

Celebrating Twenty Years

HEALTH LEADERSHIP FELLOWS

**Cohort 12
Program Book**

Presented by





A Welcome Message

Dear Fellows,

I am excited to welcome you to the 12th class of Health Leadership Fellows. Becoming a Fellow is always an achievement, but you are fortunate to be part of a landmark moment: the program's 20th anniversary.

The Fellows program was established by the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York in 2005 to encourage health and social care leaders to collaborate more effectively, break down silos in care delivery, and leverage their collective strength for the benefit of the community.

Throughout the past two decades, those founding values have remained strong, and today our community is full of nearly 400 Fellows cultivating partnerships and connections to tackle the most pressing health issues. Congratulations on joining their ranks!

Your Fellows experience is happening at a critical time for the nonprofit and health care sectors. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise as you work together to demonstrate how valuable and essential it is to have a strong, collaborative network of health leaders serving our community.

We hope that you will find your experience as a Fellow to be rewarding, challenging, and meaningful. We're proud of all that our Fellows have accomplished and can't wait to see what the future may hold.

Best wishes for a most successful Fellowship!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nora Suric". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "S".

Nora Suric, PhD

President, Health Foundation for Western & Central New York

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About the Health Leadership Fellows

The Health Foundation for Western & Central New York is committed to improving the health and health care of the communities we serve, with a focus on older adults, children impacted by poverty, and community health capacity.

In 2004, the Board of Trustees of the Health Foundation invested in the design and implementation of a comprehensive Health Leadership Fellows program as one strategy to accomplish our mission. They recognized that building a strong, collaborative network of leaders would be essential to solving the community's most challenging health issues.

The Health Leadership Fellows program aims to improve the critical skills of leaders in health and human service organizations by providing them with a collaborative learning experience. The program offers individual leadership development, academic and team support, executive coaching, professional network growth, and an opportunity for collective leadership and change. This process includes experiential learning and collaborative project design that is implemented and evaluated within the Fellowship's 18-month period.

Since the program began in 2005, more than 400 leaders in western and central New York have graduated from the program. Several projects created through the Fellows program continue to influence change and improve outcomes for older adults and children impacted by poverty.

Upon graduation, Fellows become members of the Fellows Action Network (FAN) in order to continue the collaborative work started in the program. FAN members communicate regularly about advocacy, member education, communication and leadership, and provide important information regarding community needs to the Health Foundation in furthering its mission.

Cohort 12 brings together 34 Fellows from western and central New York who currently hold influential positions at organizations dedicated to improving community health. The 18-month program requires Fellows to attend three two-hour virtual sessions before the first residential session, plus four residential sessions lasting two to three days each.

Program Outcomes

The academic and experiential work of the residential sessions will be applied and reinforced in the months between sessions through distance learning within their designated teams. Goals of the Health Leadership Fellows program are:

- Collective advocacy for improved health care delivery focused on older adults and children impacted by poverty
- A network of leaders who have developed strong collaborative and communication skills through common experiences
- Leaders with enhanced self-awareness and improved reflective skills who will be change agents for their respective communities
- New partnerships for managing change and innovation

General Overview

Central to the Health Leadership Fellows program experience are teamwork, collaboration, and the ability to give and receive constructive feedback. The active partnership of Fellows' sponsoring organizations strengthens the program's collaborative approach and ensures organizational support for meaningful change.

The program includes four residential sessions of two to three days each. The sessions build upon each other, beginning with individual leadership assessment in the first session. The concept and exercise of managing change as a leader comprises the second residential session. The third session addresses the challenge of developing accountability strategies for improved health care delivery within the context of collaborative work. Communication skill improvement through the art of storytelling is covered in the fourth session.

Much of the work of the Health Leadership Fellows program will occur in between the residential sessions in teams comprised of approximately six Fellows, typically residing within the same geographic region. Team advisors are assigned to the teams to observe and support the Fellows throughout the program. All team advisors are graduates of the Fellows program.

Each Fellow will design an individual leadership development plan and share with their team in the initial stage of the program. Each team will be responsible for the development of an asset inventory that includes personal and organizational assets.

Pre-Work for Fellows and Organizations

Readings, leadership and personality style assessments, and a Benchmarks 360 survey will be assigned and administered to each Fellow prior to the first residential session. Fellows will be introduced to each other and the program through Zoom presentations by expert faculty. These will serve as a prelude to the in-person events.

Other requirements

- Fellows are expected to attend monthly meetings during intersession periods to complete team assignments before the next residential session.
- Team meetings should occur in person, when possible and practical. The Fellows are expected to attend team meetings whether in person or virtually.
- Intersession meetings should occur during the business day at a time and location agreed upon by the team.
- Reading assignments should be completed prior to each residential session.
- Fellows are asked to refrain from using electronic devices during faculty presentations. Time spent “off the grid” is essential to learning. You are welcome to reconnect during breaks and private time at residential sessions.
- Throughout the Fellowship we ask you to pay attention to deadlines and respond to email communications and requests from program and Foundation staff within the timeframes established.
- We want this to be an extraordinary learning experience for you. Please let your team advisor or the program director know if you have issues or concerns about any aspect of the program or your ability to participate.

Required Events

Event and Location		Date and Time
Western New York Welcome Dinner Tewksbury Lodge - Buffalo		Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2025 5 pm - 8 pm
Central New York Welcome Lunch Rail Line - Syracuse		Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025 12 pm - 2 pm
Prelude to 1st Residential Session Must attend BOTH VIRTUAL sessions		Session 1: Friday, Sept. 26, 2025 9 am - 11 am Session 2: Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2025 1 pm - 3 pm
1st Residential Session Hotel Canandaigua, Canandaigua		October 6, 7 & 8, 2025
Graduation of Cohort 11 Strathallan/Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester		November 17, 2025
2nd Residential Session Del Monte Lodge, Pittsford		February 2 & 3, 2026
3rd Residential Session The Woodcliff, Fairport		June 1 & 2, 2026
4th Residential Session Hotel Canandaigua, Canandaigua		October 26 & 27, 2026
Graduation of Cohort 12 Strathallan/MAG, Rochester		April 11 & 12, 2027
Six additional seminars		<i>Led by Fellows graduates and held in both WNY and CNY throughout the duration of the program. Dates to be determined.</i>

Residential Sessions and Intersession Assignments

SESSION I: THE INDIVIDUAL LEADER

October 6, 7 & 8, 2025

Hotel Canandaigua, Canandaigua, NY

Faculty: Marcais Frazier and Nora Manz, PhD

Fellows receive feedback on pre-session assessments and Benchmarks 360. The relevance of self-knowledge as it relates to leadership and authenticity will be explored. This may include exposure to experts in leadership, leadership models, and the role of leadership in change.

Emphasis is on engagement of the Fellows in the process of personal leadership development and connecting with others in that process.

Fellows will begin to develop a personal leadership development plan that they will further develop during the intersession period with an assigned executive coach.

Session outcomes:

- Enhanced self-awareness and leadership understanding through assessment feedback and 360-degree evaluations.
- Deeper insight into how multiple assessments interconnect to reveal personal leadership strengths and challenges.

INTERSESSION I: October 2025 – February 2026

Fellows share individual leadership assessments and create their plan for personal development. Fellows serve as mentors to each other, creating a peer-to-peer mentoring engagement. Each team develops an asset inventory of their personal and professional strengths according to the assessment results.

