

# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Aja Hill

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Aja Hill

**Preferred Email:** ajaellington2@gmail.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (574) 315-6330

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Free Your Wings Youth Mentoring, Inc.

**Title/Position:** Founder & CEO

**Business Phone:** (574) 400-5777

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Free Your Wings Youth Mentoring, Inc.

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Armar'rae Hill

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (574) 276-6463

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** armhll.oeg@gmail.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 17 Years

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Nonprofit

**Secondary:** Education

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

My journey into this work did not begin with a title, it began with survival.

I grew up in deep poverty, raised by my father, and for years we experienced houselessness more than stability. I remember being a child in the projects, carrying our belongings in our hands, being laughed at as we searched through what little we had left on the sidewalk, trying to make sense of why this kept happening to us. Even then, I found myself asking why, trying to understand not just my situation, but the systems around me.

Home was layered with challenges. My father carried PTSD from Vietnam. My twin brother lived with autism and schizophrenia, and I watched him struggle in ways I did not yet have language for. Today, he is institutionalized indefinitely, a reality that stays with me because I know early support could have changed his path. My mother was in and out of prison throughout much of my childhood, adding another layer of instability that shaped my understanding of survival, resilience, and responsibility at a very young age. I also navigated life within an interracial household after my father remarried, where racism was not simply something discussed, but something we directly experienced and had to navigate as a family.

Before I had the words for advocacy, I was already practicing it. I stood up for others, stayed close to my brother, and paid attention to the needs around me. Even then, I made a quiet decision that I would not become a statistic. I refused to accept that my circumstances would define my future, and that belief continues to drive my work today. I also carry a deep responsibility to ensure other young people

understand the same truth, that we are not products of our environments.

Everything shifted when I became a teen mother and gave birth to twins my senior year of high school. After being pushed out, I returned determined to finish and create a different future. Over a year after I graduated, I enrolled at Ivy Tech Community College. Initially, my decision was rooted in survival. I needed access to financial aid to help provide housing, food, and stability for my children. I remember bringing my babies to class with me, doing whatever I had to do to stay enrolled and keep moving forward.

Over time, something changed. When I discovered human services, everything aligned. For the first time, I understood the language behind what I had lived, trauma, family systems, mental health, and support. That education did more than prepare me professionally, it transformed me personally and helped me become a better mother. I moved from surviving academically to excelling with purpose.

I continued my education, earning my associate degree and later my bachelor's and Master of Social Work from Indiana University South Bend, all while raising my twins and navigating adulthood in real time. Each step forward was intentional, aligned with a purpose much bigger than myself.

As I entered the workforce, I began to see gaps in how systems served youth and families. That realization led me to found Free Your Wings Youth Mentoring, Inc., co founded by my children, who now serve as youth directors and board members. What started as a response to what I lacked became a space for healing, mentorship, and support for others navigating similar realities.

My journey has always been about turning lived experience into action and using what I have survived to create pathways for others.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

I have faced obstacles that began early and continued throughout my life, shaping both my resilience and my perspective.

I grew up in instability, where moving frequently, experiencing homelessness, and navigating limited resources was normal. There were times my family lived without lights, heat, and consistent shelter. My mother was in and out of prison for much of my childhood, and my father carried PTSD from fighting in Vietnam, which created an environment where survival was often the priority. Over time, I came to understand the depth of those experiences and how they impact families long term.

I have experienced profound loss. I lost both of my brothers to violence within a few years of each other, each under very different circumstances that shaped my understanding of both justice and injustice. In one case, accountability was achieved. In the other, it was not. During COVID, I lost both of my grandmothers. I then buried my father the same month I began my master's program, navigating grief while stepping into one of the most demanding seasons of my life.

At the same time, I continued to show up as a mother, raising my twins and supporting them as a dedicated sports mom. In addition to raising my twins for a period of time I held guardianship for my niece who was in highschool battling mental struggles while navigating private school. I was able to support her in my sister which helped lead them both to family reunification. I learned how to keep going, often carrying my grief quietly in order to remain present for my family and my responsibilities. These experiences have deepened my resilience and strengthened my commitment to supporting others through systems that often overlook both pain and healing.

I carry the emotional weight of watching my twin brother move through systems that failed to intervene early enough. From being placed in special education "levels" classes to incarceration, where he was ultimately diagnosed with autism and schizophrenia, his journey has profoundly shaped my understanding of inequities in access to care and the critical importance of early, intentional support.

As I grew older, I faced additional challenges, including surviving domestic violence relationships that at times became life threatening. I navigated those experiences while still trying to create stability and safety for my children.

Becoming a teen mother added another layer of challenge. I had to continue my education while raising twins, often without support. There were moments in college where I struggled academically and

personally, trying to balance responsibilities while figuring out who I was becoming. I initially enrolled in college out of survival, relying on financial aid to meet basic needs such as housing and food, and I remember bringing my babies to class with me so I could stay on track.

In addition, I have lived with chronic health conditions including endometriosis, adenomyosis, and fibroids, learning how to lead and serve while managing ongoing physical pain. I turned these battles into advocacy where I now lead an awareness group, wrote a memoir coming this October 2026 and I hold awareness panels related to this.

Professionally, I have experienced being underestimated and placed in environments where I had to prove myself repeatedly. I have also encountered spaces where I was not fully supported and, at times, experienced bullying from more established women in leadership. These experiences contributed to moments of imposter syndrome, where I questioned whether I truly belonged in the roles I had earned. Over time, I learned to push through those doubts, grounding myself in my lived experiences, my education, and the impact of my work.

Rather than allowing these challenges to define me, I have used them as fuel to grow, lead, and create opportunities not only for myself, but for others.

Each obstacle has strengthened my ability to navigate challenges with intention and resilience, and has shaped how I show up for others today with empathy, purpose, and a deep commitment to ensuring that others know they are not defined by their circumstances.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I did not choose this field, this field chose me.

Before I ever had the language for advocacy, I was already living it. As a child, I stood up for others while navigating my own pain. I stayed close to my twin brother, even when I did not understand what he was experiencing, because I knew he needed someone. I paid attention to what people were going through, even when no one else seemed to.

I grew up witnessing what happens when families do not have access, when mental health is misunderstood, and when support comes too late. I have lived through environments where people were surviving, not supported. Those experiences never left me, they shaped me.

I am in this field for the young people who feel invisible, for the families trying to hold everything together with limited resources, and for the individuals who are one opportunity away from a different outcome. I am in this field because I have seen what happens when systems fail, and I have also seen what happens when someone shows up.

This work is about more than programs or positions. It is about changing how we respond to people, how we support them, and how we create spaces where they feel seen, heard, and valued.

I am in this field because it is not just what I do, it is who I am.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I currently serve as a GEAR UP Graduation Pathway Coach with South Bend Community School Corporation, where I support high school students in preparing for life beyond graduation through college readiness, career exploration, postsecondary planning, and graduation pathway development. In this role, I create access and opportunities by coordinating college visits, career exposure experiences, workshops, and large scale student engagement initiatives that connect students to postsecondary pathways and workforce opportunities. I also serve in a district level family engagement role across multiple high schools, working directly with families to increase awareness around college readiness, financial aid, career planning, and student success supports. I collaborate closely with school counselors, administrators, higher education institutions, and community partners to ensure students and families are informed, supported, and connected to resources.

In addition to my work within education, I am the Founder and Executive Director of Free Your Wings Youth Mentoring, Inc., a nonprofit organization rooted in mentorship, mental wellness, youth empowerment, and

healing centered engagement. Through this work, I lead clinical mentoring and youth development programming designed through a therapeutic and trauma informed lens. My responsibilities include program development, therapeutic skill building, youth leadership initiatives, suicide prevention education, community partnerships, workshop facilitation, and creating safe spaces where youth can process challenges, build resilience, strengthen self advocacy, and develop confidence. I also design and implement youth led initiatives that ensure young people are active voices in shaping the programs and conversations that impact their lives.

I additionally serve as 2nd Anti-Basileus for Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., Iota Xi Sigma Chapter, where I lead undergraduate engagement, membership development, leadership cultivation, and mentorship initiatives. I also support the planning and execution of large scale community programs and youth centered events, including workshops and symposiums focused on mental health, healthy relationships, financial literacy, leadership development, and career pathways.

Alongside these roles, I am a mental wellness professional, consultant, and certified QPR suicide prevention facilitator. Through training and community engagement efforts, I work to equip students, families, educators, and community members with tools related to prevention, emotional wellness, advocacy, and support systems. Across all of my roles, my work is centered on increasing equitable access, strengthening community connections, supporting the whole child and family, and empowering youth through education, wellness, leadership, and opportunity.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

My work has been recognized through numerous awards that reflect both my professional impact and my commitment to service. These include the Community Engagement Award from Sigma Gamma Phi Delta, Indiana University Alumni of the Year, the City of South Bend Mayor Obama Award, the Empowerment Zone Excellence and Service Award, and the 40 Under 40 Award through the South Bend Regional Chamber. I have also been honored with the Community Service Award and Soror of the Year through Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., as well as the Outstanding Student Service and Leadership Award. My academic journey has also been recognized, including induction into the Bronze Honor Society at Ivy Tech Community College and receiving the Outstanding MSW Leadership Award.

Beyond recognition, my contributions to the field are rooted in action and continued growth. I hold a Bachelor's degree and a Master of Social Work from Indiana University South Bend, and I have pursued certifications that allow me to better serve individuals and communities. These include QPR Gatekeeper Instructor Certification, Mental Health First Aid, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Foundations, Gender Equity in Higher Education, Disability Inclusive Mentoring Certifications, Human Trafficking Certification, Family Development Consultant Certification, and Indiana Youth Institute training, among others.

Through these credentials, I actively provide suicide prevention training, mental health education, and community based support, ensuring that individuals are not only aware of resources but equipped to respond and support others.

In addition to my professional and educational contributions, I serve through leadership roles in Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., and on the Indiana University Alumni Association Regional Board of Directors and Executive Council. I also contribute through authorship, mentoring, and advocacy in women's wellness, using my platform to educate and uplift others navigating both personal and systemic challenges.

My contributions span education, nonprofit leadership, mental health advocacy, and community engagement, all rooted in a commitment to create meaningful and lasting change.

**6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.**

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications

- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**





LOVE  
Letters  
TO MY  
Girls

100+ Black Women Speak Their Hearts of Black Women  
Contributing Author  
DR. CHESTA WILSON

Contributing Author  
**Aja K. Ellington**

AVAILABLE Now!

Walmart amazon BARNES & NOBLE

LOVELETTERSTOMYGIRLS.COM

PUBLISHED BY VOICES OF BLACK WOMEN YOUTH ACCEPTANCE, INC.  
© 2021 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. VOICES OF BLACK WOMEN YOUTH ACCEPTANCE, INC.





PDF\_News Articles\_.pdf



NN4Y-CHT-foundations-certificate-ELL....pdf



Agilities Coach Training Certificate.pdf



News Articles -2.pdf



Resume-Doc.pdf



Recommendation\_Letter\_Aja\_Hill\_Final.pdf

## 7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.

My commitment to community is not something I step into, it is how I live and lead, across local, regional, and national spaces.

I am the Founder and Executive Director of Free Your Wings Youth Mentoring, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization I established to support underserved youth and families through mentorship, mental wellness, and community engagement. Through this work, I developed a multi tiered model that includes workshops and trainings, group skill building, and one on one clinical mentoring, a structured approach that integrates therapeutic techniques in a way that is accessible and culturally responsive.

Beyond founding and leading this organization, I contribute to broader systems level efforts. I served as a contributor to the development of a proposed federal homelessness research agenda with the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, ensuring that lived experience and youth voice were represented in national conversations.

I have also served as a National Youth Advisory Council Member, mentor, and board contributor, and as a speaker for the Baker McKenzie National Children's Rights Summit, contributing to discussions centered on youth advocacy and systemic impact.

At the institutional level, I serve on the Indiana University Alumni Association Regional Board of Directors and Executive Council, where I contribute to alumni governance, engagement strategy, and initiatives that strengthen the connection between the university and the communities it serves. Through this role, I help shape how alumni engagement translates into meaningful impact beyond the institution.

Locally, I remain deeply engaged in community based efforts. I have served as a Martin Luther King Jr Day Awareness speaker through spoken word, as a Director within the Youth Service Bureau Community Youth Panel, and as a speaker with Chapin Hall through the Voices of Youth Count initiative, highlighting gaps and missed opportunities in systems serving vulnerable youth.

I am also an active member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., where I have held leadership roles including Undergraduate Membership Chair and Second Anti Basileus, contributing to service initiatives focused on youth development, education, and community impact.

In addition, I provide volunteer service through mentorship, community programming, and mental health advocacy. I facilitate QPR suicide prevention trainings, support wellness initiatives, and create spaces for open dialogue around topics that are often stigmatized.

Across every space I serve, my focus remains the same, to ensure that individuals, especially youth and families, are not only heard, but supported, guided, and given access to opportunities that can change the trajectory of their lives.

My involvement is not defined by one role or one organization, it is defined by a consistent commitment to building what is needed and ensuring that my community is not left to navigate systems alone.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.





## 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

### Nominee

**Name:** Amanda Herren

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Amanda Herren

**Preferred Email:** amandaherren84@gmail.com

**Personal Info:**

**Mobile Phone:** (708) 218-0198

**Company Info:**

**Company/Organization:** Graceful Exit

**Title/Position:** Founder/CEO

**Business Phone:** (708) 218-0198

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Graceful Exit

### If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 5

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

**Primary:** Business

**Secondary:** Financial

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

I have over 15 years experience in corporate Human Resources and have always had a type-a personality. I spent several years being an executive assistant to a CEO of a multi-billion dollar financial firm and found there was a gap in end of life planning. A financial advisor will help title accounts properly, a lawyer will draw up a will or trust but what happens when someone actually passes away? Who steps in when family members are ill informed or too grief stricken to handle matters? I started Graceful Exit as an A-Z end of life planning resource and coordination.

### 2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.

Life is always full of obstacles and I have personally been through multiple mergers and acquisitions at nearly every employer I've worked for. The uncertainty of not knowing how long or if my position would continue was always unsettling.

### 3. Why are you in your chosen field?

Simply put, I enjoy helping others. I believe that end of life planning should be buttoned up for individuals LONG before they pass away so that when it does happen, your family has a complete roadmap on what to do.

### 4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?

I am the sole employee and owner of Graceful Exit. I can assist families or individuals before someone passes away or after someone passes away. There are many complex steps associated with end of life and I can take over and handle all of it so that family can actually grieve and not worry. So many estates can take years to settle and my goal is to significantly minimize that and avoid probate when possible.

If you are unfamiliar with end of life planning, think passwords, bills, titling of assets, wills, trusts, where do your pets go, should you have an estate sale. And that's just to name a few.

I can be named a power of attorney, a healthcare power of attorney, a healthcare guardian and step in where needed. I in no way replace a financial advisor or lawyer but partner with them and aid the family. I even partner with estate sale companies.

I personally started this business because my mother in law passed away in 2019 and lived alone and my husband was her only child. She passed suddenly and told us everything was in order. We quickly came to find that things were not in order and her documents were written so long ago that my husband was a minor. This resulted in so much work and in the process, my husband shut down and didn't want to handle any of it. I stepped in and took over and the idea of Graceful Exit was born.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

I have a Bachelor's Degree from Purdue University and I am a founding member of bQuest which is a national network of all end of life/bereavement/etc. resources. They are personally partnering with financial institutions to get word out how important end of life planning is.

I am a certified benefits specialist for ADP (HRIS) and also OSHA certified. I guess you could say I really like rules.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

I am a previous nominee of NWIIAA in 2018 for my work at CAPTRUST/Lakeside Wealth. I was also named to the NWI Times top 20 under 40 in 2018.

I am currently a member of Delta Theta Tau and have been since 2022. I was co-chair of the highly successful Delta Dudes event as well as the co-chair for our mums sales. Both of these events raise over \$35k combined a year which goes to various non-profits and scholarships.

I am currently the Vice President of the Cooks Corners PTO and I have previously been the Co-President and the Treasurer. I have held one of these positions since 2022. Last year we were instrumental in raising over \$45k in funds which all went back to our students, staff and school. I'm extremely proud of the work I do with our PTO every year.

Non-profit wise over the years I have been heavily involved in Porter County. I was previously the Director of Community Engagement at Family House, the Operations Coordinator for The Collective (where I'm also a member) and I was the Operations Manager at Dressed for School. I simply cannot say no to any non-profit and will make time to help.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Amanda McKenzie

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Amanda McKenzie

**Preferred Email:** amanda.mckenzie@fcmhomeloans.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 741-4717

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** First Community Mortgage - The Amanda McKenzie Team

**Title/Position:** Loan Originator/Production Manager

**Business Phone:** (219) 841-1008

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Amanda McKenzie Team at First Community Mortgage

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Mack Howell

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (317) 372-3653

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** mack.howell@fcmhomeloans.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 22

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Financial

**Secondary:** Financial

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

Growing up, I was always drawn to business and finance. My journey truly began in high school when I took a business vocational class at Portage High School. Through that program, I was placed in an internship with Century 21 Viking under Barb White, an incredible woman business owner and mentor. During that time, I was introduced to many influential women in real estate, built lifelong friendships, and gained exposure to an industry that immediately felt like the right fit for me. I remained employed there for several years, which gave me invaluable early experience in professionalism, client relationships, and the real estate industry as a whole.

I later attended Valparaiso University, where I majored in Finance. When it came time for college internships, I joined CTX Mortgage. It felt almost ironic to be back in a related field because I already knew so many realtors and was familiar with much of the terminology from my previous experience. I quickly realized I was ahead of the curve in some ways, but also eager to continue learning. I found the mortgage industry fascinating and remained with the company after my internship, working as a file opener and learning the operational side of the business.

After graduating college, I accepted a position in retail management because it seemed like a promising career path. However, I quickly realized it was not where I belonged. I missed the challenge, the pace, and the opportunity to truly use my skills and knowledge. Fortunately, I had stayed connected with my former coworkers at the mortgage company and was offered the opportunity to return as a processor. That role allowed me to deepen my understanding of the backend mortgage process and further strengthen my industry knowledge.

In 2005, while my fiancé and I were purchasing our first home, I reconnected with another loan officer I

had met during my time at Century 21, Barb Tithof. She was looking for a loan officer assistant, and with my background in processing, file opening, and my existing relationships within the real estate community, the transition felt seamless. Moving into that role shifted me from operations into the sales side of the business, and it became a pivotal point in my career.

Over the years, I learned so much while working alongside Barb. I eventually transitioned into a Team Loan Originator role and later became a Loan Originator and Production Manager following her retirement. It has been a long but incredibly rewarding journey. One of the things I love most about this industry is that no two days are ever the same—there is always something new to learn and new ways to grow.

Today, one of the most fulfilling parts of my career is mentoring others. I have had assistants of my own and take great pride in helping develop their careers, just as others helped develop mine. I am incredibly grateful for the amazing team surrounding me, because I truly would not be where I am today without their support, knowledge, and dedication.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

I have overcome many obstacles throughout my life, and those experiences have shaped both the person and professional I am today.

I grew up in poverty in an unstable environment. Unfortunately, my mother struggled with addiction and had difficulty maintaining steady employment. As a result, we were frequently evicted and moved often. Before graduating high school, I had lived in 23 different places and attended 9 different schools. While those experiences were difficult, they taught me resilience at a very young age and showed me the kind of life I wanted to build for myself.

I became determined to create a different future. I was the first woman in my family to attend college, and I understood early on that education and hard work would be the path forward for me.

Along the way, I was fortunate to have strong female role models who made a lasting impact on my life. One of the most influential was Nancy Paunicka, the mother of my best friend growing up. Nancy was hardworking, compassionate, and driven. She worked as a nurse and later returned to school to earn her Nurse Practitioner degree. I admired her determination and kindness tremendously. She always treated me with warmth and encouragement, and I have never forgotten the positive influence she had on me during some very challenging years.

At 17, I moved out of my mother's home and finished high school while living with my now husband's family. During that time, I worked multiple jobs to support myself while trying to stay focused on my education and future goals. Paying for college was one of my greatest concerns, but through scholarships, student loans, and continuing to work multiple jobs, I was able to earn my degree.

Those challenges taught me perseverance, adaptability, and gratitude. They also gave me a deep appreciation for opportunity and for the people who invest in and encourage others. Today, I carry those lessons with me in both my personal life and my career. They continue to motivate me to work hard, support others, and help create opportunities for the next generation of women entering this industry. Another challenge I have continued to navigate throughout my career is balancing the demands of a high-performance sales environment while also managing the responsibilities that often fall on women outside of work. The mortgage and finance industry can still be very male-dominated, and in sales there is constant pressure to always be available and responsive. Clients and Realtors expect immediate answers, and success is often tied to accessibility and relationship-building.

As a woman, I have found that balancing those expectations while also managing responsibilities at home can sometimes be challenging. Many women are not only focused on their careers but are also carrying much of the mental load of running a household, caring for children or pets, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, and supporting their families. Learning how to succeed professionally while also creating healthy boundaries has been an ongoing journey for me.

Over time, I have become much better at setting boundaries and understanding the importance of balance, but it is still something I actively work on. That experience has given me greater empathy for other women in demanding careers and has reinforced my belief that success should not require sacrificing your well-being or personal life.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I often joke that I am in this field because it is all I know at this point, but the truth is, I genuinely love what I do.

At the core of it, I enjoy helping people and solving problems. The mortgage industry is about much more than numbers and interest rates. Many clients, especially first-time homebuyers who make up a large part of my business, simply do not know what they do not know. A big part of my role is educating them, guiding them through the process, and finding solutions to challenges they may not even realize exist.

One of the most rewarding parts of my career is when a realtor sends a client to me simply to “see if it’s possible,” because the client believes homeownership is out of reach for them. Those conversations are often filled with uncertainty or discouragement, and I love being able to help them understand their options and create a plan. Sometimes it involves improving credit, restructuring debt, or simply helping them realize they are more prepared than they thought. Turning what someone believed was impossible into a reality is one of the best feelings in the world.

Every client’s situation is different, which keeps the work interesting and rewarding. While this career can absolutely be stressful at times, the end result makes it worthwhile. Seeing a client close on their first home, dream home, or even their first investment property is incredibly fulfilling. Being part of such an important milestone in someone’s life is something I never take for granted, and it is one of the biggest reasons I continue to love this industry after all these years.

#### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

As a Loan Originator and Production Manager, my role combines client education, mortgage origination, team leadership, and business development. I work closely with clients throughout the mortgage process, helping them understand their financing options and guiding them from pre-approval through closing. A large portion of my business involves first-time homebuyers, so education and communication are a very important part of what I do.

My responsibilities include analyzing clients’ financial situations, structuring loan solutions, reviewing credit and income documentation, problem-solving challenges that may arise during the process, and ensuring clients feel informed and supported every step of the way. I also maintain strong relationships with real estate professionals, title companies, and other industry partners to help create a smooth experience for our mutual clients.

In addition to working directly with borrowers, I oversee and support my team’s daily operations and production workflow. Mentoring and developing team members has become one of the most rewarding aspects of my career, and I take pride in helping others grow professionally while creating a positive and collaborative work environment.

Overall, my role requires strong communication, organization, leadership, and problem-solving skills, along with the ability to adapt quickly in an ever-changing industry.

#### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Throughout my career in the mortgage industry, I have consistently been recognized as a Top Producer within my company, reflecting my commitment to excellence, client service, and strong production results. I’m an associate member of the Northwest Indiana Realtor Association and annually sponsor their continuing education courses. In 2025, I was honored to be recognized in the Scotsman Guide as a Top Originator, a distinction awarded to top-performing mortgage professionals nationwide. Additionally, I was honored to be named the 2025 Humanitarian of the Year by the Portage Chamber of Commerce in recognition of my community involvement and charitable efforts. I have also been featured in NWI Real Producers Magazine and Portage Life for my professional accomplishments and industry presence. I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business with a major in Finance, which has provided a strong foundation for my career in lending and financial services.

In addition to my professional work, I remain actively involved in industry organizations and leadership roles. I currently serve on the Ambassador Committee for NWIWA and previously served on the Finance Committee for the NWI Women’s Council of Realtors. I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Portage Chamber of Commerce, where I recently participated on the Scholarship Committee helping oversee application reviews and recipient selections.

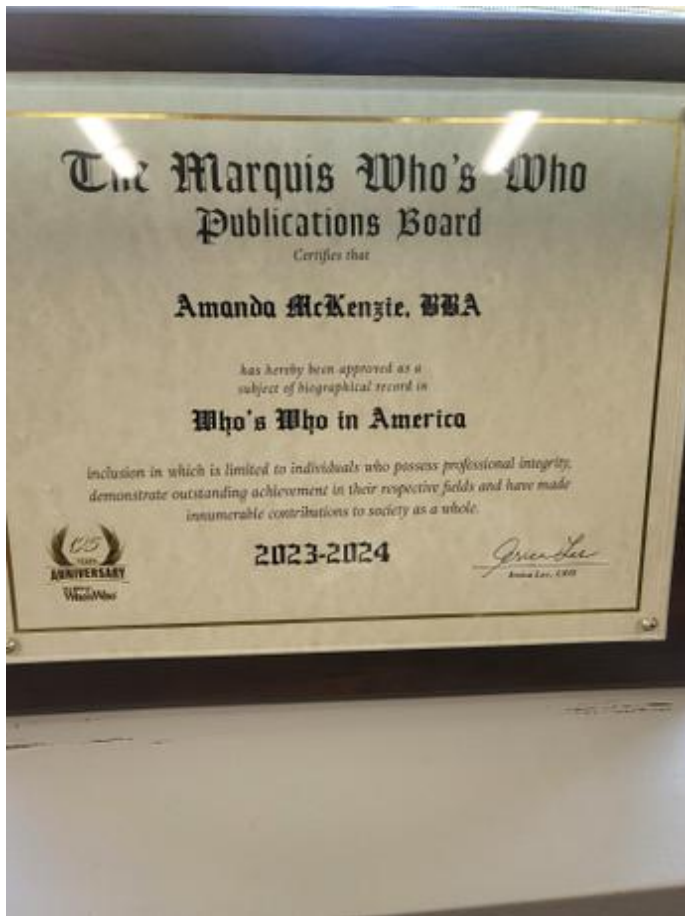
6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

Upload documents here.







