Lauren Weibrecht ‘04 M.A., vice president of outpatient mental health services at Clifford Beers, a children’s mental health outpatient clinic in New Haven, recently created a program plan for the clinic to launch adult services.

After presenting her plan to the organization’s administrators, she’s gotten the green light to put it into action. Part of the first group of candidates in the University of New Haven’s new graduate certificate program in Nonprofit Leadership, Innovation, and Organizational Sustainability, Weibrecht created the plan she presented as part of her final project.

“The program’s focus on leadership styles and characteristics has been tremendously helpful,” said Weibrecht. “The program also provided the foundation for financial planning and sustainability, strategic planning, and crisis planning that have enabled me to think about our organization’s future.”

The graduate certificate program is created specifically for current nonprofit managers who aspire to move into an executive-level role. Housed in the University of New Haven’s College of Business, the certificate program enables candidates to develop competencies in project management, marketing, and financial planning.
The AACSB-accredited graduate certificate addresses a growing need for nonprofit leaders, since approximately two thirds of the top administrators in Connecticut nonprofit organizations are expected to retire in the next five years, and less than half of those organizations have a plan for succession, says Ronald Kuntze, Ph.D., professor of marketing and director of the Nonprofit Institute at the University.

“Candidates in our graduate certificate program develop a broader understanding of leadership and strategic planning,” says Dr. Kuntze. “They broaden their horizons for leadership positions. Several of our candidates have already been promoted or moved to higher positions in their nonprofits.”

Over 18 months, students take four collaborative courses, each with fewer than 18 students. For their final project, they develop key plans for organizational change or improvement and present their findings.

“Each candidate in the program brings a different set of experiences into the classroom,” said Mike Burns, a partner at BWB Solutions and one of the program instructors. “It is most interesting to see how their experiences overlap in a meaningful way and how they draw the students forward toward an understanding of how they can better succeed in their individual nonprofits and, ultimately, better serve the community.”

Alexine Casanova, director of case management at Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven, focused her project on developing the organization’s 2019 budget, using a new approach that specified costs by program. She believes it will enable the organization to budget more precisely and to make more informed decisions regarding funding allocation and new program development.

“The most meaningful takeaway for me was that it’s important to define your leadership style and to constantly work on improving in a structured, proactive way,” said Casanova. “The program has changed the way I look at nonprofits, giving me a foundation and concrete skills that I can use to better manage a team and to develop programs and budgets. It has given me more confidence in myself.”

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– Lauren Weibrecht ’04 M.A.