support through change, increasing their engagement in the community, and enhancing their quality of life.

JASON SPEAKS
SENIOR MANAGER OF POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS
LEADINGAGE ILLINOIS

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

The goal of my Action Learning Process (ALP) is to develop ideas and strategies that increase the involvement of college students in LeadingAge Illinois as well as promote careers in Aging Services. This issue is currently an industry priority.

As the nation ages, career opportunities in aging services increase. An example is the growth of Assisted Living. In Illinois specifically, there are now 514 Assisted Living communities, which continues to grow each month. In just that one segment of the continuum of care, there are several career opportunities for those passionate about health and caring.

There is currently, and has been for some time, a national workforce crisis in the industry. There is a high need for qualified workers who have the skills and ability to manage and provide high quality older adult care and services. As a result, my ALP will focus on promoting the industry through my work at the association. It will include direct strategies to promote the industry and working with our association. It will also include indirect strategies like adding aspects to our already existing program and activities, such as our Advocacy Day/Grassroots Advocacy program and our legislative/community visits. Direct work will include more information for students in our bi-weekly newsletter and on our website.

The strong possibilities for advancement creates several opportunities for growth in a full range of careers will that be highlighted in the promotion of careers in aging services. Through recruiting more student interest and memberships, we can provide more information and resources to students and build a solid momentum. We will work towards new ways to engage students.

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

For the long-term, my goal is to make a strong, concerted and well-planned effort to increase the knowledge of careers available to students as well as establish and maintain engagement in the LeadingAge Illinois network. As a statewide association that is the affiliate of two national associations, we have a responsibility to continually promote the industry to various audiences, both internally and externally. Getting and keeping students engaged in the industry and the work they can be a part of can create a lasting impact on the industry and ultimately senior living residents.

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

This ALP will require a team effort. Therefore, various leadership lessons come into play. Various perspectives and work already being conducted on this issue will need to be taken into consideration built upon as my work moves forward. The groundwork has already been laid and is in motion. We can take this a step further.

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

The ALP process as well as the Leadership Academy as a whole, have given me invaluable resources and ideas to utilize as I work to become a leader in the industry. My belief that every voice in an organization matters and is valuable as we work towards a common goal has been strengthened through being a part of the Leadership Academy.

**KELLY STEGALL
CORPORATE HR DIRECTOR
LUTHERAN LIFE COMMUNITIES**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

My ALP is developing an ESL program for our employees. It is my hope that the program will develop and become more robust and involve our residents and possibly the children in our Child Day Care at our Lutheran Home community for a truly intergenerational program.

I have chosen this as my ALP because our field is currently experiencing recruitment and retention challenges and we are in need of ideas that will captivate not only our current employees but also individuals that want to get into the field of aging services but are hesitant because of a possible language barrier. We currently have very diverse communities and I feel that there is a lot to be learned from the diversity. I also think that by involving the residents, this will have a greater impact and could be even more powerful.

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

There is a workforce shortage, particularly, in the aging services and nursing fields and so I hope that creating a program like this will broaden the recruitment field and also allow employees to feel more connected, confident and comfortable in connecting with those we serve.

We know many individuals are looking for a job where their work is meaningful to them. It is important that our employees feel that their work is meaningful and that they feel connected with our residents. It is my hope that we can help remove any barrier that may be preventing this connectedness. A program like this will open the door for aging services communities' to truly impact the lives of the residents we serve as well as the employees that serve.

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

While working on this ALP I found myself utilizing the tools that have been shared during the Leadership Academy. Early on in the process I found myself often thinking about the program but on a big picture level and not the bits and pieces of it. I then determined that I needed to utilize some of the tools learned in the session to truly come around how the program would actually come to fruition. I learned that it would become much easier to accomplish this goal if I broke it down into smaller goals.

The first step was to gain buy-in from different leaders within the organization. I didn't find it hard to gain initial buy-in on developing this program because the stakeholders involved understand the need to continually develop our current employees and they understand the need to attract new individuals that would remain committed to our organization and our residents. However, I learned that I didn't just need their initial buy-in, but that I needed their ideas and input into how the program would function. I reviewed some of the tools that were discussed in the "Becoming a Visionary Leader" session about how to generate ideas with groups. In using the Rule of 6, I recalled that the first is always the most obvious and that the more ideas that are developed the more creative and innovative they'd become, so I knew that I needed to work with a team on generating various ideas of how the program would look and function.

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

While my ALP is still in its infancy stage, I know that failure may occur as we get further down the road, but that any failures are just learning experiences to make this program even stronger. I am excited that putting this whole process into motion, utilizing the tools that I've learned, will possibly kick start other innovative ideas whether it begins with me or someone else within the teams I work with.

KRISTY STOKER
GUIDE
THE GREEN HOUSE HOMES AT CLARK-LINDSEY

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for doing it.

