Leadership is an exhilarating journey that begins with the simple truth of getting to know ourselves in the deepest way. We all have a story that unfolds over time. Our stories are influenced by our values, by who we meet, what we learn and opportunities that provide us with experiences to stretch, grow and develop. I am thrilled to share my experience as an alumnus of the Dorothy Wylie Health Leaders Institute and the impact the program has had on both my personal and professional life.

If I could sum up my most significant learning in one statement, I would say, “I learned to know myself.” As I arrived at the residential, experiential learning program, I came as a person in a formal leadership role within an academic health sciences centre. I came with a deep-seated passion and purpose to influence change in our complex healthcare system, rooted in my personal experiences as a daughter, who from a very young age, cared for my father with muscular dystrophy. I came as an avid reader of leadership books, always aspiring to learn more, and seeking ways to constantly improve. However, if you looked deep inside, you might have seen that, despite my enthusiasm and energy, my confidence sometimes wavered. This has since changed.

The Health Leaders Institute Program is founded on key principles and a practical conceptual framework that has continued to guide my leadership to this day. The interactive components of Leadership Practices, Professional Competencies and Use of Self, supported by collaboration and relationships in a complex, dynamic
environment make so much sense to me. As we dived into each section of the framework, linking theory and practice, we were challenged through experiential learning exercises. We reflected internally upon our values, the influence of our past, our strengths, what makes us resilient and how we bring ourselves to influence everything we do. Additionally, we were continuously stretched to engage with our table partners and the larger group, for the purpose of deep discussion and connection, through collaborative learning. There was great wisdom in the room. Our skilled facilitators supported our learning by collaborating with us, sharing their personal stories and insights and providing opportunities for our community of learners to share their own stories. I loved every minute, listening and learning from the experiences of others.

We had the opportunity to engage in self-assessments, including the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory and the Majors PTI Personality Report. Reviewing and reflecting upon the summaries and meaning of our self-assessments were integral to begin the development of our own learning goals. Dedicating time and space to pause, to first go within one’s own thoughts to explore personal meaning and then to share hopes and fears, takes courage, moving one to a new place of being. I actually felt myself being moved. I felt my mind opening. And, at times, I even felt my breathing slowing down as if I was becoming more relaxed, calmer, more in tune. These are not the regular conversations that you find yourself engaging in on a daily basis, within our current complex systems, dominated by activity and action. I found myself “re-discovering me.” Without self-realization it becomes easy to forget what we value and what is most important in our lives. And the fact that this program is residential meant that our engaged discussions continued over lunch, dinner and into the evening, as we forged new bonds and relationships. Dedicated time is an invaluable gift and some of my deepest insights were, in fact, gained in the solitude of my evening.

Barry Posner, author of The Leadership Challenge, provided an inspirational morning where we learned about Leadership Practices. After lunch, we returned to find a copy of his book at every seat. My book, which was personally signed, said, “Tracey, Keep making extraordinary things happen.” There is a belief that starts to grow strong roots as you reflect inward and subsequently think about how your values lead to behaviours and actions, and how those actions inspire extraordinary things. Your world begins to change in a great way. You begin to listen and value the ways you are similar and different from those around you. You use your learning to develop a “Personal Development Plan” with timelines. You exchange emails with those who shared these impactful days with you, vowing to stay connected. You apply your learning to a capstone Change Project through which you have received mentorship and coaching for its development. And through it all, your confidence rises.
As I have continued on my leadership journey, I carry with me a conceptual framework that guides my thinking. I have engrained the Leadership Practices into my daily behaviours and I do my very best to make them live strongly, to ensure they are experienced and felt by others through meaningful relationships and collaboration. I have continued my quest for personal mastery, which has spilled beyond my work life to personal challenges, like running. Belief is a formidable force that can be applied to all aspects of life and makes anything seem possible. I have come to embrace the knowledge of truly knowing who I am. I am excited about the next unknown step. I am grateful for the opportunity to have learned, to have grown, to have experienced change and to have met so many amazing people who are touching lives and inspiring change all around us. Thank you to the Health Leaders Institute for the opportunity to change me.

Correspondence may be directed to: Tracey DasGupta – Director of Interprofessional Practice, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre; e-mail: tracey.dasgupta@sunnybrook.ca.

Help Advance Nursing informatics knowledge by supporting this first-ever scholarship named in honour of an internationally recognized nursing informatics pioneer, Dr. Kathryn Hannah.

Nurses are the biggest users of Health Informatics Solutions, delivering care 24/7 in every setting, in every region across Canada and around the world.

Nurses impact the outcomes of care, enabled by information and communication technologies.

We need more nurses prepared at the graduate level with experience in health informatics.

Visit cnf-fiic.ca for more information about the scholarship, and gofundme.com/NIScholarship to make an online donation.