



# LEADING WITH HUMANITY

Employers Prioritize – and  
Elevate – Well-Being

Indianapolis Public Library creates a supportive environment for employees across its 26 locations.

By Symone C. Skrzycki

*“None of us are unscathed by any kind of trauma throughout our lives.” – Jama Donovan, workforce wellness director, Mental Health America of Indiana*

*“The biggest thing for us is we’re a behavioral health organization, so it’s really important that we shine a light on all of the support we can provide – whether that’s with psychiatry or a therapist or a skills builder, which can help with activities of daily living.” – Lisa Suttle, vice president, behavioral health, Meridian Health Services*

*“Presenteeism with mental illness is actually costlier to employer groups than absenteeism because people (aren’t focused) and are making mistakes. There’s been a lot of studies in the manufacturing industry where that’s key. And yet, unfortunately, manufacturing is where we see the lowest engagement numbers when it comes to engaging in employee assistance programs and a lot more high-cost medical claims.” – Sarah Michaels, chief clinical officer, Kinetiq Health*

As these insights illustrate, prioritizing mental health in the workplace is vital – not only from an ethical standpoint but also because of its impact on an organization’s bottom line. According to the World Health Organization, mental health challenges affect one in four employees and cost U.S. businesses over \$200 billion annually in lost productivity.

BizVoice® talked with several Hoosier employers – and mental health proponents – regarding their strategies for supporting employees and boosting their well-being. Interwoven into the culture at each is removing the stigma, raising awareness of available resources, promoting connectedness and emphasizing compassion.

### **Providing a ‘safe space’**

The Indiana Chamber’s Healthcare Transformation Summit in June examined a variety of issues influencing well-being in the workplace. One session – *Culture as Medicine: The Mental Health Dividend* – covered the five cultural dimensions that impact mental health: psychological safety, meaningful work, workload management, interpersonal connections and leadership behavior.

“Initiatives aimed at improving workplace mental health can yield an ROI of up to 800%



The School City of Mishawaka’s mental health fair is held annually as part of its One Campaign. In addition to the event, it provides staff and students with mental health resources throughout the year. “We started the One Campaign in 2021 right after COVID,” says benefits and wellness coordinator Jenny Sanders. “For all of the horrible things COVID has done to people in our country, I think the one positive that has come out of it is it’s made (individuals) a lot more open to talk about mental health.”



due to higher productivity, fewer sick days and lower staff turnover,” notes presenter Jeremy York, lead consultant and president of InvigorateHR. “That’s important – how we feel about ourselves, how we feel about our work environment and how we feel about the people we work with.”

Suttle reveals that many employees at Muncie-based Meridian Health Services consider the workplace “their safe haven.”

“When they come to work, it’s something they know,” she comments. “They know what to do and it keeps them stable. If that (work environment) gets disrupted in any way, that’s a big part of your life. We need to support each other and know that people of all levels (of office hierarchy) can have trouble at any time.”

Managers and supervisors participate in quarterly trauma-informed training.

“That’s huge,” Suttle stresses. “We give

a different example of trauma-informed training (such as cancer, suicide or the death of a loved one) and what that means not only for patients, but also for employees because so many things happen in people’s lives that we’re not always aware of.”

She asserts that there’s a thin line guiding autonomy versus assistance.

“In many cases, we set up things to where we give them some responsibility or accountability (such as establishing agreed-upon timelines for pursuing therapy), but we’re there to support them too. Many people are wanting that accountability. They don’t want somebody to just do it for them. (Rather, what they desire is), ‘Just help me with how I can get through that.’”

Apex Benefits, Indiana’s largest employee benefits consulting firm and brokerage focused solely on group insurance programs,

instituted a Safe People program a few years ago. Apex works closely with Kinetiq Health, a multidisciplinary team of in-house clinical professionals, including registered nurses, clinical pharmacists, health data analysts, registered dietitians, a licensed clinical social worker and certified wellness coaches to deliver services to clients and employees.

“We have a licensed clinical social worker who is supporting our clients in addition to Sarah (Michaels) and the rest of the team members who are creating an atmosphere of, ‘What does the safe person look like in addition to HR and managers? How do we train those individuals to understand the resources that are available and to be able to share personal things they might have experienced along the way?’” observes Stephanie DiBlasio, vice president of human resources and administration at Apex.

