



DHS News

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Leadership Academy: A Q&A with Wanda Beasley, Tammi Hilko and Margie Remele

Wanda Beasley, regional office director (ROD) at the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) Central Regional Office; Tammi Hilko, ROD at the East Regional Office; and Margie Remele, ROD at the North Regional Office are three of 11 RODs, clinical managers, HR personnel and agency leaders participating in the first cohort of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) [Leadership Academy](#). Each took a few moments to share some reflections on their experience over the last few months.

What has your experience been in the Leadership Academy?

WB: My experience in the Leadership Academy was positive. I was able to learn, develop, and implement new skills. It was also positive because I was able to collaborate with peers and receive constructive feedback.

TH: Overall, my participation in the Leadership Academy was a positive experience. Like many of us working in child welfare, my initial reaction was "how will I have the time for this level of commitment?" There were meetings to attend, videos to watch and coaching sessions for which to prepare. However, the structure of the academy helped me settle into a rhythm and it was intriguing to watch the different activities tie together.

MR: My experience with the Leadership Academy has been helpful and enlightening. I have learned a lot about my leadership skills and where I have strengths as well as areas that could use enhancement. I appreciate the information I learned from the 360 assessment. The "in-person" sessions have been beneficial to apply what was learned via the online modules.

What has been the biggest benefit of participating in the Leadership Academy?

WB: I have experienced two benefits participating in the Leadership Academy. One being the coaching sessions that I received and continue to receive. The second being the collaboration with peers and getting to know them more intimately.

TH: I appreciated the opportunity to develop an actionable plan on something I already knew I wanted to do but needed some guidance. We needed to create a safe space so that everyone would be engaging in difficult conversations about race. The Leadership

Academy helped me look at different frameworks and leadership skills. My colleagues and I engaged in smaller breakout rooms where we could further analyze, provide feedback and reflect on our own leadership skills.

MR: There are many benefits to the Leadership Academy, but the one that sticks out the most was the opportunity to work closely and collaborate with other members in the Academy during breakout sessions. Hearing from other colleagues and their ideas on leadership, as well as further relationship building was always helpful. I really appreciated those breakout sessions.

What has it been like working on your change project (an opportunity to put what was learned into action and create change across the agency)?

WB: Working on my change project has been a very exciting and positive experience to prepare my office to honor wellness, learn how to identify secondary trauma, and work through it.

TH: My change project is applying a racial equity lens to the work that we do at the East Regional Office. I was quite grateful for the individual support that my coach provided as I worked on developing this plan. I was always appreciative that she allowed me to express my thoughts and ideas. She did a lot of active listening and was quite adept at pinpointing the areas of the plan that needed enhancement.

MR: Working on my change project has been a positive experience. I find myself reflecting on the information that I learned throughout the Leadership Academy and reflecting on different techniques, particularly related to getting people on board and taking a daring approach. It is also helpful to continue to have regular check ins with my coach and the facilitator of the Leadership Academy.

What aspect of your change project most excites you?

WB: The aspect of my change project that most excites me is implementing my change project and witnessing the positive shift in my office.

TH: It really excites me when folks take the time to send an e-mail regarding our racial equity work at the East Regional Office with a suggestion or an idea that we then implement as a team. This is exactly what I envisioned with my change project as my coach and I were talking about it. I wanted folks to always look at our work through a racial equity lens, thinking about ways to enhance our practices and being brave enough to join the conversation about race.

MR: The aspect that most excites me would be the intended outcome of having a process that can be utilized throughout all regional offices that could benefit and impact caseworker's professional development and leadership skills.

How will your time in the Leadership Academy affect your work moving forward?

WB: My time in the Leadership Academy will affect my work in a positive way moving forward as it has allowed me to identify how I lead and recognize how I can make change in my office.

TH: I learned how to step out of my comfort zone and strategies that would support and sustain the racial equity work. I am reminded of information that was introduced during the Leadership Academy as I continue our work. It reinforces how we all continue to learn and grow and how experiences (both positive and negative) become embedded in our mind and person.

MR: The knowledge that I have gained from the Leadership Academy on different leadership styles, particularly adaptive and daring leadership will be information I will carry with me through my professional career. It not only helps me grow, but also allows me to get staff on board with different leadership techniques. The opportunity to model these leadership styles will hopefully impact staff in way that they will carry forward.