While there was much preparatory work under the guidance of The Green House Project ® to develop process and procedures for day to day operations in our Green House Homes, none of the persons involved in developing the procedures at Clark-Lindsey had ever worked in a Green House home before. In a general sense, what we started with was how we imagined daily operations would be. The staff working in both Green House homes did the best they could with what they knew at the time and continue to work exceedingly hard. I believe there are some processes that if cleaned up, could provide needed organization and efficiency to the homes. I want to draw on the team's experience and expertise, knowledge that we didn't have when we opened our homes in 2017, and develop improved processes with the staff. This would include day to day operations and organization of supplies in the homes. For example, clarifying job responsibilities for each shift, organizing supplies within the house so that they are readily available and accessible (so staff aren't wasting time trying to find something), and determining optimal times of the day for elder engagement and optimal times for completion of household tasks. (Not only would this benefit the work of the team, but the elders living in the home would benefit by having increased access to staff in meaningful engagement.) These refinements would be highlighted in a 3-ring binder for easy access to team members and used as a reference when training new staff. Additionally, storage areas will be labeled to provide a roadmap for putting away supplies.

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

My hopes for the long-term impact include improved efficiencies that result in increasing staff availability by 15% for meaningful engagement with the elders living in the home. I also hope there would be an increase in family satisfaction survey results by at least 5% as a result of this effort. I believe the ALP would also benefit staff retention and would hope to see a decrease in staff turnover by at least 10%. I believe the ALP would be beneficial for the on-boarding of new team members, because processes would be clarified and adopted and would enable the team to work more efficiently and effectively together.

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

The Green House ® model is a new way of doing long term care that is designed to look and feel like home. In order to do this, there are three core values that need to be lived out, Real Home, Meaningful Life, and Empowered Staff. The staff working in a Green House home are trained to be a self-managed work team. My role, as the Guide (coaching leader), is to support the self-managed work team. As the Guide, I have the responsibility to ask questions to gain clarity and understanding, to not make assumptions, and to encourage the team to develop solutions as issues arise. As I prepare to launch this ALP, the following leadership lessons (among others) will undoubtedly come into play: Valuing the diversity of perspective - The solicitation of best practices from the team will be instrumental in the tweaking of operations in the home. The information gleaned from the team will undoubtedly have diversity of perspective as we delve into the processes and come to consensus on what is working and what needs tweaking, each bringing to the conversation their viewpoints.

Understanding the “why” - Helping the team to understand why refining processes will be of benefit to them and the elders will be fundamental in promoting buy-in and the energy needed for follow through. There needs to be a clear understanding of the “why” in order to appeal to the “rider” but also connecting emotionally with the benefits will appeal to the “elephant”, helping motivation for doing things differently where needed. Calling out the bright spots and really exploring them will also bring clarification to what is possible as the teams celebrate their successes.

Emotional intelligence - In navigating conversations that are centered around team processes, one has to have emotional intelligence and encourage the same in others. To plunge ahead without acknowledging the time and energy that the team has already invested would create resistance and defensiveness which would be challenging to overcome and could undermine the intent of this ALP. Being able to pick up on the emotional cues of others and encourage further conversation for the purpose of moving forward will be essential.

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

The Leadership Academy has given me understanding and tools to use that have furthered my development as a leader, and I am grateful. The concepts learned have increased my confidence and encouraged me that just as a ship has a rudder, the self-managed work teams do need my guidance to steer them in the desired direction. I would not have been as prepared to provide this direction in a manner in which would have the desired outcome prior to my participation in the Leadership Academy.

**SAMANTHA VICTOR
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES
THE ADMIRAL AT THE LAKE.**

Briefly describe your ALP and your reason for selecting it.

At my community the HR team identified an issue with the communication and reporting of Employee Turnover Information from a specific department to the HR Team. There has been a routine HR reporting dashboard that is pulled from our HRIS (Human Resources Information System), however, there was no formal discussion with the specific departments on the information provided, and no further discussion on how we could potentially gather information to help us determine a way to retain the staff. The ALP I decided to focus on was to utilize the Leadership, Perspective, and Communication Skills from the Leadership Academy and apply these to a more informed discussion with each of the large departments that we identified as having a greater turnover issue. This process consisted of coming up with an agenda, formulating a process to project retention information along with turnover information, and creating a space where HR and the specific department could talk more in depth about why staff were leaving in the department/area of work. The discussions also included ways to enhance our recruitment and interviewing efforts to ensure that we start our retention project with every new hire that comes in from their first interview to first official day on the job.

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

In general, I believe this is a first step towards ongoing discussions that the community can have to re-evaluate how we look at turnover information, and how we can utilize this information to change our view on turnover. It will allow us to focus on retention and ensure that we are retaining staff 1) for the right reasons and 2) giving staff and managers the right tools to be able to achieve their goals.

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

I have learned to be patient and listen to everyone's point of view throughout this process. Even though I am in HR and Turnover/Retention is one of our main focuses, it is important to communicate and receive feedback on the overall process and information gathering stage from the managers of the departments themselves. Specifically, the idea of Valuing Diversity of Perspective has been most helpful to me. It is important to understand that my colleagues may view ideas/topics in different ways than I do and we should consider all perspectives before we make a concrete conclusion/decision.

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

I think that this whole process is a great way to focus on a specific, concrete issue that you have, and tackle the situation by achieving a small change rather than changing everything or all aspects of a particular issue. By tackling one minor issue, you can gather all those solutions to be used towards a greater problem that needs to be solved.