

# SYMPOSIUM REPORT

Filling the Balloon:  
Elevating Connections and Progress

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## Day 1-Monday, June 24, 2024

### Focus and Purpose

With the theme of Filling the **Balloon: Elevating Connections and Progress**, the 2024 Vision Centre Symposium aimed to connect leaders from academia and aging service to find ways to improve senior living leadership programs. The event took place in Indianapolis, IN at Indiana University Indianapolis on June 24-25, 2024. The focus was elevating connections and communicating the importance and value of Vision Centre's goals, strategies and resources. The purpose of the event was to create more academic and provider partnerships in this pivotal time.

### Pre-Symposium Workshop

The symposium kicked off with a sponsored pre-symposium workshop presented by **Krist Schell** (Atalanta, LLC) on making classroom experiences come alive for health administration students, sponsored by Pathway Health. The workshop empowered participants to increase their confidence in the classroom using real experiences and stories to effectively help students learn. This interactive session was meant to help executives thrive in an educational environment using learning organization principles.

### Welcome

The event opened with **Sarah Johnson** (Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Affairs/ Senior Lecturer, BSHSM Program Director for Indiana University Indianapolis). Johnson gave general welcoming remarks and shared her gratitude for the connections Vision Centre has brought. **Steve Van Camp** (CEO of American Senior Communities), shared it is a very pivotal time for aging services and the need for future leaders is continuing to grow. **Mark Prifogle** (VP of Operations for BHI Senior Living), continued the welcoming remarks and highlighted that seniors deserve top-notch leaders. He also spoke on the importance of a collaborative, multifaceted approach when providing care for seniors.

### Introductory Remarks

**Steve Chies** (Chair of Vision Centre Board of Trustees), provided introductory remarks using current statistics of the aging population, describing the future need in senior care, and upcoming ideas in the aging services field.

Chies opened by posing the question of *"How are we going to shape people's aging years into how they want to live them?"* He expressed the urgency of the situation, sharing how in the year 2026 the first boomer turns 80. He went on to highlight that by 2033 there will be more boomers over the age of 80 than those under 18. These alarming statistics raised the question of who is going to take care of this population? Chies communicated that it takes individuals who are caring, passionate, motivated, and effective to solve this issue. There must be encouragement towards young adults to go into the field of aging services. Chies acknowledges that the image of senior care is poor, but that image must be reshaped to encourage young adults and mid-career individuals to become more involved in senior care leadership. Vision Centre works to enhance the image of senior care in the field by bridging the gap between providers and universities.

When people are exposed to senior living communities, they realize the impact these communities have, and many feel empowered to join the sector.

**Bruce White** (President and CEO of Johnson, Kendall, & Johnson, Inc.), was introduced as the newest addition to the Vision Centre Board of Trustees. Vision Centre is honored to have White join the board and looks forward to his contributions.

### **“The Perspective of New Leaders” Panel**

A panel of students, administrators-in-training (AIT) and professionals early in their senior living careers kicked off the symposium late Monday afternoon by providing industry leaders with a better understanding of what future leaders are looking for in their first jobs.

The panel shared why they chose this field and their journey to finding field experiences, highlighting both the joys and the challenges they encountered along the way. Participants also discussed the journey into their first job. The panel was moderated by **Christy Kramer** (Adjunct Faculty, The George Washington University- Milken Institute School of Public Health/Independent Consultant). Panelists consisted of: **Trenton Klein** (Administrator-in-Training at Marquette with Life Care Services), **Lily Kiffmeyer** (Undergraduate Student 25', UW-Eau Claire), **Hayley Carr** (Associate Executive Director at The Towne House and Prairie Landing with BHI Communities), and **Ashley Elkin** (Transitional Care Manager at Magnolia Health Systems). Each panelist brought a unique background and experience to the panel.

The panelists discussed several positive aspects of their experiences. Location, innovation, paid internships and the ability to have a work-life balance are among the key factors they said influence job decisions for younger generations. They found the senior care field rich with relationships and valued the opportunity to share ideas with students in similar programs. Advocating for residents was particularly rewarding for them, as was building relationships with residents, staff, families, and others in the industry. Additionally, the intergenerational relationships formed in aging services were highlighted as a rewarding aspect of working in the field as it provides opportunities for mutual learning, companionship, and a sense of purpose. Hayley Carr said the intergenerational relationships that are available in senior living are one of the most rewarding things she's experienced. Working with people of all ages and melding their ideas and visions together, Carr said, is what makes the industry enticing to many young leaders.

“Our generation loves contributing to new technology,” said Trenton Klein. Younger workers want to use technology to better their careers, industries and organizations, he added. If leaders are open to those, it will attract us even more.”

