



SHELLEY JACKSON

Breaking Barriers

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

For Shelley Jackson, giving back is a family legacy.

Jackson devotes her time and talents to passions such as mental health, maternal health, substance use disorder and welcoming/encouraging young staff. Her biggest inspiration for philanthropy is her father.

“He was very involved in serving his community,” she recalls. “My dad volunteered through St. Vincent de Paul, donated blood regularly and was part of a ministry serving a local prison. He taught me it’s important to take care of each other and be part of the solution.”

Jackson is partner at Krieg DeVault LLP in Carmel, where she chairs both the labor and employment practice and AI task force. She injects compassion into her pursuits at the law firm and in the community. One example revolves around collaborations with the Indiana Chamber’s Wellness Council of Indiana (WCI).

“Shelley leverages her expertise to assist employers in cultivating a more supportive workplace,” stresses Ashley O’Rourke, director of WCI’s workplace health and wellness strategy. “She’s played a pivotal role working with us to address substance use disorder and mental

health. Finding those solutions can reduce absenteeism, enhance job satisfaction, increase retention and lower turnover rates.”

Jackson believes that most employers want to create a workplace where employees can thrive – but don’t always know how.

“At WCI events, I share a legal perspective on various initiatives and issues that are being discussed within the employer community,” she remarks. “The intention is to encourage employers to feel empowered from a compliance standpoint and also consider a broader approach. How can we go beyond basic compliance and really support our workforce? There are inspiring stories that come from individuals who maybe get a second chance or are connected with an opportunity they wouldn’t otherwise have had.”

Making an impression

In 1996, Jackson entered the education field upon graduating from Ball State University with a bachelor’s of science degree in English. She spent seven years teaching high school.

“During my time as a teacher, I was part of a cohort of educators seeking to provide additional support to students who were new to our school and country. We were serving students who had recently immigrated to the United States, were learning our language, and wanted to go to college, but they needed additional language support

during their transition. We developed a ‘sheltered’ academic program for core subjects, including in my English classes, that allowed our students to earn college prep credits while also receiving temporary, targeted language support.”

While teaching, Jackson received a master’s of education degree from Indiana Wesleyan University. As much as she enjoyed her profession as a teacher, she was intrigued by the legal field and ultimately took a leave of absence to attend law school.

“My husband and I were raising our two young sons at the time,” Jackson shares. “It was a leap of faith for our family in some respects, but it was the right time to return to school, and I was eager to continue my education.”

Following graduation from Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law, she honed her skills over the next decade-plus at local Indianapolis-area law firms and working as assistant general counsel and chief privacy officer for a large corporation.

In 2020, she joined Krieg DeVault’s employment law and healthcare practice.

Spotlighting mental, maternal health

For the past several years, Jackson and her colleagues have brought their knowledge and passion to several key WCI initiatives. Krieg DeVault has long partnered with WCI to offer employer-focused content.

The group’s Employer Connection Series: Bridging Gaps in Workplace Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Resources is a community-driven convening of Hoosier organizations created in partnership with the Division of Mental Health and Addiction within the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.

Held regionally, the series covers navigating barriers in accessing care, best practices for creating supportive policies and procedures, and connecting with local resources and programs.

“We encourage employers to adopt an intentional approach to combating bias and stigma in the workplace surrounding mental health issues,” Jackson imparts. “When you think of individuals who are navigating mental health issues, it’s almost 100% guaranteed that you will either love someone, know someone or work with someone who has a need

for mental health support or accommodation in the workplace. Navigating employee mental health issues isn’t something that just happens to other people or in other workplaces.” Jackson also has collaborated with O’Rourke to develop content for WCI’s 2024 Employer Connection Series, which encompasses maternal health and breastfeeding to promote best practices and support expectant and new mothers.

On a related note, Jackson further dedicates her time to The Milk Bank, a non-profit human tissue bank which promotes community health by expanding the safe use of human milk for all babies – especially premature and ill infants. She’s a member of the board of directors and chairs its advancement committee.

“Our milk donors choose to donate their milk for a variety of reasons. They may have an unused stash of milk after their child weans, or they may be an overproducer, and sometimes our milk donors are grieving the loss of their own precious baby but decide that they’d like to help care for other babies,” she comments. “Whatever the reason, we are so grateful that their donations of carefully screened and pasteurized human milk goes to NICUs and supports highly fragile babies when they’re in the very earliest stages of their life.”

Building opportunities

Embracing a welcoming culture is another passion of Jackson’s that positively impacts the lives of others.

“I want to make sure that I am thinking broadly as a leader within the firm about creating an environment where our team members can feel supported, included and empowered to succeed,” Jackson shares. “Having this responsibility is one of my favorite parts of my work at the firm.”

Jackson emphasizes that there’s more to leadership than fulfilling functional duties.

“Employers have an incredible opportunity to help their employees thrive and do amazing work. We’re all different. And we bring different talent skills, backgrounds, experiences, fears, hopes. All of those different characteristics and experiences make us better as individuals and as a community.”



Jackson partners with the Wellness Council of Indiana at an event designed to help employers bridge gaps in mental health and substance use disorder resources.