Team assignment for this intersession:

- Each Fellow will create a personal leadership development plan.
- Each team will have completed an asset inventory.
- Each team will give a 10-minute presentation of their team asset inventory.
- Set up your first executive coaching session.

SESSION II: Leading Change

February 2 & 3, 2026

Del Monte Lodge

Pittsford, NY

Faculty: Bram Briggance, PhD and JaNay Queen-Nazaire, PhD

At the beginning of Session II, each team will give a 10-minute presentation briefly summarizing their intersession work from Residential Session I. Session II focuses on leadership's role in creating and managing change, particularly within healthcare organizations and systems. The role that power plays in leadership will be explored along with tools for the development of a “change project.” There will be an exploration of the impact that race, diversity, and environmental elements have on one’s leadership and change.

Session outcomes:

- Increased knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of change.
- Understanding of the role of leadership in change.
- Hands-on experience with project development tools.
- Increased understanding of one’s relationship to power relative to race and environmental factors.

INTERSESSION II: February - June 2026

Each team begins to consider the outcome they want to achieve through their team project. The Regional Community Health Assessment for their respective counties may be useful tool to identify community needs being addressed by the organizations represented. Each team will select one area of need around which its members will develop their project. The teams might explore how knowledge obtained from residential sessions one and two may be applied to their team project. Things to consider would be: “What is a common, non-financial challenge for organizations that impacts health outcomes for older adults and/or children living in poverty?” Teams will consider the scope of their project and its potential for expansion and adaptation. This time will be spent narrowing the challenge to a realistic project that can be developed, implemented, and evaluated in the time allotted.

Team assignment for this intersession:

- Each team will have produced a project concept that reflects one identified area of need.
- Each team will indicate how the project will be collaborative and reflect the learnings from residential sessions one and two.
- Each team will present their project concept to the entire cohort at the beginning of the next residential session.
- Individually read Chapters 1 – 5 in the Results Based Accountability book.

SESSION III: Results-Based Leadership and Accountability: June 1 & 2, 2026

The Woodcliff Hotel and Spa

Fairport, NY

Faculty: Marcais Frazier and JaNay Queen-Nazaire, PhD

This session will introduce and apply the principles of Results-Based Accountability (RBA) within the context of leadership, equity among diverse populations, and regional community health assessments. This accountability is based upon the work of Mark Friedman in his book *Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough* as applied to the health and human services fields.

Session outcomes:

- Increased knowledge and skill in the application of Results-Based Accountability in a variety of settings.
- Increased understanding of how racial, class and other differences impact our work, health equity, and population outcomes.

INTERSESSION III: June – October 2026

Each team will select a challenge that one or more of the team's members is addressing at the organization(s) represented. This issue may have been identified and carried over from the previous intersession. The team will apply RBA principles to the issue identified.

Team assignment for this intersession:

Each team will present how they applied the RBA framework to address their selected issue using the format learned during the session.

SESSION IV: Communicating as a Leader

October 26 - 27, 2026

Hotel Canandaigua, Canandaigua, NY

Faculty: Jennifer Chu, Brianna Gavio, Patrick McCabe, Francesca Washington, and Shannon Conti, McCabe Message Partners

At the opening of Session IV, Fellows present their assignment from the intersession period and a brief outline of their group's choice of a collaborative project. The central focus of the session is the role of personal and organizational communication in leadership and change. The session will include the impact of communication and story on organizational effectiveness.

Focused communication training will seek to improve the Fellows' delivery of a clear and compelling story.

Session outcomes:

- Appreciation for the power of communications and storytelling
- A clear sense of the project's mission, goal, and audience
- Understanding of how communications and storytelling can help achieve both programmatic and organizational goals
- A honed personal story and the skills to craft a compelling narrative
- Ability to translate stories for a variety of audiences

INTERSESSION IV: November 2026 – April 2027

Each team, with guidance from the program's team advisors, along with research support, will work on the team's inter-organizational project and its implementation.

Each team will prepare their project for presentation at graduation. Teams will also present a written project paper for distribution to the full cohort and graduation attendees.

Team assignment for this intersession:

- Written paper for distribution and placement on Health Foundation websites.
- Each team will present their project and its outcomes during a 20-minute presentation at graduation followed by comments from a reactor panel of experts.
- Projects that reflect an integration of leadership skills, lessons learned in the process, how the project development and implementation was collaborative, and in what way an identified issue around health care for young children or older adults can be addressed in the community.

Workshops by Fellows Graduates

Members of the Fellows Action Network will offer six workshops to the cohort, with each session designed and led by expert members in their respective fields. These workshops will provide practical applications of leadership practices tailored to each specific topic.

Fellows must attend three of the six workshops but are welcome to participate in all sessions. All Fellows Action Network members will also be invited to attend. The workshops will be held across western and central New York during the 18-month program.

Workshop Topics:

- 1) How to develop policies and procedures that ensure organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion
- 2) How to create and implement a successful advocacy campaign
- 3) How to raise awareness of ageism and methods of prevention in an organization
- 4) How to influence and sustain trauma-informed practices in an organization
- 5) How to actively participate in a collaborative network of organizations within a Social Network Analysis framework
- 6) How might leaders develop greater self-awareness and self-care for themselves and those they lead

Program Graduation/Presentation of Team Projects

April 11, 2027: Celebration Dinner at The Strathallan Hotel – Rochester, NY
Graduating Fellows, team advisors, faculty, and Foundation staff will celebrate the program's completion.

April 12, 2027: Graduation at the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, NY

Each team will formally present their project at graduation to representatives from the Fellows' sponsoring organizations, Health Foundation Trustees, Fellows Action Network members, and other invited guests.

The inter-organizational projects will illustrate:

- Applied leadership skills developed over the program
- Applied collaborative leadership

Anticipated outcomes:

Final presentations of seven (7) team projects impacting the health care of older adults and children impacted by poverty.

Introducing Health Leadership Fellows Cohort 12



Denise Baker
Director of Quality Improvement
Syracuse Community Health

Denise Baker, RN, BSN, CCM, is Director of Quality Improvement at Syracuse Community Health (SCH) in Syracuse, NY. With over 15 years of leadership experience, she drives clinical and operational improvements in performance, safety, infection control, and compliance.

At SCH, she collaborates across departments and with community partners to advance health equity and access to care. Denise also launched the H.O.P.E. Pantry to address food insecurity, improve patient outcomes, and support broader community health efforts.



Robert Batt
Executive Director
Orleans County Cornell Cooperative Extension

Robert Batt is Executive Director of Orleans County Cornell Cooperative Extension. He has a Master's in Special Education from Buffalo State University. During his 11 years at CCE Orleans, he has generated new community partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, and improved the infrastructure at the Orleans County 4-H Fairgrounds, by

maintaining traditional core programs and adding innovative new programming to the Orleans CCE portfolio as driven by community need. He also enjoys being part of haunted houses and badgering his wife and daughter about being tidier.



Sandra Bellassai
Director of Early Childhood Programs
Integrated Community Alternatives Network

Throughout her 10-year career, Sandra Bellassai has led numerous human service initiatives, passionately advancing programs that nurture family wellness and strengthen community resilience. Her expertise spans early childhood, maternal health, parenting, and behavioral health.

