

Women in Leadership: The Glass Ceiling – Reality or Perception? Panelist Bios and Headshots

Dr. Jackie Sharp Akins
Chief Executive Officer
Lakeside Community Committee

Dr. Jackie Sharp is a proud native of Starkville, MS. She moved to Chicago in 1982, after completing her Bachelors in Social Work and Masters of Education from Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS. In 2003, Dr. Jackie Sharp received her Masters of Social Work (MSW) from Governors State University, University Park, Ill., with a focus on Children & Families. In 2014, she received her certification to work with Veterans and their Families from the Dominican University School of Social Work in River Forest, Ill.



Dr. Sharp worked in the mental health field from 1982 to 1992. She started as a Mental Health Specialist III at Bobby E. Wright Mental Health Center working with the adult mentally ill population. Dr. Jackie Sharp worked as a Clinical Therapist in the residential facility for teen boys at Methodist Youth Services, Inc. She also worked as a Residential Supervisor in the Community Mental Health Council, Inc. adult mentally ill program. In 1990, Dr. Jackie Sharp interest shifted to the most vulnerable population, children in foster care. Positions included Manager of Licensing and Recruitment of foster homes at Ada S. McKinley Community Services Child Welfare Division, Placement Supervisor for youth in care at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Vice President of Administrative and Behavioral Health at Annie B. Jones (ABJ) for foster care and counseling. From 1999 to 2008, Dr. Jackie Sharp held the positions of Quality Assurance Director, Child Welfare Administrator and Deputy Executive Director at Lakeside Community Committee (LCC). In 2008, Dr. Jackie Sharp became the Chief Executive Officer of LCC, a non- profit social service agency. The mission of LCC is to enhance the quality of life for children and families by inspiring hope, empowerment and growth within all whom they serve. Services are provided for abused and neglected children, their families, pregnant and parenting teen moms and their babies, foster parents and relative caregivers. Dr. Jackie Sharp has been an Adjunct Professor at South Suburban College in South Holland, Illinois since 2004. She teaches a variety of human services administration classes. Dr. Jackie Sharp is also a Peer Reviewer for the Council of Accreditation for Children and Family Services (COA). This organization ensures that private and non-profit organizations maintain high standards in the social service fields.

Dr. Jackie Sharp has received many awards for her services to children, families, and communities from: the University of Illinois Extension – Urban Leadership Center for continued support to the “Readers Are Leaders” Program, Illinois Department of Children & Family Services Adoption Advisory Council for serving as an expert member on adoption and permanency planning for children, Black Executive Shepherds Award from Annie B. Jones (ABJ) Community Services for Committed Service to the Community, Michelle Obama Humanitarian Empowerment Award from Creativity United, “Making A Difference Award” from St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church for hard work and dedication to Metropolitan Chicago Area and Outstanding outreach to children, youth and the caregivers, Women of Excellence Award from the Chicago Defender newspaper, National Women Veterans United, Charm of the Year Award (COTY) from Charms, Inc., Georgia Doty Comprehensive Health Foundation Pioneer award for Combating Health Disparities. Dr. Sharp received an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Humanities from United Graduate College and Seminary International in October 2018.

Dr. Sharp is a member of the Chicago Chapter of Black Administrators in Child Welfare, Chicago Chapter of Black Social Workers, National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Screening for Child Abuse and Neglect Committee (SCAN), Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC), International Association of Women, Worldwide Association of Female Professional, The Greater Starkville Development Partnership/Chamber of Commerce, Bed and Breakfast Association of Mississippi (BBAM), Professional Association of Innkeepers International (PAII), Co-Volunteer Coordinator for the National Women Veteran United (NWWU) organization in Chicago, Illinois, Vice-President of the Chicago Chapter Drifters, Inc., Past President of the Chicago Chapter of Charms, Inc., National Coalition of 100 Black Women-Chicago Metropolitan Chapter, DuSable Museum of African American History, Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (SNMAAHC), National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Coalition of African American Leaders (COAL), Mississippi State University Alumni Association, Chicago, Illinois Chapter, past President of the Chicago Chapter of Black Administrators in Child Welfare, past Board member of both the Illinois Youth on Collaboration and the Illinois Child Care Association.