### Critical conversations

Creating open dialogue is paramount at the School City of Mishawaka. A key example is the One Campaign, launched in 2021.

“The whole point was that one person can make a difference with one smile. One hug. One kind word,” notes benefits and wellness coordinator Jenny Sanders. The endeavor includes an annual mental health fair – dubbed One Day in the Sun – held at a local park.

“Anything can tie into mental health,” she contends. “So, when a robotics club reached out and said, ‘Hey, can we have a booth out here?’ I’m like, ‘Absolutely!’ Joining a robotics club means that you’re interacting with other people and that’s so good for your mental health. And hopefully while you’re having fun at the event, you’re learning some different things that are going on in our community and different resources you can use.”

Susan Van Hoosen, wellness program manager at LHD Benefit Advisors, the largest independent benefits advisory firm in Indiana, stresses the significance of creating trust between managers and employees.

“We do a lot of mental health manager trainings for our clients on how to have courageous conversations and address an employee that may be living with a mental health condition or going through a tough time like the loss of their parents,” she remarks. “That’s been very effective. We do a pre- and post-assessment to assess their knowledge and understanding as a result of the training. We always say, ‘Let’s use data as much as possible to measure outcomes and investments and help HR teams build a business case for getting continued investment in mental health – whether we’re looking at EAP utilization or claims data (for instance).’”

Michaels seconds that: “We’ve done a lot in terms of mental



Among the ways Purdue University cultivates a compassionate culture is by encouraging leaders to identify and acknowledge concerns, check in with staff regularly and remind employees about the impact they have on the organization.

health training for managers: what to look for when people are in crisis and what are the signs and symptoms of that? If somebody comes to you, what words do you need to say? Because language is very important in getting people the proper help and resources that are available. If a manager doesn’t know about a resource, maybe their employee doesn’t either.”

Van Hoosen adds, “Sometimes, we’re not going to see the ROI right away. Sometimes, it’s simply a matter of VOI – value on your investment. So, we help them (clients) by looking at attendance data or absenteeism, presenteeism and medical claims. We really use the day-to-day estimate.”

Indianapolis Public Library has approximately 600 employees across 26 locations.

“We see patrons coming in with all kinds of backgrounds and we’re trying to help them. But how do we help them if we’re not helping our ourselves?” asserts chief talent and development officer Tisha Galarce. “A couple years ago, we integrated psychological safety training for executive managers. We thought it was a great training. So, we passed it on to managers and supervisors, and then we opened it up for any staff that would like to attend.”

Other training has ranged from Mental Health First Aid and financial awareness to emotional intelligence, yoga sessions and a “food for mood” cooking class.

Mental Health First Aid is an evidence-based training that teaches employees how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use concerns or crisis in a work environment and how to guide a person toward appropriate care if necessary. The full-day training is offered through various organizations, including the Wellness Council of Indiana.

“We (also) offer meditation classes every other week at different times so employees can attend,” Galarce notes. “Most of them are online. Anybody can sign up for those. For instance, their family members. Each quarter, it’s something different (covering financial, social, physical and mental matters). You can pick and choose what you take as long as you’re taking care of yourself. That’s been the biggest key that we’ve done in the wellness program – trying to find something new and different so people can engage.”

### Knowledge is power

Mental Health America is dedicated to the promotion of mental health, well-being and illness prevention. Its Bell Seal for Workplace Mental Health is the nation’s leading employer recognition and certification for mentally healthy workplaces.

Mental Health America of Indiana, an affiliate, helps promote and offer the National Bell Seal Certification. The application consists of 78 questions covering four categories: supportive workplace culture, benefits that support mental health, caring beyond compliance and holistic wellness at work. There are four recognition levels: bronze,



Financial wellness is front and center at Apex Benefits. Pictured: A representative from Your Money Line addresses team members.

silver, gold and platinum.

“It’s a self-assessment of your organization,” Donovan remarks. “The nice thing is I’ve gone out and worked with companies. You see the light bulbs going on. ‘Oh wow. We don’t have a pulse on our employees, which means we don’t have a pulse on the culture of our company.’ You see them start thinking and working as a team to start implementing those practices. It’s fun to see that companies are really buying into that mental health and wellness piece.”