At ICAN, she leads multi-county initiatives by thoughtfully applying trauma-informed, family-centered approaches and driving strategic solutions that broaden access and improve outcomes. She is motivated by aligning policies with everyday practice, fostering meaningful collaboration across sectors, and embedding equity into lasting change. She holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Rochester and a Master of Public Health from the University of New England.



Kari Bonaro
Director of Administration and Engagement
Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy

Kari Bonaro partners with nonprofits and foundations to lead strategic communications, program development, and collaborative initiatives, bringing experience as both a consultant and internal leader on complex, multistakeholder projects and organizational strategy.

Currently, she is the Director of Administration and Engagement for the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy, helping to transform Buffalo's largest waterfront park. Previously, she helped build a multidisciplinary team at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and worked in Washington, DC, and New York City with organizations focused on social impact. Kari is a graduate of Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and serves on several boards.



Brian C. Bray
Commissioner of Personnel
for Erie County

Brian C. Bray is the Commissioner of Personnel for Erie County, NY. He previously held leadership roles in the Erie County Departments of Social Services and Health, and the Town of Amherst. He chairs the Erie County Deferred Compensation Committee and the Amherst Zoning Board

of Appeals and serves as a trustee of the Labor Management Health Fund. In total, Brian has more than two decades of public sector experience. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University at Buffalo, Master of Public Administration from Hilbert College, and a Doctor of Public Administration from West Chester University.



Chantele Campbell
Community Impact Officer
BestSelf Behavioral Health

Chantele Campbell is a respected leader dedicated to community engagement, health equity, and leadership development. As BestSelf Behavioral Health's inaugural Community Impact Officer, she champions equitable access to health and wellness, working to dismantle barriers like poverty and discrimination.

She holds Master's degrees in Public Administration and Education, a Health Equity microcredential, a Leadership Coaching Certification, and is pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration. Her service extends to boards like Say Yes Buffalo and organizations such as Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and The Links, Incorporated.



Katie Connors
Project Director
CASA-Trinity

Katie Connors is a public health professional with over a decade of experience in nonprofit leadership, program management, and behavioral health services. She currently serves as Project Director at CASA-Trinity, where she oversees federal grant initiatives and facilitates regional coalitions.

Katie holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and is pursuing her Master of Public Health at the University at Buffalo. She currently serves on the boards of the New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) and Recovery Options Made Easy (ROME). Katie lives in rural western New York with her spouse, daughters, two dogs, and a hairless cat.



Heather A. Cruz
Vice Dean/Chief of Staff
University at Buffalo School of Social Work

Heather Cruz is a dynamic leader with over 20 years of experience in higher education, nonprofit and government entities in the areas of counseling, program development, coalition building, assessment, management, compliance, and strategic planning. She is committed to an environment supportive of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

With a team-centric approach, Heather is adept at collaborating with key stakeholders at the organizational, community, and national levels to provide high-quality services and programs. She holds a Bachelor's in Psychology from Buffalo State University and a Master's degree in School Counseling from Canisius University.



Roxanne Cuebas
Program Officer
Health Foundation for Western &
Central New York

As Program Officer, Roxanne Cuebas assesses grant requests, develops recommendations, and presents proposals for funding approval across the Health Foundation's 16-county region. She also manages funded projects related to caregiving (Memory Cafés) and firearm violence prevention (Imagine Nonviolence).

Roxanne appreciates opportunities to explore and learn more about the Hispanic and other underserved communities. She previously served as Project Administrator for Catholic Health's Community Partners of Western New York and was also a team member with Erie County Department of Senior Services. She has six years of volunteer experience with Colorful Minds Foundation, which focuses on raising awareness of mental health. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Health and Wellness and a Master of Public Administration, both from Buffalo State University.



Betty Dunsmoor
Program Manager
Healthy Families Oswego County

Betty Dunsmoor is the Program Manager for Healthy Families Oswego County. She oversees a voluntary, evidence-based home-visiting program dedicated to strengthening families. Under her leadership, the program continues to grow its impact by empowering parents, nurturing children, and building a healthier, more resilient community.

Born and raised in Oswego County, Betty has a passion for improving the health and well-being of her community. She has many years of public health experience and is a Licensed Master Social Worker. She has pursued her Doctorate in Psychology from Capella University, her Master's in Social Work and Gerontology from Syracuse University, and her Bachelor's in Psychology and Health Services from Oswego State.



Virginia Eddy
Administrative Director, Homeless and Domestic Violence Services
Erie County Department of Social Services

Virginia Eddy is the Administrative Director of Homeless and Domestic Violence Services at Erie County DSS. She leads programs that support individuals and families navigating housing instability, abuse, and complex service needs. With two decades in public welfare, she has expertise in eligibility operations, crisis response, and trauma-informed practice.

Virginia holds a Master of Arts in Public Policy with a concentration in Public Administration. She has championed cross-system collaboration to integrate domestic violence and family-centered services into coordinated, accessible models—reducing service fragmentation and advancing client-centered, solution-focused care for vulnerable households across multiple systems of support.



Nancy Grimes
Administrative Director of Programs and Operations
Cradle Beach

Nancy Grimes serves as the Administrative Director of Programs and Operations at Cradle Beach, where she provides vision and leadership in delivering quality programs and services needed in our community. Her valuable insight into growing sustainable programs from concepts allows Cradle Beach to continue expanding its reach and services across western New York.

Nancy is deeply dedicated to improving youth opportunities. She serves on the American Camp Association Local Council of Leaders Chair for Western New York. She is also the Volunteer Outdoor Programming Chair for the Girl Scouts of Western New York.



Susie Gutenberger-Fitzpatrick
Executive Director
Lansing Community Library

Susie Gutenberger-Fitzpatrick is an experienced nonprofit director with a demonstrated history of collaboration, strategic planning, effective fundraising, inclusive management strategies, and community engagement. She has over 18 years' experience creating space for people of diverse backgrounds to come together to develop strategies to address community problems and effect positive change.

Susie has proven success leading nonprofit organizations through times of transformative change and planned growth and developing plans for retention and enrichment of needed services. In addition to serving as Executive Director of the Lansing Community Library, she is a member of the Town of Ithaca Board.



Asantewa K. Holley
Vice President of Operations
Northland Workforce Training Center

Asantewa K. Holley is a dedicated workforce development leader passionate about advancing equitable access to education and careers. She serves as Vice President of Operations at Northland Workforce Training Center in Buffalo, NY. A 40 Under 40 honoree, she is a graduate of Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education and the Advance CTE Postsecondary State Career Technical Education Fellowship.

With nearly two decades of operational and financial leadership experience, Asantewa is committed to building pathways to family-sustaining careers through innovation, collaboration, and community impact.



Kimberlee Hoyt-Folaron
Executive Director
Safety Net Association of Primary Care
Affiliated Providers

Kimberlee Hoyt-Folaron serves as Executive Director of the Safety Net Association of Primary Care Affiliated Providers and the Safety Net Association of Primary Care Affiliated Providers IPA. She holds a Bachelor of Health Science from SUNY Brockport, and a Master of Healthcare Administration from D'Youville University.