Dr. Jackie Sharp is also a businesswoman and currently operates Sharp’s Bed & Breakfast in Starkville, MS and Sharper Focus Consulting, LLC in Chicago, IL. Dr. Jackie Sharp has dedicated her career to ensuring that children and families receive “best practices” services. She encourages all to “be their best and to do their best”. Dr. Jackie Sharp enjoys reading, gardening, sewing, decorating, crafting, helping others and playing with her dog, Chloe.

Ashley Hinton
Senior Director of Community Relations
Chicago Blackhawks

Ashley Hinton is in her 13th season with the Blackhawks and her third as Senior Director of Community Relations. Hinton oversees the design and implementation of new programs that advance the vision and goals of the Community Relations Department as well as Chicago Blackhawks Foundation. She also directs special events and manages game-night fundraising. Hinton facilitates volunteer engagement among the staff, players, and their families. She has helped several Blackhawks players launch their individual charitable foundations. Hinton, a Michigan native, graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in sports management and communication.



Kimberly Hollingsworth
President
Olive-Harvey College

Olive-Harvey College President, Kimberly Hollingsworth, an East St. Louis native began her 26th year in higher education this academic year. Ms. Hollingsworth started her career in education immediately following College – she began working as the Cook County Recruitment Coordinator for Eastern Illinois University, her alma mater, where she earned her undergraduate and graduate degree in Business and Education respectively. She is currently completing a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration at Northern Illinois University. While attending EIU she was initiated into the nationally recognized service sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. After three years in the Coordinator role, Ms. Hollingsworth accepted the Assistant Director of Transfer Student Recruitment position at DePaul University. Ms. Hollingsworth automated and improved transfer services during her tenure at DePaul.



Ms. Hollingsworth decided to follow her passion of serving underrepresented student populations and in 1999 accepted the position of Director of the Transfer Center at Harold Washington College. At Harold Washington College, she ran the center and managed the Special Populations and Higher Education Cooperative Act Grants and taught as an adjunct Business faculty. Ms. Hollingsworth spent 5 years at Harold Washington College before being asked to take on the role of Assistant Dean of Student Services at Richard J. Daley College. Ms. Hollingsworth spent three years at Daley College leading the Advising and Student Development team before assuming the role of Dean of Continuing Education at Malcolm X College. Ms. Hollingsworth served Malcolm X College in a number of capacities over her eleven-year tenure. While serving in the capacity of Dean of CE, she was asked to step in as the Dean of Students to get the College through their Higher Learning Commission site visit.

After 5 years as Dean of Students, where under her leadership, the College experienced tremendous enrollment growth, Ms. Hollingsworth was promoted to Dean of Instruction and served in that capacity for three years before being appointed to the position of Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs. Ms. Hollingsworth served as the Vice President, leading over 126 full time faculty and managing the largest academic Department within the College, until her appointment as President at Olive Harvey College.

Ms. Hollingsworth welcomes the charge of leading Olive-Harvey College, on the city's far South Side; Olive-Harvey College serves thousands of students annually in their pursuit of a certificate, degree, high school equivalency, or to learn English as a second language. A major accomplishment during her first year as President was completing the construction of a 103,000 square foot transportation, distribution, and logistics (TDL) center; TDL is one of the region's fastest growing industry segments. Additionally, Ms. Hollingsworth was recently instrumental in leading her team through their 2020 HLC Reaffirmation visit. A calculated risk-taker, under her leadership, Olive-Harvey College became the first Chicago College to offer a certificate in Cannabis Dispensary Operations. Ms. Hollingsworth is wholly committed to equity work and developing programs that improve the quality of life of the residents of Chicago. Ms. Hollingsworth has participated in and helped lead three HLC reaffirmation visits, has successfully written grant proposals totaling over \$15MM, has developed strong and sustainable shared governance models while at the City Colleges of Chicago, and is known for her experience in strategic planning and strategic enrollment management. On a personal note, Ms. Hollingsworth enjoys reading, working out and most importantly, being the mother to her 20-year old son, Kendall who is a Sophomore at the University of Oklahoma.

Samantha Oliver Mitchell
Chief Operating Officer
TCA Health Inc.