A Portage Life in the Spotlight.docx



NWI Real Producers.pdf



B.Head.A.McKenzie.RecLetter.Signed-... .pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Community involvement and service are extremely important to me, and I am passionate about using my time and resources to positively impact others. In 2024, I helped found Big Dogs Don't Cry, a 100% volunteer-run, foster-based animal rescue organization where I currently serve as Vice President and Treasurer. Since launching in September 2024, our organization has rescued and placed more than 515 dogs and cats through foster care, rescue efforts, and community support initiatives.

I am also a proud supporter and sponsor of several local organizations and programs throughout Northwest Indiana, including the Portage Police K9 Unit, the Portage High School Football Team, the Portage High School Robotics Team, and Portage's Music in the Park series.

Giving back to the community that has supported me throughout my career is something I value deeply. Whether through nonprofit leadership, volunteer service, or community partnerships, I strive to make a meaningful and lasting impact both professionally and personally.

**8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Amy Sexton Stanislavski

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Amy Sexton Stanislavski

**Preferred Email:** [info@therdprocoach.com](mailto:info@therdprocoach.com)

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (708) 224-6689

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** The RD Pro Coach

**Title/Position:** Founder and CEO

**Business Phone:** (708) 224-6689

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Plan and Gather Events, AES Consulting and The RD Pro Coach

**If applicable:**

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 15

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Business

**Secondary:** Nonprofit

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

I didn't plan on entrepreneurship as a career choice. I fell into it. But I am so thankful for that fall.

I started my career in the nonprofit sector because I believed in mission-driven work and I quickly learned that none of it happens without the resources to fuel it. That realization set the course for the next two decades. I built my career working in and alongside some of the country's most complex nonprofit organizations, including creating a department at Boys & Girls Clubs of America focused specifically on supporting the development function at local affiliates across the country. My team helped raise hundreds of millions annually. I personally closed 7- and 8-figure gifts. I led feasibility studies and campaigns. I helped organizations move from reactive fundraising to real, sustainable growth. I built all of this through a sustainable funding model so that the recipients of these services never needed to spend a dime to utilize them.

But the fundraising career is only part of the story.

I've always had an entrepreneurial streak. In 2017 I founded Plan and Gather Events, a full-service event planning and execution company specializing in weddings, corporate events, and nonprofit events. What started as just me has grown into an 11-person team. Most of them have been with me for over five years. We retained our entire team through COVID. Not because it was easy, but because it was the right thing to do. That same year I launched AES Consulting, my senior-level fundraising consulting practice. And in 2024 I launched The RD Pro Coach, a membership platform and coaching practice for nonprofit development professionals who are doing good work but need better tools, better systems, and someone in their corner.

I got where I am by showing up. For clients, for my team, and for the broader community I care about. I've donated time, services, and a portion of business proceeds to nonprofits in Northwest Indiana, Chicago and beyond for years. That's not separate from the work. That is the work.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

The most significant obstacle I've navigated isn't a single moment: it's a sustained one. Running multiple businesses, one of which is in the events industry, through a global pandemic is not something any of us planned for.

When COVID hit, Plan and Gather Events had a full team and a full calendar. Weddings were canceled. Corporate events disappeared. The nonprofit galas that fund missions I've dedicated my career to went dark overnight. The pressure to make fast decisions, communicate honestly with my team, and find a path forward while the ground was shifting was unlike anything I'd experienced professionally.

We didn't lay anyone off. We retained our entire team and our full contractor roster through the entire pandemic. That decision wasn't the easy one. It was the right one. It was intentional. And I'd make it again.

I think you find out what kind of leader you are when things get hard. What I found out is that I take the responsibility of other people's livelihoods seriously and that if you build a culture where people actually feel valued, they stay. Most of my team has been with me for over five years. That means more to me than any revenue milestone.

Beyond the pandemic, I've had to learn to bet on myself in a field that doesn't always make that easy. Building three ventures simultaneously, staying grounded in your values, and doing it all with integrity requires a tolerance for uncertainty I've had to develop over time. I'm still developing it. But I'm further along than I was.

I've also had to learn balance and I'm still learning it. I spend a lot of my professional life coaching others, giving resources, showing up for organizations and teams that need support. Learning to receive grace, help, and rest has been its own quiet challenge. In 2023 I became a mom, and that changed things in the best possible way. Setting an example for my child has become the greatest blessing and the clearest goal I've ever had. It puts everything else in perspective in a way nothing else quite does.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

Honestly? Because I believe in people. That's the simplest answer I have.

In fundraising: the organizations I've spent my career supporting exist because someone believed the work was worth funding. Youth development programs, health systems, community-based nonprofits right here in Northwest Indiana and across the country – when the funding dries up, the mission does too. I stay in this field because I've seen what a strong, supported development professional can do for an organization. And I've seen what happens when they're burned out and working alone without the right tools. I built The RD Pro Coach because the second scenario was happening too often and I thought I could help.

In events: I believe in the power of people coming together. The nonprofit galas, the weddings, the corporate gatherings are not just logistics. They're the moments where community gets built and generosity gets sparked. Helping create those experiences, especially for organizations doing important work, is something I find genuinely meaningful.

Giving back has always been part of how I operate. Every year I select a nonprofit to receive pro-bono consulting, not as a marketing strategy, but because some organizations need support they simply can't afford. Over the past year that's been Chicago Recovery Alliance. When I started working with them they had a four-person board that wasn't functioning. Today they have 17 active and contributing board members. That kind of change doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen alone. It happens because a group of people commit to doing the work. I just helped them get there.

I also donate a portion of proceeds from all of my businesses to local nonprofit organizations, and I've contributed time and in-kind services to organizations throughout Northwest Indiana and Chicago over the years. I don't say that to be recognized for it. I say it because it reflects what I actually believe: that if you have something to give, you give it.

#### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I run three ventures simultaneously and I'm intentional about keeping each distinct.

As Founder and Managing Director of Plan and Gather Events, I lead a full-service event planning and execution company with an 11-person team. We produce weddings, corporate events, and nonprofit fundraising events across Northwest Indiana and beyond. My role spans client relationships, team leadership, vendor partnerships, and overall business strategy.

As Principal Consultant at AES Consulting, I work with nonprofits at a senior level. Typically, organizations navigating campaigns, building endowments, establishing planned giving programs, major gift program buildouts, or significant transitions in their development function. This is high-touch, senior-level work. Clients work directly with me.

As Founder of The RD Pro Coach, I run a membership platform and coaching practice for nonprofit development professionals with a growing library of tools and templates, live webinars, group coaching, and one-on-one strategic partnership sessions. I also speak nationally at conferences on fundraising strategy, team sustainability, emotional intelligence in development work, and endowment building.

I serve as Immediate Past President and current President Elect of the AFP Northwest Indiana Chapter, which keeps me grounded in the local professional community I care about. And on a rolling basis, I take on pro-bono consulting work for nonprofits that need support but don't have the budget for it because access to good guidance shouldn't only go to organizations that can afford to pay for it.

#### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

I'll start with the credentials because they're straightforward: I hold the Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) designation and a Philanthropic Leadership Institute Certificate from Indiana University. Both reflect a commitment to professional standards and continued learning in a field where the landscape is always shifting, where the stakes of getting it wrong belong to someone else's mission.

Earlier this year I was honored by the Crossroads Chamber as Young Entrepreneur of the Year, a recognition that spanned all three of my businesses. I don't love talking about awards, but this one meant something. Not because of the title, but because it reflected years of showing up, doing the work, and trying to do it right. That felt worth acknowledging.

I am a member and Immediate Past President of the AFP Northwest Indiana Chapter, the local arm of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Serving in chapter leadership has been one of the more meaningful investments of my time, because the health of this region's nonprofit sector depends in part on how well its fundraising professionals are supported and developed.

The contributions I'm most proud of aren't on a resume. They're in the organizations that are stronger now than when I started working with them. This past year that includes Chicago Recovery Alliance, a small nonprofit that came to me with a four-person board that wasn't functioning. Through board recruitment, training, and onboarding support, they now have a board of 17 active, contributing individuals. Watching that transformation happen is the kind of work that reminds me why I do this.

More broadly, I've donated time, in-kind services, and a portion of proceeds from all of my businesses to nonprofit organizations throughout Northwest Indiana and Chicago. Through Plan and Gather Events, that's meant producing events that helped couples and families celebrate milestone events, corporations and businesses convene and celebrate achievements, and nonprofit organizations raise more and connect more meaningfully with their donors. Through The RD Pro Coach, it's meant building a resource infrastructure that practitioners across the country can actually use, including many right here in this region.

Every year I select one nonprofit to receive pro-bono consulting. Not every organization that needs help can pay for it. That matters to me.

If there's a thread running through all of it, the businesses, the volunteer work, the coaching, the giving, it's this: I believe in people. I believe most organizations are one good system, one strong hire, or one honest conversation away from being significantly more effective. My job, in all its forms, is to help them get there.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Volunteerism has always just been part of how I operate. In every city I've lived in, I've looked for ways to show up for the community around me, whether I was just starting out in my career or running three businesses at once.

My most sustained organizational commitment has been to the Association of Fundraising Professionals. I've been an active member of the AFP Northwest Indiana Chapter for years, serving in chapter leadership and completing my term as Chapter President. That role meant investing real time in the professional development of other fundraisers in this region - work I care about because the strength of our local nonprofit sector depends on the people raising money for it.

My volunteer work spans multiple organizations:

Boys & Girls Club of Greater NWI: My professional roots are in the BGC network, and that connection has never felt purely professional. I show up here because I believe in the work.

Boys & Girls Club of Charlotte County: That same commitment, extended across distance.

Opportunity Enterprises: A remarkable organization serving individuals with disabilities in Northwest Indiana. Volunteering here has been a privilege.

Chicago Recovery Alliance: most intensive recent commitment. Over the past year I donated my time and consulting services pro-bono to help them rebuild their board from the ground up. They started with four board members who weren't functioning as a governing body. Today they have 17 active, contributing individuals. I'm proud of what that group accomplished together.

Beyond direct service, I donate a portion of proceeds from all three of my businesses to local nonprofit organizations annually, and I contribute in-kind services - event planning, fundraising strategy, coaching - to organizations that can't always afford what they need.

I do this because I believe in people. Most organizations are closer to where they want to be than they think. In 2023 I became a mom, and if anything, that's sharpened my commitment to this kind of work. I want my child to grow up watching what it looks like to give back without keeping score.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Caitlyn Bull

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Caitlyn Bull

**Preferred Email:** caitlyn.bull@clevelandcliffs.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 776-8384

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Cleveland-Cliffs Inc

**Title/Position:** Senior Integrations Engineer

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Cleveland-Cliffs Inc.

## If applicable:

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Dave Grinstead

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (216) 258-4195

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** David.Grinstead@clevelandcliffs.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:**

Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 10

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:**

STEM

**Secondary:**

Construction/Manufacturing

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My journey in Integration Engineering began 10 years ago with a high-stakes challenge: migrating a private practice from zero infrastructure to a full Epic EHR system using only my medical coding background and a drive for problem-solving. This experience was the catalyst for my CIS degree from Indiana University Northwest, which I earned through night school while working full-time, as a mom. Since joining Cleveland-Cliffs, I have leveraged that unique blend of clinical precision and technical rigor to transform supply chain integrations from a back-office cost center into a strategic competitive advantage. Today, I focus on moving beyond data points to drive enterprise-wide resilience and operational agility.

### 2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.

The most significant obstacle I've overcome was the mid-career transition from a tactical specialist to a strategic engineer while lacking a formal technical degree.

Early on, I was operating in healthcare with only a medical coding certificate. When I was tasked with a full Epic EHR migration for a practice with zero infrastructure, I was effectively building the plane while flying it. I realized then that my passion for integration outpaced my formal training.

To close that gap, I committed to a four-year journey of 'double-duty': working full-time by day and raising my oldest son, all while putting myself through a full-time night school schedule at Indiana University Northwest.

### 3. Why are you in your chosen field?

I am in Integration Engineering because I enjoy being at the intersection of strategy and execution.

My passion for this field was sparked during that first EHR migration; I saw firsthand how seamless data flow wasn't just a technical convenience, it was a requirement for patient care. Transitioning into the

supply chain at Cleveland-Cliffs solidified this. I realized that in a global economy, the integration layer is the 'nervous system' of the enterprise.

I'm driven by the challenge of turning chaos into clarity. I thrive on taking disparate, legacy systems and legacy mindsets and architecting them into a unified, resilient ecosystem. For me, it's about the impact: there is a unique satisfaction in knowing that the architectures I build are what allow an organization to scale, pivot during a crisis, and maintain a competitive advantage in real-time.

Ultimately, I stayed in this field for 10 years because I don't just see myself as an engineer; I see myself as an enabler of business agility.

#### 4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?

In my current role, I own the technical architecture and standardization of our EDI environment. My mission has been to shift the organization away from custom, fragmented workflows toward a centralized, scalable integration model. By standardizing our inputs across several business units, I've eliminated operational friction and established a single source of truth for outbound and inbound data. This doesn't just simplify our IT landscape; it ensures enterprise-wide data integrity, accelerates partner onboarding, and protects our global supply chain from the risks of inconsistent data

#### 5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.

Enterprise Standardization: Transformed a fragmented data landscape into a "single source of truth" by standardizing Rail shipment and ASN shipment files across the entire organization. This initiative eliminated operational friction and ensured data integrity for all outbound customer communications.

Financial & Operational Integration: Architected and completed mission-critical integrations between SAP and EDI, including iDoc to 810 (Invoice) mapping and 830 (Planning Schedule) flows. These projects directly improved cash flow and demand forecasting accuracy.

B.S. in Computer Information Systems (CIS): Earned from Indiana University Northwest

Professional Associations:  
IBM Sterling User Communities  
AAPC

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**

 Completion Certificate _ SkillsBuild.pdf
 IBM MQ Developer.pdf
 IBM SCBN Mapping Specialist.pdf



MOCertificateofCompletion.pdf



IBM PY0101EN Certificate \_ Cognitive ....pdf



Letter of Recommendation - Conrad Vi....pdf



Letter of Recommendation - Dave Grin....pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Food Bank of Northwest Indiana

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Carrie Ann Carlson

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Carrie Ann Carlson

**Preferred Email:** carrie.carlson1955@gmail.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (574) 220-3016

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Northwest Indiana Rusty Strings Community Orchestra

**Title/Position:** Music Director/Conductor

**Business Phone:** (574) 220-3016

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Northwest Indiana Rusty Strings Community Orchestra

### If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 34

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

**Primary:** Education

**Secondary:** Arts

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My musical journey began when I was eight years old. I began taking piano lessons, which I enjoyed. Even though we didn't have much money, my parents (high school sweethearts who met in band) encouraged me and chose to support music lessons to the best of their ability. We used what we had at hand and got by just fine. My first piano was an old broken down player-piano in our basement which was missing many of the ivory keys, but I barely noticed. Even a rough piano teacher, who used to swat me on my hands with a ruler if I made a mistake, wasn't enough to stop me, but my parents quickly realized I needed a kinder teacher, and I appreciated their insight and continued on the piano with a new teacher, Miss Reinhardt.

At age ten (in fifth grade) I began violin as a member of the Tekoppel Grade School Orchestra, with Mr. Conway, a clarinetist. I chose violin because there was a handmade folk instrument/violin in our attic that had been made by a relative. The entire violin was made from mahogany wood, not the traditional spruce top and maple bottom, and wasn't quite the correct size, but it was what we had, so that is what I played. By the time I reached high school, I was doing okay, even with the odd violin. My piano lessons had advanced with a new teacher, (Mrs. Moore) which had given me a head start and buoyed my success on violin. As a freshman, we found a used violin to replace my sweet little relic. As a sophomore, we added violin lessons in addition to the piano. Our H.S. string specialist (Mr. Schuster) was an excellent teacher. He prepared me for various auditions. I auditioned and was accepted into the Evansville All-City Orchestra (three years) and the Indiana All-State Orchestra (two years) and did well at Solo and Ensemble contests. I attended summer music camp. I was beginning to see some success in music. I continued with the piano.

In preparation for college, I acquired my third violin from Moennig and Son in Philadelphia, which was a quality instrument, and what I needed for college. But, the violin is a very difficult instrument. Despite my progress, I was not able to get into the bigger music schools that I auditioned for and landed at Indiana State University, where I received a music talent grant as a double major in Violin and Piano. But, incredibly I was graced with a full ride tennis scholarship, which paid for my college. Music was my chosen field and I continued the long journey to become an excellent violinist. It was hard work and I still did not feel as though I was where I needed to be. My senior year, I got straight A's and a B on my senior violin recital! I

was lacking that early head start on violin, and still catching up. Geez, music is so hard. The violin, impossibly hard. But, I was a leader, was recognized for that and was highly successful on many fronts. So I had that going for me.

Following college graduation I started my career at Duneland School Corporation as a string specialist, grades 5-12. In Indiana at the time, after five years, educators were required to obtain their Master's Degree.

So, I looked into area schools that offered Master's programs and I was fortunate to get a full scholarship to the University of Notre Dame where I started on my Master's Degree in Violin Performance/Sonata Literature. During this program, I purchased my fourth and final violin, a Pierre Audinot violin that I still play to this day. Things started looking up for me. I became concertmaster and Executive Director of the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra. We started our family. I was having some great success and making an impact in my community through music.

Then....we moved to Pittsburgh, PA for my husband's work. We had three children by then. I wondered what I could do in Pittsburgh, so I looked into violin lessons. I was invited to participate in the Artist Diploma Performance Degree at Duquesne University! I jumped at the chance to improve my skills even further. My teachers were amazing, Concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Opera and Ballet Company and Associate Concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony. I was successful at Duquesne, passed my graduate recital with high marks and shortly after graduation, my husband's work brought us back to NW Indiana. I was feeling pretty great about my playing at the time. I decided to audition for a full-time position with the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, which I had played in for the three years I was in Graduate School at Notre Dame.

I auditioned. I did not get the position. But, we will get to that part of the story in the "did I face any hardships" question...

In the meantime, I was hired by St. Mary's College to teach violin where I remained for three years. I founded a new Moreau Chamber Orchestra there, taught Secondary Music Methods classes and returned to the LaPorte County Symphony (LCSO) as Concertmaster and Associate Conductor, also served as Principle Second Violinist with the Whiting Park Festival Orchestra and Associate Concertmaster of the South Shore Orchestra. In my position with the LCSO as Associate Conductor and as an educator, I wrote and produced children's concerts (over the course of twelve seasons) that attracted nearly 8,000 children from LaPorte and surrounding counties each year. I presented at the American String Teacher Association's National Conference with a session on writing and producing Children's concerts.

My next break came when the director of the Portage Orchestra program reached out and asked if I would be willing to complete the second semester of the year because an illness in his family was forcing him to retire early. I accepted and the next year left St. Mary's College to become the Orchestra Director at Portage Township Schools, where I spent the rest of my career, twenty-two years of teaching, playing, leading, growing in a very satisfying position.

During my years at Portage, the program continued to grow and thrive and I did also. As a result of my curiosity with new technology I reached out to Zeta Music Systems in Oakland, CA where they were promoting new technology with Midi/Electric string instruments. We were able to invite Drew Tretick, an ambassador for Zeta Music Systems (whose family was from Muncie, IN) to come to Portage where he joined our orchestra for a fascinating concert. He enjoyed our collaboration and I was hired by Zeta to serve as an Education Clinician for their company. That opened many doors for me and our program at Portage. We became the leading alternative styles program in the state of Indiana and my orchestra created a new Zeta Rock Orchestra which presented at numerous conferences in the Midwest. She also led the way in Alternative Styles with our jazz orchestra in addition to very successful traditional orchestral programming. It was an exciting time in our program, which continued until my retirement. The year after I retired from Portage, Covid hit. Boy was I glad I wasn't teaching then! I was able to continue with the LaPorte County Symphony, as they found a way to continue their season. After Covid, I was active in several orchestras throughout the area, primarily with LaPorte and have expanded to now actively perform in five area orchestras.

After retirement I spent nearly a full year as an assistant to the director of orchestras in Crown Point

following their director's cancer diagnosis. I felt that I was able to make a difference there by keeping the program strong and grounded as I worked side by side with their teacher. That year the Crown Point HS orchestra even made it down to Indy for the state finals! Two colleagues of mine who are also retired high school orchestra teachers and I have created the Aspire String Trio. We are very active throughout the area. In addition, I recently created a professional group called Shockwave Rock Orchestra and we have performed two concerts so far using our Zeta electric instruments. The past two years I have been featured as a soloist for the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra and South Shore Symphony performing Trans-Siberian Orchestra pieces on my Zeta Violin! That has been exciting!

The last big change in my musical journey came recently when I was asked to take over as music director and conductor of the Northwest Indiana Rusty Strings Community Orchestra. The orchestra meets at Pines Village Retirement Community in Valparaiso and prepares five concerts each year. When I began conducting the orchestra, there were approximately twenty musicians involved. We now average around forty musicians for each concert and collaborate with Culver Military Academy for our Holiday Concert. This year we were invited to play a run-out concert to the Lutheran Church in Valparaiso. The orchestra is comprised of musicians ranging in age from mid-twenties into their eighties. We typically have a dozen residents of Pines Village who join us in rehearsals as appreciative listeners and supporters of the group. We frequently include them in our concerts as guest performers, singing carols, narrators and even participants as former musicians.

I pray my career in music will continue for many years to come, helping me bring joy to the Northwest Indiana community. I couldn't be happier and know I have made a difference across the region. What a journey!

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

Music performance is a challenging field to excel in, maybe nearly impossible.

Following college graduation I started my career at Duneland School Corporation as a string specialist, grades 5-12. In Indiana at the time, after five years, educators were required to obtain their Master's Degree.

So, I looked into area schools that offered Master's programs and incredibly I received a full scholarship to the University of Notre Dame where I started on my Master's Degree in Violin Performance/Sonata Literature. Things started looking up for me. I became concertmaster and Executive Director of the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra. We started our family. I was having some success.

Then....we moved to Pittsburgh, PA for my husband's work. We had three children by then. I wondered what I could do in Pittsburgh, so I looked into violin lessons. I was invited to participate in the Artist Diploma Performance Degree at Duquesne University! I jumped at the chance to improve my skills even further. My teachers were amazing, Concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Opera and Ballet Company and Associate Concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony. I was successful at Duquesne, passed my graduate recital with high marks and shortly after graduation, my husband's work brought us back to NW Indiana. I was feeling pretty great about my playing at the time. I decided to audition for a full-time position with the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, which I had played in for the three years I was in Graduate School at Notre Dame.

I auditioned. I did not get the position.

It was such a blow to me. WHAM! After all the work I had done, two advanced performance degrees (the second in Orchestral Literature), I could not believe I didn't get into the orchestra. I went home, laid down on my bed and bawled my eyes out, just devastated. How could this be? In the meantime, I was hired by St. Mary's College to teach violin. I also founded a new Moreau Chamber Orchestra, taught Secondary Music Methods classes and returned to the LaPorte County Symphony as Concertmaster and Associate Conductor, Principle Second Violinist with the Whiting Park Festival Orchestra and Associate Concertmaster of the South Shore Orchestra, but my heart was still broken.

The pay for an Associate Professor was embarrassingly low. I thought, maybe I should get my Doctorate, so I applied to Northwestern University and was selected as 1st alternate for the degree, but in the

meantime, an opportunity fell into my lap when a colleague from Portage reached out and asked if I would be willing to complete the second semester of the year because of an illness in his family was forcing him to retire early. I accepted and the next year left St. Mary's College to become the Orchestra Director at Portage Township Schools, where I spent the rest of my career, teaching, playing, leading, growing.

So, what obstacles could there possibly be from this point on? A highly successful career in music education, many accolades and respect from my peers and fellow state educators. Music is still hard. Even though I had played in many orchestras over the years, most of the time sitting either as concertmaster or section leaders, I had that itch to try again with the South Bend Symphony. But, I knew what I was facing after 22 years in the classroom; it would not be easy.

I initiated violin lessons with Jameson Cooper of the Euclid String Quartet, affiliated with IUSB and the IU School of Music (and currently concertmaster of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra). He is an amazing teacher and an incredible violinist. But, I was rusty. On my second lesson, I dropped my bow. Well, I was nervous. So, I prepared for one full year for an audition with the South Bend Symphony Orchestra. Hours and hours and hours, weeks, months of practice on a solo, and 10 excerpts.

I did not make the cut. As a matter of fact, out of the 9 auditionees, only one musician was selected.

Music auditions are no joke. They rip your soul out, in less than 10 minutes, behind a screen, no personal connection, no words, one year of preparation, no thank you for auditioning, just no call back, go home and cry again.

So now following the failed audition, two more years of violin lessons, non-stop practice, working on orchestral excerpts, learning concertos, unaccompanied Bach Sonatas, mastering techniques, etudes, doing so many incredible things as a musician, performer, educator, soloist, chamber music performer, conductor, I just wonder if I should audition for the South Bend Symphony again. My friends, who play in the symphony and surround me on all sides of the orchestras I play in cannot believe I am not in the orchestra. They wish I was, tell me I should be, they encourage me, ask, can't you be a sub? You have to get through the audition, I tell them.

Do I have it in me? Do I have the internal fortitude to keep trying? The only true obstacle I have ever really had to overcome in life is the genuine difficulty of being a professional musician. I am successful, admired and respected, conduct a community orchestra and play in five semi-professional orchestras....is that enough?

