



Lift every voice and sing

*Till earth and heaven ring,*

*Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;*

# Diversity, Equity & **INCLUSION**



**By Dr. Nancy Koury King**  
President, Senior Options

***This is the final article in our series on Diversity & Inclusion.***

*In this article, I speak leaders in our field, who were willing to share some personal, and compelling experiences with me.*

## **Voices of Diversity**

**This is the final article in our Senior Options Series on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It is entitled, Voices of Diversity. Inside, you will hear from leaders in our field of aging services whose voices perhaps are not well known. Each person will share their message about what it is like to be a leader from a minority group in our field.**

As we are all learning about diversity and inclusion, there can be some hesitation to ask people from a disenfranchised group to share their experiences. And let's face it, as a society, we haven't really listened.

I wanted to hear directly from leaders in our field, and they have graciously stepped up and shared some profoundly personal, uncomfortable, and compelling experiences with me. I am grateful.

There is a hymn I love singing in church called "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson. He wrote this song to be sung by 500 children at the 1900 celebration of President Lincoln's birthday. I didn't know until recently that this song is commonly known as the "Black National Anthem."

And so, in this last article in our series, I want to lift up these voices with the hope that it will move us all further toward becoming more diverse, understanding, and inclusive organizations.





## Opening Doors for People of Color

**David Myers, CPA**  
Chief Financial and Compliance Officer  
Westminster-Canterbury  
on Chesapeake Bay

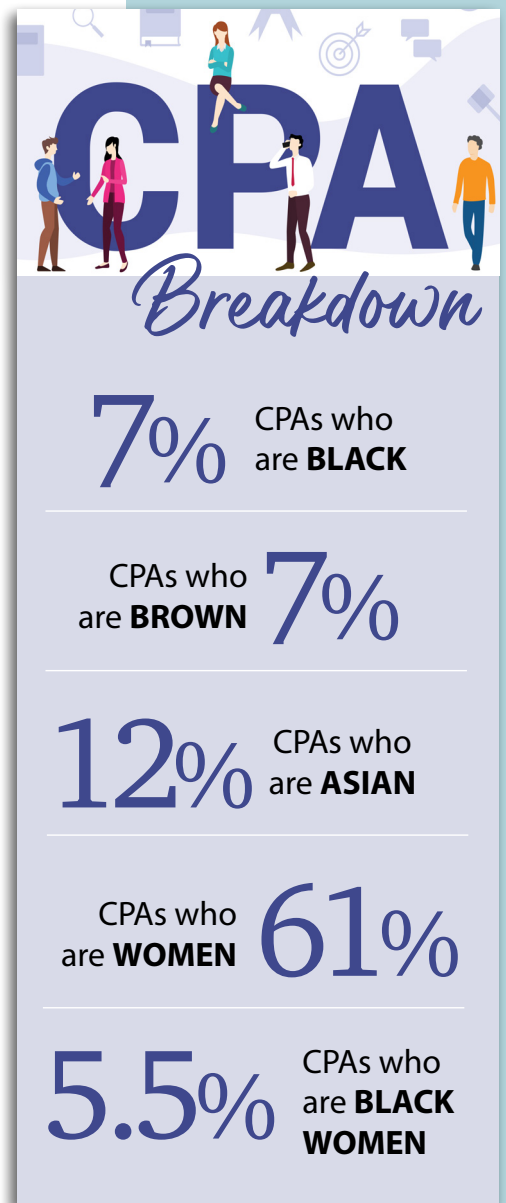
I began my conversation with **David Myers**, Chief Financial and Compliance Officer, Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay (WC Bay), by talking about the recent string of news stories graphically depicting police violence toward Blacks. David put it in context, “This is nothing new; people of color have been facing this for years. African Americans have been on the outside looking in, trying to get a piece of the American dream. It’s been an ongoing challenge.” However, David shares that it has been refreshing to see that people of all backgrounds are starting to recognize the challenges people of color have been facing for years, stepping up and trying to be part of the solution. He further observes that this current crisis brings people together, forcing each other to find common ground.

The lack of people of color in our field at the leadership level is no secret. David knows this firsthand. “In our industry, there is a scarcity of African Americans in top leadership positions. When I got to conferences, there might be several hundred attendees, and I was lucky to see a handful of minorities. And that’s a high number. You do sometimes feel like an outsider.”