There were also challenges addressed throughout the panel. It takes a long time to become an AIT, discouraging many people from entering the field. It was also highlighted that many programs are focused on acute care rather than aging services. To decrease burnout, the panelists suggested making AIT and internship opportunities more accessible and setting boundaries with preceptors, such as limiting hours worked beyond the normal workday.

The discussion also covered ways to improve programs. They suggested encouraging students to get involved with health services organizations near their schools, creating opportunities for students to foster relationships with their peers, and increasing exposure and mentorship by bringing aging services organizations into educational programs.

Elkin encouraged university programs to connect students with senior living communities and other long-term care properties. Those one-on-one meetings open doors to opportunities that students previously were unaware of, and they allow operators to present a compelling case for working in the industry, she said.

Carr added that she sees many high school students already working in long-term care settings, providing opportunities to make an impression early on with the current younger workforce. Kiffmeyer added that investing in those young workers and giving them career paths will pay dividends down the road.

There were many key points emphasized by panelists. They believe it is crucial to get kids involved in the field at a young age and one great way to do this is to provide volunteer opportunities for middle and high school students. Partnering with high schools for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) programs was also recommended as a beneficial way to get young people involved in aging services. The young leaders also suggested that operators extend their reach beyond universities and colleges and partner with high schools and younger grade levels to expand interest in the industry during the formative years.

Although the long-term care industry continues to battle negative media attention that began with the COVID-19 pandemic, the panelists offered a different perspective that they can bring to the industry.

“Something to consider is that COVID was a big part of my life,” Kiffmeyer said, adding that the pandemic encompassed one-fifth of her years. “Something that was a huge battle for others was something we had to grow up with and accept. The pandemic was normal for us growing up,” she said.

Younger generations, she added, have different visions and values as well as different perspectives to offer. Kiffmeyer shared, “You need to shift your perspective and remember we’re here, we’re excited about the field, and the pandemic didn’t chase us away.”

Those partnerships for field experiences and volunteer opportunities also can lead to real-world experiences and opportunities that add depth and context to degree programs, the panelists noted. Klein said that the real-world opportunities and projects he has worked on as an administrator-in-training have been among his most valuable experiences. He suggested that university programs should start those real-world opportunities in the classroom and create partnerships in the senior living community.

Learning all aspects of the field is vital for understanding the entire community and mentorship and exposure is the key to success. Overall, the session provided valuable insights into the experiences and aspirations of new leaders in the senior care field, offering a glimpse into the future of the industry and where the field of senior living leadership is heading.

## Appreciation of Sponsors

**Chris Mason** (President and CEO of Senior Housing Managers), introduced the levels of contributions to the Vision Centre. These include:

- **Gold Sponsorship:** CCL Hospitality Group, Point Click Care
- **Silver Sponsorship:** Johnson Kendall Johnson (JKJ), American Senior Communities, Silverado, Kendal, Marquis Communities, Front Porch, Human Good
- **Bronze Sponsorship:** SpringPoint, Ziegler, BHI Senior Living, Life Care Services, Greystone, Lee Agency
- **Symposium Sponsors:** CCL Hospitality Group, Pathway Health, IHCA/INCAL, Vium Capital, Samaritan Alliance, Healthcare Therapy Services, Inc., LeadingAge Indiana, Direct Supply, Illuminus, Ziegler, Bowstring Studios
- **Endorsing Organizations:** American College of Health Care Administrators (ACHCA), National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care (NIC), Argentum, LeadingAge, National Association of Long-Term Care Administrator Boards (NAB), National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC), American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA), American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL).

## Networking Social

Vision Centre attendees concluded the evening with a networking social featuring hors d'oeuvres and live music. They networked in the lobby of Hine Hall, using the time to foster beneficial relationships between providers, universities, and students as well as to explore new potential partnerships.

## Day 2-Tuesday June 25

### Progress, Tools, and the Future

The second day kicked off with opening remarks from **Kiki Beschorner** (Associate Director of Operations, Vision Centre), thanking the student interns, students, universities, and providers for their contributions noting this wouldn't be possible without them.

Lily Kiffmeyer then addressed her Career Pathways research. Survey respondents (whose average age was 28) said the most important things when looking for a field or training experience are the ability to gain more professional knowledge, the possibility of future employment, and having a paid internship-type position. She emphasized the field is often seen as over professionalized. The locale of the work did not factor highly in the students preferences. She also highlighted that students value personal connections and forming relationships within the industry, and discussed the importance of personal professionalism, including dress codes in communities. When accepting internships, students are primarily looking for learning and career opportunities. They often discover the field early on through various ways such as volunteering, family exposure, and work experiences.

**Doug Olson** (CEO and President of Vision Centre), also delivered remarks, thanking endorsing and supporting organizations, students, interns and attendees. He discussed the organization's growth, mentioning that it now includes up to 30 universities partnerships. Key points included the updating of a digital directory and the prioritization of programs from a wide variety of disciplines and perspectives.