Kimberlee is a certified practice facilitator, holds a certificate in care coordination, a certificate in long-term care, and has almost 25 years of healthcare experience. Kimberlee is a former board member of the Niagara PAL Soccer Club and has been a volunteer coach for more than 20 years. She is very passionate about supporting primary care and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).



Serena K. Jackson
Assistant Director of Volunteer Programs
InterFaith Works, Center for Healthy Aging

Serena Jackson is a seasoned human services professional with over 15 years of experience in leadership, program development, and community engagement. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science/Kinesiology from Norfolk State University and a Master of Science in Exercise Science and Health Promotion from California University of Pennsylvania.

She has excelled in various roles, including but not limited to Regional Director, Director of Residential Services. Her current role is the Assistant Director of Volunteer Programs at InterFaith Works of CNY, Center for Healthy Aging. Serena is deeply committed to enhancing the lives of individuals through innovative programs and compassionate leadership.



Janice Jenosheck
Director, Children with Special Needs Program
Niagara County Department of Health

Janice Jenoshek is Director of the Niagara County Department of Health Children with Special Needs (CWSN) Program, where she serves as the Early Intervention Official (EIO) for Niagara County. As Director and EIO, she diligently explores various service model options within existing programs and identified community supports and collaborators to meet the needs of young children in Niagara County.

Janice resides in Lewiston, NY, with her husband, teenage son, and her 10-year-old pug, Pug Edward. In her free time, she enjoys baking and traveling. Janice is a lifelong New York Yankees fan and can usually be found watching or listening to games on the radio during the baseball season.



Kimberly Kadziolka, EdD, MS
Executive Director
Parent Network of Western New York

Kimberly Kadziolka has an extensive background working with vulnerable populations in western New York, including the oversight of residential programming for children and adults with disabilities, domestic violence intervention and prevention programs, and the operation of a residential federal prison reentry center.

She sits on the Boards of Unique Theatre Company, BRICK, Buffalo Academy, Gateway Comfort Care Home, Care Management Coalition of WNY, and Families Together in NYS. She has a Bachelor of Arts from SUNY at Buffalo, a Master of Science from Buffalo State University, and a Doctor of Education in Health Administration from D'Youville University. Her dissertation focused on compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue in human service workers and how it impacts their decision to change jobs.



Sarah K. Lanzo
Senior Director of Programs
Mental Health Advocates of WNY

Sarah Lanzo is Senior Director of Programs at Mental Health Advocates of Western New York (MHA), overseeing five key programs. With over 15 years in nonprofit leadership, she fosters collaboration among program managers to drive growth and innovation. She is dedicated to advancing MHA's mission to promote mental health, reduce stigma, and create impactful change.

Sarah works to expand programming, build regional partnerships, and ensure mental health services are accessible and equitable. Passionate about advocacy and systemic change, Sarah's leadership focuses on developing support systems and overseeing peer support programs to better serve individuals in need.



Alex Lauer
Executive Director
Sloan Comfort Care Home

Alex Lauer is Executive Director of the Sloan Comfort Care Home, Erie County's only social model hospice home. Having previously served as Board Secretary, she brings experience working with older adults and a commitment to dignity and autonomy to her work.

Alex began her nonprofit career as an AmeriCorps VISTA member, working with a startup serving veterans in Buffalo. She is a volunteer with Make-A-Wish and the Buffalo Animal Shelter. A former foster parent, she now lives outside Buffalo with her two children, two cats, and a rescue dog.



Dior Lindsey-Virgill
Program Manager
The Osborne Association (Buffalo site)

Dior Lindsey-Virgill is a lifelong Buffalo resident. Her dedication to community blossomed during her time at Canisius College (now Canisius University). There, as a McGowan/Urban Leadership Learning Community Scholar, she honed her leadership abilities while earning a Bachelor's in Anthropology and Criminal Justice. She furthered her education by earning her Master of Social Work.

Currently, Dior serves as Program Manager for The Osborne Association's Buffalo site, where she supports justice-impacted children and families. Additionally, she is an active member of the Buffalo Association of Black Social Workers and is presently pursuing her Doctor of Social Work.



Sara Longhini
Associate Director
WNY Rural Area Health Education Center

Sara Longhini is a dedicated nonprofit leader with over 25 years of experience, including the past three as Associate Director at WNY Rural Area Health Education Center (WNY R-AHEC), where she has focused on improving healthcare quality in western New York through workforce development, education, and access to resources.

Her background includes supervision and management, training, building community partnerships, and expanding youth and health care initiatives. With expertise in nonprofit management, grant writing, fundraising, and program management, Sara brings a mission-driven approach to every role. She is also an experienced educator with a foundation in early and elementary childhood development.



Emily Mallar
Senior Director of Care Transitions
Cayuga Health

Emily Mallar currently serves as the Senior Director of Care Transitions with Cayuga Health, a member of Centralus Health System. A nurse for over 18 years, Emily’s experience in leadership includes population health management, project management, and program design to mitigate adverse health outcomes related to social determinants of health.

Outside of work, Emily is the volunteer President and CEO of the Youth Rally, a 5-night camp for youth ages 11-17 living with chronic illness, congenital birth defects, and physical trauma affecting their bowel and/or bladder systems. Emily lives outside Ithaca with her husband, Phil, and son, Hunter.



Kaitlin Pettine
Director of Health Promotion
Public Information Officer
Genesee and Orleans County Health Depts.

Kaitlin Pettine is Director of Health Promotion and Public Information Officer for the Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments. She oversees the planning, implementation, and evaluation of community-based health education initiatives for healthy behaviors, reducing chronic disease risks, and building strong community partnerships.

As Public Information Officer, she manages media relations and public health messaging to keep residents informed and engaged. Kaitlin holds a Master of Public Health from the University at Buffalo and brings over 15 years of experience in public health education, program development, and outreach. She is committed to creating healthier communities through collaboration and impact-driven work.



Cheryl Pusztai
Sr. Vice President of Advancement and Growth
YMCA of Central New York

Cheryl Pusztai is the Senior Vice President of Advancement and Growth for the YMCA of Central New York. She provides leadership in fund development, marketing and communications, strategic partnerships, and healthy living initiatives. She brings more than 25 years of experience in the nonprofit sector and focuses on building community partnerships and advancing mission-driven work.

Cheryl is deeply committed to serving the community and strengthening the foundations of community for all. She holds a Master’s in Public Health and currently resides in the Syracuse area with her husband and daughter. She is an active board member for the American Cancer Society Syracuse Area Board of Advisors.



Daniel Robertson
Director of the Boys and Men of Color Initiative
Say Yes Buffalo

Daniel Robertson is the 2025 NAACP Daniel Acker Award recipient and a tireless champion for youth and community. As Director of the Boys and Men of Color Initiative at Say Yes Buffalo, he has led transformative programs that uplift, educate, and mentor young men of color across Buffalo. With over 20 years in youth development, Daniel is known for building authentic connections, elevating youth voices, and driving impactful change.

He is a respected speaker and leader dedicated to equity, opportunity, and excellence. Daniel holds degrees from the University at Buffalo and Medaille College and is proudly known as “Mr. D.”



Jessica Robinson
Senior Director
Community Services for Every1, Inc.

Jessica Robinson is a Senior Director who brings 20 years of dedicated experience in the not-for-profit sector, all at Community Services for Every1, Inc. As a Senior Director, she provides expert administrative and fiscal oversight for a full spectrum of services, annually empowering over 1,000 individuals with varying abilities.