He poignantly describes the added pressure he feels being an African American leader in an organization. “We do feel that pressure, especially when we are among the first in a leadership position. It feels like you are always on stage, having to prove yourself constantly. You have to be very careful of how you come across because you sometimes feel like people will not give you the same benefit of the doubt as others. Sometimes you feel like you are being judged – maybe differently than your white counterparts.”

David carries the mantle of job performance beyond his career. He is committed to opening up opportunities for other African Americans. “My performance has to be at a level that it doesn’t embarrass my people or doesn’t stop the person behind me from being afforded the same opportunities. I don’t want to be the reason someone is less willing to hire the next person of color.”

David recognizes that he has been given an opportunity and believes that opportunity is a key to advancing diversity and inclusion.





**“If sharing my story can open up doors for other people of color, that’s what I want. It’s about me being able to create opportunities for others and open doors for a person of color behind me.**

It’s not all about being the Chief Financial Officer for Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay. If I can open doors for others, I feel like I am doing what God has asked me to do.”

– David Myers

*David Myers is the Chief Financial Officer for Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay, where he has worked for 20 years. Before that, he served as the organization’s controller. David has a bachelor’s degree in business administration-accounting from Penn State University. He is a certified public accountant. You can contact David at [david\\_myers@wcbay.com](mailto:david_myers@wcbay.com).*

For him, it’s all about being open-minded and giving people options. “Do away with the assumptions and stereotypes. Judge on merit and character; that’s the first thing; give people opportunities to prove themselves. You have to be intentional. You have to be open-minded. You have to be willing to take a chance, willing to hire people, be patient, and train them.”

David is thankful to be at WC Bay, where he has worked for 20 years. “As an organization, I believe we are more progressive than most. Our team is more diverse than most. I have been given opportunities to grow and develop at WC Bay, for which I am very thankful,” David states. Notably, women, people of color, ethnic minorities, and gays have been represented on WC Bay’s executive and leadership teams.

While there is diversity among the management and leadership teams, the resident population is not diverse. David would like to see our field make more progress attracting people of color to live in our community. “We are becoming a more diverse society – this is an untapped market,” David suggests that organizations create a goal around recruiting more diverse residents, including steps to reach and educate the target market. I think it boils down to economics and education. You have to be intentional. We need to market that to a more diverse client. People don’t understand that people of color can afford this lifestyle as well.

Diversity and inclusion are complex subjects to broach, especially at work. David explains, “We are conditioned that work is work, and you keep those other things outside of work. But that’s hard to do when you know people are hurting. Sometimes, you have to have the release valve, which encourages us to share experiences and pain. Through this exchange, you find out that we probably have a lot more in common than you think.”

Despite the challenges, David encourages LeadingAge members to continue having the conversation, stating that it all starts with the heart’s mindset. “If you are not pushing for change, then you are buying into the stereotype and accepting things as they are. But by taking on how things are and being comfortable, you might be accepting racism. Instead of lip service, he urges us to be actively involved in being part of the solution.

In a moment of reflection, David shares both despair and hope. “Interesting times we are in right now. It’s unfortunate that it takes a chain of events to start this movement toward more equality, understanding, acceptance, and diversity. I don’t think it should take the loss of lives to start a movement. But now that it’s here, I hope it will continue to progress and see some tangible gains and changes out of this movement. You know that is my hope.”



## Addressing Health Disparities in Vulnerable Populations

**Shnea Weatherspoon**  
Administrator  
McGregor Hospice

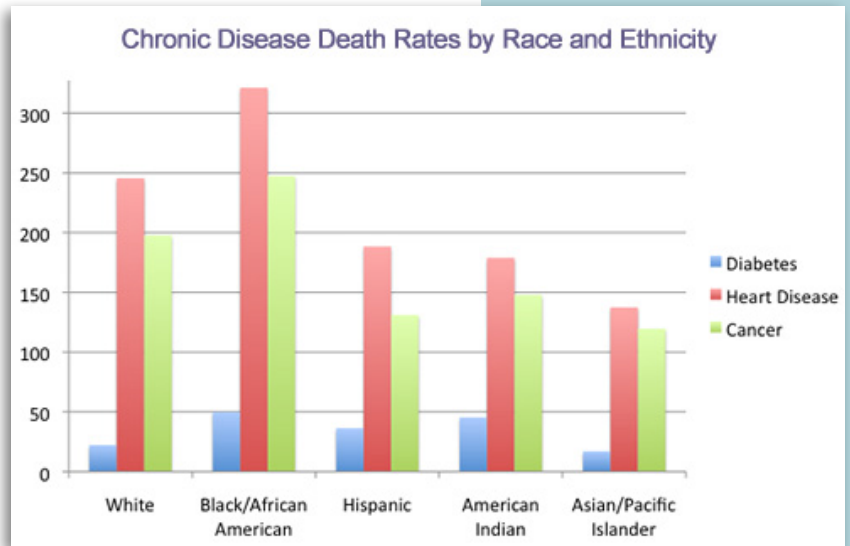
Shnea is the administrator of McGregor Hospice, part of the McGregor Foundation. The organization serves a diverse population in East Cleveland, Ohio.

