

DECIDING TO LEAD

HOW THE INSTITUTE HELPED LAUREN EATON ADVANCE HER CAREER AND LIVE OUT HER VALUES

For Lauren Eaton, participating in the Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute's Professional Leadership Program for Women came at the perfect moment in her service-minded career.

"When I started the Institute's Professional Leadership Program for Women in February 2022, I was at a crossroads," recalls Eaton, who at the time served as a program director for [Itineris](#), a Baltimore-based non-profit that empowers adults on the autism spectrum to live meaningful lives, throughout their lifespan. "The Institute's training came at such a perfect time because I was thinking through some big personal and professional decisions."

Among those big decisions was whether Eaton should go for a promotion. At the time, she was juggling being mom to her young twin girls, a partner to her wife Caitlin, and managing a busy program that she had successfully developed to include outreach services and a growing team.

"As a working parent who values family time, I knew that this new position was going to be more hours and more responsibility," she recalls. "I was really considering what to do; all the options were on the table. Did I want to scale back and do part-time consulting until my kids are older and more self-sufficient? Did I want to stay in my current role, or should I take this new opportunity?"

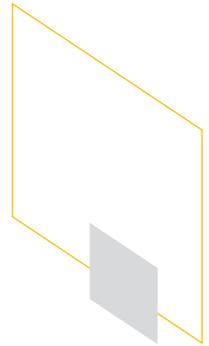
Ultimately, Eaton decided to go for the promotion. She credits the professional coach with whom she was paired as part of the program for giving her the confidence to take that leap.

"They really helped me make those decisions. She never said, 'You should do it,' but she helped me assess my skills to understand what drives me and what I love to bring me to the realization that this new position would be a good match," says Eaton.

Today, Eaton is thriving as the senior director of operations at Itineris, where she oversees six different programs delivering services to about 130 clients, including outreach services.

"I got involved in the field of behavioral health as a clinician. I worked directly with the clients and was focused on behavioral and mental health care," she explains. "But over time, it became clear to me that I really excelled at applying those same principles and skills at the organizational level and it gave me a lot of fulfillment."

She credits the Institute with giving her tools to not only make this career move but develop new skills as a leader. Further, she reports that the program improved her public speaking skills—even giving her more confidence for a recent interview with a local television program. She also appreciates the ways that the program focused on highlighting inequities in the workplace, not only for women but anyone who is not cisgendered, white, and male.



“Erin Moran is the perfect combination of being totally present and 100% prepared, organized, and intentional. She makes you feel like you’re a part of something really special. She challenges you to be in the moment and does things differently than any other facilitator I’ve experienced. But you feel so comfortable letting go because you just trust that she’s steering the ship and you’re going somewhere important,” says Eaton.

Another pivotal moment occurred for Eaton on the first day of the program. Eaton will be the first to admit that she faced some challenges as a young professional first starting her career. When Erin Moran opened the first session of the Professional Leadership Program for Women by inviting each participant to share their professional journey, Eaton was quick to volunteer.

“That was the first time I shared in a professional setting some of the hiccups that had an impact on my professional path,” she shares.

Eaton candidly told her fellow participants how this impacted her experience at one of the world’s premier behavioral health organizations. But what Eaton didn’t know was that later that same day, an HR director from that very organization, would be participating on a panel made up of alumnae of the Professional Leadership Program for women.

“As soon as she introduced herself and her role, my eyes lit up and I was locked in. And given how the whole day had been an emphasis on being vulnerable and courageous and putting yourself out there, I went right up to her and introduced myself and told her my story,” recalls Eaton.

In a full circle moment, the HR director told Eaton that she would advocate on her behalf, which she did.

“It was a lifelong goal of mine to resolve this part of my past,” she shares. “And the only reason why that happened is because of my participation in this program.”