Jessica received her Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences from the University at Buffalo, and is a results-driven leader known for strategic planning, managing complex occupational issues, and achieving significant business objectives. She is also a Certified Lean Professional and a 2021 Buffalo Black Achiever.



Digna Saad, PhD
Executive Director
King Urban Life Center

Dr. Digna Saad brings transformational leadership to community development as Executive Director and servant leader of King Urban Life Center. She holds advanced degrees from the University of Pennsylvania (Doctorate and Master of Education) and Boston University (Master of Business Administration).

Digna has a distinguished career encompassing executive roles at Gallup Organization, Schott Foundation, MassBay Community College, MillerCoors, and Rahama. Previously serving as Chairman for UMass's Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, she now pioneers innovative programming that amplifies community voices, builds strategic partnerships, and positions Buffalo's East Side as a national blueprint for grassroots-driven urban renewal and empowerment.



Yolanda Smith
Chief Program Officer
Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers

Mrs. Yolanda Smith, a Buffalo native, serves as Chief Program Officer at the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers. A proud alumna of SUNY University at Buffalo and Medaille College, she is a licensed mental health practitioner with over 12 years of experience in education and health services.

Raised on Buffalo’s East Side, Yolanda has a deep, personal commitment to empowering marginalized communities—especially young Black and Brown mothers. A *Buffalo Business First* 40 Under 40 honoree, her work centers equity, healing, and purpose-driven leadership. She lives in the western New York region with her husband and three daughters.



Sarah Alice Thomes
Supervisor, Nursing Prevention Programs
Herkimer County

Sarah Alice Thomes leads nursing prevention services and coordinates emergency planning efforts for Herkimer County. With over 10 years in public health and 21 years of ongoing military service in a public safety leadership role, Sarah brings a disciplined, mission-driven approach to crisis response and community protection.

She serves on the Executive Committee for Herkimer Oneida Organizations Active in Disaster (HOOAD) and with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County. Sarah leads deep collaborative efforts with various community agencies to promote wellness through prevention and education, as well as planning, preparedness, and recovery in emergency events. A Mohawk Valley native, Sarah holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Utica College.



Denise Walden-Glenn
Chief Executive Officer
Urban Christian Ministries

Rev. Denise Walden-Glenn is a visionary leader, strategist, and faith-filled disruptor who serves as CEO of Urban Christian Ministries in Buffalo, NY. With a shepherd's heart and a reformer's fire, she equips youth and communities to break generational cycles of poverty and violence through faith, leadership, and restorative justice.

Whether mentoring young leaders, shaping equity-centered programs, or driving systemic change, Rev. Denise walks humbly, leads boldly, and serves with relentless love and excellence.



Brittany Washington
Director of Programs
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie, Niagara, and
the Southern Tier

Brittany Washington is a young professional who has over 15 years of experience working in the nonprofit sector. This, coupled with her education (Master of Business Administration in Innovation and Master of Science in Global Enterprise), has allowed her to be creative and strategic in her leadership and programmatic approach.

She has facilitated multiple youth and education programs within western New York, as well as in Philadelphia, PA, and Atlanta, GA. Brittany has experience working with youth of all ages with diverse backgrounds, unique adversities, and needs. She is currently serving as Director of Programs at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie, Niagara, and the Southern Tier. As the head of the Program Department, she plays a key role in senior leadership and decision making for her team and agency.



James Williams
Community Engagement Manager
Blueprint 15

James Williams, a native of Syracuse, NY, is a passionate community leader with over 20 years of experience in youth mentorship and human services. A graduate of Corcoran High School and SUNY Morrisville, he returned to Syracuse to serve his community through impactful roles, including Building Coordinator at PEACE, Inc.

He is now Community Engagement Manager at Blueprint 15. His leadership in youth programs like Y.E.O.P. and various mentoring initiatives has left a lasting legacy. James is known for bridging gaps, empowering youth, and championing community voices with compassion, dedication, and strategic vision.



Nicole Zulu
Director of Health Planning
Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County

Nicole Zulu is the Director of Health Planning at the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County (HSC). In this role, she serves as the Director of the Tompkins County Health Planning Council, and in a supervisory role for the health insurance navigators, community health advocates and the Community Health & Resource Network at HSC.

Nicole also serves as a member of the Tompkins County Community Services Board. She holds a Bachelor's degree from the University at Buffalo as well as a Master of Social Work, a Master of Public Administration, and a Doctorate from Binghamton University. Nicole's passion for community-based work started while she was serving in AmeriCorps NCCC.

Instructional Faculty



Bram B. Briggance, PhD

Bram Briggance is the founder and principal of Briggance Consulting, which provides strategic consultation and training to a wide variety of health organizations. He has over 20 years of research experience as well as a global understanding of the health care field. His specialized knowledge of health workforce issues includes education and training, supply and demand estimates, regulation and scopes of practice, demographics and geographical distribution, globalization and changing patterns of work.

Previously, Bram worked for Kaiser Permanente. He is a former faculty member of the Presidio Graduate School as well as a former Program Director for the Center for Health Professions, a health workforce research and leadership institute at the University of California, San Francisco. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Denison University, and his Master's and Doctorate from the Department of Philosophy at Stony Brook University. He also holds a Certificate for Meritorious Research from the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, in association with Keble College, Oxford University.



Jennifer Chu

Jennifer Chu is a Vice President at McCabe Message Partners with more than 15 years of experience in health communications. Combining her love for communication and her public health training, she has primarily focused on public awareness and behavior change campaigns. This includes persuading the public to make changes they may not necessarily want to make—eating right, getting screened for cancer, or talking about family disease history.

Jennifer has worked with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to develop communications to reduce healthcare-associated infections, supporting the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's The Heart Truth Campaign, and leading colorectal cancer screening and gynecological cancer awareness campaigns for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She led audience research, message development, partnership development and management (including managing relationships with state, local, and Tribal health departments), campaign implementation, and tracking/evaluation. She has a Bachelor's in English and Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Master of Public Health from the George Washington University.



Shannon Conti

Shannon Conti has the keen ability to envision all aspects of a campaign, honed by years in a newsroom and related communications experience. Before joining McCabe Message Partners, Shannon led a range of local and national campaigns to promote financial security and banking issues. She also spearheaded diversity, equity, and inclusion communications efforts for an association of credit unions. Her passion lies in advancing health care equity and working to support that mission.

Early in her career, Shannon worked in television and radio in Washington, D.C. for ABC national news. She has worked on *World News Tonight*, *This Week*, and News One broadcasts, where she covered political and breaking news. She earned a Master's degree in Communication Management and Media, graduating with high honors from the College of New Rochelle in New York. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Broadcast Journalism from Howard University in Washington, D.C. In her free time, she seeks out adventurous activities and tries new foods.



Marcais Frazier

Marcais Frazier, Principal, BlueNote LLC, is a leadership development consultant and executive coach with over a decade of experience helping senior leaders navigate complexity with clarity and impact. Through BlueNote, he's supported clients—from NIH to regional nonprofits—in strengthening leadership, team dynamics, and results. Certified by the Institute for Coaching Innovation and ICF, Marcais blends transformational coaching with Results-Based Accountability.