Although utilization is improving, older African Americans are less likely to use hospice and are therefore more likely to suffer untreated pain at the end of life. According to the National Association of Hospice and Palliative Care, while Blacks represent 12% of the population, they make up 8% of hospice patients. And while 50% of white Medicare beneficiaries die with hospice, only 40% of black beneficiaries do.

**“The most commonly cited barriers to hospice use for African Americans include preferences for life-sustaining therapies, lack of knowledge about hospice, general mistrust of the health care system, and spiritual beliefs. The small number of African Americans working in hospices may also present a barrier.”**

**- (Duke Health, 2018)**

Shnea recognizes this reluctance in families and potential patients. As the President/CEO of the Black Nurses Society Cleveland (BNSC), an organization she helped form. BNSC began in 2020 to create a platform for African American nurses to educate the communities on health disparities while mentoring and inspiring others. This group helped her realize the importance of educating the communities about health care and mentoring other nurses.





Read More

“The mission of the BNSC is to empower our fellow nurses and educate our vulnerable communities on health care while inspiring and uplifting one another. We want to educate our community on health disparities that affect them.” Shnea explains that people sometimes hear about diseases from their doctors, but it might be very complicated and not understood. “This is where the BNSC comes in. We can take diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease issues and break these conditions down into understandable pieces to the community. This way, people receive education on health care in an understandable way.”

BNSC accomplishes its mission through partnerships with other organizations. This past year they have partnered with different organizations such as the AKA Delta, My Sister’s Keeper, NorthEast Ohio Health Coalition, and Girl Trek. They perform community services such as health fairs, blood pressure checks, COVID-19 screenings for volunteers, and breast self-examination lessons. They also focus on career days in local high school and college settings, guiding those interested in nursing, giving them a platform to explore and ask questions.

**Why is diversity important?**

“Diversity is important because you have to be able to understand all cultures. We can’t let our bias determine how we are going to care for or treat an individual. Leaders in our organizations must commit to diversity and inclusion and display this in their leadership.”

**What can aging services leaders do to make their organizations more accessible and responsive to people of color?**

“To make organizations more accessible and responsive to people of color, aging services leaders should ensure that their employees are educated in diversity and understand people of color’s cultures and beliefs. For example, when discussing hospice services, you want to explain that this does not mean the end for their loved one. Hospice will give their loved one quality of life at this time, and that it is an added support not only for their loved one but also for them.”

Top Left – Pittman, Tim Hospice Use Lower among African Americans 2018 <https://physicians.dukehealth.org/articles/hospice-use-lower-among-african-americans>

*Shnea Weatherspoon currently serves as the Administrator for McGregor Hospice, located in East Cleveland, Ohio. McGregor Hospice emphasizes quality and caring while promoting comfort and support for both the individual and their family. Before that, she served as the hospice clinical director and in various positions in long-term care. Mrs. Weatherspoon has a Master’s degree in Nursing Leadership from Grand Canyon University and a Bachelor’s degree in Nursing Science from Ursuline College.*

*Shnea can be reached at shnea.walker@mcgregoramasa.org.*



## The Embedded Challenges of Recruiting Leaders of Color

**Marvell Adams**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Kendal Corp.

**Marvell Adams, Jr.** has worked in the Kendal system since 2011. Currently, he serves the residents, staff, and board members as Chief Operating Officer, only the second individual in Kendal’s history to serve in the role. Prior to that, Marvell was the CEO of Collington-a Kendal Affiliate in Maryland.

I had the opportunity to talk with Marvell. I started by asking him how he came to the aging services field. Marvell replied, “I planned this. I reported on Alzheimer’s disease in ninth grade. I was awestruck by it and amazed at this disease that could steal one’s memories.” Marvell started pre-med in college, wanting to be a geriatrician, and at the age of 19, he realized that being a physician wasn’t his path. Fortunately, a professor encouraged him to look at health care administration. After college, he got his administrator’s license and took a job as a nursing home administrator, a role that later expanded.