I wonder...but you know, music is hard.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

Music brings great joy and challenges. As I entered college I looked at my options, trying to decide what my major should be, I chose education because I felt it was an honorable career, but then I had to decide music or physical education. I was the top singles player for my high school and was looking to continue that same role as a college player, so choosing one over the other was a serious decision since I loved both equally. I contemplated what I would be doing later in my life, playing tennis or playing the violin/piano. I realized in order to choose a career that I could maintain for my whole life, the clear choice was music. It is a decision I will never regret. I do not play tennis any more, but my life is full of music.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I conduct all concerts and rehearsals for the NWIRS, on average seven rehearsals for each of our five concerts/season. (This year we are doing an additional run-out concert at Immanuel Lutheran Church, so we have six concerts on our schedule this season.)

I am totally responsible for the administration and musical direction of the NWIRS Community Orchestra.

Those duties include preparing the season schedule and coordinating with the venues and administrators where we perform and rehearse.

Recruiting members: I communicate through area newspapers, social media and personal contacts to recruit and build the orchestra up to its current strength, maintaining a membership of between 35-50

musicians. (When I started as director, the orchestra consisted on average of 20 musicians)

I have created a personnel roster/spreadsheet with the contact information of all musicians who have ever performed with the orchestra and communicate with them on a regular basis, announcing opportunities for upcoming concerts and events.

I choose the music literature we will be playing, coordinating with our HS partners to acquire music for loan, or use donations to purchase new music for the group.

At this time, I have created a music library for music to help ensure our future.

I prepare all the music for performance by marking bowing and fingerings into the parts and use the expertise of colleagues to mark the same in the cello parts. Once parts are marked, they are then scanned and sent digitally to orchestra members.

I create and arrange for printing of concert programs, send out press releases for concerts and create events on social media to promote our concerts.

We have recently initiated donation requests at our concerts, so now I must keep track of all donations through a separate bank account. Those funds are used to purchase new music and build our library, but I must be very diligent with its use and accountable for its security.

I am responsible for communicating weekly with musicians regarding upcoming rehearsals and concerts.

Our orchestra rehearses at Pines Village Retirement Community in Valparaiso on Tuesday evenings from 7-8:45. As part of our outreach, we encourage residents of Pines to join us for rehearsals and include them whenever possible, for participating in sing-alongs or other interactive opportunities. We usually have a dozen or more residents who join us weekly.

## **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Carrie Ann Carlson is currently the director of the Northwest Indiana Rusty Strings Community Orchestra based in Valparaiso, Indiana. She recently retired after 22 years as Director of Orchestras at Portage High School in Portage, Indiana. The orchestras maintained an active traditional performance schedule under her direction, participating in all Indiana State School Music Association events as well as exploring alternative styles, participating in the ISSMA Jazz Contest and preparing their own annual "Zetafest" rock orchestra concert! She also taught class piano, music appreciation and music technology.

The role Carrie played in bringing music technology to PHS began with a four year collaboration as an educator clinician for Zeta Music Systems. As a Zeta educator clinician, she presented numerous clinics at national and regional music conferences teaching fellow music educators how to incorporate electronic string instruments into the traditional music curriculum. The PHS orchestra was once featured in an article for The Band and Orchestra Product News as "The Orchestra of the Future."

In 2015 Carlson was the recipient of the Indiana American String Teacher Association's High School Orchestra Teacher of the Year award. She has conducted three All-Region Honor Orchestras, served as coordinator of the Indiana All-State Orchestra, presented clinics at both National and State American String Teacher Association conventions and served as a judge for ISSMA Solo and Ensemble Contests. Professionally, Carrie performs as a violinist with the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra, Whiting Park Festival Orchestra, Elkhart County Symphony Orchestra, South Shore Symphony Orchestra, Symphony of the Lakes and is Music Director/Conductor of the Northwest Indiana Rusty Strings Community Orchestra. She studies violin privately (three years) with Jameson Cooper, violin professor at IUSB, principal violinist of the Euclid String Quartet and concertmaster of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra.

A native west-sider from Evansville, IN., Carrie attended F.J. Reitz High School. As a youth she was active in The Girl Scouts of America (earning her First Class and also being selected to represent Indiana attending the Wider Opportunity "Saddle Straddle" at the Girl Scout National Center West in Ten Sleep, Wyoming). Carrie was a ten year member of the 4-H Horse and Pony Club, a member of the Evansville All-City Orchestra, Indiana All-State Orchestra and was awarded Reitz High School orchestra's prestigious

Arion Music Award for outstanding senior musician. As an athlete, she played on the basketball team and was the number one singles player, lettering on her high school tennis team.

She earned her Bachelor's Degree as an Area Major in Music Education from Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN, attending with a music talent grant and a full tuition tennis scholarship (serving as team captain for three years, number one singles player for four years, receiving "most outstanding leader awards" three consecutive years and lettering four times). She was a member of the AOII Social Sorority and during her senior year was recognized as an ISU Alan C. Rankin Outstanding Senior.

Following graduation, she began her teaching career at Chesterton High School serving five years as their string specialist. Upon leaving Chesterton, Carlson attended graduate school at The University of Notre Dame and earned her Master's of Music in Violin Performance and Sonata Literature. Following graduation, she served as concertmaster and executive director of the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra for many years before moving to Pennsylvania with her husband and young family. She continued her studies there, earning an Artist Diploma degree in Violin Performance and Orchestral Literature from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

Upon returning to Indiana, Carlson served three years as an Adjunct Professor of Music at Saint Mary's College and began a twelve year affiliation with the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra, serving as associate conductor and concertmaster of the orchestra. She scripted, produced and conducted the LCSO children's concerts (collaborating with its current namesake, V. Michael Drayton) which drew nearly 8,000 children annually. In Carlson's final year with the orchestra before a brief hiatus, Drayton and Carlson presented a clinic at the National American String Teachers Association Conference in Kansas City, MO on the writing and production of children's concerts. During this period she also began her 22 year career with Portage Township Schools, played professionally in several local orchestras and maintained an active string quartet and string trio. She currently serves the members of the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra as their orchestra liaison and attends all board and performance committee meetings. See below for Resume

**Please fill out the above or upload documents here.**


 Carrie Carlson Resume 5.15.26 current.pdf

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**

 CC Letter Of Recommendation by Pat... .pdf

 Carrie Carlson Recommendation by D... .pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Twelve years as volunteer pianist for Lamb's Chapel UMC, coordinator of summer bible school. Aspire String Trio, volunteer performances at Memorial Hospital, South Bend, IN

Coordinator of Jazz Festival for Rolling Prairie UMC, 3 years  
Board of Directors for the RPUMC  
Current Orchestra Liaison to the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra, attending all board meetings and Performance Committee meetings.  
Volunteer to the PAX CENTER in LaPorte, IN, help preparing Thanksgiving dinner  
Volunteer for RPUMC fair booth, many years preparing food during LP County fair week.  
Indiana American String Teachers Association, past member

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves.  
This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



## 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

### Nominee

<b>Name:</b>	Ciara Ward
<b>Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:</b>	Ciara Ward
<b>Preferred Email:</b>	ciaraward22@gmail.com
<b>Personal Info:</b>	
<b>Mobile Phone:</b>	(331) 980-5513
<b>Company Info:</b>	
<b>Company/Organization:</b>	Caring Conversations Center
<b>Title/Position:</b>	Owner

**Business Phone:** (630) 717-2752

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Caring Conversations Center

### If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 5

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

**Primary:** Healthcare

**Secondary:** Business

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My journey into the therapy field was not something I originally planned. In many ways, it unfolded through life experiences, opportunities, and people who saw something in me before I fully saw it in myself.

Before becoming a therapist, I worked as a probation officer for nearly ten years. During that time, I was constantly interacting with people who were navigating trauma, difficult life circumstances, and systems that often focused more on punishment than understanding. Even then, I found myself naturally listening to people's stories and trying to understand the deeper "why" behind their behavior.

During COVID, a friend encouraged me to take the licensing exam and consider working in a hospital setting as a therapist. I had already earned my degree, but I had never seriously considered stepping into the therapy field in that way. With some encouragement, I decided to take the exam, and once I passed, everything began to move quickly.

I started working in hospitals across Illinois, including Northwestern, where I gained valuable experience supporting individuals and families during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. That work deepened my understanding of mental health, trauma, and the importance of having someone present who can hold space for people without judgment.

Through that experience, mentors and colleagues began encouraging me to start my own private practice. They recognized my ability to connect with people and support them through complex emotional experiences. That encouragement eventually led me to launch my own practice, where I now have the privilege of helping individuals, couples, and families work through life's challenges. My journey into the therapy field was not something I originally planned. In many ways, it unfolded through life experiences, opportunities, and people who saw something in me before I fully saw it in myself.

Before becoming a therapist, I worked as a probation officer for nearly ten years. During that time, I was constantly interacting with people who were navigating trauma, difficult life circumstances, and systems

that often focused more on punishment than understanding. Even then, I found myself naturally listening to people's stories and trying to understand the deeper "why" behind their behavior.

During COVID, a friend encouraged me to take the licensing exam and consider working in a hospital setting as a therapist. I had already earned my degree, but I had never seriously considered stepping into the therapy field in that way. With some encouragement, I decided to take the exam, and once I passed, everything began to move quickly.

I started working in hospitals across Illinois, including Northwestern, where I gained valuable experience supporting individuals and families during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. That work deepened my understanding of mental health, trauma, and the importance of having someone present who can hold space for people without judgment.

Through that experience, mentors and colleagues began encouraging me to start my own private practice. They recognized my ability to connect with people and support them through complex emotional experiences. That encouragement eventually led me to launch my own practice, where I now have the privilege of helping individuals, couples, and families work through life's challenges.

Looking back, my path into therapy feels very aligned with who I've always been. The work allows me to listen, guide, and create spaces where people can be honest about their experiences while reconnecting with their strength, identity, and purpose.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

One of the biggest obstacles I have overcome in my life and career has been learning how to step into spaces that no one around me had stepped into before. I am the only person in my immediate circle who became a business owner, and when I started my private practice I truly did not know anything about starting or running a business. There was no blueprint in front of me, no one close to me who had already done it, and very few people who could guide me through what entrepreneurship actually required.

What I did know was that I had a strong desire to help people and a deep sense that this work was something I was being called to do. Even before I could clearly see the bigger picture, I trusted that feeling and kept moving forward. Starting my practice meant learning everything from the ground up while still doing the clinical work of supporting clients. I had to learn about business structure, systems, finances, leadership, and how to build something sustainable while also showing up fully for the people I serve.

Personally, I have also had to overcome many of the challenges that come from growing up in environments where trauma and hardship were common. For a long time, survival was the focus. Over time, I began to realize that my experiences were not just obstacles but also part of what allows me to connect with people in a genuine way. They helped shape my empathy, my understanding, and my commitment to helping others find their voice and direction in life.

Looking back, those obstacles pushed me to grow in ways I never expected. They taught me to trust my intuition, remain grounded in my purpose, and continue building something meaningful even when the path is unfamiliar. Today those experiences allow me to support others not only as a therapist, but as someone who understands what it means to create a new path when one did not previously exist.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I am in the therapy field because I believe people deserve a space where they can tell the truth about their lives without fear of judgment. Many people move through life carrying pain, confusion, or experiences they have never had the opportunity to process. I felt called to be someone who helps create that space for healing, reflection, and growth.

My journey and life experiences helped shape that calling. I grew up seeing how much people were dealing with internally while often trying to appear strong on the outside. Those experiences helped me understand how powerful it can be when someone finally feels seen, heard, and understood. That awareness stayed with me and eventually led me into this work.

Over time I realized that therapy is not about fixing people. It is about helping people reconnect with who they are, understand their experiences, and move through life with more clarity and intention. I am

passionate about helping individuals recognize their value, their voice, and their ability to create change in their lives.

The work also aligns with my belief that healing should not be limited to a select group of people. Through my work as a therapist and through the platforms I have created, I strive to make conversations about mental and emotional wellness more accessible so that more people feel empowered to take care of their mind, body, and spirit.

At the heart of it, I am in this field because I care deeply about people and the power of transformation that can happen when someone is given the space to grow into their authentic self.

#### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I currently serve as a clinical behavioral health therapist and the owner of a private practice, Caring Conversations Center. In this role, I provide therapeutic services to individuals, couples, and families who are navigating a range of life challenges including trauma, anxiety, relationship concerns, life transitions, and emotional stress.

My responsibilities include conducting clinical assessments, developing treatment plans, and providing ongoing therapy that helps clients gain insight, build healthier coping strategies, and move toward greater emotional wellness. I work from a holistic perspective, recognizing that mental health is connected to the mind, body, and spirit.

In addition to providing direct clinical services, I also supervise and mentor emerging therapists who are working toward licensure. I support them in developing their clinical skills, ethical decision-making, and professional confidence as they grow in the field.

Beyond my clinical work, I also create educational content and speak on topics related to mental health, personal growth, and emotional wellness. Through these efforts, I aim to extend conversations about healing and self-awareness beyond the therapy room so that more people have access to tools that support their well-being.

#### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

I hold a Bachelor of Social Work from Saint Mary's College, a Master of Social Work, and a Master of Conflict Resolution from Dominican University. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and a member of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

My contributions to the field include providing clinical mental health services to individuals, couples, and families through my private practice, Caring Conversations Center. I have also contributed as an educator by teaching, mentoring, and supervising graduate-level students and associate clinicians across multiple disciplines, including social work, marriage and family therapy, professional counseling, clinical mental health counseling, and psychiatric nursing. Through supervision and training, I support the development of emerging clinicians as they build clinical skills, ethical practice, and confidence in working with diverse populations.

In addition to my clinical and educational contributions, I hold certifications as a Certified Parenting Instructor, Certified Anger Management Instructor, and Certified Mediator. I am also a member of the Phi Alpha Social Work Honor Society and the Kappa Gamma Pi National Catholic College Graduate Honor Society.

Through clinical practice, interdisciplinary education, and mentorship, I continue working to strengthen the behavioral health field while helping prepare the next generation of mental health professionals.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

a. Awards

- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**



**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

My community involvement has primarily centered around expanding access to mental health education and support. Through my work as a clinical behavioral health therapist and founder of Caring Conversations Center, I regularly engage with the community by providing mental health education, resources, and support to individuals and families who may not otherwise have access to these services.

Earlier in my career, I worked closely with community systems through the Circuit Court of Cook County as a Domestic Violence Case Worker, where I helped individuals and families navigate resources, complete psychosocial assessments, and connect with support services. I also co-facilitated parenting groups for families involved in the court system, helping parents develop healthier communication and family dynamics.

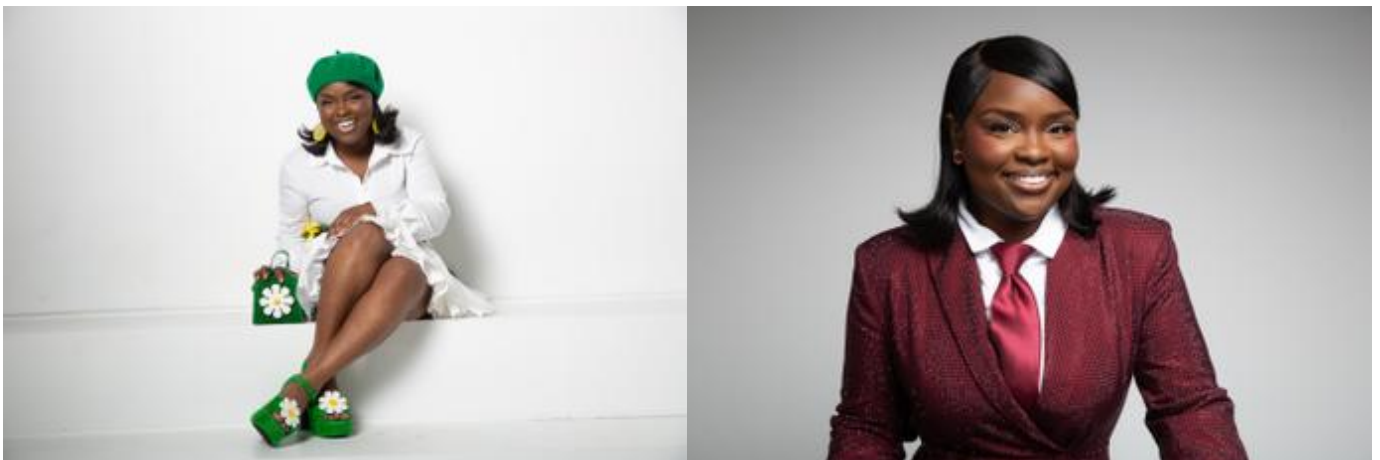
I have also contributed to community work through program development and collaboration with organizations focused on supporting children and families impacted by domestic violence. My work included helping develop trauma-informed educational modules and coordinating resources for families in need.

In addition, I volunteer my time through mentorship and education by supervising and training graduate-level students and emerging clinicians across multiple disciplines, helping them develop the skills necessary to serve their communities effectively.

Through both professional and volunteer efforts, my goal has always been to support healthier communities by increasing awareness of mental health, strengthening families, and helping individuals access the resources they need to improve their well-being.

**8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Corrina Whalen

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Corrina Rene Whalen

**Preferred Email:** soldbycorrina@gmail.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 902-7498

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Realty Executives Premier

**Title/Position:** Realtor

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Realty Executives Premier -Corrina Rene

## If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

### Choose Award Category:

Influential Woman

### How many years in field:

10

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

#### Primary:

Business

#### Secondary:

Marketing/Media

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My journey into real estate is deeply rooted in resilience, growth, and determination.

I became a mom at a young age while navigating a very challenging environment. I was surrounded by instability and addiction, and there were moments where the odds felt stacked against me. But I made a decision early on that my story would not end there. I wanted more for myself and for my son.

Real estate became more than just a career for me, it became a way to create stability, build a future, and help others do the same. I started with very little, learning everything I could, showing up consistently, and pushing through self-doubt and obstacles along the way.

Over the years, I've built my business through hard work, relationships, and a genuine passion for helping people. Today, I'm proud to serve families across Northwest Indiana and Chicagoland, guiding them through one of the most important decisions of their lives.

My journey hasn't been easy, but it's exactly what allows me to connect with my clients on a deeper level. I understand what it means to want better and I'm committed to helping others get there.

### 2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.

One of the biggest obstacles I've overcome in my life was learning to walk away from a toxic relationship early on. As a young mom, I found myself in a situation that was emotionally draining and unhealthy. It impacted how I saw myself both physically and mentally and for a period of time, I struggled with confidence and direction.

Making the decision to leave wasn't easy, but it was necessary. It became a turning point in my life where I chose growth over comfort and self-worth over uncertainty.

I initially pursued nursing school, thinking it was the right path, but I realized I was being called to something different. Taking the leap into real estate required faith, resilience, and the willingness to start over. Around that same time, I met my now-husband, and over the past 13 years we've built a life rooted in commitment, growth, and faith.

Like any relationship, we've faced challenges, but we chose to work through them. Strengthening our foundation through our faith and prioritizing our family has been a major part of that journey.

These experiences have shaped who I am today. They've taught me resilience, self-worth, and perseverance and they allow me to show up stronger, both in my personal life and in my career.

### 3. Why are you in your chosen field?

I'm in real estate because, at my core, I've always had a passion for helping people.

Originally, I thought that path would look like nursing caring for others in a more traditional sense. But over

time, I realized I could serve and support people in a different, equally meaningful way through real estate. Every client I work with has a story and a reason behind their move whether it's a growing family, a first-time buyer starting fresh, a life transition like divorce or loss, or relocating for a new opportunity. Being trusted to guide people through those moments is something I don't take lightly. I also love the creative side of this industry. Marketing a home isn't just about putting it online, it's about telling a story, creating emotion, and helping buyers truly connect with a space. I take pride in bringing that vision to life and positioning my clients' homes in a way that stands out. Real estate allows me to combine both of my passions, helping people and being creative, and that's exactly why I'm in this field.

#### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

In my current role as a real estate professional, I manage all aspects of the buying and selling process while providing a high level of service to my clients.

My responsibilities include:

Advising buyers and sellers on market conditions, pricing strategies, and timing

Creating and executing strategic marketing plans for listings, including digital campaigns, video content, and social media exposure

Coordinating showings, open houses, and broker events

Negotiating contracts to ensure the best possible outcome for my clients

Managing transactions from contract to close, including inspections, appraisals, and communication with lenders, attorneys, and title companies

Guiding clients through major life transitions such as relocation, first-time home purchases, and upsizing or downsizing

Building and maintaining strong client relationships and referral networks

#### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

I am committed to continuous growth and professionalism within the real estate industry. I have earned my At Home With Diversity® (AHWD) certification, which reflects my dedication to serving clients from all backgrounds with inclusivity and understanding.

In addition to my certification, I regularly attend industry conferences, training sessions, and continuing education opportunities to stay current on market trends, marketing strategies, and best practices. This ongoing commitment allows me to provide my clients with informed guidance and a competitive edge in today's market.

I am also an active member of both the Northwest Indiana Realtors Association (NIRA) and the Midwest Real Estate Data (MRED) MLS, giving me access to a wide network of professionals, resources, and up-to-date market data across Northwest Indiana and the Chicagoland area.

Through both my education and professional involvement, I strive to continuously elevate the level of service I provide to my clients

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

I am involved in my community through my local church, Anthem Church, where I serve as a greeter and have participated in outreach efforts such as food drives, soup kitchens, and renovation projects. I also regularly volunteer at my children’s schools, supporting events and activities as needed. While balancing family life keeps me busy, giving back remains important to me, and I plan to continue expanding my involvement over time.

**8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** DANEL ERICKSON

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** DANEL ERICKSON

**Preferred Email:** DANEL@EPIPHANYADMIN.COM

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 743-7885

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** EPIPHANY ADMINISTRATIVE SOLUTIONS, LLC.

**Title/Position:** OWNER & ACCOUNTANT

**Business Phone:** (219) 777-7090

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** EIPHANY ADMINISTRATIVE SOLUTIONS

**If applicable:**

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 26

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Business

**Secondary:** Financial

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

I got my first taste of business management working a part-time office job in high school. I loved the way the different functions worked together and separately, and learning how the work flowed. That early spark never went away.

About 25 years ago, I landed my first "adult" job and really dove into the field. There, I learned about manufacturing, construction, service, accounting, and quality management. I developed policies and procedures, handled employee relations, and created safety programs. Over time, I worked my way up to Corporate Administrator, working side by side with the owner and president, and managing the quality system with zero audit findings for the five years I was in charge. While I was there, I also went back to school and earned my associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees, along with a post-graduate certificate.

From there, I moved to my current full-time employer, where I started as Financial Accounting Manager, was promoted to Director of Financial Accounting, transferred into a Director of Compensation & Benefits role, and now serve as AVP of Total Rewards & HR Systems for more than 5,000 employees.

But accounting has always been my greatest love, and it prompted me to launch my own company. Almost six years ago, Epiphany Administrative Solutions was born. The tax side of the business has taken off like wildfire, but my true passion is in accounting and business management. Helping other businesses understand their story through their financials is one of my greatest joys.

**2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

My biggest challenge – in life and in my career – was getting myself and my two daughters out of an abusive relationship and starting over as a single mom. That was 21 years ago, and I haven't looked back since.

For 15 years, it was me and my girls against the world. During that time, I earned all of my degrees, built my career, and gave them the best life I could. They never saw mom quit. Today, they are beautiful, grown, and successful – and I'd like to think that watching me push through taught them something about what's possible.

I'm now married to the best man on the planet — going on six years — but I carry those 15 years with me as proof that grit and love can get you through just about anything.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

Because I love it. I have a natural ability for organizing, managing, and running things. I have an affinity for numbers and understanding how the puzzle pieces fit together — and how to interpret their story. There's nothing quite like helping a business owner see what their financials are really telling them, or building a system that makes something complicated run smoothly.

I've also been able to translate those skills into nonprofit and community work, which is where my passion really comes alive. I am the co-founder of NWI Make a Difference Foundation, a nonprofit serving the region. I served as League President of the Lake Village Summer League for seven years. I've been the Treasurer of the Lowell Chamber of Commerce for the past three years. And most recently, I'm a founding member of the Newton County Long-Term Recovery Group, working to assist survivors of the March 10th tornado who have unmet needs and need help returning to a normal life.

Being good with numbers and operations is a skill. Choosing to use those skills to lift up the people and communities around me — that's the reason I'm in this field.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

Business Owner: Epiphany Administrative Solutions

I own and operate Epiphany Administrative Solutions, now approaching its sixth year. Epiphany is dedicated to helping individuals and businesses achieve financial growth, both personally and professionally. Our services include accounting, bookkeeping, tax preparation, payroll, and business administration. I work directly with clients ranging from individuals to small businesses, handling everything from tax returns and bookkeeping to helping business owners understand the story their financials are telling. The tax preparation side of the business has grown significantly, but my core passion remains in accounting and business management, helping clients build stronger foundations and make better-informed decisions.

Full-Time Position: AVP of Total Rewards & HR Systems, Gardant Management Solutions

I also serve as Assistant Vice President of Total Rewards & HR Systems for Gardant Management Solutions, a multi-location S-Corp with an ESOP that operates more than 100 senior living communities. I am responsible for the strategic design and administration of the organization's total rewards programs, including compensation, health and welfare benefits, retirement plans (ESOP and 401(k) - single employer plan and a MEP), and HR technology systems for a workforce of more than 5,000 employees across multiple states.

My day-to-day responsibilities include benefits plan design and compliance, ERISA and ACA oversight, multistate leave law administration, workforce analytics, ESOP communications, nondiscrimination testing coordination, vendor management, and open enrollment strategy. I also lead system-level work in our HRIS, building reporting and process automation to support data-driven decision-making. I serve as the liaison between our accounting teams and our HRIS, ensuring that accounting gets the data they need, in a way they understand, and that HR and Payroll understand what accounting needs and why they need it. When complex compliance questions arise, whether it's a multistate leave law conflict, an international remote work situation, or a benefits disruption affecting plan participants, I'm the one who researches, interprets, and builds the path forward.

### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Recognition and Contributions:

I was (obviously) recently nominated as a 2026 Influential Woman by the Northwest Indiana Influential Women Association. As a college student, I received a Malcolm Baldrige Award. In a prior role, I managed a corporate quality system with zero audit findings for five consecutive years. While formal awards have not been the primary focus of my career, I believe my contributions speak for themselves.

I co-founded the NWI Make a Difference Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit serving the Northwest Indiana region. I am a founding member of the Newton County Long-Term Recovery Group, formed to assist survivors of the March 10th tornado. I have served as Treasurer of the Lowell Chamber of Commerce for

the past three years, served as League President of the Lake Village Summer League for seven years, and currently serve on the local library board.

Through Epiphany Administrative Solutions, I contribute to my field every day by helping individuals and small businesses in the region navigate their finances, understand their numbers, and build stronger businesses.

Education:

All of my degrees were earned through Davenport University, completed while working full time and raising two daughters as a single mom:

Associate's Degree in Business Management

Bachelor's Degree in Business Management

Master of Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting

Post-Graduate Certificate in Human Resource Management

Professional Certifications and Associations:.

SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP)

Member, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

Member, Northwest Indiana SHRM

Member, Lowell Chamber of Commerce

Member, Kankakee Illinois Chamber of Commerce

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

## **7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Community involvement and service have been a constant thread throughout my life.

I am the co-founder of the NWI Make a Difference Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to strengthening the Northwest Indiana community through charitable, educational, and disaster relief initiatives. I remain actively involved in the organization's operations, financial oversight, and fundraising efforts.

Most recently, I am a founding member of the Newton County Long-Term Recovery Group, formed in response to the March 10th tornado that devastated parts of our community. The group is working to assist survivors with unmet needs and help them return to a normal life. NWI MAD serves as the fiscal agent for the recovery effort, and I have been hands-on in coordinating donor management, compliance, and financial stewardship of recovery funds.

I have served as Treasurer of the Lowell Chamber of Commerce for the past three years, managing the organization's financial accounts and reporting.

I currently serve as a board member of the Newton County Public Library.

I served as League President of the Lake Village Summer League for seven years. Under my leadership, the league built a brand new four-field complex, creating a lasting resource for kids and families in our community. Prior to that, I was President of the Newton Nightmares softball organization for two years

and served as Treasurer of a previous softball organization. I also coached softball teams for 10+ years.

I have volunteered with Junior Achievement, bringing real-world business and financial literacy education into local classrooms.

Service is not something I do on the side. It is part of who I am.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Jennifer Dudrey

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Jennifer Dudrey

**Preferred Email:** jenniferd@bullyingfreefuture.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 793-5658

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Bullying Free Future

**Title/Position:** Founder / Executive Director

**Business Phone:** (219) 334-5804

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Bullying Free Future

**If applicable:**

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 32

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Nonprofit

**Secondary:** Education

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

I began working in the mental health field at age 21, starting out at a community mental health center working in the adult groups homes for adults with SMI (serious mental illness). I had my undergraduate degree in psychology however there isn't anything that prepares someone to work in that type of setting. I enjoyed the work, moved up the ranks to House Manager. Part of me wasn't sure I liked the administrative part as much as the direct service, but I was good at it. I worked in multiple areas during my 9 years at the community mental health center- out-patient case manager, inpatient unit case manager, and finally emergency services.

I left that agency to work with children and adolescents in a psychiatric residential treatment facility. I started out as a therapist, then worked up to Risk Manager / Director of Performance improvement / Intake and then served as Clinical Director for 5 years. During my 10 years there, I started an intern program for therapists, won an award from Indiana University Northwest for Field Instructor of the Year; was awarded a Bridge Building Instructor of the Year by my staff and had some of the best years of my career in that facility. I had great working relationships with staff, and really embraced the administrative roles I had. Over time, it did lead me away from direct practice and that was something I missed.

I returned to my roots and went back for another 7 years at the community mental health center. I ran 4 departments that worked with Department of Child Services court-ordered children and families and even did some direct therapy on some children's cases. But, over time, I realized I needed to slow down and was reaching burn out working in such chaotic and intense systems. I was offered a position with a former intern I had years prior that had started her own Intensive Out-patient therapy agency. I felt that it was time to return to direct care and provide groups to adolescents and families. I also got to supervise interns again, which was something I really love doing. It was during my 3 years there that I considered starting my own non-profit. We were seeing such an increase in patients with social anxiety, school avoidance and suicidal ideations due to being bullied that I felt something more needed to be done.

In late 2021 - 2022, I formed a 501c4 non-profit called Bullying Free Future. I wanted to provide support

groups for students who were being bullied. I felt it was important to give them a space for healing and to know they are not alone. I created the by-laws, obtained members to be on the board of directors and we started as a literal "grass-roots" organization. I created our mascot, Buddy Bear, who comes with me during all my presentations and he stays on-site to give kids who need a good listener or who just need a hug an opportunity for comfort. Buddy "gives better hugs than Olaf". Buddy has traveled as far as South Dakota, because a 9 year old girl there was bullied and needed a friend. Since inception, Bullying Free Future has provided parent information meetings and/ or school wide bullying prevention at the following schools: Oregon-Davis Jr/Sr High, (Hamlet) ; Montessori of the Oaks, (Hobart), St. Peter Lutheran School, (North Judson), Wanatah schools, (Wanatah), Hebron Elementary, (Hebron), and have just started working with Griffith Community Schools, (Griffith). I also started an Empathy Program / Curriculum in Oregon-Davis Jr/Sr high and provide intervention groups there every 2 weeks for those identified in bullying behaviors and support groups for those who have been bullied. The focus of the Empathy Intervention program is to help those who commit acts of bullying to realize the severity of their actions and foster cultures of kindness. Students are referred to the program by the principal and spend 6-8 groups learning about empathy, challenging their thinking and addressing impulsivity.

The program has been so successful at Oregon-Davis that parents in that community often call the school and request their kids be in our groups to help with impulsivity and other behaviors besides bullying. One of the first successful "graduates" of the intervention program became a Kindness Captain for the school. He then helped plan groups on forgiveness, how to use words rather than fight and he really turned things around for himself. This is why I feel providing services to the students who bully is as important as providing services to the victims. The "bullies" are kids too. Often, they need someone to listen and help them understand what they are doing and how they can change. This is a kiddo who went from viewing himself as "the big bad dude" to asking how he can help and wanting to wear a "Be a Buddy not a Bully Shirt" around the school. He served as a mentor for other students. Bullying Free Future is now a part of the Oregon-Davis community. We have returned every school year and are embraced by the staff and students. We help in other ways as well by providing items and food for their Bobcat store which is accessible to students who can use "money" to purchase toiletries, clothing and snacks.

We have also participated in back pack drives / school supply giveaway events in both Jasper and Porter Counties.

In addition to helping students in Indiana, we have provided support to students in Michigan and South Dakota through our website and our online support groups.

Other activities I have done include a podcast with Porter County Health Department on bullying and a video for parents that was distributed to Valparaiso Community schools.

I also have been engaged in public speaking events. I provided an ADHD seminar at the NWI Psych Consortium last year. I have held 2 ADHD public events at my private practice location through Gerald Lewis and Associates.

I also was a guest speaker at a Parent Coalition meeting at Griffith First Christian Church after one of their students committed suicide. We are now working with Griffith Public Schools as a result.

I fully believe that all my years of service have led me here- to be doing this level of advocacy and support. I am passionate about what I do.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

No LCSW (licensed clinical social worker) has 32 years in the field without facing obstacles. One of my obstacles was being in supervisory / administrative positions so early in my career. In mental health, those positions are like being the bologna in a bologna sandwich. There is a constant push-pull between the senior management above and the line staff below. The clinical supervisor / director positions are the bologna. Someone either above you or below you is wanting more, doing less and your job is to fix it all. It's like trying to change a tire while still driving the vehicle. Often, you get to be the scapegoat or object of hostility by someone. It's also a fast-paced high stress constant fires-to-put-out sort of environment. I think those life lessons teach you that you are expendable, that work-life balance has to be important and that you can never lose sight of the people for whom you are providing services. They are truly the ones who benefit from great services and who lose when services fall short. I think it is difficult to be in this

field and not feel burn-out eventually. It also causes (sometimes) life changes. I lost a marriage because of the emphasis I put on career and living at work. But that also led me to a second "forever" marriage and I am happier for that.

When I left the fast-paced environments, it was like I was in slow motion. Imagine being a fire fighter your entire life and not having any more fires to put out. It gives a whole different perspective on things- services, life, etc. For me, I wouldn't change working in the high stress environments because it gave me so many experiences in different ways that help me provide the therapy services I provide now.

In my life, I lost both my parents by the time I was 21. That changed my outlook on life and helped me to grow up fast. I think that's partially why I married my high-school sweetheart (which was my first marriage that lasted 14 years). I felt the need to be taken care of, but ultimately that turned towards a need for independence and that marriage ended. I had two beautiful children from that marriage and I believe that is what was meant to happen. I am with my "forever husband" now, (for 13 years), and were were blessed to have a child together so again, everything happens for a reason. I don't live in my career now- I have work-life balance. I've overcome that obstacle.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I truly love the mental health field. I come from a family of nurse practitioners and nurses. Providing help is in our DNA. But for me, it was never going to be nursing. I love the psychology of mental health. I believe in helping people find tools that they can use to navigate stressors in their life. Through my years in mental health, I have been a teacher in supervising interns and clinical staff towards licensure, been able to provide direct therapy services, create a non-profit organization, learned about administrative challenges and obstacles. A truly macro and micro experience. I can't imagine any other field that would give me those opportunities.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I am a DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapist) in private practice at Gerald Lewis and Associates. I provide individual and family therapy services.

I am the Founder and Executive Director of Bullying Free Future. I am the BFF group facilitator, the presenter and also make the products we sell at craft shows to help generate revenue. The services we provide the schools are free, unless they want to obtain grant funding for us.

### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

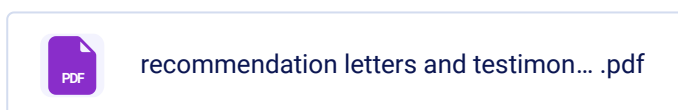
I have a BA in Psychology; MSW in social work and have an LCSW. Years ago, I was awarded field instructor the year at IUN.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**



### **7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Years ago, I worked with Hebron girl scouts and organized a back pack drive to donate filled back packs

with comfort supplies to children in foster care. We had close to 90 back packs that were donated between Lake County DCS and Carmelite Home in East Chicago.

I volunteered as a t-ball coach in Hebron Little League for 4 years. I was briefly the Chair of the softball program for a season and organized a 3 town softball tournament that year.

As the founder of Bullying Free Future, I have done multiple anti-bullying convocations at schools in NWI. BFF created an online support group for students who have been bullied. BFF has a bullying intervention program that has been in place at Oregon-Davis since the 2022 school year.

I have participated in school supply drives and give-away at the Porter County health fairs for 2 years, participated in Demotte back pack drive, participated in the Northshore health fair last year.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



## 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

### Nominee

**Name:** Jennifer Parham

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Jennifer Parham

**Preferred Email:** [jparham@lhragency.com](mailto:jparham@lhragency.com)

**Personal Info:**

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 292-5109

**Company Info:**

**Company/Organization:** Lighthouse Realty

**Title/Position:** Broker/Owner

**Business Phone:** (219) 306-4165

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Lighthouse Realty NWIN

### If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 19

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

**Primary:** Business

**Secondary:** Economic Development/Government

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

Some days I am not sure if I chose real estate, or if it chose me. I have been blessed to build a career in an industry that represents one of the most fundamental human needs, shelter.

I can remember being a teenager and my aunt dragging me from open house to open house, walking through homes we surely could not afford. At the time, I did not fully understand what she was showing me. Looking back, she was exposing me to possibility.

In my early 20s, with a strong background in customer service, I began exploring real estate as a career. I wanted something that would allow me to express myself, while also helping others, especially those who were dreamers like I once was, understand the true gift of homeownership and how it can create generational wealth when used correctly.

After becoming licensed, I was still working while trying to transition fully into real estate. In 2008, I joined Prime Real Estate as an in-house processor, which allowed me to learn the business from the inside out. Unfortunately, that same year marked the beginning of one of the largest housing recessions in history. The market shifted dramatically, and roles like mine became uncertain as transactions slowed significantly.

After giving birth to my son in 2009, I made the decision to fully step into real estate as a Realtor. I needed flexibility for my family, but I also wanted to see if I could truly build something of my own. What I came to love about real estate is that it allows you to shape your career based on your vision and your willingness to grow.

Over the years, I have experienced this industry from multiple perspectives, as an employee, a part-time agent, a full-time agent, and now as a property manager and brokerage owner.

Real estate became more than a career. It became a way to serve, to advocate, and to help others access

opportunities that I did not always see for myself growing up. It became a way to stand in spaces that once felt out of reach and say, "We belong here too."

I did not come into this industry with a roadmap. I came in willing to learn, to grow, and to serve. Over time, that led me into leadership, first locally, and then across the state. I had the honor of serving as President of the Indiana Association of REALTORS® in 2024, becoming the first Black woman elected to that role. A moment that was bigger than me, because it represented what is possible.

Entrepreneurship followed purpose. I founded Lighthouse Realty in 2016 to build something rooted in professionalism, integrity, and care for people. I later launched Lighthouse School of Real Estate because I realized success is not just about what you build for yourself, but what you build for others. My goal was not simply to bring new agents into the industry, but to equip existing agents with the skills, professionalism, and foundation needed to build lasting and meaningful careers.

It is my sincere hope that my journey has created space for others along the way. And when I do leave this industry, I will leave it better than when I found it.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

I wish I could say my life has been without obstacles, but such is life.

This is the hard part. I do not naturally enjoy talking about myself, but I understand it is necessary to recognize the weight of the journey. So here goes.

I was orphaned by the age of 11 and moved from the only home I knew to live with my maternal aunt. We did not always have the best relationship, but I do credit her with opening my eyes to the career that would ultimately change my life.

By the age of 20, I was facing homelessness. Not the kind that is always visible, but the kind where everything you own fits in your car and you move from couch to couch between friends and family. The irony of me having experienced homelessness and now building a career centered around housing is not lost on me.

I also entered an industry where representation was, and still is, limited. As a Black woman in real estate, I quickly realized there were very few people who looked like me in the rooms I was walking into. Even today, African Americans make up only about 4% of REALTORS® in Northwest Indiana. There were moments where I could have questioned whether I belonged, but instead, I chose to grow, to learn, and to stand.

There were also moments that tested me in very real ways, being denied access while attempting to show homes in certain communities, or being followed while simply doing my job. Those experiences could have discouraged me, but instead they strengthened my resolve.

Professionally, I built my career without a blueprint. I did not come from generational wealth or established networks in this industry. I made mistakes, I learned in real time, and I had to develop both confidence and competence along the way. What could have been barriers became building blocks.

Serving as the first Black President at both the local and state levels came with its own internal obstacles. I had to overcome the quiet question of whether I truly belonged in those spaces. I learned that it was not enough to simply be the first. I wanted to be one of the best. Being recognized in that way is something that has moved me more than I can fully express.

Today, my obstacles look different. I am navigating motherhood with a 17-year-old son, balancing life transitions, and embracing new seasons both personally and professionally. These moments serve as a daily reminder that my work is not finished.

Each obstacle has refined my perspective. They have deepened my commitment to service, strengthened my ability to lead with empathy, and expanded my understanding of what access and opportunity truly mean.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I am in real estate because it allows me to serve people at one of the most foundational levels of their lives, where they live, how they live, and what they are able to build for the future.

For me, this work has never been just about buying and selling homes. It is about access. It is about opportunity. It is about helping people step into something they may not have always seen as possible for themselves.

Having experienced instability earlier in my life, I understand the importance of having a place to call your own. That perspective shapes how I show up in this work. It is not transactional for me. It is personal.

I also remain in this field because I recognize the responsibility that comes with representation. As a Black woman in an industry where we are still underrepresented, I am intentional about showing up, leading, and creating space for others to see what is possible. I want people to know that there is room for them here.

Over time, my role in this industry has expanded. Through my brokerage, my school, and my leadership roles, I have been able to move beyond individual transactions and into building pathways for others, whether that is helping clients achieve homeownership, or helping agents build sustainable and meaningful careers.

Real estate gives me the ability to combine purpose with impact. It allows me to serve, to lead, and to leave something better than I found it.

And that is why I continue to choose this work.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I currently serve as the Broker/Owner of Lighthouse Realty and the Founder of Lighthouse School of Real Estate, where my responsibilities span leadership, operations, education, and strategic growth.

At Lighthouse Realty, I oversee the day-to-day operations of the brokerage, including agent development, transaction oversight, compliance, and client service standards. I lead and mentor agents at various stages of their careers, ensuring they are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and professionalism needed to succeed in a constantly evolving industry. I also manage our property management services, vendor relationships, and overall business strategy.

Through Lighthouse School of Real Estate, I develop and deliver continuing education courses for real estate professionals across Indiana. My focus is on creating meaningful, practical training that strengthens ethical practices, leadership development, and long-term business success within the industry.

In addition to my business roles, I have served in leadership positions at both the local and state levels within the REALTOR® community, including serving as President of the Indiana Association of REALTORS®. These roles have allowed me to contribute to industry advocacy, professional standards, and the advancement of real estate professionals across the state.

Overall, my work is centered on leadership, education, and creating systems that support both clients and professionals. I am committed to building businesses that not only operate successfully, but also develop people and elevate the industry as a whole.

### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

When I reflect on recognition in my career, I do not see it as personal achievement alone, but as confirmation that the work I have been called to do is making an impact.

My contributions to the real estate industry and community include:

President (2024), Indiana Association of REALTORS®, first Black woman elected to this role  
President, MLS Board, Northwest Indiana REALTORS® Association

Board of Directors, Indiana Association of REALTORS®  
Member, Professional Standards Committee  
Member, Broker Engagement Committee, National Association of REALTORS®  
Graduate, Indiana Association of REALTORS® Leadership Academy (Class of 2018)

In addition to leadership and service, I contribute to the industry through education:

Founder, Lighthouse School of Real Estate  
Developer and instructor of continuing education courses focused on ethics, fair housing, leadership, and business development

My professional foundation includes:

Licensed real estate professional since 2007  
Ongoing continuing education and professional development

Beyond business, I am committed to community and ministry:

Co-leader, GO! 2Gether Marriage Ministry, The Go Church  
Developer of premarital counseling and marriage enrichment programs  
Facilitator of faith-based relationship education and support for couples

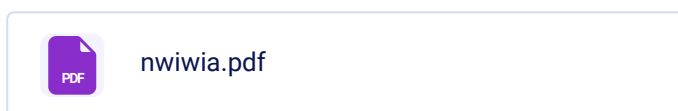
More than any title or recognition, my focus has remained the same, to serve, to build, and to create pathways for others. It is important to me that the work I do leaves people, and the spaces I serve, better than I found them.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**



**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

2018-2023 Boys and Girls club of NWI Merrillville Advisory Board  
2018-2023 GNIAR MLS BOD  
2018- 2021 GNIAR MLS Rules and Reg Chair  
2022-2024 National Association of Realtors BOD  
2022-24 National Association of Realtor Member Involvement Committee  
2022- IAR Professional Standards Committee  
2022 - GNIAR MLS Board President  
2022 Indiana Assoc of Realtors Vice President  
2023 Indiana Assoc of Realtor Pres- Elect  
2024 Indiana Assoc of Realtor President  
2024 IEDA Women in Economic Development Leadership Cohort  
2025 United Neighborhood Inc. BOD

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Jocelyn Colburn

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Jocelyn Colburn, MSW, LSW

**Preferred Email:** [jocelyncolburn41@gmail.com](mailto:jocelyncolburn41@gmail.com)

**Personal Info:**

**Mobile Phone:** (574) 310-9918

**Company Info:**

**Company/Organization:** Michigan City Police Department

**Title/Position:** Police Social Work

**Business Phone:** (219) 874-3221

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Michigan City Police Department

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Chief of Police Steve Forker

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (219) 874-3221

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** sforker@emichigancity.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 3

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Economic Development/Government

**Secondary:** Nonprofit

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

My journey into social work began with a strong interest in understanding human behavior and the factors that influence how individuals respond to stress, trauma, and life challenges. I first earned my bachelor's degree in psychology from Indiana University Northwest, where I developed a foundation in understanding mental health, behavior, and the importance of supportive systems in helping individuals navigate difficult circumstances. Wanting to make a more direct impact in supporting people through crisis and life transitions, I went on to pursue my master's degree in social work.

During my master's program, I gained valuable hands-on experience through two internships that helped shape my professional path. My first internship was with the Behavioral Health Unit in Michigan City, where I was introduced to the ways mental health services intersect with community safety and crisis response. My second internship was at an outpatient therapy center in South Bend, where I worked with individuals facing a variety of mental health, trauma, and life stressors. Through this work, I began to recognize how frequently many of these challenges intersected with law enforcement and public safety systems.

These experiences sparked my interest in the role social work can play within law enforcement settings. I saw firsthand how individuals experiencing mental health crises, substance use challenges, or family conflict often meet law enforcement before they ever receive the support or resources they need. I became passionate about the idea of bridging that gap and helping create pathways for individuals and families to access appropriate services while also supporting officers who regularly encounter these

complex situations.

After graduating with my master's in social work from Indiana University Northwest, I came across a job posting for a Police Social Worker with the Michigan City Police Department. The position immediately stood out to me as an opportunity to combine my passion for social work with my interest in supporting both community members and law enforcement. I applied knowing it was the type of role where I could help connect individuals in crisis with resources, assist officers in navigating complex social and mental health situations, and contribute to strengthening relationships between the police department and the community.

Today, as the Police Social Worker for the Michigan City Police Department, I work alongside officers to respond to situations involving mental health, family conflict, and social service needs. My role focuses on connecting individuals and families with resources, supporting officer wellness, and helping address underlying challenges that often contribute to repeated calls for service. My journey into this field has been shaped by education, mentorship, and hands-on experience, and it continues to fuel my passion for finding innovative ways to strengthen collaboration between social services and public safety to better serve the community.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

One of the most significant challenges I have faced in my career has been stepping into a professional space where my role is still relatively new and not always fully understood. Police social work is an emerging field, and integrating social work into a law enforcement environment requires far more than simply bringing resources into a department. It requires building trust, breaking down misconceptions, and learning how to bridge two professions that have historically operated very differently.

When I first entered the Michigan City Police Department as the Police Social Worker, I understood that I was stepping into a culture built on resilience, structure, and strength. Law enforcement officers are exposed to situations every day that most people will never experience, and because of that, trust is not given easily. I knew early on that there may be assumptions about who I was or what my role represented. As a social worker, I worried there would be a perception that I was simply there to be "soft" or idealistic - someone who only saw situations through a lens of compassion without understanding the realities officers face on the street.

What became important to me was showing that social work and accountability can coexist. Compassion does not mean avoiding difficult conversations, and empathy does not mean ignoring reality. I have learned that part of my role is being able to sit with people in their hardest moments while also being honest, direct, and solution-focused when necessary. Building credibility within the department meant showing officers that I respected the work they do, understood the pressures they face, and could be a reliable partner in difficult situations, not just someone offering "rainbows and butterflies," but someone willing to navigate the hard realities alongside them.

Over time, those relationships began to grow. Officers started to see the value of having someone available to assist with individuals experiencing mental health crises, trauma, homelessness, addiction, family instability, and other complex situations that cannot always be solved through enforcement alone. At the same time, I also began to recognize the emotional burden carried by many officers and the importance of supporting their wellness, too.

Through this role, I discovered gaps that often existed between law enforcement and community resources. Many individuals encountered by police did not know how to access help, while agencies and organizations sometimes lacked direct collaboration with first responders. Rather than viewing those gaps as frustrations, I saw them as opportunities for progress. I have worked to strengthen relationships between the police department and community partners, improve communication, and help create pathways for individuals and families to receive support before situations escalate further.

This work can be emotionally challenging. Many of the situations I encounter involve significant trauma, crisis, and human suffering. However, it is also incredibly meaningful. There is something powerful about watching barriers slowly turn into partnerships and seeing trust built between systems that once felt disconnected. Being part of that progress has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career.

These experiences have strengthened my commitment to advocating for innovative approaches that bring public safety and social services together. They have also reinforced my belief that meaningful change happens through relationships, collaboration, and a willingness to meet people where they are - both within the community and within the profession itself.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I chose to pursue a career in social work because I have always been drawn to helping people navigate some of the most difficult and vulnerable moments of their lives. I believe that when individuals are met with compassion, support, and genuine human connection, it can change the course of their future. Many people carry unseen struggles such as trauma, mental health challenges, family instability, grief, addiction, or overwhelming life circumstances, and often what they need most is someone willing to listen, advocate, and help them find a path forward.

My passion for this work deepened during graduate school and through my internship experiences within the mental health field. During that time, I began to recognize that many individuals experiencing crisis first encounter help through a police response. I saw firsthand how often officers are called into situations involving mental health emergencies, trauma, homelessness, substance use, domestic conflict, and other deeply human struggles that cannot always be solved through enforcement alone. It became clear to me that there was an opportunity to bridge a gap between public safety and social services in a way that could create better outcomes for everyone involved.

What drew me specifically to police social work was the ability to be part of something progressive and meaningful. This role allows me to advocate for individuals and families during incredibly difficult moments while also supporting officers who carry the emotional weight of this work every day. I can help connect people with resources, provide crisis intervention, assist families in navigating difficult systems, and work toward long-term stability rather than temporary solutions alone.

At the same time, I have grown deeply passionate about officer wellness. Through this work, I have seen the emotional toll that repeated exposure to trauma, crisis, and tragedy can have on first responders. Supporting the mental health and resilience of officers is equally important to me because healthy officers are better equipped to serve their communities effectively and compassionately.