Samantha is a Licensed Clinical Social worker, with more than 25 years of experience in health care leadership, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment; HIV/AIDS education & prevention; juvenile justice, child welfare, workforce development, and supportive housing administration. Her vast expertise includes resource & program development, fundraising, grant writing, international training, research, and strategic planning. Over the past 15 years Samantha has served in executive roles as Chief Operating Officer, most recently at TCA Health Inc. a federally qualified health center in Chicago, assuring that Chicago's south side residents have comprehensive, high quality barrier-free access to health care and related services.



Samantha earned her BA in Occupational Social Work from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg SA, and her Master's in Social Work Management and Policy from University of Illinois -Jane Addams School of Social Work. Prior to serving in COO roles in Child welfare and at FQHC's, she served as the as a Senior Vice President for HRDI, Leading Strategic Planning & Research and served as the agency's HIPAA Privacy Officer. HRDI was Samantha's first international internship placement organization as a scholarship recipient of the South African Black Social Workers Association, and fertile local and international leadership training ground for Samantha's social work career in the USA. In her birthplace – Kliptown, South Africa her social work expertise grew in providing direct care in both rural and urban school based, EAP, outpatient HIV care , substance use disorder and mental health treatment settings.

During her tenure at each organization Samantha increased grant revenues and or outcomes by 25-75%. Making a minimum impact of 20-35% increase to each overall organizational budget over time. Samantha is one of 15 Dr. C.V Bakeman Leadership Institute Master Trainers, a founding board member of the Illinois African American Prevention Coalition; served as a founding Executive Council Member of the Connects @ South Shore Safety-Net for violence prevention; past board member of the Region 5 Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association. Professionally she currently represents TCA Health on the SafetyNet Steering committee on Integrated Primary Care and Behavioral Health Care, Racial Equity Provider Workgroup, and Illinois Primary Health Care Sub Committees. Personally, she serves as St. Mark United Methodist Women Membership Co-Chair, and resides in the Chatham Community on the South Side of Chicago, with her husband and four daughters. Samantha loves to travel with family, hike, and explore new culinary delights.

Essence Smith
Director of Operations and Communications
SocialWorks

Essence Smith is a DJ, Entrepreneur and serves as the Director of Operations & Communications for SocialWorks. As SocialWorks' Director of Operations & Communications, Smith works diligently to produce branding strategies, orchestrate favorable content surrounding SocialWorks' initiatives and events, manage press relations, and maintain the organization's overall positive image. Smith also owns her own clothing brand titled "Black Women Are Essential," as well as an event planning business titled ELMS Event Planning and Production, where she curates memorable events tailored to her client's vision. Though Essence is capable and more than willing to plan events of all themes and genres, within ELMS, her main focus is to produce events supporting and elevating the importance of women of color. In her free time, Smith enjoys spending quality time with friends and family, scrapbooking, and traveling the world. She aspires to be an inspiration to young black women worldwide by setting the example to dream big, advocate for what you believe in, and never needing to conform to the image that society labels you to be.



Elena Sotomayor
Executive Vice President of Sales
Cardenas Marketing Network

Elena Sotomayor is a senior-level branded entertainment and marketing executive with demonstrated leadership skills, proven success in strategic ideation and innovation practices at Cardenas Marketing Network (CMN). Elena has a proven track record for orchestrating and activating national sponsorships for tours produced by CMN and entertainment programs for Fortune 500 brands. A leader in innovative thinking with the ability to quickly recognize opportunity and growth within the entertainment, experiential and branded content marketing space, Elena has seventeen years under her belt in experiential marketing and event marketing space.

Recognized as an entrepreneurial think tank with the ability to direct and oversee various national experiential programs around the country for her clients, Elena also works as Brand Concierge managing top-level relationships with artist camps and brands through extensive marketing platforms from the ground up. With solid and progressive experience in event marketing, experiential and digital synergies, her strength is within experiential platforms with global brands such as Wrigley, Bud Light, Sprint, Advanced Auto Parts, U.S. Army, Burger King , Chevy, Johnson and Johnson among others.

Elena's passion for philanthropy as a member on the board of directors of the Maestro Cares Foundation founded by Global Star Marc Anthony and Icon producer Henry Cardenas. Maestro Cares helps disadvantaged children in Latin America and the U.S. by creating healthy and safe living environments such as orphanages and community centers to support their academic dreams and basic everyday needs. Elena has served on the Executive Board for eight years.