Doug also spoke on connections and partnerships, emphasizing the coordination and toolkit available, the career pathways report, and the developing leadership profile study. He further elaborated on the importance of equity, diversity, and belonging, highlighting the strides Vision Centre has been making to enhance these values. He shared that the value propositions are on track and being well received by all the engaged stakeholders of the Vision Centre. Dr. Olson highlighted the coordination, promotion and resource development (CPR) focus of the Centre and the strides made with action oriented engagements, funding and sustainability. Overall, the remarks showed the significant progress being made and the ongoing efforts to grow and improve educational programs and partnerships by Vision Centre with the support of all the collaborating partners.

### **“What do we need from each other? That is the question.” Panel**

The second day included a panel titled *“What do we need from each other? That is the question”* moderated by **Keith Knapp** (Senior Advisor for Adult Programs at the KY Cabinet for Health and Family Services). The panel featured **Maria Henke** (Senior Associate Dean at the University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology), **Dan Carr** (Vice President of Operations at BHI Senior Living), **Loren Shook** (CEO at Silverado), and **Lisa Kuhlman** (Program Director, Health Services and Senior Living Administration at Southern Adventist University).

Henke discussed the importance of tracking students and keeping their program, which was formed three years ago, aligned with industry changes. She emphasized the need for perspectives from students, academia, and providers to improve their offerings. Maria highlighted the challenges universities face, such as the slow process of changing curriculum, justifying those changes, and meeting the demand for more students from providers.

Kuhlman focused on expanding opportunities in Tennessee, particularly for the Hispanic population, and stressed the need for paid internships and integration opportunities for international students seeking citizenship. She noted that a significant challenge comes from navigating higher levels of university administration and suggested program directors work more closely with human resource managers and screeners from providers.

Shook expressed a need for high-potential leaders who can be put through his AIT program. He looks for students knowledgeable about licensing and motivated individuals. He mentioned the current need for three AITs and the importance of connections with universities. Loren emphasized the necessary competencies, including understanding the customer, fundamentals of aging, basic business knowledge, and leadership skills.

Carr highlighted the need for legitimate commitment from universities beyond just one person. He called for a shift away from the acute care focus in education towards aging services. He outlined the essential competencies for leaders, such as work ethic and willingness, while noting that GPA and pre-existing skills are less important since skills can be taught.

Overall, the panel showed the need for collaboration between universities and providers to address the evolving needs of the senior care field and to build sustainable academic leadership programs that promote and support the field of aging services while cultivating the next generation of leaders.

## Spotlight Series

There was a featured spotlight series that explored innovative ideas and considerations for the growth of programs and the expansion of partnerships.

- **Jared Bloomfield** (Director of Field Programs at Wish of a Lifetime), presented a video about Mel's return 75 years after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Wish of a Lifetime grants life-changing wishes to older adults, such as Mel. Bloomfield highlighted the organization's mission to shift society's perception of older generations by fulfilling seniors wishes and sharing their stories in order to inspire all ages. Together the goal is to embed and expand the opportunity that Wish of a Lifetime provides to older adults within senior living communities with an administrative residency experience that students do as part of their academic program affiliated with the Vision Centre.
- **Ashley Tanner** (Vision Centre Fellow/Doctoral Student), introduced the field experience guide which aimed at centralizing best practices and resources to enhance the entire sector. She emphasized the importance of collaboration among academia, providers, associations, and students to create better field experiences for emerging leaders. The development of this guide is critical to future leadership in aging services across the continuum of care and services, and does not seek to recreate tools already in the industry, but add to best practices to help foster leadership and growth in the industry of aging services.
- **Dana Bradley** (Dean of UMBC Erickson School of Aging Studies), and **Nancy Swanger** (Founding Director of Granger Cobb Institute at Washington State University), talked about the significance of women in leadership. They discussed the importance of mentoring relationships to advance women's careers in the field. Vision Centre's interest in paying attention to this area is based on the fact that approximately 60% of students who go to college are female and is probably even higher in programs training senior living leaders
- **Zach Britton** (Director at Locust Point Capital), spoke about the partnership with other leadership disciplines such as hospitality and gerontology. He stressed that senior living organizations need emerging leaders and that seniors deserve the best talent available.
- **Nick Castle** (Chair and Professor at West Virginia University School of Public Health), addressed the future supply and demand for senior care leaders. He warned of near future leadership workforce gaps in senior care. Castle also introduced the attraction theory, which suggests that good, happy employees attract other good, happy employees.

Overall, the spotlight series highlighted the need for innovative approaches, collaboration, and strong leadership to advance the senior care field, and the need for critical connections and partnerships.