What continues to motivate me most is the opportunity to create meaningful change through relationships and collaboration. Every day, I am reminded that real progress happens when people are willing to work together, challenge traditional barriers, and approach difficult situations with both accountability and empathy. Being able to serve as a bridge between law enforcement and the community is something I consider both a privilege and a responsibility.

This field has taught me that meaningful impact does not always come from grand gestures. Sometimes it comes from showing up consistently, listening without judgment, advocating when someone feels unheard, and helping people believe that change and support are possible. That is why I chose this field, and it is what continues to inspire me in this work every day.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I currently serve as the Police Social Worker for the Michigan City Police Department. In this role, I work at the intersection of social services and public safety to support both community members and law enforcement officers when situations involve underlying social, behavioral health, or resource-related needs.

A primary responsibility of my position is responding to situations involving mental health crises, family conflict, substance use, and other social service needs that often arise during police calls for service. I work closely with officers to assess situations, provide crisis intervention, and connect individuals and families with appropriate community resources such as mental health services, housing assistance, domestic violence support, and other supportive programs.

Another important aspect of my role involves proactive follow-up and case management. After critical incidents or repeated calls for service, I work to identify underlying challenges individuals may be facing and help connect them with services that can provide longer-term stability and support. This approach helps address root causes while also reducing repeated interactions with law enforcement.

In addition to supporting community members, I also focus on officer wellness. Law enforcement professionals are frequently exposed to high-stress and traumatic situations, and I work to provide resources, education, and programming that support officer mental health and resilience. This includes connecting officers with counseling resources, assisting with wellness initiatives, and helping normalize conversations around mental health within the profession.

Through this role, I aim to strengthen collaboration between law enforcement and community service providers while ensuring that individuals experiencing difficult circumstances are connected with compassionate and effective support. By integrating social work principles into public safety, my goal is to improve outcomes for both officers and the community they serve.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

I hold a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work, which have provided a strong academic and practical foundation for my work in mental health, crisis response, and community support. My education prepared me to approach complex situations through a trauma-informed and systems-based perspective, which is particularly valuable when working within a law enforcement environment.

In my current role as Police Social Worker with the Michigan City Police Department, I contribute to the field by helping integrate social work practices into public safety. This includes providing crisis intervention, connecting individuals and families with community resources, and supporting officer wellness initiatives. My work focuses on strengthening collaboration between law enforcement and social services to improve outcomes for both officers and community members.

I am actively involved in peer support efforts within law enforcement. I serve as a member of both the LaPorte County Peer Support Team and the Michigan City Police Department Peer Support Team, where I help provide support and resources to first responders who may be experiencing stress, trauma, or other challenges related to their work. These teams play an important role in promoting mental health awareness and resilience among first responders.

I have been honored to receive recognition for my work through the Unsung Hero Award in 2024, as well as the District 1 Civilian Service Award in 2024. These recognitions reflect my commitment to supporting both the officers I work alongside and the community members we serve.

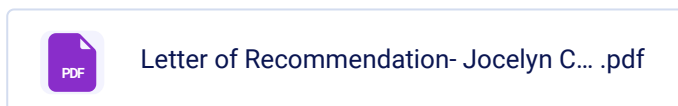
In addition, I plan to include letters of recommendation as part of this application from colleagues and professionals who have observed my work and the impact of integrating social work within a law enforcement setting. I remain committed to continuing my professional development and contributing to the growing field of police social work through collaboration, community engagement, and innovative approaches to supporting both public safety and community wellbeing.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**





Unsung Hero Award.pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Community involvement is central to both my professional role and my personal commitment to service. As the Police Social Worker for the Michigan City Police Department, my work extends beyond direct crisis response and resource coordination; it includes ongoing collaboration with community partners, service providers, and advocacy organizations throughout LaPorte County and surrounding areas. Through these partnerships, I work to strengthen communication between law enforcement and local agencies to ensure individuals and families have access to appropriate support.

I actively serve as a member of both the LaPorte County Peer Support Team and the Michigan City Police Department Peer Support Team. In these roles, I assist in providing support and resources to first responders who may be navigating work-related stress, trauma exposure, or personal challenges. Peer support plays a critical role in promoting mental wellness and resilience within public safety professions, and I am committed to helping reduce stigma surrounding mental health support for first responders.

In addition to crisis response and peer support efforts, I am involved in community outreach and educational initiatives designed to strengthen relationships between law enforcement and the public. This includes participating in events that promote youth engagement, transparency, and trust-building within the community. Through these efforts, I aim to ensure that the Police Social Work program is not only reactive in times of crisis, but also proactive in fostering positive, collaborative relationships.

My involvement in the community is ongoing and continues to grow as the role of police social work expands. I am passionate about contributing to initiatives that improve access to behavioral health resources, enhance officer wellness, and create sustainable partnerships between public safety and social service organizations. Service, collaboration, and advocacy remain at the core of my commitment to the community I serve.

**8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



## 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

### Nominee

<b>Name:</b>	LaShawn Brooks
<b>Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:</b>	LaShawn Brooks
<b>Preferred Email:</b>	shawshine247@gmail.com
<b>Personal Info:</b>	
<b>Mobile Phone:</b>	(219) 973-6222
<b>Company Info:</b>	
<b>Company/Organization:</b>	C.A.R.E University NWIN
<b>Title/Position:</b>	Executive Director

**Business Phone:** (219) 973-6222

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** C.A.R.E University Northwest Indiana

**If applicable:**

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 5

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Nonprofit

**Secondary:** Education

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

## **1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

My journey in the nonprofit sector, specifically focused on supporting first-time college students, began with a simple observation: many students leaving home for the first time are academically prepared but lack the essential resources needed for independent living. Items like bedding, personal hygiene products, kitchenware, and basic toiletries (things often taken for granted) can become barriers to a successful transition into college life.

Recognizing this gap, I became committed to addressing both educational access and student stability. I understood early on that success in higher education is not determined solely by academics, but also by whether students have their basic needs met. This realization shaped my work and passion for creating opportunities that provide “dorm/apartment starter kits” for students entering college, particularly those from underserved communities.

My path into this field was driven by a combination of lived experience, community engagement, and a desire to create tangible impact. I connected with local organizations, educational institutions, and community leaders to better understand the challenges students face. Through collaboration, I helped organize donation drives, resource distributions, and partnerships that ensured students received essential items before stepping onto campus.

Over time, this work expanded into a broader nonprofit focus advocating for student equity, resource accessibility, and wraparound support systems. I learned how to coordinate logistics, build community partnerships, secure donations, and align services with real needs. Each step reinforced the importance of not just providing items, but also restoring dignity, confidence, and a sense of preparedness for students entering a new chapter of life.

Today, my work continues to center on bridging the gap between access and success. By equipping first-time college students with the essentials for daily living, we are not only supporting their transition, but we are also investing in their ability to persist, thrive, and ultimately graduate.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

One of the most significant obstacles I have faced in both my personal life and professional journey has been overcoming limited resources both for myself and for the students I serve.

As a single mother raising college-bound students, I experienced firsthand the financial and emotional strain of preparing a child for life on campus while still trying to maintain stability at home. Providing essentials such as bedding, toiletries, and basic living supplies was not just a checklist, it was a real challenge that required sacrifice, budgeting, and creativity. Balancing my responsibilities while ensuring my children had what they needed to succeed in a new environment tested my resilience daily.

At the same time, this personal experience directly shaped my professional path. In my work supporting students, I encountered similar challenges on a larger scale through limited funding, inconsistent donations, and growing demand for essential care packages. There were moments when resources did not meet the need, and I had to make difficult decisions about allocation while still striving to serve as many students as possible.

To overcome these challenges, I relied on persistence, resourcefulness, and relationship-building. I sought out partnerships with community organizations, engaged local supporters, and maximized every available resource. I learned how to stretch limited supplies, organize efficient distribution efforts, and advocate for the importance of basic needs support in student success.

These experiences strengthened my ability to lead with empathy and determination. Rather than viewing limited resources as a barrier, I learned to see them as an opportunity to innovate and build stronger community connections. My journey has reinforced my commitment to ensuring that no student is overlooked simply because they lack access to basic necessities.

Ultimately, overcoming these obstacles has not only shaped my character but has also deepened my passion for the work I do with helping students transition into college with dignity, confidence, and the support they deserve.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

This chosen field is important to me because it is deeply personal and rooted in real-life experience. I understand firsthand what it means to prepare a student for college while navigating limited resources. As a parent, I have faced the challenge of ensuring my children had not only the academic readiness but also the basic necessities required to live independently and succeed away from home.

Through those experiences, I realized that many students, especially first-time college students face similar barriers that are often overlooked. Success in college is not just about tuition or academics; it is also about stability, dignity, and having essential everyday items like bedding, hygiene products, and kitchen supplies. Without these, students can feel unprepared, overwhelmed, and at a disadvantage from the very beginning.

This field allows me to turn my personal challenges into purpose. It gives me the opportunity to support students in a tangible way, helping to remove barriers that could otherwise hinder their success. I am passionate about ensuring that students start their college journey with confidence, knowing they have what they need to focus on their education. Making their environment as stress-free as possible for both the student and parents.

Ultimately, this work is important to me because it is about equity, compassion, and impact. It is about making sure no student is left behind due to circumstances beyond their control, and about creating a support system that empowers them to thrive both in and out of the classroom.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

In my current role (daily job) as Chief of Staff to the Gary Common Council, I serve as a senior administrative and strategic advisor supporting the legislative body and its leadership. My responsibilities include coordinating daily operations, managing communications between Council members, city departments, and external stakeholders, and ensuring that priorities of the Council are effectively organized and executed.

I assist in agenda planning, policy coordination, and the review of legislative matters to help ensure that information presented to the Council is accurate, timely, and actionable. I also help facilitate meetings, track initiatives, and follow up on Council directives to ensure accountability and continuity across departments and committees.

In addition, I oversee administrative functions, support constituent-related matters, and help manage projects and events that require Council involvement. A key part of my role is serving as a liaison—helping to streamline communication, resolve issues efficiently, and maintain alignment between the Council's goals and city operations.

Overall, my position requires strong organizational skills, attention to detail, discretion, and the ability to coordinate multiple priorities while supporting effective governance and public service delivery.

In my role as Executive Director of CARE University NWIN, a nonprofit organization, I am responsible for leading strategic initiatives that support organizational growth and mission delivery. My primary duties include fundraising, developing and implementing marketing strategies, building partnerships, and expanding the organization's network of collaborators.

I oversee efforts to secure funding through grants, sponsorships, and community support to ensure sustainability of programs and services. I also manage outreach and marketing initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of the organization's mission and engaging stakeholders, donors, and volunteers.

A key component of my role involves collaborating with local high schools and educational institutions to establish pipelines that support students as they transition into post-secondary environments. Through these partnerships, I work to identify student needs, coordinate resources, and promote programs that assist with college readiness and access.

Additionally, I focus on building and maintaining a strong professional network that includes community leaders, organizations, and institutions aligned with our mission. This network helps strengthen partnerships, increase resource availability, and enhance the overall impact of the organization.

Overall, my role requires leadership, relationship-building, strategic planning, and the ability to align community resources with the needs of the populations we serve.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Throughout my career in public service and nonprofit leadership, I have made meaningful contributions focused on community development, educational access, and supporting underserved populations. In my role as Chief of Staff to the Gary Common Council, I contribute to the coordination of legislative operations, ensuring effective communication between Council members, city departments, and community stakeholders. My work supports organizational efficiency, transparency, and the advancement of initiatives that impact the residents of Gary.

As Executive Director of CARE University NWIN, I lead efforts to expand access to resources for first-time college students by developing partnerships, coordinating outreach, and securing funding to support program sustainability. Through collaborations with local high schools and community organizations, I help create pathways that assist students in transitioning to higher education by addressing essential needs and reducing barriers to success.

My educational background includes a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with a focus in Project Management, as well as a certification in Health & Human Services. These academic credentials have strengthened my ability to manage complex initiatives, develop strategic partnerships, and implement programs that align with both organizational goals and community needs.

In recognition of my contributions, I was honored with the Gary Community Partners Community Impact Award in 2024, acknowledging my commitment to service and measurable impact within the community. This recognition reflects my ongoing dedication to improving outcomes for residents and supporting initiatives that foster growth and opportunity.

I am also actively engaged in several professional and community organizations, including membership in the NAACP, service on the Board of Directors for the 1972 Group, Board membership with Concrete Roses, and membership with AIM Indiana. Through these affiliations, I remain connected to networks that promote civic engagement, leadership development, and collaborative problem-solving.

Overall, my contributions are centered on leadership, service, and partnership leveraging my education, professional experience, and community involvement to create meaningful and lasting impact.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

Upload documents here.



Letter of Support.pdf

## 7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.

My community involvement is rooted in a sustained commitment to service, leadership, and collaboration with organizations that support civic engagement, education, and community development.

I have been actively engaged in community service for over thirty (30) years, participating in a wide range of initiatives including blight elimination projects, block club and neighborhood organizations, fundraising efforts for beautification projects, youth activities, food drives, community church initiatives, and supporting age-friendly community efforts through AARP-related activities, as well as projects benefiting veterans. These efforts have focused on improving neighborhood conditions, strengthening community ties, and enhancing overall quality of life for residents.

I currently serve as a member of the NAACP, where I support efforts that promote civil rights, equity, and social justice. Through this affiliation, I remain engaged in initiatives that advocate for the advancement and well-being of underserved communities.

I also serve on the Board of Directors for the 1972 Group, where I contribute to organizational oversight, strategic planning, and community-focused initiatives. In this capacity, I participate in guiding programs and decisions that align with the organization's mission and impact goals.

In addition, I serve as a Board Member for Concrete Roses, where I support initiatives aimed at empowering individuals and strengthening community resources. My role involves collaboration with fellow board members to help advance programming, outreach, and organizational growth.

I am also a member of AIM Indiana, where I engage with municipal leaders and professionals to support best practices in government operations, leadership development, and intergovernmental collaboration.

Beyond formal organizational roles, my volunteer efforts are closely aligned with my professional work in public service and nonprofit leadership. Through my role as Executive Director of CARE University NWIN, I actively participate in community outreach, partnership building with local high schools, and efforts to provide essential resources to first-time college students. These efforts include coordinating donation drives, supporting resource distribution, and working directly with community partners to meet student needs.

Collectively, my community involvement reflects decades of consistent service with a focus on leadership, collaboration, and improving outcomes for individuals, families, and neighborhoods. My work continues to center on creating access to resources, strengthening community connections, and contributing to

initiatives that promote long-term community development, equity, and civic engagement.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Lesley Miller

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Lesley M. Miller

**Preferred Email:** [lmiller@ahelpershearthomecare.com](mailto:lmiller@ahelpershearthomecare.com)

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 455-4725

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** A Helper's Heart Home Care

**Title/Position:** Director of Operations

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:**

A Helper's Heart Home Care

## If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

### Choose Award Category:

Up and Coming Woman

### How many years in field:

6

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

#### Primary:

Healthcare

#### Secondary:

Business

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My journey in healthcare began at 19 years old when I found myself advocating for my father. At a young age I was helping navigate his care, asking questions and making sure his needs were taken seriously. That experience shaped how I saw the world. It showed me how important it is for seniors and their families to have someone willing to speak up for them and ensure they are treated with dignity.

As I continued helping my father, I also began assisting neighbors, strangers and friends who had elderly loved ones. What started as simply helping where I could quickly became something much deeper. I realized many families needed guidance, support and trustworthy care for the seniors they loved.

In 2020, God gave me the vision to turn that calling into something greater. That vision became A Helper's Heart Home Care. I spent time studying the requirements for licensing a non-medical home care agency and learning everything I could about the industry so I could build a company that truly served the elderly with compassion and integrity.

Since then, I have worked to grow A Helper's Heart Home Care while remaining deeply connected to the community we serve. Along the way I also made the decision to return to school so I could continue strengthening my ability to advocate for others. In 2025, I completed my associate's degree, and I am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree in social work to deepen my understanding of the systems that impact the elderly and the families who care for them.

My journey in healthcare has always been personal. It started with advocating for my father and grew into a mission to support seniors throughout my community. That same purpose continues to guide my work today.

### 2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.

One of the biggest obstacles in my life has been learning how to build something meaningful while navigating personal challenges that could have easily knocked me off course. I grew up advocating for my father at a young age while also witnessing the impact alcohol had on his life and our family. That experience forced me to grow up quickly and taught me how important it is for vulnerable people to have someone willing to stand up for them.

As an adult, I have also faced the challenge of rebuilding my life after divorce while continuing to lead a

business and raise my son. Divorce brings a level of grief and transition that many people underestimate. Learning how to move forward personally while still showing up as a leader, a mother and a business owner required resilience and a deep commitment to my purpose.

Professionally, I have had to navigate the challenges of operating a home care agency in a very difficult healthcare market. Regulations, industry changes and financial pressures have forced me to adapt constantly while still ensuring the seniors we serve receive dependable and compassionate care.

The obstacles I have faced, both personally and professionally, have strengthened my ability to lead with empathy and determination. They have taught me that challenges do not define us. They shape the compassion and resilience we bring to others.

Because of the challenges I have faced, I do not just provide care for seniors. I understand what it feels like to fight for someone you love.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I am in this field because my passion for serving seniors began at a young age while advocating for my father. That experience showed me how important it is for elderly individuals and their families to have someone who will speak up for them and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect.

My work is driven by the belief that aging should never mean losing dignity, independence, or a sense of belonging. I believe this field chose me. Serving others, especially the elderly has always been my purpose.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

As the owner of A Helper's Heart Home Care, I oversee all aspects of the agency's operations. My responsibilities include hiring, onboarding and training caregivers, ensuring compliance with state regulations and maintaining the policies and procedures required to operate a non-medical home care agency in Indiana.

I also manage payroll, scheduling and administrative operations while ensuring caregivers have the support and resources, they need to provide quality care. A large part of my role involves supporting clients and their families, helping them navigate systems that can often feel overwhelming and ensuring their loved ones receive dependable and compassionate care.

In addition to the operational side of the business, I advocate for both staff and clients, build relationships with community partners and work to improve services within the agency, so seniors can remain safely and comfortably in their homes while maintaining dignity and independence.

### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Throughout my career I have remained committed to strengthening my knowledge and leadership in the field of senior care through continued education and professional involvement.

In 2025, I earned my associate's degree, and I am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree in social work to deepen my understanding of the systems that impact seniors and the families who care for them. I am also a Certified Dementia Practitioner and have completed training as a Death Doula, reflecting my commitment to supporting individuals and families through all stages of aging and end of life care.

As the owner of A Helper's Heart Home Care, I contribute to the field by providing compassionate non-medical home care services that allow seniors to remain safely in their homes while maintaining dignity and independence. My work often includes helping families navigate complex care systems and advocating for the needs of elderly individuals in our community.

I am also a member of the Indiana Home and Hospice Care Association, which helps me stay informed about industry standards, regulations and best practices while remaining engaged in efforts that strengthen the quality of care provided to seniors.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other

acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**

Nominee: Matthew Muta

For the past two Christmas seasons, Hammond-based A Helper's Heart Homecare has orchestrated a Christmas party for the good folks at Golden Manor in early December entitled "Christmas at Golden Manor." Volunteers from A Helper's Heart Homecare, located right here on Hohman Avenue, graciously give an entire Saturday from their busy holiday schedules for an afternoon of giving and holiday cheer for all Golden Manor residents. The event includes food, drinks and prizes sponsored by a variety of Hammond-based organizations. Several residents, many of whom are elderly or disabled, receive raffle prizes and pictures. On December 3, 2022, eight (8) volunteers from Helper's Heart made Golden Manor's Day merry and bright!

Lesley Miller, A Helper's Heart Home Care's Director of Operations has led a diverse volunteer group for the last two holiday seasons. This newfound holiday tradition exemplifies the kind of volunteerism and community support which the Hammond Mayor's Commission on Disabilities pursues.

A special thanks to Lesley M. Miller, Maxine Pierce, Delois Brown, Heliaynia Walker, Angel Woods, Marzhanille Flowers, Qundia Banks, Jeremy Joseph, all volunteer's at this past year's Christmas at Golden Manor.

Please see attachments for additional details pertaining to the event.





A Helper's Heart Home Care is with ...  
Food Bank of Northwest Indiana.

Nov 12, 2025 • 🌐

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Helper's Heart Home Care Donates \$1,000 to the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana to Support Thanksgiving Drive

Merrillville, IN – November 12, 2025 – A Helper's Heart Home Care has donated \$1,000 to the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana to assist with their annual Thanksgiving drive, helping provide meals for families in need during the holiday season.

Lesley M. Miller, Director of Operations at A Helper's Heart Home Care, emphasized the importance of community support amid ongoing challenges affecting local families.

"With the current issues surrounding childcare vouchers and SNAP benefits being withheld, many parents are struggling to make ends meet," said Miller. "As a community-based organization, we felt it was necessary to step up and lend a hand where we can. No family should have to worry about putting food on the table, especially during the holidays."

The donation will go directly toward purchasing and distributing Thanksgiving meals through the Food Bank's outreach programs, which serve thousands of individuals across Northwest Indiana each year.

A Helper's Heart Home Care remains committed to not only providing quality care to seniors and individuals in need of home assistance, but also supporting local initiatives that strengthen families and build community resilience.

**About A Helper's Heart Home Care**  
A Helper's Heart Home Care is a trusted home care agency serving Northwest Indiana, dedicated to providing compassionate, professional and reliable support to individuals and families. The organization's mission is rooted in service, faith and a deep commitment to improving quality of life for those they serve.



CDP Certification\_8543.pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Throughout my career I have focused on contributing to my field through service, advocacy and continued education.

In addition to operating A Helper’s Heart Home Care, I founded a 501c3 nonprofit organization called An Anchored Heart. We are currently in the building stages of the organization, with a vision to become a vital resource for elderly individuals in our community by expanding support services and addressing everyday challenges seniors face. A key initiative will focus on addressing laundry barriers by creating a program that ensures seniors in Northwest Indiana have consistent access to clean clothing and essential care resources.

In 2023, I received the Hammond Mayor’s Commission on Disability Business Award in recognition of my volunteer and sponsorship efforts, including organizing and supporting an annual Christmas celebration for residents in the senior building where my father once lived, held in his honor.

Also in 2023, I was honored to receive the Fearless Award for Women Impacting Nonprofits, presented by Dr. Janell Harvey of Harvey Nonprofit Consulting Group, recognizing my commitment and compassion towards the elderly community.

From 2023 to 2024, I served on the City of Hammond Gaming Commission Board, which helps support nonprofit organizations in the community through gaming revenue.

Through my work, education and community involvement, I remain committed to strengthening services for the elderly and ensuring they receive the dignity, compassion and support they deserve.

**8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



## 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

### Nominee

<b>Name:</b>	Melody Wolff
<b>Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:</b>	Melody Wolff
<b>Preferred Email:</b>	mjwolff60@gmail.com
<b>Personal Info:</b>	
<b>Mobile Phone:</b>	(219) 741-8463
<b>Company Info:</b>	
<b>Company/Organization:</b>	Lake Central School Corporation
<b>Title/Position:</b>	teacher

**Business Phone:** (219) 365-8577

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Kolling Elementary

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Mrs. Cassandra Cruz

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (219) 365-8577

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** cncruz@lcmail.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 40

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Education

**Secondary:** Education

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

At a very young age I told my parents that I wanted to be a teacher. I would sit my little sister down and teach her what I knew. When she went to school they put her in the gifted track. However, when she reached third grade they determined she was a general education student.

After graduating from High School I went to Mid-America Nazarene University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Education.

My first year I decided to substitute teach because I wanted to experience many grade levels before focusing on one. I learned many lessons about teaching and the classroom.

I got my first job teaching fourth grade in the Hickman Mills School District in Kansas City Missouri. I was moved to first grade for several years. I loved helping my students and thought that a good way to have broader impact was to become an administrator. I began my Master in Elementary Administration. Then I was moved to another building where I taught second grade and then first again but continued my degree. After five years of continuing to take classes, I received my degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City at the age of twenty-nine. The next year I taught first grade and was acting Assistant Principal.

My focus changed because I got married and moved to Huntington Beach, California. I got a teaching job in Orange Unified School District teaching a split class first and second grade. I was then moved to a new

school where I taught first grade.

My husband was transferred so we moved to the Chicago area. I wanted to get back in the classroom and went on many interviews never securing a job. One of my last interviews the principal said I was perfect but I had too many years of experience (Indiana had to pay teachers their years of experience and degrees). I was out priced. The next school year I substitute taught and got to know teachers and principals in several districts. I accepted a job at Forest Ridge Academy, a private school, for full day Kindergarten. It didn't seem a fit. In the spring an acquaintance asked if I'd like to apply for a job at one of the Lake Central School Corporation schools. I resubmitted my application and accepted a job as a first grade teacher. At Lake Central I had many opportunities over the past 30 years.

I am one of the fortunate people to be able to live my childhood dream for 40+ years. My career has been very rewarding. The satisfaction gained from children learning is priceless.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

When you receive a teaching licence it's for the state you've completed your course work or degree. All states are different. One example is that Mid-America University is on the border of Missouri and Kansas. Both states have different requirements for a teaching licence. Therefore, I had to add five extra courses during my four year degree to be certified in both states. Another example was moving to California where I had to take extra course work to apply for a teaching license. Also California had state exams which needed to be completed before receiving a certificate. The cycle continued when we moved to Indiana. I took course work for both Indiana and Illinois not knowing where I would get a teaching position. Of course, each state had their teaching exams of which I had to pass also. I remember one person saying, 'you are smart. You could do any job.' My reply was, 'I'm a teacher. That is my job.' Twenty - four years ago was difficult time in my life for me and my family. It began with me knowing there wasn't something quite right. I was driving down to Purdue Lafayette for my doctorate and teaching when things weren't going together. After visiting many doctors, they would say there was nothing wrong. However, in my heart I couldn't continue with what I was doing. I dropped out of the doctoral program and began struggling more with teaching. At the end of the school year my mom found an infectious disease doctor in Missouri. After several trips and tests, I was diagnosed with Lyme disease. The test was off the chart. My body was shutting down and I was given six months to live. One visit I told the doctor 'the disease will not beat me, I will beat the disease.' With my family support I went through our patient IV therapy for over a month and many heavy prescriptions. I took two years of medical leave from teaching. For a year I would sleep 16 hour nights, get up for an hour or so and go back to bed. My body needed to heal. The second year I gained more strength and became more active. My goal was to teach again. My principal, at that time, keep my position open and I was able to return. Being a person that strives to achieve, and a bit stubborn, I reached my goal. That first year back all I did was teach. My husband did everything else. I would go home and rest for the next day. I am very grateful for my husband and mom for their support.