### Conversations on Diversity and Inclusion

Marvell shared a story of being at the LeadingAge conference 2019 in San Diego, notable for being the first-time colleagues approached him about diversity in our field. As gold sponsors were being announced in the general session, Marvell was working in another room on a presentation he was doing later in the conference on the lack of diversity among emerging leaders. The gold sponsors came up on stage, and all were white males. Marvell re-appointed to the LeadingAge board, and pictures of all the board members were on the screen at this time. “It was stark, of course, it was. All middle-aged white men walked up on the stage as our gold sponsors, the leaders. That is juxtaposed with a picture of me.”

Marvell describes what happened next as the first time people in our field wanted to talk about diversity with him. “People were coming out of the session, and I was coming out of my meeting. **Robyn Stone**, LeadingAge Senior Vice President for Research, and Co-Director LeadingAge LTSS Center at UMASS, stopped me, ‘We gotta do something.’ I didn’t know what she was talking about. She described it to me.”

## Explicit bias

Expressed directly

Aware of bias /  
operates consciously

Example - Sign in the  
window of an apartment  
building - “we don’t  
rent to \_\_\_\_\_”

## Implicit bias

Expressed indirectly

Unaware of bias /  
operates unconsciously

Example - a property  
manager doing more  
criminal background  
checks on African  
Americans than whites.

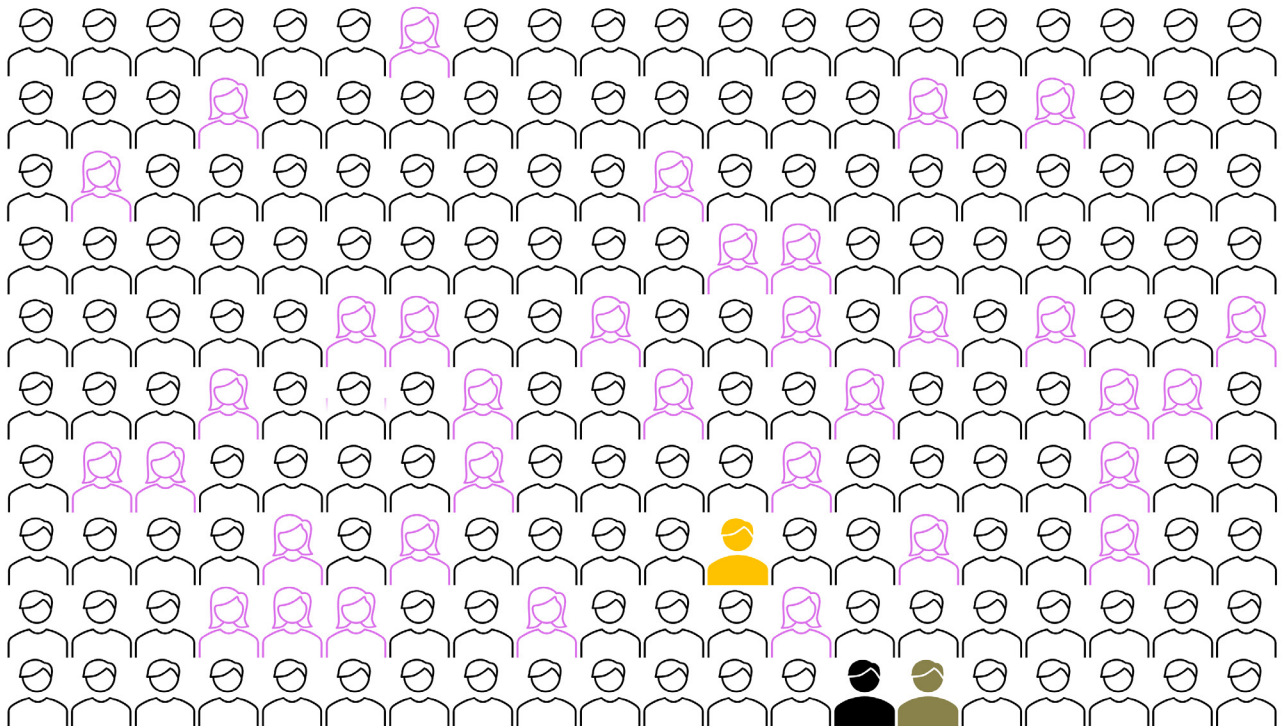
“The next thing I know, I am standing in the main lobby with a group of people around me, and the conversation is about the lack of diversity in leadership in our field. Particularly when you put it alongside the tremendous amount of diversity in our hourly and direct-care workers in some parts of the country, that contradiction is something we have to tackle.”

