



NLCDD Research in Action: Leadership Development Reignites Passion & Fuels Stronger, More Confident Frontline Leaders!

Developing the leadership strengths and skills of DSPs and frontline leaders increases self-confidence, lasting professional connections, and critical knowledge needed to advance services for people with IDD. Participants of NLCDD’s Leadership, Empowerment, Advancement & Development (LEAD) program, an intensive leadership training for frontline employees, report personal improvements and renewed passion for their work. Their supervisors note personal improvements in individual skills, team functioning, and benefits to the organization as a result of the training. Ultimately, building the leadership capacity of frontline leaders has profound personal impacts that lead to more strategic, strengths based, and culture enhancing leadership practices.

“I came into the program probably very close to the edge of burnout. I was very tired. We have been chronically understaffed, and I was just feeling very done. So, on a very personal level, I got very reenergized by the training. It made me a lot more capable of doing my job and making what we do better.” –2024 LEAD Participant

This research brief highlights the results of pre- and post-evaluations, participant interviews, and participant supervisor surveys that demonstrate the LEAD program’s profound personal impact.

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92%

of LEAD participants **STRONGLY AGREED** that they learned new information and resources about Strengths Based Leadership

98%

of LEAD participants **STRONGLY AGREED** or **AGREED** that what they learned about Strategic Leadership is useful to their current work



98%

of LEAD participants **AGREED** or **STRONGLY AGREED** that what they learned about Transforming Organizational Culture would be useful to their future needs as a leader

Past LEAD participants had positive things to say about their growth during the training:

"Now I feel like, 'I know what I'm doing. I'm supposed to be here.'" –2023 LEAD Participant

"I've gained the ability to really see other people, who they are and what skills they have, and be able to meet someone halfway, rather than being like 'No, no, no, my way's the right way.' Instead, appreciating that there are many ways to do things and learning how to give and take a little bit more in my line of work." –2025 LEAD Participant

Supervisors also saw positive changes in their LEAD trainees. When asked two months after the LEAD program which skills their employees gained by participating in LEAD, supervisors noted:

- Increased and improved leadership skills
- Stronger communication skills
- Better listening skills
- Evolved problem solving skills
- More confidence when training and communicating with staff
- Communicating with staff in a more positive manner
- Stronger conflict resolution skills
- Increased collaboration with others



98%

of Supervisors of LEAD participants **STRONGLY AGREED** that the information, knowledge, and skills from the training has improved the trainees' work

"I think she is stopping and considering how other DSPs need interaction as well as what will help the participants to have their best day." –Supervisor of 2025 LEAD Participant

"I think she has more confidence and willingness to be a part of the solutions." –Supervisor of 2025 LEAD Participant

"I've heard from my manager that she heard upper management mention that they've noticed a difference in my leadership since the training, which was really cool to hear." –2024 LEAD Participant

How can organizations get the most out of frontline employee training?

- »» **Invest in staff development as a core support strategy:** Providing time and resources for DSPs and frontline leaders to participate in professional development opportunities helps them feel that they are valued at the organization and worth investing in.
- »» **Normalize ongoing learning and development for DSPs:** Like professionals in other hands-on fields, DSPs should be supported in pursuing ongoing professional development to continuously strengthen their skills and expertise.
- »» **Create space for reflection and growth after training:** Offer opportunities for employees who attend leadership programs to reflect on what they learned, identify personal goals, and discuss how they want to grow in their roles.
- »» **Encourage confidence and leadership at every level:** Empower DSPs to contribute ideas, problem solve, and take initiative in their daily work, reinforcing the leadership skills they develop through training.
- »» **Recognize personal development and achievement:** Openly and frequently acknowledge employees that demonstrate confidence, initiative, or skill development with public praise, benefits, financial rewards, and/or promotions.