Three years ago a former student gave me a "big" hug at school. This resulted in enough pain that I went to a doctor for evaluation. Although the hug caused little damage, the scans showed an anomaly in my lung. Further testing resulted in a diagnosis of "cancer". Successful surgery followed and three years into recovery it looks good. As amazing as it sounds, a random hug from a student resulted in a chain of events that literally saved my life.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to be a teacher / educator. My parents were educators so it must be in my DNA. There is a saying that goes something like, "If you do what you love you will never work a day in your life." I couldn't agree more.

## **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

1. Small reading groups: I've always believed that curriculum needed to be differentiated according to student's needs. One example is reading. During my career I've had different reading groups. When I began the Four Block model I began to be more deliberate in student reading levels. I would do a running record with each student at the beginning and middle of the year. I would place them in their instructional reading groups. During those groups we would discuss reading strategies (i.e. picture walk, stretch and sound, predicting, context clues, cross checking, confirming and so on). Over the years I've had parent volunteers come and help. I train them in my way and they come in weekly. We spend 30 -40 minutes a

day with groups. The book is taken home for students to reread. I include a parent signing sheet to where students get a sticker. When they fill up their sticker sheet (25 stickers) they get their choice of a free book. At the beginning of this year, 2025-56, I had one student reading at the beginning of second grade level and six in the middle of Kindergarten. My ending of the year test for reading levels: I have six reading third grade level, ten in the middle of second grade, and seven at the end of first grade reading.

2. Restaurant: Many years ago, the building I taught in there was a Kindergarten kitchen. Expanding on that exercise, I decided to have my students to plan and execute a restaurant. It would begin with a foods unit that lead into planning a breakfast menu. This lead into establishing jobs for that restaurant.

Students had to apply for their job. Then they thought of a theme, name and colors. Two menus were planned and preorder forms were made. We had to calculate the cost of a meal. Once that was done we collected the forms. Then we had to figure out appropriate food items and quantity to buy. While leading up to the day, students would research the theme, write a report and make it into a place mat. They also love to weave extra placemats. Another aspect is decorations which they made. I could not do a restaurant without parent support. For every hot item I had an adult, with a couple more to supervise. Each year was a success. Our customers were the parents, principals, central office and the school board.

3. Plays/Presentations : I love students to participate in plays. This year we had two Thanksgiving plays, a Holiday Performance, and the year end fracture fairy tale plays. When we study animals and habitats, students write a report and make a diorama of their animal's habitat for a presentation. A high ability unit is biographies. All my students enjoy learning about people in history. They get to choose a person and at school they create a PowerPoint. Then they dress up as their person and do a presentation. The audience for all these activities are parents and grandparents who pack the classroom.

4. Banking / Auction: My behavior system is a stoplight. For the first two quarters green is good, yellow a warning and red we need to talk. The third quarter each students has a savings book. Students help create a one dollar bill. I add silver above green. Now silver is \$3.00, green is \$1.00 and we try not to drop to yellow or red. Students collect money and on Fridays they count their money and record it in their savings book. At the end of the quarter we have an auction of things the parents have donated. The students use the money they have earned in order to bid on items. Fourth quarter we start over and do the same thing, but gold goes above silver. Students help create a \$5.00 for gold. We continue to add our savings. Students can now do difficult double digit addition which is a goal of this project. At the end we have another auction. I commend my parents for helping.

5. Store: At the end of the year I review money and time. My money project is a store. We discuss the isles in a store, make signs and separate the items. We have a cashier and customer. The cashier has a receipt they fill out while the customer buys the items and pays. The prices are the key: white + white is easy, white + yellow is more difficult, and yellow + yellow is difficult. Students really learn how money works.

6. STEM Projects: STEM activities are hands-on, inquiry-based learning task that integrate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Instead of teaching subjects in isolation, these activities encourage practical problem-solving, critical thinking, and real-world application. I coordinate with a fourth grade teacher as our student helpers. This school year we performed 15 special activities to enhance the learning experience. A few examples include Apple Raft, Spider Web Bridge, Pumpkin Volcanoes and Wind-powered Maze.

7. Mentoring Education Major students in science, math and language Arts: Education students are required to have field experiences. I have hosted many students over the years. I help them discover what a running a classroom is all about. Some came with ideas and ready to go while others came with lots of questions and reservation. However, all left my classroom with a positive field experience.

Building Representative for Science: In high school I enjoyed all my science courses. Therefore, being the science representative was perfect. Lake Central held a Science Fair for students from fourth grade through high school for many years. I encouraged teachers and students to sign up for the district science fair. There were many facets from organization of the project, getting and feeding the judges, as well as presenting the winners. Along with the district science fair, I also coordinated a school science fair for the fourth and fifth grades along with anyone else that wanted to have a project in the School Science Fair. I was the First Grade Science Committee for 29 years. For being a representative for my school, I got to help choose the science curriculum.

High Ability was always a pull out program for Lake Central beginning in fourth grade. The State decided that districts were going to service high ability students in first, second and third grade. Therefore, I decided to earn my High Ability endorsement from the state. I got in on the ground floor to establish the first grade high ability curriculum for Lake Central. This has become my focus. My classroom is a mixture of high ability and general education students. I meet the unique learning needs of each of these groups

of students.

Wellness Committee: I have been a member the Lake Central School District committee for many years. The committee plans wellness challenges for the district such as month long step challenges. We drive for maximum participation from the staff.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

- Who's Who In America Education
- Phi Delta Kappa International - professional organization dedicated to support public education
- ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) - member
- IRA (International Reading Association) - member
- NCTE ( National Council of Teacher of English) - member
- NAGC (National Association of Gifted Children) - member
- ISTA (Indiana State Teachers Association) - member

After teaching in Lake Central for a couple of years I found a framework for teaching, Four Blocks Literacy Model. This is a balanced, multi-method, and multi-level framework for teaching language arts in grades 1-3. It operates on the premise that children learn differently, dedicating a daily 30-40 minute block to each of four areas: Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words. I asked my principal if I could use this model in my classroom the next year. His only stipulation was my students had to score higher than the other classes. They did. For several years I would go to their conferences. I had the opportunity to lead in services at the Northwest Indiana Educational Service Center for years. Also I gave in-services to school districts in the area.

One of the professional organizations that makes a difference in my teaching is IRA (International Reading Association). They offer Annual Conferences that deal with reading. I was a Speaker / Presenter several years. One was in 2003 where the presentation was Targeted Grouping in the Early Literacy Classroom: Making a Difference, by Making it Strategic. The Annual Conference in 2004 the presentation was Fostering Emerging Readers' Literacy Strategies: Putting Children First.

Co-authored a book, Teaching Reading Strategies in Primary Grades through Scholastic. The book was in the Reading Strategies section of their Teacher Resource pamphlets. It was putting what I did in my classroom into a book.

Co-authored an article in the Indiana Reading Journal titled Fostering Strategic Reading in a First Grade Classroom.

An honor in education is to be nominate by your peers to be Teacher of the Year. The end result was, Lake Central School Corporation Teacher of the Year finalist 2025-2026. In section 6, I've attached comments from my peers.

This was read at my retirement by the Lake Central Board of Education. 'Melody Wolff will be retiring after 40 years in education, including 30 with Lake Central. Melody's accomplishments over the years include: a Master's Degree from Kansas City Missouri in Educational Administration, a 5 Time Presenter at the International Reading Association, the co-author of the book Teaching Reading Strategies in Primary Grades and co-author of several articles on literacy, and a trainer in Northwest Indiana for the Four Block Literacy Framework. During her tenure with Lake Central, Mrs. Wolff has taught in grades K-4, including high ability. In addition to being a stand-out teacher in literacy, Melody was known for regularly incorporating STEM and inquiry-based learning activities and she regularly invited parent and community volunteers into the classroom to allow enriching experiences for her students. Mrs. Wolff has been involved with the district through active roles on committees.'

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

## 7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or

### **offices held at services organizations.**

Teacher Union - treasurer

Lake Central Education Foundation (LCEF) - The Foundation's central mission is to enhance innovative educational opportunities for the students of Lake Central School Corporation through teacher grants. I have been a board member for 29 years and Grant Chair for 16 years. Over my tenure the committee and I have given \$192,000 and funded 304 grants. This is accomplished through securing monies from fundraisers such as 5k runs, pickle ball tournaments and refreshments at school functions. We also have corporate donations / sponsors.

Fleet Feet - Outside of education running became a passion. I've ran with Fleet Feet for 15 years. Over those years I mentored new runners for around 10 years. I've also been involved with Girls on the Run.

## 8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.

# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** MIA DIGGINS

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** MIA DIGGINS

**Preferred Email:** MIAMOREOILS@GMAIL.COM

**Personal Info:**

**Mobile Phone:** (574) 300-6574

**Company Info:**

**Company/Organization:** Mia More Oils LLC

**Title/Position:** CERO/FOUNDER

**Business Phone:** (574) 300-6574

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Mia More Oils LLC

### If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 3

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

**Primary:** Business

**Secondary:** Business

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My journey into entrepreneurship and the wellness industry was not something I originally planned—it was born out of love, faith, and one of the most difficult seasons of my life. In February 2022, my daughter, Diamond, passed away after a courageous battle with acute myeloid leukemia. In the midst of that heartbreak, I leaned on my faith and began searching for ways to transform my grief into purpose.

During Diamond's illness, I became deeply interested in natural ingredients and wellness practices that support healthy skin and hair. After witnessing the effects that treatments can have on the body—especially hair loss—I began researching and experimenting with natural oils that could help nourish and restore. What began as a personal pursuit soon became a calling.

I created my first product—an all-natural hair growth oil—initially inspired by the journey many cancer survivors face when regrowing their hair after treatment. That single product became the foundation for Mia More Oils, a natural skincare and wellness brand rooted in healing, compassion, and faith.

Since launching the business, Mia More Oils has grown from one product to a full line of body oils, beard oils, beard balm, and body butters designed to nourish the skin and uplift confidence. Our products are crafted with natural ingredients and care, and many customers have shared how our oils have helped soothe dry and sensitive skin, including those dealing with conditions like eczema.

Beyond creating products, my mission has always been about people. I have had the opportunity to partner with local businesses, serve my community through events and outreach, and share my story to encourage others who may be walking through grief or adversity. My goal is to remind people that even in life's most painful moments, there is still purpose waiting to be discovered.

Today, Mia More Oils represents more than a business—it represents resilience, faith, and the power of turning pain into purpose. My daughter Diamond's legacy lives on through the work I do every day, and my mission remains clear: to create products and share a message that brings healing, hope, and beauty from

the ashes.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

One of the greatest obstacles I have faced in my life was the loss of my daughter, Diamond, who passed away in February 2022 after a courageous battle with acute myeloid leukemia. Losing a child is a pain that no parent ever expects to endure, and in that season I was faced with a decision—whether grief would define me, or whether I would allow God to transform that pain into purpose.

During that difficult time, I leaned heavily on my faith, family, and my desire to honor my daughter's life in a meaningful way. Instead of allowing my grief to silence me, I chose to channel it into something that could bring healing and hope to others. That decision led me to create Mia More Oils, a natural skincare and wellness brand inspired by love, resilience, and restoration.

Starting a business while navigating grief was not easy. There were moments of emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, and learning curves that come with building a company from the ground up. As a woman entrepreneur, I had to educate myself on product development, branding, business operations, and building partnerships—all while continuing to heal personally.

Despite those challenges, I remained committed to the vision. What began with one product has grown into a full line of natural wellness products, and the business has expanded through community partnerships and loyal customers who believe in our mission.

The obstacle of loss ultimately became the foundation for my greatest purpose. It strengthened my faith, deepened my compassion for others, and fueled my commitment to create something meaningful from life's most difficult moments.

Today, I carry my daughter's legacy forward through my work, reminding others that even in the face of unimaginable challenges, resilience, faith, and perseverance can transform pain into purpose and impact.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I am in the wellness and skincare field because I believe caring for the body is closely connected to confidence, dignity, and overall well-being. For many people, something as simple as healthy skin or hair can restore a sense of confidence and self-worth. Being able to contribute to that transformation is incredibly meaningful to me.

Through Mia More Oils, I have the opportunity to create products that help people care for themselves using natural ingredients while also encouraging them to slow down and prioritize self-care. In today's fast-paced world, many people neglect themselves while caring for everyone else. I want my products to serve as a reminder that taking care of your body is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

I am also passionate about building something that inspires other women to pursue their own ideas and dreams. As a business owner, I enjoy connecting with people at community events, partnering with local businesses, and encouraging others who may be considering entrepreneurship. I want women to see that it is possible to start with an idea, remain committed to the vision, and grow something meaningful.

For me, this field is about more than products—it is about service, empowerment, and impact. Every bottle created represents care, intentionality, and a desire to help people feel their best from the inside out.

## **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I currently serve as the founder and owner of Mia More Oils, an all-natural skincare and wellness brand dedicated to creating products that nourish the skin while encouraging self-care and confidence. In this role, I oversee all aspects of the business, including product development, branding, marketing, community partnerships, and customer relationships. I am deeply involved in ensuring that every product reflects the quality, care, and purpose that the brand stands for.

In addition to leading my business, I also serve alongside my husband in ministry, as he pastors our church. As a pastor's wife, I help support the spiritual and emotional needs of our church community through encouragement, outreach, and service. This role allows me to walk alongside individuals and

families during both joyful and difficult seasons of life.

Professionally, I also work in a healthcare facility, where I assist in caring for individuals who require medical and rehabilitative support. This work allows me to extend compassion and practical care to people who often need encouragement, patience, and dignity during vulnerable moments.

Each of these roles—entrepreneur, ministry partner, and healthcare professional—reflects my deep passion for serving others. Whether through wellness products, spiritual support, or healthcare services, my goal is always the same: to uplift, care for, and positively impact the lives of the people I encounter.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Throughout my entrepreneurial journey, I have remained committed to professional growth, ethical business practices, and contributing to the broader entrepreneurial community. As the founder of Mia More Oils, I strive to lead a business that reflects integrity, quality, and service.

Mia More Oils is proudly BBB Accredited, demonstrating our commitment to transparency, accountability, and trust with our customers and community. The company is also WBENC Certified, recognizing Mia More Oils as a Women’s Business Enterprise and positioning the brand to participate in supplier diversity opportunities and corporate partnerships.

To further strengthen my business knowledge and leadership skills, I completed the Entrepreneur Bootcamp through the University of Notre Dame, where I received training in entrepreneurship, strategic business development, and growth planning. This experience provided valuable insight and mentorship that continues to guide my business journey.

I also actively contribute to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. I serve as one of the organizers for the Mishawaka chapter of 1 Million Cups, a national program supported by the Kauffman Foundation that connects and supports entrepreneurs through weekly gatherings where business owners share their ideas, receive feedback, and build community. Through this role, I help create a supportive space where entrepreneurs can learn from one another and grow their ventures.

In addition, I am the author of a book titled Oils from the Ashes, which shares my personal journey through grief after the loss of my daughter and how that experience inspired the creation of my business. Through this book, I hope to encourage and support others who may be navigating loss, reminding them that healing and purpose can still emerge even in life’s most difficult moments.

Through my business, community involvement, and writing, I remain committed to uplifting others, supporting fellow entrepreneurs, and using my experiences to inspire hope and resilience.










6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**



-  BBB ACCREDITATION\_2357.pdf
-  1 MILLION CUPS ORGANIZER CERTIFI... .pdf
-  ENTREPRENEUR BOOTCAMP CERTIFI... .pdf
-  JUNETEENTH PARTICIPATION CERTIF... .pdf
-  Black History, Black Futures\_ Black-o... .pdf
-  South Bend family feeds the homeles... .pdf
-  Passion fuels Mia More Oils\_ a comm... .pdf
-  Mia letter of rec.docx
-  RECOMMENDATION LETTER 2.pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Serving others has always been central to my life and purpose. I am actively involved in my faith community where I serve alongside my husband, Pastor Jeffery Diggins Sr., at The Believers Church of God in Christ. As a pastor’s wife, I support ministry and outreach efforts that provide encouragement, spiritual guidance, and practical support to individuals and families within our congregation and the surrounding community.

I am also committed to strengthening the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. I serve as one of the organizers of the Mishawaka chapter of 1 Million Cups, a national initiative powered by the Kauffman Foundation that brings entrepreneurs together weekly to share their businesses, receive feedback, and build meaningful connections. Through this role, I help foster a supportive environment where entrepreneurs can learn from one another and grow their ventures.

In addition to organizing this program, I have also mentored and encouraged other women who are pursuing entrepreneurship, sharing my experiences and helping them navigate the early stages of starting and growing their businesses. Supporting other women in their entrepreneurial journeys is something I care deeply about, as I believe collaboration and encouragement help create stronger communities.

Another meaningful community initiative that I lead is an annual Thanksgiving outreach for individuals

experiencing homelessness, held in honor of my daughter, Diamond, who had a deep heart for serving others. Since her passing, each Thanksgiving Day we host a free Thanksgiving meal for the homeless, where we decorate the facility and welcome guests in for a warm meal, fellowship, and dignity during the holiday season. For those who cannot attend, we also deliver meals to individuals in the downtown South Bend area. This outreach has grown each year and has even been featured on a local television station, helping raise awareness about the importance of serving vulnerable members of our community.

Through my business, Mia More Oils, I also participate in local events and partnerships that support small businesses and community engagement. These opportunities allow me to connect with individuals in the community, encourage aspiring entrepreneurs, and contribute to the growth of local businesses.

Whether through ministry, mentorship, entrepreneurship, or direct service, my goal remains the same—to uplift others, create opportunities for connection and growth, and continue serving my community with compassion and purpose.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Modupeoluwa Adeoye

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Modupe Adeoye

**Preferred Email:** dupedarabidan@gmail.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (574) 703-8119

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Indiana University South Bend

**Title/Position:** Director for Innovation & Entrepreneurship

**Business Phone:** (574) 520-5465

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** IU South Bend

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Sheila Snyder

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (574) 520-4180

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** ssieradz@iu.edu

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 16

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** Education

**Secondary:** STEM

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

My journey into information technology began in 2010 as a User Support and Information Systems Analyst supporting five branches of a new-generation bank. I helped deploy new banking technologies, trained over 50 operations officers and staff, resolved critical system issues, and partnered with regional project managers to ensure seamless software rollouts. This experience strengthened my technical expertise, operational leadership, and ability to design systems that improved productivity and reduced downtime.

In 2013, I transitioned to full-time leadership in the nonprofit sector, where I managed and scaled technology and entrepreneurship programs that significantly expanded the organization's impact. I developed initiatives that increased access to STEM and innovation opportunities for young people, particularly women and underrepresented communities, positioning them as creators, problem-solvers, and future leaders. My responsibilities grew from program implementation to strategic design, cross-sector partnerships, and ecosystem development.

Today, as Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Indiana University South Bend, I lead the development of an inclusive innovation infrastructure that connects students to entrepreneurship, workforce readiness, and industry collaboration. My work integrates education, STEM, and regional economic development to build sustainable pipelines from classroom learning to career and venture creation.

Throughout my career, my mission has remained clear: expanding access to opportunity by building

systems that empower people and strengthen communities.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

Throughout my journey, one of the most significant obstacles I have navigated has been building credibility and influence across different sectors and cultural contexts. I began my career in Nigeria's banking technology sector, transitioned into nonprofit leadership, and later moved into higher education in the United States. Each transition required me to reestablish my professional identity, adapt to new systems, and earn trust in environments where I was often one of the few women, and sometimes the only woman of color, at decision-making tables.

Another challenge has been building innovation-focused programs within institutions that were not historically structured for entrepreneurship. Establishing new systems, securing partnerships, and shifting mindsets from traditional academic models to innovation-driven approaches required persistence, relationship-building, and the ability to communicate a compelling long-term vision.

Balancing professional growth with personal responsibilities, including motherhood, has also required intentional discipline and resilience. Rather than viewing these responsibilities as competing priorities, I have learned to lead with clarity, boundaries, and purpose, modeling for students and colleagues that leadership can be both ambitious and grounded.

Each obstacle strengthened my adaptability, strategic thinking, and commitment to expanding access to opportunity. The challenges I have faced have not deterred me; they have refined my leadership and deepened my resolve to build systems that allow others not to have to overcome the same barriers alone.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I am in the field of education and innovation because I believe access to opportunity should not be accidental. It should be intentional, designed, and equitable.

Early in my career, I saw how technology and systems could either empower people or exclude them. I also saw how exposure, or the lack of it, shapes confidence, career pathways, and economic mobility. That realization shifted my focus from simply implementing technology to building pathways that help individuals see themselves as creators, problem-solvers, and leaders.

Education is one of the most powerful levers for long-term change. When paired with STEM and entrepreneurship, it becomes transformative, equipping individuals not just to seek jobs but to create value, solve community challenges, and drive regional growth.

I remain in this field because I am motivated by the systems-level impact it delivers. I am driven by the opportunity to design environments where talent is recognized, barriers are reduced, and students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, can move from potential to possibility to achievement.

For me, this work is not just a profession; it is a commitment to expanding access and building sustainable pathways for others to thrive.

## **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I currently serve as the Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Indiana University South Bend. In this role, I am responsible for building and leading the university's innovation infrastructure to ensure that entrepreneurship and creative problem-solving are accessible to all students.

My responsibilities include designing and implementing entrepreneurship programming, cultivating cross-sector partnerships with industry and community organizations, securing sponsorships and grant funding, and developing pathways that connect students to workforce opportunities, venture creation, and regional economic development. I oversee strategic initiatives such as workshops, experiential learning programs, founder development pipelines, and community-engagement events that integrate STEM, business, and real-world application.

In addition, I collaborate with university leadership to align innovation initiatives with institutional goals

around student retention, completion, and community impact. My role requires strategic planning, stakeholder management, program development, and ecosystem building to position the university as a catalyst for regional innovation.

At its core, my responsibility is to create systems that empower students to move from ideas to implementation, and from education to economic impact.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Throughout my career, my contributions to education, innovation, and economic empowerment have been recognized at institutional, national, and international levels.

In 2023, I was named the inaugural Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Indiana University South Bend, where I also serve in the Chancellor's Cabinet (2024 – 2025) and the Chancellor's Expanded Cabinet (2026). I currently serve on the IU Innovates Internal Advisory Board, contributing to a university-wide strategy to strengthen entrepreneurship across Indiana University campuses. I also sit on the IU South Bend Community Advisory Board for the Office of Professional Engagement, supporting initiatives that increase students' workforce readiness and employer alignment.

Nationally and internationally, I am a 2019 Mandela Washington Fellow ~ Leadership in Business, selected as one of 700 Fellows from over 38,000 applicants across Sub-Saharan Africa through the U.S. Government's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). I was also selected as a 2018 YALI Regional Leadership Center Fellow. Through these platforms, I have contributed to leadership development, advancing entrepreneurship, and fostering cross-border collaboration.

My professional engagement includes serving on the Membership Committee of Graduate Women International (U.S. Chapter), where I help shape strategic initiatives to support women and girls globally, and serving as a Board Member of the Girl-to-Queen Initiative, providing governance and strategic direction to empower young women.

Earlier in my career, I received multiple recognitions for leadership and service, including awards from the Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni Association of Nigeria, the U.S. International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) Alumni Association, the Carrington Youth Fellowship Initiative (CYFI), and a YALI Regional Business Simulation Award.

Academically, I hold a Master of Science in Entrepreneurship, Engineering, and Science Technology from the University of Notre Dame and a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Economics from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. My research contributions include participation in the "Fair-Shared City" feminist urban planning study in collaboration with the Heinrich Böll Foundation, advancing conversations around digital equity and inclusive city planning.

Collectively, these recognitions reflect a consistent commitment to advancing inclusive innovation, strengthening education-to-economy pathways, and building systems that empower individuals and communities.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

Upload documents here.





Embassy of the United States of America  
 Plot 1073, Diplomatic Drive  
 Central Business Area, Abuja  
 Nigeria  
 Telephone: 09-461-4000  
<http://nigeria.usembassy.gov>

March 19, 2019

Dear Modupeoluwa Darabidan:

Congratulations! You have been chosen to participate in the 2019 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders.

As you know, the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). As a Mandela Washington Fellow, you will arrive in the United States on June 19, 2019, where you will spend six weeks taking part in a Leadership Institute hosted by a U.S. educational institution. You will also hone your leadership skills and network with other young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa and the United States. After your academic residency, you will travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in a three-day Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit. During the Summit, you will have the opportunity to interact with U.S. leaders in the fields of business, government, and the non-profit sector. In addition, a small number of Fellows will remain in the United States for additional professional development experiences at U.S. companies, non-profit organizations, or government agencies.

Upon completion of the U.S.-based program, your Fellowship continues in Africa where you will have access to ongoing professional development, networking, and collaboration opportunities.