“I had never spoken publicly about the lack of diversity and inclusion in our space. It’s rare for me to run into another black person at LeadingAge events. It’s almost comical. It is difficult actually to find someone who is Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). I started thinking about what that meant for our industry, and with the help of my assistant, **Pam Moriarty**, I wanted to see what the makeup of the LeadingAge Ziegler 200 CEOs looks like. And I created a collage, a graphic of all the CEOs. One individual who was black.” *A representation of this collage is pictured below.*

For most folks, it has been very jarring. **“This is the epitome of what systemic racism looks like. It’s not as if people in our industry have conspired to keep people of color out of leadership. The system itself is geared toward staying the same.”**

“By and large, the executive recruitment infrastructure in our field is monochromatic. The entire governance structure in our field is monochromatic. And the executive leadership is monochromatic.”

## Top 200 NFP Senior Living CEOs



# Summer Enrichment PROGRAM



LeadingAge®

## Is there an opportunity now to increase diversity with the number of retiring CEOs?

Marvell notes that it will still be a challenge. “If their CEO is leaving, the board may have never been a part of a CEO search. In that dynamic, I think it would be hard for an all-volunteer board of directors to not only have their search be cast wide enough to have a diverse slate, but have they educated themselves to be of an inclusive mind? Do they understand implicit bias?”

“The entire infrastructure has made it far more difficult for a person of color to be in a leadership position. Our industry has been complacent – it was just accepted it and very easy to dismiss.”

## What’s on the Horizon?

Marvell and **Christy Kramer**, Vice President, Student Engagement and Workforce Partnerships at LeadingAge, have been working on a summer enrichment program for BIPOC juniors, seniors, and grad students. The internships can be in any discipline, not just administration. Marvell shares that Christy was adamant that the CEOs of the participating organizations be directly involved.

The goal is to give the student as much access to the CEO as possible. Organizations will provide students with a stipend or housing as well as guaranteeing regular meetings with the CEO. At the time of this interview, 30 organizations have signed up.

Recruiting students of color to organizations with minimal color may pose challenges, so the organizations must have the training to understand what they may have to do differently. “That will be a big differentiator – helping the organizations become more sensitive and inclusive. Everyone is in a learning mode.”

## What advice would you give?

“You need to do something. What I mean is, we are not going to solve systemic racism tomorrow. A minor thing you can do is where the work is right now. We can have high-level goals, but our work is in daily interactions with people. Your job is within yourself. Recognize your implicit bias. None of us are trained to start a conversation. If it were that simple, we would have done it.” stated Marvell.

*Marvell Adams is the Chief Operating Officer for the Kendal Corporation. Prior to that he served as CEO of Collington – a Kendal affiliate. He is also the Director of Emerging Talent for the Kendal Corporation and as such has spoken frequently at many universities. Marvell is a member of the LeadingAge Board of Directors.*

*Marvell’s career began in Rochester, NY, where he became a licensed nursing home administrator. He stayed in Rochester seven years becoming the Administrator/ COO of a senior living community.*

*Marvell received his undergraduate degree in political science from the College of Charleston in South Carolina and his Masters in Healthcare Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

*Marvell can be reached at [madams@kcorp.kendal.org](mailto:madams@kcorp.kendal.org).*





