

Strengthening the Nonprofit Sector: LEAD 24/7

Local nonprofits are critical to our ability to create a fully thriving community for all who live and work in Holland and Zeeland. Our strengthening the nonprofit sector (SNS) investments support nonprofit leaders and organizations with the resources, information, and people to do their best work. CFHZ invests a portion of our Community's Endowment funding to strengthen the nonprofit sector with a special focus on investing in board and staff leadership.

Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance (LNA) and Community SPOKE are crucial partners in this work. Amongst the programs and services offered by LNA is Nonprofit LEAD 24/7. LEAD 24/7 is a twelve-month immersive leadership program for nonprofit directors who wish to grow their leadership skillsets. The program welcomed its first cohort in 2020, and since then seventeen leaders have completed the program.

Participants meet monthly for an all-day teaching session on specific leadership topics. While the topics might not be new to the participants, the way in which they are taught, processed, and practiced help to expand participants' skillsets. Between the monthly gatherings, participants engage in one-on-one executive coaching sessions and additional learning opportunities.

The curriculum and model for LEAD 24/7 was created by Rodger Price, the founder of Leading by Design.

Price worked closely with Patrick Cisler, Executive Director of LNA, after Cisler approached him about adapting Leading by Design for nonprofit leaders.

Cisler co-facilitates LEAD 24/7 alongside Kurt Wassink, HR Executive and Business Consultant at HR Solutions Group West Michigan. The program features guest speakers from local businesses and organizations who are experts in their field.

"Most nonprofits dedicate every available dollar towards meeting their missions, meaning staff often miss out on critical professional development opportunities," said Cisler. "However, we know that investing in nonprofit professionals can actually lead to better organizational outcomes. LEAD 24/7 is one of the tools we are offering to help change that by providing an opportunity for executive directors to learn, foster deep relationships with other leaders navigating similar circumstances and challenges, and lean into their strengths."



DEEDRE VRIESMAN
PRESIDENT/CEO, RESTHAVEN
LEAD 24/7, 2020 Cohort



JED MULDER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE BRIDGE YOUTH CENTER
LEAD 24/7, 2021 cohort

Q&A

DEEDRE VRIESMAN
PRESIDENT/CEO, RESTHAVEN
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Tell us a little about your career, and how you came to work in the nonprofit sector.

I graduated from Calvin College with a BA in Psychology and an MA in Counseling from Spring Arbor University. I started working in the nonprofit sector and never left. I have worked with three different nonprofits in my career: Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, Samaritas, and now Resthaven.

How did you first learn about the LEAD 24/7 program?

I was unfamiliar with LEAD 24/7 until Patrick Cisler reached out to me. I was intrigued by the program and the support that was being provided to Executive Directors to participate.

What were your initial goals upon joining the 2020 cohort of the LEAD 24/7 program?

Being new to working in Holland, one of my goals was to meet other executives. Leading an organization can be lonely and I was excited to connect with and learn from like-minded leaders in the community. The relationships I made with my cohort continue, and I am grateful that I feel comfortable reaching out to them; we consult with one another, we share our struggles, and we celebrate our successes. I was also excited to learn more about fundraising and about how to continue developing my public speaking and management style.

How has the LEAD 24/7 program impacted your leadership style or approach?

We spent time talking through tough conversations during the course. One class focused on employee relations and how one of the tough decisions we need to make is who we need to be on our team and who may need to come off the team. I've thought differently about how to build a team and how to view departures from our team. On the last day of the class, we provided and received feedback from our peers. Some of the feedback I received was to dare to be more vulnerable at work. I've been motivated to do this more over the past year and it has positively impacted my relationships both internally and externally.

Why do you think this program is so well-received amongst our local nonprofit leaders?

As leaders we often don't take the time needed to continue to grow ourselves. We wear multiple hats and allow our time to get eaten up by the day-to-day tasks. Taking a step back and evaluating myself as a leader and learning some tools and having conversations about how I might be more intentional about that was wonderful.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE BRIDGE YOUTH CENTER
LEAD 24/7, 2021 cohort

Tell us a little about your career, and how you came to work in the nonprofit sector.

I've worked in a variety of fields, including teaching, writing, sales, and the circulation department at the Holland Sentinel. While at the Sentinel, one of my customers was Youth for Christ. My contact there encouraged me to apply for a position in Zeeland at a new organization called The Bridge Youth Center. I've been the Executive Director now for 17 years.

How did you first learn about the LEAD 24/7 program?

Most of my knowledge came from Gentex connections, including Rodger Price. One of our Board members also recommended the program to me and Patrick Cisler reached out too.

How has the LEAD 24/7 program impacted your leadership style or approach?

I learned the importance of active listening, providing clear instructions, and giving regular feedback. I'm adapting to find balance between being detail-oriented and focusing on the big picture.

Are you implementing tools or skills from the LEAD 24/7 program?

I sit down with staff every morning to check-in on projects and/or adjust our plans for the week. That dedicated time to share ideas, work through healthy conflict, and make decisions is vital to a healthy team.

In your opinion, what are the top benefits of a program like this for our local nonprofit sector?

It helps leaders develop themselves and the people on their team. The ability to recognize strengths and adjust jobs to meet the skills and strengths of the people already on your team isn't just financially responsible, it grows and preserves a mission-focused, happy staff.

Why do you think this program is so well-received amongst our local nonprofit leaders?

It's an opportunity for us to gather and share about what makes the 'whole' better. It's not our individual organization that makes the community better – it's all nonprofits, businesses, churches, etc. This program inspires and pushes us to think strategically about how we can work together, debate, and collaborate for the benefit of the entire community.