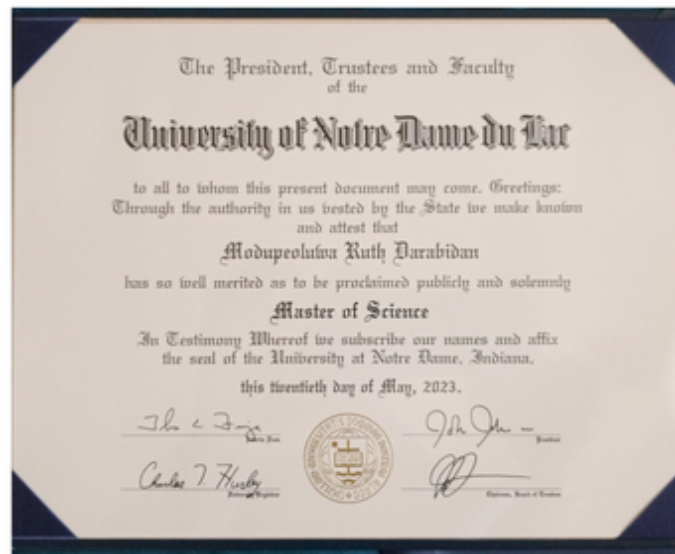
You will receive more information via email in the next few days from IREX, our implementing partner, regarding your participation in the Mandela Washington Fellowship and the forms that you need to complete; please check the spam or junk folders in your email account to ensure you receive the message. If you do not receive an email from IREX 2-3 days after this letter, please contact [MW2019@irex.org](mailto:MW2019@irex.org).

In order to finalize your participation, you will need to accept the program's terms and conditions and receive a J-1 visa to the United States. If you have questions after hearing from IREX, you may email them at [MW2019@irex.org](mailto:MW2019@irex.org).

On behalf of the U.S. government, I congratulate you again on your selection as a Mandela Washington Fellow.

Sincerely,

  
 William I. Mellott  
 Chargé d'Affaires a.i.





Ex6 - YALI Regional Business Simulati... .pdf



Ex8 - YALI Regional Leadership Center... .pdf



Ex7- MWF Certificate\_U.S Department... .pdf



Ex10 - 100 Out-of-School Girls, Young ... .pdf



Ex9 - Tech hubs the key to getting wo... .pdf



Ex13 - Overview - IU Innovates Internal... .pdf



Ex14 - Modupe CAB Board Service Let... .pdf



Ex12 - Modupe Darabidan Adeoye na... .pdf



Ex11 - Fair Shared City Research Pape... .pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Community engagement has been a consistent pillar of my professional and personal journey. I believe leadership extends beyond institutional roles and into meaningful service that strengthens communities.

I currently serve on the IU Innovates Internal Advisory Board (2024 – Present), contributing to advancing entrepreneurship initiatives across Indiana University. I also sit on the IU South Bend Community Advisory Board for the Office of Professional Engagement (2024 – Present), where I support strategies that expand internship access, strengthen employer partnerships, and increase workforce readiness for students in Northern Indiana.

Presently, I serve as an Ambassador for IDEA Week 2026, a regional innovation festival designed to amplify entrepreneurship, creativity, and economic growth across the South Bend–Elkhart region. As an Ambassador, I help shape the event’s programming and outreach strategy, working alongside founders, creators, and community connectors to ensure the event reaches every corner of the region and inspires broad participation.

Beyond the university and regional ecosystem, I serve on the Membership Committee of Graduate Women International – USA Chapter (2023 – Present), helping develop strategic initiatives that expand support for women and girls globally. Since 2020, I have also served as a Board Member of the Girl-to-Queen Initiative, providing governance oversight and strategic guidance to advance leadership and education programs for young women.

Internationally, I remain actively engaged with the Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni network and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). From 2019 – 2020, I served as South Zonal Coordinator for the Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni Association of Nigeria, leading regional engagement efforts and supporting leadership development initiatives.

Across these roles, my service reflects a sustained commitment to building inclusive ecosystems, strengthening leadership pipelines, and expanding access to opportunity at local, national, and international levels.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Natalie Skaro

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Natalie Skaro

**Preferred Email:** nconlon@NiSource.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 742-5633

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** NiSource

**Title/Position:** NIPSCO Permitting Team Leader

**Business Phone:** (219) 742-5633

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** NIPSCO

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Anya Ritchie

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (412) 522-3591

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** aeschoss@nisource.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Influential Woman

**How many years in field:** 15

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** STEM

**Secondary:** Construction/Manufacturing

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

I graduated from Indiana University Bloomington in May 2011 with a Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs, majoring in Environmental Management. From the outset, my goal was to serve communities through environmental protection. I began my career in the environmental field with Waste Management in Indianapolis before joining NiSource to support its growing Environmental Policy department—an opportunity that laid the foundation for my long-term career in utility environmental permitting and compliance.

Early in my career, I focused on tracking regulatory changes and evaluating organizational readiness to implement new environmental requirements. I worked closely with experienced mentors who helped me build a strong technical foundation in environmental permitting for utility infrastructure and linear projects. In 2015, I transitioned into a role supporting NIPSCO's gas and electric infrastructure replacement and relocation projects, further expanding my knowledge and responsibilities.

In 2020, I took on the complex challenge of supporting NIPSCO's generation NPDES permitting—an area that pushed me well beyond my comfort zone and significantly strengthened both my technical expertise and professional confidence.

In 2023, following departmental growth, I was selected to serve as Environmental Permitting Team Leader. In this role, I lead and mentor a team of nine environmental professionals responsible for permitting and regulatory support for critical infrastructure projects across NIPSCO's service territory. Mentorship has been a defining influence in my career, and I am intentional about paying that forward by developing others and fostering a culture of accountability, collaboration, and continuous learning.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

Since becoming a mother, my perspective on obstacles has shifted significantly. It feels as though I have had two distinct career experiences: one before motherhood and one after. Both have shaped my leadership, but the latter has challenged me in ways I never anticipated.

Early in my career, I encountered a significant professional challenge when I was responsible for implementing an environmental review process that was new to many internal teams. Although the process—still in use today—was designed to improve consistency and strengthen compliance, it initially created friction by adding new steps to project workflows.

Many early discussions were difficult, as teams were concerned about schedule impacts and additional workload. Through those conversations, I learned that successful change requires more than technical expertise—it requires listening, empathy, and collaboration. By working closely with business partners, I helped develop tools and guidance that allowed the process to be more effectively integrated into project planning. Ultimately, this effort strengthened cross-functional relationships, reduced risk, and improved consistency across projects, while shaping my leadership approach grounded in transparency and trust.

A different and more personal challenge emerged in 2023, shortly after I was promoted to Environmental Permitting Team Leader, when I learned I was expecting my daughter. Within a matter of months, I was preparing to lead a newly formed team of eight new hires with varying levels of experience while also planning for maternity leave.

I felt a strong responsibility to ensure my team was set up for success before I stepped away. I approached this by prioritizing structured onboarding, accessibility, and team collaboration. I dedicated focused time to each employee, established clear processes and expectations, and created an environment where team members could learn from one another. Encouraging shared communication and peer-to-peer problem solving not only helped manage the demands of rapid onboarding, but also established a strong foundation for how the team continues to operate today.

At the same time, I was navigating the personal transition into motherhood. After my daughter Vivian was born, we experienced unexpected medical concerns that required a short but extended postpartum hospital stay. That experience brought a level of perspective and vulnerability that fundamentally changed how I view both work and life. It reinforced what truly matters while strengthening my resilience.

Returning to work introduced new challenges—balancing leadership responsibilities with childcare transitions, evolving schedules, and the unpredictability that comes with raising a young child. More recently, an unexpected daycare closure required our family to quickly adapt and secure new childcare while maintaining professional commitments. To clarify what I mean by unexpected: we found out on a Monday that Friday was the last day of the daycare's operation.

These experiences have reinforced an important truth: many individuals are navigating challenges outside of what we see in the workplace. As a result, I strive to lead with empathy, flexibility, and trust while maintaining high standards and accountability. I am proud to be a high performer, but I have learned that sustaining success requires resilience, strong support systems, and the ability to give yourself grace.

While the challenges of balancing career and caregiving are ongoing, they have made me a stronger and more intentional leader—more adaptable, more empathetic, and more focused on supporting both my team and my family.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

Growing up in Northwest Indiana, I developed an appreciation for the natural environment through time spent at the Indiana Dunes and along Lake Michigan. At the same time, I found fulfillment in helping others through volunteer service. When it came time to choose a career path, I knew I wanted work that combined service, responsibility, and meaningful impact.

That desire led me to Indiana University's O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. During my early coursework, it became clear that environmental protection was a powerful way to support communities by safeguarding the resources people rely on every day. This purpose continues to motivate my work and reinforces my commitment to environmental stewardship and responsible development.

## **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I serve as NIPSCO's Environmental Permitting Team Leader, leading a team of nine professionals responsible for securing environmental permits, obtaining regulatory clearances, and providing environmental guidance to project and construction teams. Our work ensures that infrastructure projects are executed responsibly and in full compliance with environmental regulations.

In addition to regulatory oversight, my role includes mentoring team members, strengthening cross-functional partnerships, and advancing practices that prioritize avoidance, minimization, and mitigation of

impacts to natural resources—particularly wetlands, waterways, and sensitive habitats. Our collective goal is to support safe, reliable service for the communities we serve while maintaining full environmental compliance.

**5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

I earned a Master of Business Administration from Indiana University Northwest in 2018 and subsequently obtained my Lean Six Sigma Green Belt certification.

In 2021, I was honored to be named Child Advocate of the Year by LaPorte County Family Advocates for my work mentoring at-risk youth—an experience that reflects my commitment to advocacy, service, and investing in the success of others.

**Please fill out the above or upload documents here.**





NWIWA influential women info.pdf

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Early in my career, I was actively involved with Taltree Arboretum (now Gabis Arboretum at Purdue Northwest), serving in several leadership roles:

- Board Member at Large (2014–2016)
- Vice President (2016–2017)
- President (2017–2018)

Through these roles, I contributed to organizational governance, strategic planning, and initiatives focused on environmental education and community engagement. This experience reinforced my commitment to conservation, leadership, and giving back to the Northwest Indiana community.

While community involvement remains important to me, my current focus is on raising my young daughter and spending time with my family. I look forward to becoming more actively involved in volunteer work again as she grows. In the meantime, we enjoy spending our time together outdoors, attending community events, and staying connected to the environment that inspired my career path.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.

# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Nicole Pomeroy

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Nicole Pomeroy

**Preferred Email:** nicole.pomeroy@hitachiglobalairpower.com

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 221-3968

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** Hitachi Global Air Power

**Title/Position:** Manufacturing Engineer

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Hitachi Global Air Power

## If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:**

Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:**

5

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:**

Construction/Manufacturing

**Secondary:**

STEM

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

When I graduated college in 2021, I got my first job as a Manufacturing Engineer at a facility that contract manufactured medical devices – one of which was a COVID vaccine-related device. This project placed me, at the start of my career, in an environment that required expediency, extreme attention to detail, and a high degree of adaptability. I learned the FDA and ISO requirements for medical devices as quickly as possible so I could set up and optimize a multi-million-dollar product line that was needed to help save people's lives. It was a textbook "trial by fire" situation that included long days and ever-constant shifting priorities. Once those intense initial first six months of my job were over and the product line was fully operational and optimized, my role shifted from the vaccine project to optimizing the legacy products we already manufactured and quoting/insourcing new products. I became the ME responsible for our extrusion department, increasing productivity and quality for products being manufactured as well as insourcing new tubes. I was responsible for the entire process from inception to full-scale production: quoting projects for customers, purchasing tooling, fully qualifying the manufacturing of the new product, and getting it into production to be sold to customers.

In 2023, after two years of living and breathing medical device manufacturing, the corporation that owned our facility made the decision to close the Merrillville location and move production to Mexico. I received an offer to relocate to San Diego, but it wasn't what was right for my personal life; I had to make a career change.

I got a job at Hitachi Global Air Power, formerly Sullair, as a Manufacturing Engineer in the new fabrication shop that was built onsite in 2021. The transition from med devices to sheet metal manufacturing was both challenging and interesting. While the strict regulatory environment was no longer a factor, I was now responsible for insourcing new parts at a scale I was wholly unfamiliar with. I no longer had to validate every step of my process as I did before, but I now had to memorize the different gauges of steel and how the respective bend-radii would affect the overall dimensions of the parts we were making. I had to very quickly learn how to create sheet metal parts in solid modeling software and how to program lasers, laser-combo machines, panel benders, and multiple different brake presses. It felt like starting my career over in many ways, but my experience in my first job allowed me to think about things in a structured, quality-driven way that has helped me be consistent and reliable in my current role. In my three years at Hitachi, I have become the head ME in charge of our form area as well as the main point of contact for our manufacturing floor whenever there are issues.

### 2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.

Right before my senior year of college and during the summer of 2020, my mom was diagnosed with

Stage 3 breast cancer. During my final year of college, I had to balance completing my senior capstone project, finishing classes, applying for my first job, and navigating the uncertainty of graduating during a global pandemic – all while going home periodically to support my mom through her treatments. Despite my family facing a traumatic, life-changing experience, I had to stay focused on finishing my education. While my peers spent weekends partying, I went home to help my mom shave her head to avoid the horrifying experience of her hair falling out in clumps. Instead of being able to focus on studying for tests, I was worrying about her recovery from having a full mastectomy. This period of my life was about learning who I was through constant changes and chaos while setting up the foundation for the rest of my career. I learned to stay focused and positive through hardship, and to be thankful for the good things even when everything around me felt like it was falling apart. I had to accept that life is not always easy, and that regardless of the circumstances, I had to put my best foot forward and hope that things would eventually work out.

I wish I could say that this was the end of this difficult chapter. Unfortunately, when I was early in my career, my mom was very suddenly diagnosed with Stage 4 metastatic breast cancer and passed away in 2022. My life went from exuberantly focusing on my career, to worrying about her new cancer diagnosis, to taking all my sick and personal time to spend every second in the hospital with her, to her passing in less than a month. It was a tragedy and it ripped the ground out from under me at 23 years old. My mom was the working parent so I had to put my own hardships on hold and figure out how my dad was going to keep his own life together. We had to dig through notebooks to find the passwords to bank accounts, figure out how life insurance works, pay for a memorial we had never anticipated, and all of the million other things you have to do when someone passes. My memories of this period are hazy with grief, stress, and the compartmentalizing I had to do to keep going. I was exhausted and traumatized, and my previous philosophy of “it will all work out in the end” couldn’t hold up any longer.

I had to adjust my everyday normal to existing with my grief and trying to find joy in the little things. I went to work and found a welcome distraction with my project responsibilities and socializing with my coworkers. Throughout the aftermath I learned the importance of true friendships – how much it means to have friends that will answer a phone call at any point of day, who will drive hours just to give you a hug, and who will be there for you through months of nothing but negativity. My perspective on interacting with people completely changed. Instead of being upset that people are in a bad mood or seem disinterested, I now feel a bone-deep empathy when I think about the things they could be experiencing outside of our interactions. The saying, “you never know what someone else may be going through” resonates with me and is a mindset I try to universally apply. I learned that I can survive really hard things; it is easier to tell myself that I can get through something difficult because I have been through something worse. I know I can find happiness in the darkest of times and still make a positive impact on the people around me when I am at my worst.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I have wanted to be in a STEM field since I was a little girl. I grew up building and fixing things with my dad in his woodshop and garage. In middle school, I started participating in science fairs; I competed at the NWI regional fair and qualified for the Indiana state competition for seven years in a row. Through these projects, I developed hypotheses, designed experimental methods, built testing devices, and analyzed data. I fell in love with science, engineering, and creating in general. I have wanted to be some form of engineer since at least the seventh grade, and over the course of my high school years I realized how much I enjoy building things that serve a purpose or solve a problem. From there, I decided to get my bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering so I could get a job as an engineer and keep doing what I loved so much as my career.

In college, I realized I had a lot more interest in how things are made than how to design them – I loved learning the manufacturing process behind products and how to optimize manufacturing lines to make them more productive. I loved getting my hands dirty so much that I regularly signed up to be the teacher’s assistant in my college’s Manufacturing Laboratory, where I could help other students learn to use the machines. After identifying where my true passions within engineering lay, I got a job as a Manufacturing Engineer after graduation.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

My current role is Manufacturing Engineer in a sheet metal fabrication shop. A large part of my job is insourcing new parts to the fabrication shop to support on-time delivery of established product lines and new product launches. I evaluate new products based on manufacturing feasibility and constraints of all pieces of equipment. Once I determine that we can make the part, I perform all tasks associated with new part set-up. This starts with taking the solid model provided by our design team and modifying the part to

make it fully manufacturable with our equipment. Then I create programs to cut the parts on one of our two different lasers and program the part on one of three different press brakes. The machine on which I program the part is driven by the geometry and the capacity on the manufacturing floor. For every sub-component and final part number, I fully set up routings and other data in our ERP system so orders can be generated to the floor and the part will be driven through all sub-departments on the manufacturing floor needed to manufacture the part.

On top of bringing in new work to the shop, I am responsible for making improvements and supporting the production floor. I work with cross-functional teams to update designs of new and existing parts to improve manufacturability. This involves reviewing parts and providing detailed feedback on how they need to be modified to make them manufacturable on our machines, more efficient to manufacture, or higher quality. I design and create fixturing to aid in inspections or welding of parts as well as improve the general manufacturing process. These fixtures will perform tasks like holding hinges in the correct location for our welders to tack them into place or go/no-go gauges to quickly perform in process inspection of parts.

An additional aspect of my role is that I am responsible for identifying gaps in our manufacturing capabilities and sourcing new tools or capital equipment. For all large purchases, I perform a detailed return on investment analysis as well as a capital investment acquisition report detailing the scope of the need the company has and how the machine will fill it. These new tools/pieces of equipment need to allow us to make parts we are currently unable to manufacture, improve safety, increase productivity, or sometimes do all three of these things.

## **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

In my role as a Manufacturing Engineer at my company, I work closely with the manufacturer of our laser and press break equipment, AMADA America, and have developed a great working relationship with them. As a result of my repeated demonstration of my knowledge of the equipment we have, as well as my positive experiences with them, I was invited by AMADA to give a "Voice of the Customer" presentation at their Schaumburg Solution Center Event this year. This was a presentation in front of 500+ current and potential AMADA customers where I shared my experience programming and operating the machines that I use every day. I gave a detailed description of the five different machines on our manufacturing floor as well as their respective manufacturing capabilities. I spoke to how the precision and automation built into the machines reduced the instances of tolerance stack-up, as well as allowing us to make products we would not be able to produce on other pieces of equipment that are common in the sheet metal fabrication industry.

I am a national member of the Society of Women Engineers and have been so for the last nine years. In college, I served as a member of my school's executive board in various roles. Since graduating, I have maintained my membership and continued to attend the national conference every year. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Mathematics. I was recognized with a Haas Award by the Gene Haas Foundation, an award given to College of Engineering students who "excel in the area of manufacturing, are good campus citizens, and excellent overall students."

**Please fill out the above or upload documents here.**



Amada VOC Doc.pdf



Nicole Pomeroy Recommendation Letter.pdf



Nicole Pomeroy Recommendation - R... .pdf



6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Society of Women Engineers National Membership since 2017

Valparaiso University Collegiate Section Executive Board:

- 2018-2019 Secretary
- 2019-2020 Public Relations Chair
- 2020-2021 Professional Development Chair

Professional Member

- Attended all national conferences since membership (2018-Milwaukee, 2019-Anaheim, 2020-Virtual, 2021-Indianapolis, 2022-Houston, 2023-Los Angeles, 2024-Chicago, and 2025-New Orleans)
- Served as mentor for Valparaiso University collegiate members attending conferences.

First Robotics Team 3936 – Michigan City  
2025 – Adult Mentor for build session.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Nikki Goodson

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Nikki Goodson

**Preferred Email:** [ngoodson@nisource.com](mailto:ngoodson@nisource.com)

## Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (219) 508-8041

## Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** NiSource

**Title/Position:** Team Lead - Environmental Compliance, Generation & Renewables

**Business Phone:** (219) 851-3654

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** NiSource

**If applicable:**

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Joe Kutch

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (219) 741-4843

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** jkutch@nisource.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:** Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 8

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:** STEM

**Secondary:** STEM

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

**1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?**

When I graduated from Chesterton high school in 2009, I was unsure of what I wanted to do, bouncing back and forth between wanting to be a cosmetologist or wanting to be a doctor and nothing in between. I landed on cosmetology and quickly decided that I wanted to teach it. After teaching cosmetology for 3 years, I decided I wanted to go back to school. With the support of my then fiancé (now husband), I made the decision to go back to school. I was 25, engaged, with two cats and we had just bought a house, so I understood the sacrifices and importance of taking school seriously. In school, I majored in Chemistry where I studied hard and cried a lot. While in school, I was able to intern at a wonderful company, whose charm at times felt like an episode of The Office, in Valparaiso called AM Stabilizers. In the summer of 2017, my husband sent me a LinkedIn job posting for an internship at NiSource. I responded with "What is NiSource?" (I plead the fifth) I applied, interviewed and to my dismay, did not get the position. But as always we prevail, so in 2018 when I saw the same posting, I applied again and this time I GOT IT! I worked as an intern at NiSource in the chemical compliance department from May 2018 to September 2018 when I applied for and got a job as the Chemical Lab Supervisor for the Michigan City Generating Station. This was just so cool! I felt empowered and motivated, which worked in my favor because I still had one year of school to finish. It was a long year but one day I woke up and it was graduation day, funny how time works! I was 29 years old when I graduated college. Graduating with a degree in Chemistry has been my single biggest accomplishment. It gave me the confidence I never knew was in me. Working in the chem lab taught me more than I can put into words, not only about power plants (because wow) but also about people and how kindness can go so far. I developed relationships that will last forever (shout out to the MCGS chem techs!) After working in the lab for 4 years, I decided to make the jump from NIPSCO to

NiSource and join the environmental compliance team. I have been with the environmental compliance team for 3 years (shout out EFC!). While in environmental compliance, along with all of the technical skills, I have learned the importance of working with a good team and people who believe in you. In all my time with NIPSCO/NiSource, I have grown so much into who I am as a professional. I have met people who have changed my life; best friends (shout out Lisa and Licie), great leaders and even some stinkers. For the last couple of years, I have been supporting renewable generation as it pertains to environmental compliance. This has been challenging but rewarding in the best ways (shout out renewables team!). In April of 2025, I got a promotion, my title is Team Lead, Environmental Compliance – Generation & Renewables. My team (shout out Matt and Aerial) supports all of the generating stations and all of the renewable locations. We work very hard but we also have a lot of fun and like being around each other. My goal is to keep it that way!

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

I have had a lot of people come into my life whose only purpose was to challenge me. That has made me who I am today. People who told me I would always be stupid and never be successful, people who told me I only got a good job because I am a woman. I want people to see this and understand that words and people do not define you. You can speak your mind; you deserve to take up space and be who you are without inhibitions.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I am a woman in STEM because I won't ever accept that I cannot do something. Proving to myself that I can make a goal or idea reality has become my favorite thing to do. My chosen degree has led me to an amazing career at an amazing company. It has also led me to a passion of empowering young girls' interest in STEM fields.

## **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

I am a Team Lead, Environmental Compliance – Generation & Renewables. In my role, my team of 2 and I support environmental compliance at 4 generating stations and 10 renewable energy facilities. High level my role is to ensure that environmental compliance is being met at all of these locations. However, my main role as a leader is to build a high functioning team who works well together, understands each other's strengths and doesn't dread coming to work.

## **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

In my field of work, which is environmental, I have been an integral part of the renewables energy sector as it pertains to environmental compliance. I have worked with industry experts to develop a recycling program for solar panels, that resulted in saving the company over a million dollars and NiSource being one of the leading companies in waste management for renewable energy. These efforts led me to winning a NiSource Mission Medallion in 2025.

I am involved in The Women's International Network of Utility Professionals (WiNUP). In WiNUP I serve as the co-committee lead for the STEM/Community Outreach committee. I am also a member of the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) and serve on the Member of EPRI Technology Transfer (METT) for NiSource. I am also a member of the career champion program for NiSource in which we participate in different events to recruit new talent to NiSource.

I belong to NWI Times 20 Under 40 class of 2025. [https://nwitimes.com/exclusive/article\\_68507b88-69e7-496e-8051-907773961683.html](https://nwitimes.com/exclusive/article_68507b88-69e7-496e-8051-907773961683.html)

Please fill out the above or upload documents here.