Indiana University Health has a simple, but powerful message when it comes to mental health:

“We want to make sure we’re constantly reminding our team members that it’s important to care for yourself first,” stresses Susie Bell, manager of the Healthy Results incentive driven digital wellness program. It revolves around physical health and emotional well-being.

“There’s an app associated with our wellness portal,” she explains. “We have telephonic health coaching, and we do some things that are in person as well. So, we have lots of different modalities where we deliver our program. We’re (Healthy Results) just one arm of what IU Health offers in terms of the mental health space.”

Each year, IU Health provides an emotional well-being track for its health coaching program.

“You’re partnered with a licensed social worker,” Bell comments. “In our portal, we have lots of self-driven, self-paced activities that our participants can engage in that are around depression, anxiety, stress management. We focus a lot on energy management. We focus on thought management. If we’re engaging in a lot of toxic thoughts and not really able to move through an issue, we can



Visits from a furry friend, meditation classes and more contribute to psychological safety at the Indianapolis Public Library. An upcoming session will revolve around managing mental health at work.

help redirect, reframe and rebuild a coaching toolbox. And if we feel like the need is beyond our reach as a coach, we always refer them to our EAP or my MyStrength (a digital platform that provides teletherapy, emotional well-being coaching, psychiatry and more) or IU Health behavioral healthcare.”

Purdue University’s Healthy Boiler wellness program encompasses five pillars: behavioral health, physical, financial, work-life integration and social.

“Within behavioral health, we have a couple of different things that we offer throughout the campus from a benefits perspective,” reflects associate vice president of benefits and payroll Candace Shaffer. “One of them is our Beyond the Surface campaign. It focuses on how people will say, ‘How are you doing today?’ And you (simply) say, ‘I’m fine.’ The idea of

going beyond just that surface. A little bit of that was us trying to get out there that it’s normal to not feel okay sometimes, but what can you do about it? We actually have videos giving examples of if someone isn’t acting just fine, what’s that next question to ask to try to get beyond the surface?”

Purdue spreads the message via emails, articles, videos and social media posts.

The university also has an on-site employer health clinic, the Center for Healthy Living, on its main campus in West Lafayette. “Within that, we have behavioral health counselors,” Shaffer explains. “If someone goes through the EAP – which traditionally is six to 10 visits on one particular kind of crisis or situation – and needs longer term or more ongoing services, our employer health clinic is available for more of that long-term counseling. The clinic has wraparound services for members who need them. Employees can also use other community mental health providers as well.”

Reflecting on why prioritizing mental health in the workplace is crucial, DiBlasio observes, “As leaders, we prioritize our mental health. I’m proud of our achievements and continue to champion these efforts because enhancing the lives of our employees and our (clients’) organizations is crucial to me. It’s our personal mission to be healthier ourselves and healthy because we all believe in what that means to internally our employees, but also their families and our community. It creates a beautiful ripple effect if we can make an impact with that.”



Mental Health America of Indiana 2024 Bell Seal recipients. The 2025 honorees will be recognized at the Wellness Council of Indiana’s annual Wellness Summit on September 11.

**RESOURCES:** Susie Bell, Indiana University Health, at [www.iuhealth.org](http://www.iuhealth.org) | Stephanie DiBlasio, Apex Benefits, at [www.apexbg.com](http://www.apexbg.com) | Jama Donovan, Mental Health America of Indiana, at [www.mhai.net](http://www.mhai.net) | Tisha Galarce, Indianapolis Public Library, at [www.indypl.org](http://www.indypl.org) | Sarah Michaels, Kinetiq Health, at [www.kinetiqhealth.com](http://www.kinetiqhealth.com) | Jenny Sanders, School City of Mishawaka, at [www.mishawakaschools.com](http://www.mishawakaschools.com) | Candace Shaffer, Purdue University, at [www.purdue.edu](http://www.purdue.edu) | Lisa Suttle, Meridian Health Services, at [www.meridianhs.org](http://www.meridianhs.org) | Susan Van Hoosen, LHD Benefit Advisors, at [www.lhdbenefits.com](http://www.lhdbenefits.com) | Jeremy York, InvigorateHR, at [www.invigoratehr.com](http://www.invigoratehr.com)