Dr. Olson also shared the work of Vision Centre on a document clarifying the social component role of the Vision Centre in the ESG corporate responsibility principles. He highlighted the efforts of his co-author **Lynne Katzmann, Ph.D.** (Founder and CEO of Juniper Communities), and invited critique and feedback.

## Endorsing Organizations

The attendees were then directed to a video produced highlighting the individual relationships with the endorsing organizations, including the National Association of Long-Term Care Administrator Boards, LeadingAge, Argentum, National Association for Home Care & Hospice, American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL), American College of Health Care Administrators, National Investment Center, and the American Senior Housing Association. Leadership from each of these organizations shared the importance and context of their partnership with the Vision Centre.

## Group Discussions and Feedback

After a networking lunch where many connections were made, attendees broke into diverse groups for further discussion. These were led by Steve Chies and with designated facilitators at each table. During this time participants came up with ideas to be further engaged, gather supportive paths, ideas, and suggestions with report outs from the group. Each group provided feedback to the audience and comment sheets were collected at the end of the session. Several of the groups focused on heightening student involvement, advancing best practice curriculums, coordinating and sharing partnerships, providing further clarity on the call to action and fund development needs, and prioritizing actionable steps. There was overall support of the Vision Centre direction and progress expressed by the groups. The board and advisory council will use this feedback as we chart the course for the next year and beyond. Everyone was thanked for their thoughtful participation and feedback.

## Closing Remarks

**Bob Kramer** (NIC Strategic Advisor/Founder & Fellow, Nexus Insights) emphasized in the closing remarks the importance of language and vocabulary in shaping perceptions and actions within senior care. He reflected on insights from the previous day's panel, highlighting Ashley's perspective on the marketing and sales challenges and Lily's focus on improving seniors' lives through impactful career pathways. He stressed the need for better coordination between universities and providers, promoting a new image of the field, and developing necessary resources.

Kramer proposed that Vision Centre should serve as a catalyst and facilitator rather than directly developing university-based programs or hiring staff members. He advocated for broadening the focus to "growing leaders who will make THE different" in a field essential to families and the community. He noted the industry's tendency to make entry difficult despite the high demand for new professionals, suggesting this approach obviously causes disruption. He outlined the urgent need to address overwhelming demand, high costs, avoidance tendencies, and complacency within the field. Kramer argued for shifting the industry's focus from just providing care to enriching human connection and purpose.

"It's tough to get a job in this field. We make it really difficult," said Kramer. "We need people. We desperately need people. What I want to suggest is that as a field and an industry/product we are ripe for disruption. It will either happen internally or externally. But it's going to happen."

And, as I was sitting here yesterday and today, I was struck by how this is true as we recruit for the workforce. So, ripe for disruption – internal and external.”

- *Demand*: There’s going to be overwhelming demand and the need for things we do [within the field of senior living and aging services].
- *Cost*: About 90% of the folks who will need our services can’t afford them. They are going to either be dependent on government services (not enough dollars) or left to fend for their own – the whims or provisions of their families.
- *Dread*: We offer an avoidance product. It’s a difference between an aspirational setting or profession versus an avoidance. People do whatever they can do to avoid using the product – and then when we want to recruit people to come serve in this field, we wonder why they don’t jump up and down about this opportunity.
- *Complacency*: I don’t see this group as a complacent group. All I have to do is read all the latest investor reports – there’s going to be overwhelming demand and customers will have no choice but to use our services. When you have overwhelming demand, many people can’t afford it, you have an avoidance product, and you are complacent.

Kramer stressed the importance of making the field more accessible and appealing to prospective students by highlighting opportunities for growth and innovation. He encouraged universities to recruit students by presenting on these challenges that require innovative, creative solutions. To support this, he suggested that Vision Centre provide tools for universities to attract students while assisting providers in engaging with these programs. He proposed expanding student attendance at the annual symposium to create connections and show opportunities in the field.

Kramer called for a collective effort to revitalize the field of senior care by attracting a wide range of talent. He urged stakeholders to embrace and drive disruption to ensure the sector remains relevant, dynamic, and capable of meeting the evolving needs of seniors. Through a commitment to inclusion and collaboration, Vision Centre aims to build a future where senior care is enriched by the best leaders from various disciplines, ultimately enriching the lives of seniors and their families.

### **Questions and Information**

For more information on Vision Centre: Leadership Development for Aging Services, please visit our website: [www.visioncentre.org](http://www.visioncentre.org) or email us at [info@visioncentre.org](mailto:info@visioncentre.org).

*Written By: Emma Cochrane (Vision Centre Intern) and Kiki Beschorner (Associate Director of Operations).*



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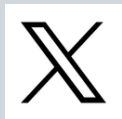
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