Formerly the Director of Clear Impact Academy, he trained 250+ RBA leaders. He is a champion for equity and mental health, and brings cultural relevance, strategic focus, and authenticity to every engagement. He can be contacted at marcais@bluenoteleadership.com or admin@bluenoteleadership.com.



Brianna Gavio

Brianna Gavio is a Vice President at McCabe Message Partners, working with foundations and nonprofits to communicate effectively for nearly a decade. She enjoys discerning and connecting how systems-level policies impact real people in communities. She has worked extensively with organizations and foundation grantees to plan long-term strategic communications. She helps organizations hone their goals, key audiences, and messages.

For eight years, Bri has worked with grantees of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, who work in myriad ways to improve health and health care, including the Foundation's decade-long commitment to improving health care quality in 16 targeted regions across the country. She led the agency's work with state governments and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to bring America's health IT system into the 21st century. Bri graduated with honors from Georgetown University with degrees in marketing and accounting. She was named a Rising PR Star by PR News in 2017.



Nora Manz, PhD

Dr. Nora Manz's multifaceted career spans education, mental health, and organizational development. With over 20 years of experience in higher education, she has served in both administrative and faculty roles, leading critical divisions focused on student mental health services, academic advising, and transfer support programs. She has also designed and implemented comprehensive leadership development programs across diverse sectors, including higher education and healthcare organizations.

A professional development consultant, Nora has provided therapeutic services and coaching to individuals across all age groups. Her ability to establish meaningful connections and deeply understand individual needs has enabled her to build enduring relationships while addressing diverse client populations effectively. She supports mental health advocacy through active board service and as program development lead for the AllAbility Employee Resource Group. She has facilitated workshops and delivered presentations at local and national conferences. She holds a Doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education in Adult Learning and Leadership. She has a Master of Arts and Master of Education in Counseling Psychology from Columbia University's Teachers College, and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Alfred University. She is a graduate of the Institute for Coaching Innovation, an ICF certified Institute, and is working towards her coaching credentialing. 32



Patrick McCabe

Patrick McCabe is the founder and President of McCabe Message Partners, a Washington, D.C.-based health communications firm. His work on the importance of affordable, accessible health insurance resulted in coverage in all the nation's top 100 newspapers and every network news program. His award-winning *Choosing Wisely* campaign changed how physicians and patients think about routine medical tests or procedures. Earlier in his career, he worked with the Cancer Research Foundation of America to launch the first Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

He has coached CEOs, executive directors, and other senior leaders on how to communicate effectively and with heart. His market research for the Institute of Medicine about how and when patients want to receive treatment options was published by the peer-reviewed journal *Health Affairs*. Prior to launching McCabe Message Partners in 2016, he helped co-found GYMR Public. Earlier, he was a vice president at Fleishman Hillard and an award-winning journalist in metropolitan Washington, D.C. Patrick graduated with high honors from the University of Notre Dame.



Dr. JaNay Queen Nazaire

Dr. JaNay Queen Nazaire's life mission is to be a good ancestor, enabling a culturally rich, thriving, and dynamic democracy for everyone in every generation to come. As co-founder and CEO of BLK GRVITY, Janay is building a world where all people and the planet are interconnected, wealthy, and well. She brings decades of leadership and expertise in data-driven strategy and results for institutions, communities, and places in the U.S. and abroad.

Her work spans public, private, and philanthropic sectors, focusing on innovative, cross-sector solutions that are impactful. Notably, in her roles as Senior Advisor at PSG, a multibillion-dollar global private equity firm, and Chief Strategy Officer at Living Cities—where she directed over \$100 million – JaNay successfully improved economic conditions for people and places across the nation. Her strategies guide leaders to move from a mindset of poverty alleviation to one focused on wealth creation. This asset-based approach yields broad social and economic results for everyone. Her work has led to permanent impact for people in 40 states, the capital, two U.S. territories, and six countries.



Francesca Washington

A seasoned professional in the broadcast news industry, Francesca Washington understands the impact of good storytelling. She's excited to use her journalist skills on behalf of clients to improve the health and well-being of communities. She joined McCabe after working in television news for more than a decade. She started her career in Texas and most recently worked in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she covered major weather and preparedness events, political protests, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Francesca earned her undergraduate degree in broadcast communications from the University of Texas at Arlington. Outside of work, she enjoys singing, Olympic lifting, and travelling.

Team Advisors



Chris Curry

Chris Curry is Chief Operating Officer for Catholic Charities of Onondaga County. He began his career at Catholic Charities in 1996 as a volunteer teen program coordinator. He now oversees the agency's five program divisions, facilities, and IT. Chris has a Bachelor of Arts in History from Tulane University. He also has a Master of Arts in Public Administration and a Certificate of Advanced Study in Health Services Management & Policy from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Chris is a graduate of Health Leadership Fellows Cohort 6 and lives in the City of Syracuse with his wife, son, Pug, Bassett Hound, and Corgi.



Joanne Haefner

Joanne Haefner, FNP, is President and Chief Executive Officer for Neighborhood Health Center of Western New York. She prioritizes strengths-based leadership to drive patient and employee engagement with a focus on achieving health equity and creating career opportunities so all people feel valued. Additionally, she has molded Neighborhood into one of Western New York's *Buffalo Business First* Best Places to Work finalists.

Her health care career spans more than 30 years, and over the last 18, she has proudly provided care as a nurse practitioner and worked her way through the ranks at NHC. She is active in the community, and most recently, she served on the Community Healthcare Association of New York State Board, chairing CHCANYS's HCCN board, and the Univera Healthcare Regional Advisory Board. She is also Vice President of Western New York's Safety Net IPA and the Safety Net Association of Primary Care Providers (SNAPCAP). She is a Cohort 3 Health Leadership Fellow and has received numerous honors, including the LISC Buffalo Community Builder, *Buffalo Business First* Healthcare Excellence Award, and CHCANYS's E. Swain Leadership and Vision Award. She is a western New York native, a product of Riverside High School, and a graduate of D'Youville University.



Tammy L. Marshall

Tammy L. Marshall loves to break glass ceilings, both at work and in the minds of those with outdated culture-scape narratives around aging. The glass shattered when Tammy became the first woman chief experience officer in the country for aging services, the first woman to sit on Thrive Senior Living's vision team, and the first woman executive vice president for Strategic Planning for one of New York's largest long-term care systems.

She gives keynotes around the globe on the topics of ageism, women in leadership, religious women, integrative health, and civil rights for those living with changing cognitive abilities. She is known for her published works on leadership, dementia care, designing salutogenic environments for older adults, and strategic planning. She serves on several boards that focus on older adults and women. Tammy is the founder and CEO of Biophilia Pharma and developer of Re, a product designed to help reclaim well-being for older adults in partnership with nature. Lastly, she is the host of Tammy Talks , a talk show designed to change the narrative on aging, which can be found on SaltboxTV.



Brittany Perez

Brittany Perez, OTD, is a Senior Project Manager on the Energy and Climate Equity team at the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), where she manages the Energy Equity Collaborative. Prior to NYSERDA, she worked at Local Initiatives Support Corporation New York, a nonprofit community development financial institution. At LISC, she managed neighborhood community development planning with multiple partners focusing on neighborhoods on the East Side of Buffalo.

