



J. SINCLAIR PHOTO

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Action Learning Projects help build and better the community.

Shop at the relocated Habitat for Humanity ReStore on Coliseum Drive, and you'll see firsthand what happens when a diverse team of community leaders from Leadership Winston-Salem takes on an Action Learning (A/L) Project. The ReStore relies on discards and donations for its merchandise, yet its appeal rivals any home improvement store, thanks to guidance garnered from Lowe's Home Improvement by an A/L Project team.

"Our Action Learning Team was charged with reorganizing the ReStore, then located on Witt Street, and considering how the items were merchandised to maximize its retail potential," says Catherine Heitz New, vice president of development at the Arts Council of WS/FC and a 2009 LWS graduate.

"The beauty of the A/L Projects is that they teach you teamwork in a truly organic way," she says. "You are intentionally paired with a diverse array of personalities and working styles, then given a task to focus on and a coach to guide you. The most poignant lesson was how to work effectively with others—a lesson that can be applied towards any goal."

Today's ReStore reflects those results.

"Lowe's designers helped the A/L Team and ReStore staff to reconfigure the flow and layout of the store, as well as to better understand the principles of successful retail," explains John Bost, a member of the LWS Board of Directors and A/L Project coach. "Today, a new store sits at one of the most traveled intersections of our community, a testimony in part to what these teams are adding to the economy and quality of life in our great community."

Brad Zabel, Habitat's Director of Resource Development, LWS 2006, participated in the program the first year after LWS was re-tooled to include the A/L Projects. Zabel (pictured above) says his experience with LWS led him to reevaluate his purpose in work, and he eventually left his successful advertising career to join Habitat.

"The life-changing part for me is that it gave me a source of courage to make change," says Zabel, also a former member of the LWS board of directors.

The impact of LWS participants' creative problem-solving is widespread. Other A/L Projects have benefitted the Downtown Health Plaza, Family Promise of Forsyth County, Hospice & Palliative CareCenter, and a foster care mentoring program at Forsyth County Department of Social Services.

LWS 2010 graduate Kimberly Nesbitt, social work program manager for the Forsyth County Department of Social Services, later coached an A/L Project team.

"I learned that it is so valuable to be a good follower, a good encourager of the talent of others, and there are many ways to lead and many opportunities for leadership," Nesbitt says. "I learned that while I already had a wide range of information and insight, there is still so much more to diversity and inclusion for us all to learn."

—KATHY NORCROSS WATTS

Community organizations can propose Action Learning Projects to LWS by completing a project description form at leadershipws.org.