## A Natural Love for this Generation

**Ashley Jackson**  
Chief Operating Officer and  
Health Care Administrator  
Lucy Corr

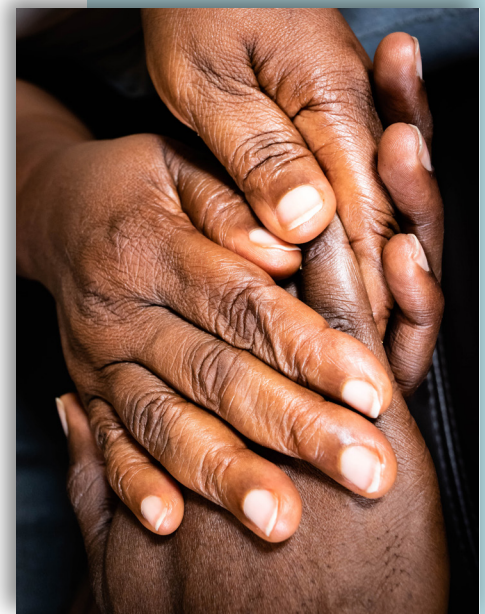
**Ashley Jackson** is currently the Chief Operating Officer, and Health Care Administrator of Lucy Corr, a non-profit continuing care community in Chesterfield, Virginia. Ashley began her career in senior living during high school as a server in dining services at Westminster Canterbury, a life plan community in Lynchburg, VA. She then had the opportunity to try out various positions within the community, including supervisory positions, scheduling, and a summer internship as an administrative assistant.

Raised by her grandparents, Ashley shared that she has a “natural love for their generation.” She has firsthand experience as a caregiver. This, along with her experience at Westminster-Canterbury Lynchburg, led her to enter the James Madison University Health Services Administration program. “As I was able to gain exposure to various areas within healthcare, I quickly learned that my passion was within the administration and organizational leadership.”

I asked Ashley why she thought there were so few minorities in leadership positions in our field. “First, I feel that many in the African American community, especially women, have a gift of caregiving. We as women have been caregivers in so many facets throughout the generations. I believe there is a natural draw to the caregiving side such as nursing and nursing management over administration and leadership.”

Secondly, Ashley shares that education opportunities within the health services administration umbrella are limited. “There were previously Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) within Virginia that offered the program. But as those programs have closed, that direct pipeline of minority students into long-term care administration is no longer viable.” Outside of HBCUs, Ashley acknowledges a few four-year programs remain that specialize in health services administration. “But Health Administration programs generally have a disproportionate amount of emphasis on opportunities within acute care administration such as hospitals.”

“Lastly, I feel that many times we imitate what we see. People followed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s footprints because he opened the door to make it possible. We see very little diversity among leadership within long-term care, especially in C-Suite positions. There are few people to follow. In my opinion, the previous and current lack of diversity in these positions contributes to and perpetuates the future lack of diversity.”



## Why are diversity and representation important?

“I believe it is imperative to have organizational leadership align with the organization’s stakeholders. In long-term care, caregivers are overwhelmingly minority, and the residents and communities many of us serve are as well. In my experience, we prioritize diversity and representation, the quality of care and services we provide improve. We strengthen our ability to communicate and connect and have a natural empathy for the residents, communities, and team members we serve.”

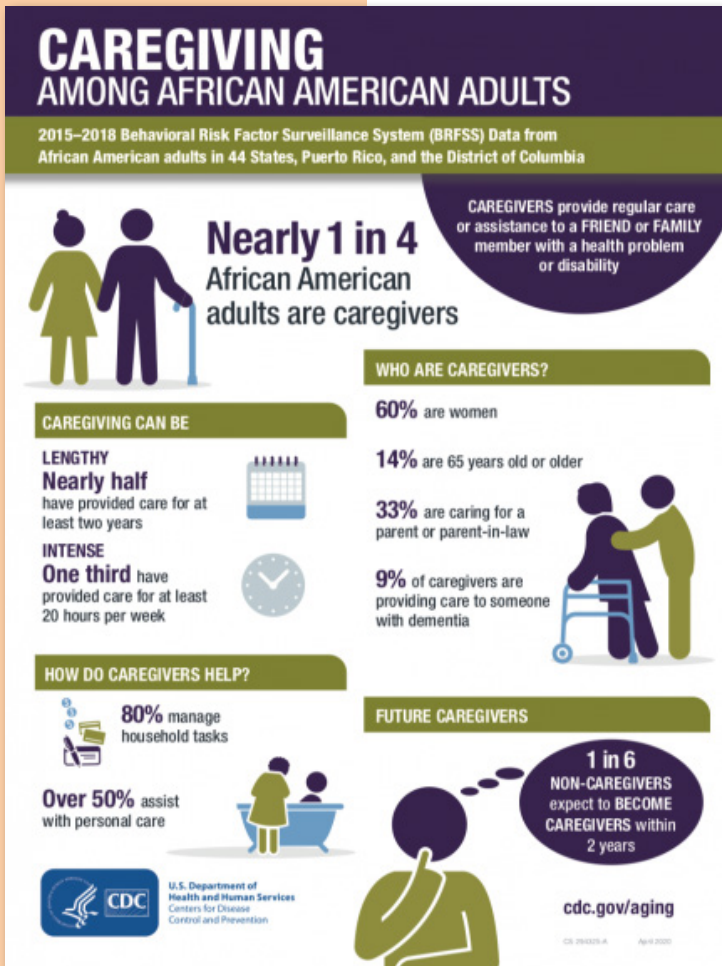
Interestingly, Ashley states that working in environments where the residents and the managers are mostly white has made her a well-rounded leader and a more assertive communicator. However, there have been challenges. “The biggest obstacle I have experienced has been a combination of being African American and being young. My age, coupled with my race, takes many people by surprise. They seem to be waiting for me to prove myself. I have encountered stakeholders who did not want to work with me because of my race, and I have also encountered stakeholders who encouraged and supported me more because of it.”