As an occupational therapist, she brings a unique expertise and approach to community development and building multi-sector partnerships. Her research expertise is in inclusive design for transportation, community mobility, and social participation among diverse populations and communities. She discovered the influence of environmental design on health equity and social participation while pursuing her Doctorate in Occupational Therapy at Washington University in St. Louis, where she also earned an undergraduate degree in psychology. She is a graduate of Health Leadership Fellows Cohort 8.



Chandra Redfern

Chandra Redfern is a compassionate, creative, and visionary servant leader. As Chief Executive Officer for the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Chandra brings over two decades of invaluable experience in the nonprofit sector to the table. She has a knack for fostering diverse and strategic partnerships that yield positive impacts within the community. She is a fervent advocate, regularly facilitating workshops and delivering addresses

on topics ranging from women in the workforce and leadership development to diversity, equity, and inclusion in health care. In 2023, she was honored as one of western New York's outstanding Women of Influence in the Nonprofit Leadership category by *Buffalo Business First*. Additionally, she's been lauded for Excellence in Health Care and featured in *Buffalo Business First's* prestigious lists such as Power 200 Women, Power 100 Business Leaders of Color, and Power 250 Business Leaders. Chandra holds a Master's in Counseling and a Bachelor's in Psychology and Criminal Justice from Canisius University, complemented by certification in Pastoral & Christian Ministries from Houghton College.



Tanya M. Staples

Tanya M. Staples is Senior Director of the Strong Community School initiative for Say Yes Buffalo, a partnership with Buffalo Public Schools to invest in the education of Buffalo's future workforce. Before joining Say Yes, Tanya was CEO of the YWCA of WNY, Buffalo's oldest and largest organization for women. In 2006 she was appointed by Mayor Byron W. Brown to serve as the Commissioner of Community Services and Recreational Programming for the City of Buffalo.

Tanya later joined M&T Bank/Westminster Foundation as Director of Community Affairs for Buffalo Promise Neighborhood. She currently serves as a board member, advisory member, and committee member for numerous organizations. She is the founder and President of Perrin Associates, providing consulting services for capacity building, board governance and management, executive search, and talent management. She received her Bachelor's from Syracuse University and her Master's in Education from Canisius University. Tanya is a graduate of Cohort 3 of the Fellows program, the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education Adaptive Leadership Program, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Results Based Leadership Facilitation program. She is also an alumna of Leadership Buffalo.

Executive Coaches



Ida Gibson, PhD

Dr. Ida Gibson serves as Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Catholic Health System. Before joining CHS, Ida worked at Meta and Tesla as a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) executive. She also served as the inaugural Chief Diversity Officer at Daemen University in Amherst, NY. She has a storied background in public administration, having worked in the District of Columbia government and the City of Richmond, Virginia.

A native of LaGrange, Georgia, Ida earned a Doctorate in Higher Education Administration from Jackson State University, a Master's degree in Public Administration from Savannah State University, and a Bachelor's degree in Communications from the University of Georgia. Her research interests and areas of teaching are in talent management, diversity initiatives, cultural competency, equity and access in public policy, and minority women in politics.



Geri Grossman

Geri Grossman has been coaching established and emerging leaders for more than two decades. As a successful Human Resources executive in a Fortune 50 corporation, she helps leaders to be even more effective in their roles by learning to lead with emotional intelligence. A graduate of Syracuse University with dual majors in psychology and liberal arts, she has participated in a graduate studies program in creative problem solving at Buffalo State University.

She is a licensed administrator of the Hogan Leadership Assessments, Korn Ferry-Emotional and Social Intelligence Inventory (360 assessment), Inventory of Leadership Styles, and Organization Climate Surveys. She has completed advanced coaching certificates from the Gestalt Center for Organization and Systems Development and The International Coaching Program at the Gestalt Institute at Cleveland. She has also completed the executive leadership program at the Center for Creative Leadership. In 2021 she completed a six-month program in Breakthrough Coaching with renowned author and master coach Marcia Reynolds, Ph.D., and Open Stance Coaching with author and master coach Ann Van Eron, Ph.D. She has received many awards for her visionary and successful work in human resources.



Gizelle Hinson

With a career spanning over 15 years in organizational change and leadership development, Gizelle Hinson is a seasoned professional dedicated to fostering positive change. Her journey is a testament to a relentless commitment to community well-being, underscored by proficiency in consulting, leadership development, and education. She specializes in executive leadership and coaching, providing strategic insights for businesses, educational institutions, and community organizations.

Her expertise encompasses talent learning and development, workplace resolution and coaching, and the meticulous development, implementation, and evaluation of impactful programs. With a keen focus on strategic planning and framing, Gizelle excels in cultivating collaborative partnerships and conducting insightful research to inform effective practices with clients. Her academic journey includes earning a Master's in Social Work, a Master's in Education, and a Bachelor's in African American studies from Syracuse University.



Maureen Millane, PhD

Maureen Millane is President of Transformation Consulting Services focusing on board/staff retreats, organizational development, and executive coaching. A Cornell University Honors graduate, she earned her Master of Business Administration from Canisius University and a Doctorate from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She also completed the Harvard University Executive Education Nonprofit Certificate program and the New York Peace Institute mediation program.

She began her career in organizational development at Marriott Hotels Corporate Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and served on corporate task forces for new and renovated hotels and on opening teams as the Towers manager of the Chicago Hilton & Towers, director of Human Resources for the Seattle and Park Hilton Hotels and Warwick Hotels in Houston and New Orleans. As resident manager of the Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel, she oversaw a \$12 million renovation program. Maureen returned home to Buffalo. As Associate Dean for Canisius University's Wehle School of Business, she oversaw the Center for Professional Development, the Canisius Amherst Conference Center, and the Women's Business Center.



Cindy Odom

Cindy Odom has over 25 years of nonprofit executive leadership experience. She has served as President & CEO of New City Kids, Inc., Chief Executive Officer of the Girl Scouts of Western New York and the Girl Scouts of Buffalo & Erie County, Chief Advancement Officer at Hillside, and Chief Community Impact Officer at the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo. As the founder of Executive Insight Coaching, LLC, established in 2017, she has coached executives, senior leaders, and mid-level leaders to help them reach their professional goals.

Embracing lifelong learning has been important to Cindy. She has participated in the Canisius College Women's Leadership Development Certificate Program and is a graduate of the Wharton Business School Executive Leadership Program. Cindy is a Leadership Buffalo graduate, a participant of the Not-for-Profit Institute Training at Stanford University, and a participant of the Canisius College Center for Professional Development's Fundamentals of Fundraising program. Recently she completed Georgetown University-McDonough School of Business' New Strategies Program for Nonprofit Executives.



John C. "Jack" Salo

Jack Salo provides consulting services to the nonprofit sector, including Executive Director coaching and advisement, project management, and interim Executive Director services. Having retired from full-time work as Executive Director of Rural Health Network of South Central New York in 2021, he continues to be actively involved in the health and human services sectors both as a consultant and a volunteer.

A rural advocate, he has worked in a leadership capacity with nonprofit organizations in South Central New York State for the past 35 years. His experience includes leading health, human service, and youth development organizations. Jack received recognition for his contributions to rural health in 2022 as the recipient of the Senator McGee Rural Health Award from the NYS Association for Rural Health and selection as New York State's recipient of the 2022 Community Star Award from the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health. He received his Bachelor's in Geography and his Master of Science in Education from SUNY Oneonta. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the NYS Association for Rural Health, Guthrie Lourdes Hospital, and Excellus Southern Tier Regional Advisory Board. He is also Chair of the Board of 40 Directors of Care Compass Collaborative and Care Compass Supporting IPA.



