

APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY SKILLS IN NEW VENUES

Practitioner Profile: Charmain F. Jackman, PhD



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By Rebecca A. Clay

PsychoLOGY graduate education pushes what Charmain F. Jackman, PhD, calls the "dream of private practice." That was never enough for Jackman, who comes from a long line of female entrepreneurs and sees herself as a therapist-entrepreneur. Her grandmother, aunt and mother taught her that businesses fare better when they rely on multiple revenue streams, and Jackman has put that belief into practice.

Today Jackman is the full-time director of health and wellness at Boston Arts Academy, a public high school for visual and performing artists. But she also has a part-time private practice called Innovative Psychological Services, where she provides individual therapy and conducts forensic assessments in termination of parental rights cases. She serves as a consultant for academic summer programs for high school students. And she runs a coaching business aimed at other clinicians. (See sidebar for Jackman's tips for applying clinical skills in new ways.)

"As psychologists, we should be thinking about how we can use our skills to reach untapped markets," says Jackman, who earned her doctorate from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg in 2001. "There's a certain segment of the community that will find us, but we have to actively seek out others."

Working with young artists

As a teenager in Barbados, Jackman dreamed of being a psychologist and working in schools. Now she does both, with a twist. "It's very unusual to have a counseling psychologist doing clinical work at a school," she says, noting that school psychologists

specializing in educational testing are the norm in the district. The school's only clinical psychologist, Jackman leads a nine-member team made up of social workers, a nurse, health educators and clinical interns.

Arts training, by design, stirs up deep feelings, says Jackman. "The arts curriculum pushes students to dig deep into their emotions," she says, explaining that students have to engage in self-exploration and reflect on their personal histories to develop their artistic voices. However, these activities can also trigger memories of past trauma. "That's why having clinicians on-site is crucial," says Jackman. "We are available to provide on-site support immediately, which is a great benefit for students experiencing emotional crises."

Jackman and her team provide individual therapy, group counseling, health education and crisis assessments to students, most of whom self-refer or are brought in by friends. In response to a spike in crisis assessments and subsequent psychiatric hospitalizations a few years ago, she launched a program called "Bridge" to help students transition back to school after hospitalizations. "Diving back into a full academic and arts course load is overwhelming if you have been out of school for an extended period, and it can trigger a relapse," she says, explaining that the program gives students access to clinical and academic support as they stabilize and transition back to their regular schedule.

"I am always amazed to see students perform at high levels, despite difficult personal circumstances," says Jackman.

Jackman also works with teachers. At the beginning of each school year, for instance, she leads a professional development workshop on the warning signs of mental

health issues in adolescents. She sits in on classes to observe problematic behaviors flagged by teachers, then suggests ways to address the behaviors. She also conducts mediations between students and teachers if they're experiencing conflict. "Our school has a social justice orientation," says Jackman, explaining that the school encourages students to be artist/activists who will advocate for improvements in their communities and society as a whole. "We encourage students to speak to power." Engaging families and educating them about adolescent mental health are also important parts of Jackman's school-based services.

School's out, but opportunities remain.

One advantage of working at a school is summers off, says Jackman. And that means extra time to take advantage of additional income opportunities. As a consultant for two Massachusetts Institute of Technology summer programs, she provides clinical support to students and is on call to guide program staff in addressing student concerns.


"It's an interesting contrast to working with artists," Jackman says. While the artists are comfortable with their feelings and seeking help, she says, the high school students in these Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs are often reluctant to reach out when they're struggling. "These are students who can typically solve complex equations or build intricate contraptions on their own," says Jackman. "They often perceive asking for help as a flaw and often minimize their struggles or think that they should be able to handle any problems on their own."

Jackman is also busy helping other psychologists thrive. She offers business development coaching to clinicians who want to launch or grow their own private practices, plus workshops on such topics as personal branding for therapists. "We know how to do the clinical work, but not how to market ourselves," says Jackman. "We rarely get that training in graduate school, but clinicians need these business skills to run lucrative practices."

Jackman's own brand is based on the idea of giving psychology away—getting the word out and increasing access to care for underserved communities.

On a recent trip to Barbados, for example, Jackman led a professional development workshop on mental health for counselors at the Barbados Community College and spoke to a group of adolescents about topics the country's young people typically don't discuss with adults.

In addition to all her other roles, Jackman also serves on the Diversity Council of Big Sister Association of Greater Boston, having been a mentor herself for nearly a decade. She was the psychological consultant for a movie called *Knockaround Kids*, a 2013 film about three children in Massachusetts' child welfare system. She has also become a source for journalists from the *Boston Globe* and local television stations.

"We need to think about nontraditional ways we can contribute and put our services to use," says Jackman. "That's the new model—to go where we haven't gone before and find new territory to explore." 

Moving beyond Private Practice

When Charmain F. Jackman, PhD, works with psychologists interested in launching private practices, one of her key messages is to not put all their eggs in the practice basket. "It's important to look at diversified streams of income and not be overly reliant on reimbursement from insurance," says Jackman. Fortunately, she says, psychology training—which includes clinical work, research and writing—prepares psychologists to take on multiple roles. And, she adds, "psychology can be applied to any field."

Jackman offers these tips to psychologists interested in bringing their skills into innovative new venues:

- **Create your niche.** "Be open to new ideas and think about how you can use your special skills," says Jackman. Many psychologists have careers in other fields before becoming psychologists, for example, which could lead to opportunities to apply psychology in new ways. Also think about what interests you outside of work, such as a running club or creative hobbies, and how you might bring psychology to bear on those areas.
- **Promote your brand.** Get out of your office, meet a wide variety of people and follow up with people you meet, says Jackman, noting that some of the connections she has made have approached her with opportunities years later. "I would never have anticipated where they would lead," she says. "Networking may seem terrifying to some psychologists, but it is a necessary part of your business strategy."
- **Set goals.** Do what you tell your clients to do, says Jackman. That means setting a goal, creating action steps toward reaching that goal and enlisting accountability partners who will keep you on track. "Post the goal where you'll see it every day," she says.
- **Be persistent.** New opportunities often take time to materialize, says Jackman. But don't be discouraged, she says. "Don't take the first or second no; keep pursuing it," she says. "If there's something you're interested in, just go after it."