“Overall, I would say it is a challenge being a young, educated, minority, and a leader in this field. I have had to ensure my work spoke for my abilities and ensure that when I speak, I command respect because of my knowledge and ability to lead.”

**We are “supposed” to keep our work and personal lives separate. However, with the overt displays of racism, people have shared their devastation, fear, and sadness at work and have allowed their employees to do the same.**

“One of the top indicators of an employee’s satisfaction at work is having a friend at work. That has been crucial for me during the current climate. I have developed relationships in which discussing racial tensions and opinions are welcomed, not frowned upon.”

Ashley describes how her organization has stepped up to help its employees cope with the effects of the country’s current racial and political climates and also through this pandemic. “Our foundation has provided our employees with a caregiver counselor, a licensed psychologist, who specializes in caring for the caregivers in long-term care facilities across Virginia. Lucy Corr provides this service because we know for our leaders and our frontline caregivers, feeling safe to discuss and speak up about what is impacting them is important.”



*Ashley Jackson is the Chief Operating Officer and Health Care Administrator of Lucy Corr, a continuing care community in Chesterfield, VA. Before that, Ashley served as executive director of Bay Lake Community, Heritage Hall, and the administrator for Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay’s Hoy Center. Ashley has a master’s in business administration, with a concentration in health care management from St. Leo University. She has her bachelor’s degree from James Madison University in health services administration. Ashley is a licensed nursing home administrator. In 2016 Ashley was recognized as the Virginia Health Care Association Nursing Home Administrator of the Year. Additionally, she was named to the American Health Care Association Future Leaders Class of 2017- 2018.*

*Ashley is honored to contribute to this publication. She can be reached at [ajackson@lucycorr.org](mailto:ajackson@lucycorr.org)*



## Diversity Just Makes Dollars and Sense

**Luis Estrada**  
Controller  
Westminster-Canterbury  
on Chesapeake Bay

**Luis Estrada** is relatively new to Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay (WC BAY). He was initially hired as a financial systems analyst and was recently promoted to controller. When he joined the organization, Luis noticed that it had a very diverse management and leadership group. “It is unique. It’s unusual. I remember coming into our finance department and looking around – white people were in the minority. Data tells us that this is not typical in the finance industry. At WC Bay, it’s not deliberate in any way. We find the right candidates that fit.”

### Luis represents the intersection of two historically marginalized groups. “I am a twofer. I am Hispanic and gay.”

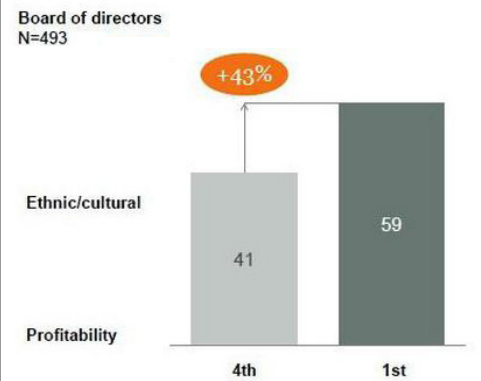
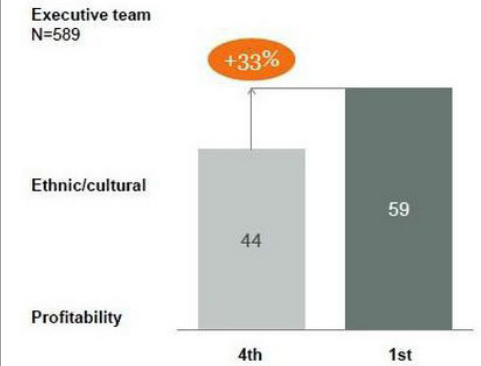
Luis recognizes that between being brown and gay, he has a unique set of challenges. While his family is very supportive and progressive, he acknowledges that it typically doesn’t go well for a person who is both brown and gay, as they may have access to fewer resources, experience more bias, or have unaccepting families.