Gellenia Nicole Smallwood

As Senior Director of Early Childhood Services, Gellenia Smallwood leads the early childhood portfolio at Say Yes Buffalo and the Ages & Stages Social Emotional Screening Strategy. She was instrumental in launching Buffalo Public Schools' Parent Centers, overseeing the Say Yes Legal Clinics in partnership with the Erie County Volunteer Lawyers Project, and leading a citywide Child Tax Credit outreach initiative in partnership with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, United Way, and VITA.

Gellenia is also an independent consultant and executive coach. Her commitment to collective impact and community transformation extends into her civic engagement. She serves as a board member for Buffalo Prep and the Child Care Resource Network, and a member of the WNY Women's Foundation's Women's Economic Mobility Hub, Help Me Grow Advisory Committee, and University at Buffalo's Early Childhood Research Committee. She is a proud member of Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Academic and Professional Honor Society International and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Gamma Phi Omega Chapter. She earned a Bachelor's in Communication Studies with minors in Women's Studies and Child, Family, and Community Studies from Canisius College, and a Master's in Counselor Education.



Helen Eshenour Stepowany

Helen Stepowany has more than 40 years of executive leadership experience in nonprofit organizations throughout New York. Her work has included the design, development, and continuous improvement of health and human service organizations, as well as the development of organizational leaders. She has served as a project consultant for the Health Foundation's Ready or Not 2 Initiative and for the Gifford Foundation's ADVANS project. A member of Cohort 1 of the Health Leadership Fellows program, she has served as an executive coach for several recent cohorts of Fellows.

As a consultant, Helen provides organizational development, executive coaching, and special project consultation services to organizations throughout New York and beyond. She is a founding board member of the National Task Group on Intellectual Disabilities and Dementia Practices, Inc. (NTG), a national nonprofit dedicated to advocacy and supports for individuals with intellectual disabilities. She serves as Project Manager for NTG's Changing Thinking! Project, a multi-year initiative to increase the understanding of CMS GUIDE Practitioners and Care Navigators, while improving access to dementia-capable health services for adults with intellectual disability and dementia and their caregivers.

Evaluators



Diane R. Bessel

Diane R. Bessel, PhD, LMSW, CNM, currently serves as Associate Professor, Director of the Master of Social Work program, and Chair of Social Work and Sociology at Daemen University. She is responsible for establishing program vision and policy; determining curriculum content; allocating program resources; and advising, instructing, and assessing students in conjunction with faculty.

Diane also directs the Institute for Government and Nonprofit Innovation, Training, and Evaluation (IGNITE), an applied research consultancy which she founded in 2014. She provides capacity building support to local foundations, government, nonprofit organizations, and community coalitions. Her current research focuses on the use of interprofessional collaboration within community-based initiatives to address complex social problems. She holds a Master's and a Doctorate in Sociology from the University at Buffalo and a Master's in Social Administration from the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University



Deborah Meehan

Deborah Meehan is the founder and currently Senior Consultant for the Leadership Learning Community (LLC), a national network committed to advancing justice by promoting leadership that is equity-based, networked, and collective. She is the author of numerous leadership publications and has provided consulting to over 30 foundations in the design and evaluation of leadership programming.

Deborah believes that mainstream models of leadership development must be expanded if we are to support all who want to lead, especially those most impacted by racism and inequity. She was a trade union organizer, parent activist, and disability rights advocate before being launched into leadership development through a fellowship experience. Deborah loves Oakland, California, where she has lived for 45 years and raised two amazing daughters, and now enjoys four granddaughters.

Health Leadership Fellows Co-Directors and Staff



Marie Cannon, PhD Co-Director

Dr. Marie Cannon is the President and CEO of Community Action Organization of WNY. CAO is a federally designated anti-poverty program providing safety net assistance, senior and youth activities, early HeadStart, and HeadStart programming, and recovery services with a substance abuse clinic. She is the first woman to lead the organization.

She previously served as the Commissioner of Erie County Department of Social Services, as well as Chief Executive Officer for several not-for-profit organizations. Marie has over 34 years of executive management experience in community-based organizations serving vulnerable communities. Marie's community involvement included serving as the past Co-Chair of the Live Well Erie Taskforce, as well as Co-chair of the COVID 19 Emergency Child Care Taskforce and Housing Taskforce. She was selected to serve on Governor Hochul's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council and Children Cabinet Advisory Board, and is a graduate of Cohort 5 of Health Leadership Fellows.



Tracy Sawicki Co-Director

Tracy Sawicki serves as Executive Director of The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, a \$153 million family foundation supporting Erie and Niagara counties in Western New York and select Eastern Massachusetts counties. The Foundation awards over \$4 million annually to organizations that help children, adolescents, and young adults facing mental illness, substance abuse, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities.

Tracy brings over 37 years of nonprofit experience across grassroots and national organizations, leading community change initiatives with expertise in board governance, strategic planning, program development, fundraising, and volunteer management. She has consistently built and led high-performing teams throughout her career. A graduate of the second cohort of the Health Leadership Fellows program, Tracy has served as a team advisor and now serves as co-director of the program. She also serves on the Board of Philanthropy Massachusetts and Buffalo State University Foundation, where she is an active alumna.



Steve Copps
Operations Manager

Operations Manager Steve Copps, who joined the Health Foundation in 2015, oversees the internal systems that keep the day-to-day logistics of the organization running smoothly. Before joining the Health Foundation, Steve spent four years living and working in New York City. With New York as home base, he traveled the country to perform in regional theatres.

In 2012, he transitioned from land to sea, providing guest enrichment and performing in fully staged productions aboard the five-star Oceania Regatta cruise ship. Upon his return to Buffalo, Steve became Business Manager for the Historic Palace Theatre in Lockport, NY. He graduated cum laude with a Bachelor's degree in Musical Theatre from SUNY Fredonia. Born in Syracuse, NY, Steve is proud to be helping to better both of his 'hometown' communities through the Health Foundation. He lives in Kenmore with his wife, Kelly, and their sons, Noah and Milo.



Leslie Daniel
Executive Assistant to the President

Leslie Daniel joined the Health Foundation in 2017, bringing with her more than 33 years of administrative experience in the not-for-profit sector. As Executive Assistant to the President, Leslie provides high-level administrative support and maintains smooth operations at the leadership level. She is a key liaison between the President and internal and external stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees.

Prior to joining the Health Foundation, Leslie was with the American Red Cross Western New York Chapter, where she served as Executive Coordinator for the Executive Office. In this role, she managed the daily operations of the executive office. While at the American Red Cross, she also held positions within Health, Safety, and Community Services; Health, Safety, and HIV Services; and the Blood Services Divisions. She has an Associate degree in Paralegal Assistance from SUNY Erie and lives in Buffalo, NY.

Health Leadership Fellows: A Systems-Change Mindset

How can I influence program decisions made by my agency?

How can I influence my organization as a whole?

How can I transform my community?

“You have to be willing to go into something like this and let it change you.”

Antara Mitra, Cohort 6