Luis previously worked for an organization where he did not see the same commitment to diversity as he found at Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay. “While at my former employer, I tried hard to move into a leadership role and was frustrated that there was not a single supervisor of color. I felt this need to push myself harder and harder to get there and be a trailblazer for others. There wasn’t anyone there that looked like me, and I wanted to be that for someone else. That has been a big driver for me throughout my career – both the Hispanic and gay side of me. I don’t know that I have personally encountered a Hispanic leader or a gay leader.”

Luis recalls an incident when an opportunity opened up that both he and his peers applied. As a high performer on the team, Luis expected that he would get an interview. But he didn’t; and later he learned some of the lower performers he worked with did. Even his teammates were surprised. He speculates that perhaps the manager went with someone he felt more familiar with. “One of the reasons I ended up leaving was because I was frustrated with the lack of diversity there.”

## How ethnic diversity correlates with profitability

Likelihood of financial performance<sup>1</sup> above national industry median by diversity quartile (Percent)



<sup>1</sup> Average economic profit margin 2011-15 and average EBIT margin 2011-15

Note: Results are statistically significant at p-value <0.5  
Source: Company websites; McKinsey Diversity Matters database



## How should a leader respond after a tragedy like the death of Duante Wright?

Luis advises leaders to react quickly, so people know there is support. Overall, he recommends that leaders work to create and sustain an environment where it is safe to have conversations like these, warning, “Unless you create a safe environment, emotional security, people won’t speak up.”

Luis used the experience to learn why finance roles were not going to people of color, noting that the finance industry, in particular, is not very “colorful” or gay-friendly. A very high percentage of CPA holders are white men. Only 7% of CPAs are Hispanic, and 7% are Black.

### How do you see the role of leaders in building representation?

Luis states that the first step in building representation is to be willing to do so. Once people see that “someone like me” can be in leadership, it catches fire. “I can’t help but think of the movie *Coco*, which is about Hispanic families and culture. I remember getting so emotional because it had a family story like mine and I wasn’t used to seeing that in the mainstream. I felt represented. So I can’t help but think that there are people of Hispanic origins in different businesses that maybe don’t even consider that management is a path for them because there is no one there that looks like them. I try to be that person. I know I’m never going to be that ideal role model, but I’d love for someone to say, ‘hey, he kind of looks like me, and he did it, and I wonder how he did it.’ I want to create the idea of opportunity for others.”

Luis recognizes that he can be better at being more visible to the workforce and believes that being visible lets us challenge things. He says that his parents would sometimes give him advice along the lines of ‘sit down and shut up’ because their path to success was doing that – assimilating, marking some generational differences.

They would joke about him being a ‘Brown Panther,’ being too much of an advocate, and worry that he would cause trouble for himself. Fortunately, these conversations were productive for both Luis and his parents. Luis believes that it is mission-critical for employees to see someone like them who perseveres, takes on challenges, and walks through mentorship. In his experience, having a mentor is essential, but he acknowledges that people who don’t have leaders, mentors, and opportunities may not make it into leadership positions.

### What is your advice to others seeking to become more culturally aware and inclusive?

First, Luis suggests that we become friends with someone authentically who doesn’t look like us and get to know them as human beings without any intention or motive. Second, Luis advises leaders to be willing to receive feedback. Unconscious bias exists, and everyone is guilty of it. “If I went to a networking event, I am going to gravitate to the people who look like me or those who are brown or gay. That’s who I feel comfortable with. It’s natural. It’s human nature, and the best thing to do to combat it is to be aware of it and to recognize that bias.”

“At the end of the day, diversity and inclusion make dollars and sense. It helps with productivity and what we are offering to the community. Businesses with a diverse leadership team who understand the needs of different groups of people will ultimately win those customers over.”



*Luis Estrada is the Controller for Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay. Before that, he worked at a central health system and an LGBTQ Center. He graduated from the Old Dominion University, where he earned his Bachelors of Science in Business Administration, double majoring in finance and accounting. Luis lives in Norfolk with his partner, Matthew, and their dog, Pickles. You can reach Luis at [luis.estrada@wcbay.com](mailto:luis.estrada@wcbay.com).*

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