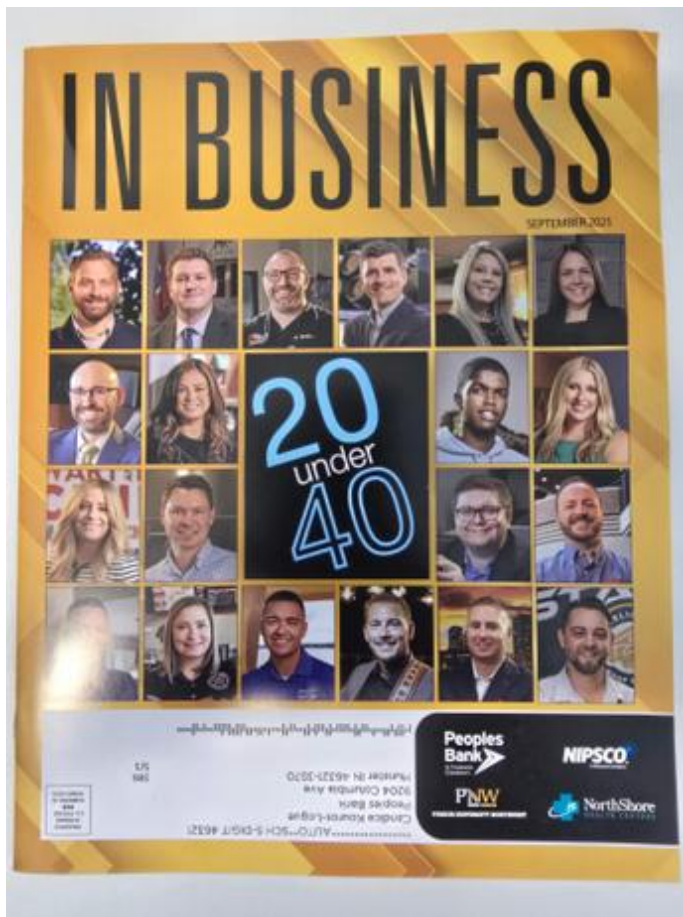
6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

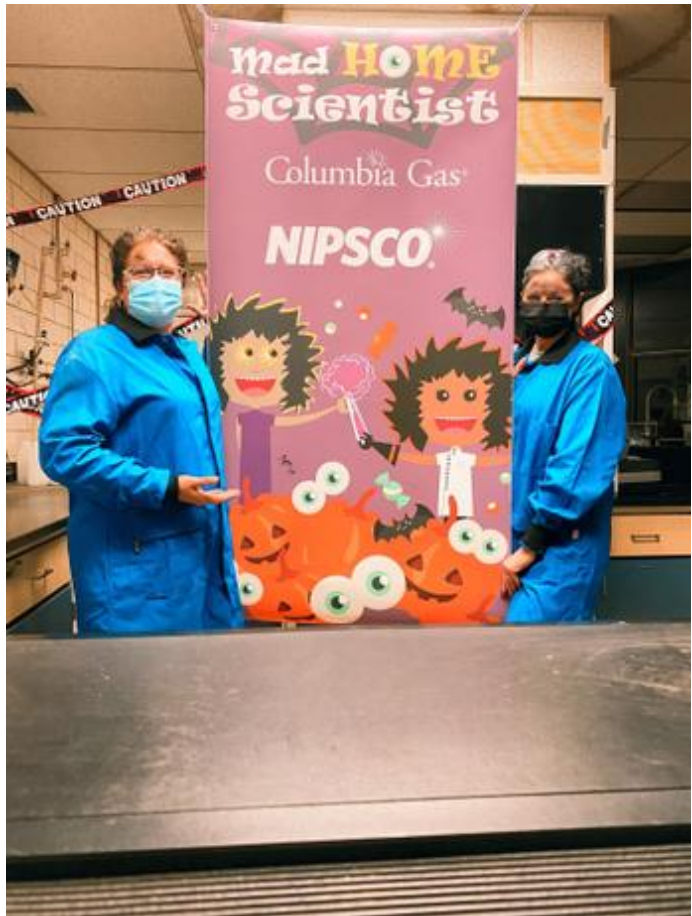
Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

Upload documents here.









**20 UNDER 40**

# Nikki Goodson

**Age:** 31  
**Residence:** Charleston

**Position and employer:** Team Lead, Environmental Compliance, Generation & Renewables at NISOURCE

**Training and education:** Bachelor's degree from Purdue Northwest

**Family:** S.G. Goodson, husband

**Free time/hobbies:** Hiking, riding, the outdoors, music, reading and baking

**Community activities:** Volunteer with Duweland YMCA and Hot Body Pilates

**CHRISTINE DEYANT**  
**T**here is power in a strong body and mind, Nikki Goodson says. That's why when she's not serving as team lead of Environmental Compliance - Generation & Renewables at NISOURCE, there's a good chance you'll find her teaching pilates and spin classes or working with youth to promote careers in STEM. A volunteer spin class teacher at the Duweland YMCA and pilates teacher at Hot Body Pilates in Portage, Goodson also has worked with the Chevrolet Park Department to bring Pilates to the Park to town every other Saturday during the summer months. "In addition to encouraging the community to move, my biggest life purpose is engineering young girls and women's interest in STEM activities," she said. After being a part of various local community STEM outreach programs, including STAEAMS and NISOURCE's introduce a Girl to Engineering Day, Goodson created the STEAM Like a Girl event - a collaborative effort between Women's International Network of Utility Professionals (WINUP) and the Duweland Family YMCA Healthy Living Campus. "A small but mighty group of amazing women, who call ourselves STEAM TEAM, was created," she said. "My hopes are that the legacy of this event are everlasting. We plan to commit to an annual STEAM Like a Girl event. To me, this is just the beginning. Northwest Indiana has so many amazing opportunities for collaboration, I cannot wait to see what else stems from this program." Goodson began her career at NISOURCE as an intern in the chemical compliance department and was later promoted to chemical lab supervisor for the Michigan City Generating Station. After working in the lab for four years, she joined the environmental compliance team where she has been for three years. In April, she was promoted to team lead in Environmental Compliance-Generation & Renewables. "For the last couple of years, I have been supporting renewable generation as it pertains to environmental compliance," she said. "This has been challenging but rewarding in the best ways." In her newest role with NISOURCE, Goodson says one of her goals is to become a leader people can trust, count on and enjoy being around. "I want people to know that I am always in their corner cheering them on," she said. "My goal is to build a reliable, high-functioning team that knows how to get things done in the most effective way possible."



## **7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

I am a born and raised Chesterton resident. Chesterton has such a special place in my heart, with a rich history and beautiful downtown area so close to the lake, it is home in every sense of the word. Since my community is so important to me, I try to give back any way I can.

I have been a volunteer at the Duneland YMCA for 3 years teaching SPIN classes on Monday mornings (shout out to my Monday morning spinners!). I am also a certified Pilates instructor, having previously taught at Hot Body Pilates. Last summer I worked with Tyler McLead at the Chesterton Parks Department and formed an LLC called Temperance Pilates, LLC., to bring Pilates in the Park to Chesterton. The Intention for Pilates in the Park was to bring affordable Pilates to Chesterton and in doing so empower the community to move, as well as bring people to town to support the local community.

My biggest passion project is empowering young girls and women interest in STEM subjects. Having been a part of various local community STEM outreach programs, such as STARBASE and NiSource's Introduce a girl to STEM (Formerly, Introduce a Girl to Engineering day), it was evident that a continued effort at a grass roots level would be welcome and was needed. One day on my way to Pilates, while thinking about this, the idea came to me. An event that captured science in a fun, interactive way. The next day I scheduled meetings with various resources and thus STEAM like a Girl event was created.

Our first STEAM like a girl: Dream it – STEAM it, was a collaborative event with The Women's International Network of Utility Professionals (WiNUP) and the Duneland Family YMCA Healthy Living Campus. Once the idea was proposed, both organizations made no hesitations in making this event come to life. A small but mighty group of amazing women, who call ourselves STEAM TEAM, was created. The first event in September of 2025 brought nearly 80 young girls aged 8-14. The feedback from the attendees and the community was astounding. We have already begun planning the second annual STEAM like a GIRL fall event.

The STEAM team is in the midst of planning our second event, STEAM like a Girl – Her STEM Story on April 11th. Her STEM Story is for teenaged girls. It is a conference for teenaged girls. At this event there will be a panel of professional women in STEM, as well as breakout speakers, where the girls will learn about topics such as resume building, AI, how to build confidence and how to overcome bias. These types of empowering events are crucial in striking the match of interest in the female youth of our community.

Due to the appetite of the community for these events and my love for creating a space where curiosity is encouraged, I have started the process of creating a non-profit specialized in STEM events for girls. It will be called the South Shore STEM Collective (SSSC).

## **8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Patricia Martinez

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Patricia Martinez

**Preferred Email:** paty.mtz@live.com

### Personal Info:

**Mobile Phone:** (773) 426-5734

### Company Info:

**Company/Organization:** NiSource

**Title/Position:** Project Scheduler

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** NiSource

## If applicable:

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

### Choose Award Category:

Up and Coming Woman

### How many years in field:

3

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

### Choose Industry Category:

#### Primary:

STEM

#### Secondary:

Construction/Manufacturing

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

My path to my current role has been a long and winding one shaped by curiosity, persistence, and a desire to make processes work better for the people around me. About 16 years ago, I began working in the Maintenance Department for a school corporation. As I gained exposure to facilities management and operations, I became increasingly interested in project planning, construction coordination, and long-term maintenance strategy. I enjoyed solving the puzzle of how to implement projects efficiently while balancing budgets, timelines, and operational needs.

That interest motivated me to return to school to deepen my knowledge and expand my opportunities. I first attended Ivy Tech Community College, where I earned a degree in Construction Management, and later earned my MBA from Valparaiso University with a focus in Engineering Management.

As I pursued opportunities in project planning and management, I also wanted to find a career that aligned with my passion for community involvement and service. I found that opportunity at NiSource. In my current role as a Project Scheduler, I support communications grid upgrade programs and help facilitate collaboration across project teams. At the same time, I have found strong support from both the company and my colleagues in continuing my community service and STEM outreach efforts throughout Northwest Indiana.

### 2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.

Growing up as first-generation, I learned pretty early that obstacles are usually temporary. Sometimes you go through them, sometimes around them, but you keep moving forward. When I first started college, I was learning everything as I went, from finances to career planning to simply figuring out what direction I wanted my life to take.

Not long after graduating, I became a mom, and balancing work, school, and raising young children was not always easy. Finding a role with the school corporation ended up being a huge turning point for me. It gave me stability and flexibility as a mother, but it also helped me discover interests I did not expect in operations, project planning, and finding ways to make systems work better.

Over the years, I continued going back to school, earning certifications and degrees while working full time and raising four children. At times, it felt like I was constantly juggling responsibilities, but looking back, those experiences taught me resilience, patience, adaptability, and how to take big challenges one step at

a time. My family became my team. We learned together how to multitask, support one another, and build new skills for the success of the whole team. I adapted my learning to my mom life by listening to audiobooks while cheering on my kids during cross country or building Excel workbooks on the bleachers at a soccer game. My teenagers learned to meal plan and cook while their mom worked on 10-page papers.

Last year, I went through a period where I felt a little lost professionally and personally. Participating in the Northwest Indiana Influential Women Association mentoring program really helped reconnect me with my confidence, my goals, and the person I wanted to continue becoming. It reminded me of who I am and who I still have the potential to be.

Because of my own experiences, I try to approach both work and community involvement with empathy and encouragement. I remind people that little steps can you get you far, you just have to start taking them. I know how important support, mentorship, and opportunity can be, and I enjoy helping students and others see that obstacles do not have to define where they end up.

### **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I found my way into this field little by little on what sometimes felt like a winding road. Early in my career, I realized I was naturally drawn to planning, problem solving, and bringing structure to complicated situations. Whether it was planning a more efficient delivery route or creating a streamlined inventory system, I genuinely enjoyed finding ways to make things work better, and it gave me a real sense of pride.

What I love about this field is that every project and every team is different, so there is always an opportunity to learn, improve, and try something new while working toward a shared goal. I also appreciate knowing that the work I do has a real impact on both communities and the people doing the work every day. I sometimes joke that my job is like the movie the Matrix, seeing images in the line items, but there is something about driving past a communication tower and knowing that you had a part in its construction.

Over time, I learned that successful projects are not just about schedules and systems, they are also about communication, collaboration, and trust. Being able to help teams stay aligned, solve problems together, and move projects forward is what makes the work meaningful to me.

### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

In my current role as a Project Scheduler at NiSource, I support communications grid upgrade programs by developing and maintaining project schedules, coordinating updates across teams, and helping improve collaboration between stakeholders. I facilitate subgroup meetings to collect progress updates, identify challenges, and keep projects moving forward efficiently. One part of my role that I especially enjoy is helping teams stay connected and aligned through communication and trust, not just through schedules and systems.

Outside of my professional role, I am also active in several volunteer and community organizations throughout Northwest Indiana. I currently serve as Communications Co-Chair for the GOLD ERG, NiSource's Latino employee resource group, where I help support employee engagement and community outreach efforts. I am also involved in STEM outreach activities through Women's International Network of Utility Professionals (WiNUP), Girl Scouts and Purdue Northwest SWE collaborations, volunteer with the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana as part of their Developmental Leadership Committee, and enjoy supporting programs that encourage students and young women to explore leadership and STEM opportunities.

Both professionally and personally, I enjoy work that brings people together, supports growth, and creates a positive impact within the community.

### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Throughout my career, I have tried to contribute by improving processes, strengthening collaboration, and continuing to grow professionally. In the last nine months, I went from tracking smaller engineering schedules to larger grid modification multi-site programs. I have also leaned into the Augmented Intelligence shift, learning new skills and sharing with my team to close some small knowledge gaps with

CoPilot. I was recently promoted to Project Scheduler, which was a meaningful milestone and recognition of my growth, contributions, and leadership within the organization.

Education has played a major role in my professional journey. I earned a Master of Business Administration from Valparaiso University with certificates in Engineering Management, Business Decision Making, and Leading the Global Enterprise. I also earned degrees in Mathematics and Spanish Business from Butler University, along with a degree in Construction Management from Ivy Tech Community College.

I have continued pursuing professional development through certifications including Microsoft Excel Specialist, OSHA 30, NLPA Certified Procurement Operations Specialist, Certified Logistics Technician and Project Management Institute Certified Professional in Managing AI (PMI-CPMAI) and Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) certification.

In addition to my professional work, I value staying connected to organizations that support leadership, service, and professional growth. I am involved with the Northwest Indiana Influential Women Association, the Project Management Institute Calumet Chapter, and Women's International Network of Utility Professionals (WiNUP), where I support STEM and community outreach efforts. I have also been recognized by the Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana for my years of service and for organizing events that give Girl Scouts opportunities to explore STEM fields and careers.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**

	NWIIWA pictures.zip
	NWIIWA v2 Pictures.zip
	P Martinez Resume.pdf

**7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

Community involvement has always been an important part of my life because I believe service, mentorship, and connection can have a lasting impact on both individuals and communities. Over the years, I have been involved in several organizations focused on education, outreach, leadership, and supporting others.

I currently serve as Communications Co-Chair for the GOLD ERG at NiSource. At NiSource, I have also been part of the Hispanic Heritage Month Planning Committee and the annual Introduce a Girl to STEAM Planning Committee for the past three years.

For nearly two decades, I have volunteered at the school level as a parent helper, PTO member, field trip chaperone, soccer coach, and team parent. I have also been actively involved with the Girl Scouts of

Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana for several years as a troop leader and volunteer. One of the areas I am most passionate about is introducing girls to STEM opportunities and careers. I have helped organize and support STEM-focused events and activities that encourage girls to explore science, engineering, and problem solving in a fun and welcoming environment. This spring we had 52 girls register for a STEM day at PNW and were requested to grow the programming. I have been recognized by the Girl Scouts for my years of service and contributions to STEM programming.

In addition, I support STEM and outreach initiatives through collaborations with Purdue Northwest SWE and Women's International Network of Utility Professionals (WiNUP), including multiple speaker panels providing insight on how to leverage volunteer organizations and professional memberships for career growth. I also volunteer with the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana and currently serve on their Development Leadership Committee, where I leveraged my network to help secure 13 items for the organization's silent auction fundraiser. I have served as a scholarship reviewer for the Legacy Foundation for the past three years and am also part of the Butler University Latinx Alumni Association Steering Committee.

Through both professional and volunteer organizations, I enjoy creating opportunities for mentorship, encouragement, and growth, especially for students and young women exploring future career paths.

8. Please upload a professional headshot here.

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.



# 2025 Influential Women Nominee Application Form

Congratulations! You have been nominated for an Influential Women Award. Influential Women Awards are inspired by the strength and courage of women making a difference in their field.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Nominees must be a female.
- Nominees must work or live in Northwest Indiana.
- There are no costs for nominees to fill out their applications.
- Nominees will need to purchase a ticket to attend the banquet.
- Nominees can purchase tickets at the NWIWA member price.
- Women do not need to be a member of NWIWA to submit their application or win an award.
- Create an account or login, this will allow you to save your application and come back to finish it later.
- Be sure to submit a professional headshot.

The Influential Women of Northwest Indiana Awards Banquet is **September 25, 2025**.

For tickets and sponsorship information please visit <http://nwiwa.org/tickets-sponsorships/>.

Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2025**.

## Nominee

**Name:** Wadzanai Nyabeze

**Name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** Wadzanai Nyabeze

**Preferred Email:** wadzanai.nyabeze@bp.com

**Personal Info:**

**Mobile Phone:** (312) 244-9619

**Company Info:**

**Company/Organization:** bp

**Title/Position:** Commercial Process Engineer

**Company name as you'd like it to appear on supplemental material/website:** bp

## If applicable:

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner:** Vincent White

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Phone:** (219) 433-9671

**Immediate Supervisor/Partner Email:** vincentj.white@bp.com

To ensure accuracy, we request that you choose your award and industry category. (Up-and-Coming is typically 15 years or less, while Influential is typically more than 15 years.)

**Choose Award Category:**

Up and Coming Woman

**How many years in field:** 10

There are 12 industry categories. Please choose the most accurate category. You may choose two categories if applicable.

**Choose Industry Category:**

**Primary:**

STEM

**Secondary:**

Construction/Manufacturing

The following section is about your personal journey. Tell us about your strength, courage, success, and commitment.

### 1. Describe your journey in your chosen field. How did you get where you are?

What first drew me to chemical engineering was its breadth and the way it sits at the intersection of mathematics, chemistry, and physics to turn raw materials into things people use every day. After completing my undergraduate studies in December 2013, I won a full scholarship to pursue a master's degree at the University of Cape Town (UCT) from January 2014 to December 2015. I researched copper sulphate as a flotation activator, refining dosages for platinum-bearing ores and achieving significant cost savings for concentrators. Additionally, I undertook a voluntary site flotation survey at Pilanesberg Platinum Mine, gathering operational data to support plant optimization. This experience provided me with a strong foundation for scaling laboratory studies through pilot projects to fully deploying them in large-scale industrial operations.

I joined bp as an early career engineer in February 2016 and have since held progressively senior roles across three bp operational sites. As an Asset Support Engineer at bp's South African terminals, I developed Safe Operating and Design Limits that were later standardized across all bp-operated terminals in the country. I was promoted to Maintenance Engineer in November 2017 where I managed preventive and proactive programs for 5,000+ operational assets pumps, compressors, pipelines, and storage tanks.

From December 2018 as Reliability Engineer, I led a team of three and a \$1M annual maintenance budget. By applying risk-based maintenance strategies and data-driven performance monitoring, maintenance costs were reduced by 10%, equipment integrity was enhanced, and gantry availability improved from 95% to 98%. I moved into project management next in February 2021, delivering a \$3M capital portfolio of ten projects at bp's Cape Town Terminal spanning emissions reduction, infrastructure upgrades, and asset integrity and served on the Governance Board for the bp/Strategic Fuel Fund Joint Venture.

In August 2023, I then relocated to the United States on expatriate assignment as Process Safety Lead at bp's Whiting Refinery, leading a team of seven and serving as deputy to the Process Safety Engineering Superintendent. In this role, I was the site's Subject Matter Expert on Management of Change (MOC), Safe

Operating & Design Limits (SOL/SDL), and Hazard Operability and Layer of Protection Analysis (HAZOP/LOPA) studies. I have since transitioned into my current role as of February 2026 as Commercial Process Engineer at Whiting Clean Energy which was a deliberate move to complement my technical foundation with commercial and financial fluency as I prepare for senior strategic roles in the energy industry.

## **2. Describe any obstacles you have overcome in your life/career.**

I completed my A-Levels in 2008 in Zimbabwe at Monte Cassino Girls High School. It was a brutal year. Zimbabwe's hyperinflation peaked at 89.7 sextillion percent that November, the economy collapsed, and schools across the country were losing teachers as educators left for better opportunities abroad. My chemistry teacher, the man who had inspired much of our class to specialize in science for our final two years passed away from a short illness, and no one came to replace him. Frequent load-shedding meant I studied by candlelight long after the power went out.

I had to teach myself chemistry. Two things kept me going. First, my love for the subject. I already knew by then that I wanted a career working with molecules and chemical manufacturing processes, and giving up wasn't an option. Second, my family's deep belief in education. My parents had instilled in me from a young age that excellence in academics was the lever that opens every other door, and I was determined to earn admission to a top African university.

In addition to my high school academic pursuits, I led the school's Current Affairs Club, published the annual school magazine, and competed in field events on the athletics team. The balance kept me grounded and built the leadership and teamwork muscles that have carried into every chapter since.

The outcome was admission to the chemical engineering program at the University of Cape Town and the start of everything that followed.

## **3. Why are you in your chosen field?**

I'm passionate about energy, innovation, and the empowerment of women in STEM and these three threads are why I've stayed in this industry for over a decade.

I chose chemical engineering because I'm fascinated by industrial chemical processes. I've stayed in energy because few industries have a more direct and tangible impact on people's lives providing heat, mobility, and the foundation of economic growth. Having grown up through Zimbabwe's economic collapse, I understand viscerally what energy reliability, affordability, and access mean to families and economies, and what their absence costs. My longer-term ambition is to bring the technical, commercial, and strategic skills I've built at bp into board advisory roles, particularly for organizations working on energy access in developing economies, where I've seen firsthand what functional systems and policies make possible.

What also keeps me here is how fast the field is evolving. In recent years alone, I've watched the industry deploy AI-powered satellite imagery and drone surveillance to detect methane leaks within minutes, automate hazardous processes to protect personal and process safety, and use predictive smart-sensor data to catch equipment degradation before failure. The prospect of contributing to the energy transition truly energizes me, and I am eager to play a role in its development over the coming decades of my professional life.

But the path hasn't been easy. Several of my female peers from university have pivoted to other industries, citing lack of representation and difficult working conditions. I've navigated those same headwinds by advocating for myself, finding mentors and allies, and staying true to who I am. A particularly significant experience occurred when I served as the sole female member of a project leadership team in South Africa. I advocated successfully for the implementation of appropriate ablution facilities for women on site, introduced more inclusive signage, and promoted greater awareness of harassment and daily challenges faced by women within the industry. These initiatives demonstrated that incremental improvements could have a lasting effect; such measures are instrumental in supporting women to remain engaged in the field, rather than simply facilitating their entry.

#### **4. What is your current job role/responsibilities?**

As Commercial Process Engineer at the bp Whiting Clean Energy Cogeneration Power Plant, a 525 MW facility that supplies 50% of the steam used at the bp Whiting Refinery, I sit at the intersection of operations, commercial markets, and strategic planning.

On the technical side, I troubleshoot plant performance, analyze operating data, evaluate energy efficiency, and ensure compliant, safe, and reliable operations. I manage steam and power production planning to meet refinery demand, oversee operating procedure updates, and manage chemical ordering for the boiler feedwater treatment plant, cooling towers, ammonia for the emissions reduction system, and other site chemicals.

On the commercial side, I authorize daily natural gas purchases and manage power capacity sales and auctions through the U.S. Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) the regional electricity market covering 15 states. I provide day-ahead and real-time load forecasting to support our participation in MISO's energy markets, and I manage the operational relationship with MISO, including reporting planned and unplanned outages that affect grid stability.

I'm also the budget owner for the facility leading monthly budget reviews, overseeing purchasing and procurement, and managing contracts and I serve as deputy to the Operations Superintendent, supporting operational decision-making and plant leadership when called on.

The role is deliberately broader than a typical engineering position. I took it on to complement my technical foundation with the commercial and financial fluency I'll need as I move into more senior strategic roles in the energy industry.

#### **5. Discuss any recognition and/or contributions you have made to your field, include education qualifications and any professional associations you belong to.**

Education and publications:

I hold a bachelor's and master's in chemical engineering from the University of Cape Town. While pursuing my Master's, I served as Marketing and Communications Chair for UCT's Graduate Student Council and received the Student Leadership Award for outstanding contributions including organizing the Engineering and Built Environment Faculty's annual research expo, which showcased graduate research to undergraduates considering graduate study. My thesis, The Effect of Copper Sulphate on Froth Stability, is publicly available on UCT's OpenUCT platform. The peer-reviewed paper based on my research "Adsorption of copper sulphate on PGM-bearing ores and its influence on froth stability and flotation kinetics", published in Elsevier's Minerals Engineering has been cited 36 times as of May 2026 across 19 peer-reviewed journals spanning minerals processing, water and environmental engineering, materials science, separation science, and waste management.

Professional associations:

I am an Associate Member (100221516) of the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) since October 2022 and an Associate Member (0083985) of the Energy Institute since April 2024.

- Feb 2026: Appointed as a judge for the Institution of Chemical Engineers' Young Engineers 2026 Awards for Innovation and Sustainability. Served by evaluating, scoring, and selecting winners from shortlisted submissions according to their potential impact on sustainability challenges.

bp recognition:

February 2026 marked my 10-year anniversary with bp, accompanied by over 35 internal recognitions since the company's recognition program launched in 2019. Highlights include:

Whiting Refinery (current site)

- Dec 2025: Organizing the 2025 Winter First Level Leaders Summits, convening front-line leaders with the refinery leadership team on key operational topics.
- Oct 2025: Facilitating Hazard Operability and Layer of Protection Analysis (HAZOP/LOPA) studies across operating units and active projects.
- Jul 2025: Whiting Refinery will provide training for its operations and technical staff on the Risk Reviewer process, helping them recognize risks connected to changes involving equipment, personnel, or processes.
- Sep 2025: Serving as deputy for the Process Safety Engineering Superintendent while running my own

Process Safety Lead role.

- Oct 2024: Supporting the Whiting Refinery Management of Change (MOC) squad by developing a Power BI dashboard to enhance the visualization and monitoring of key performance indicators within the change management process.
- Oct 2024: Completing a comprehensive incident investigation to identify the root cause and assess the safety and environmental consequences of the February 2024 refinery-wide power outage.
- Oct 2023: Supporting the refinery's 5-yearly Major Accident Risk (MAR) study update which included walking the site and gathering census data critical to quantifying major accident hazards.

At other bp locations – South Africa and the United Kingdom

- Jun 2023: Presented at bp's global Tank Subject Discipline Network on storage tank maintenance and inspection best practices from South African operations.
- Oct 2022: Organized the Europe and South Africa Leadership Team off-site meetings for operations strategy planning that took place in the United Kingdom.
- Oct 2022: Delivered the Cape Town Terminal drainage and oily water separator pit upgrade on time and on budget. I was also recognized for building a strong working relationship with a difficult contractor.
- Sep 2022: Chosen to participate in bp's Advancing First Level Leaders Program, designed to build strong leadership skills that focus on safety, people, and delivering consistent results while upholding bp's standards.
- Apr 2022: Recognized by the Vice President of Terminals & Pipelines for significant improvement to the Tank turnaround intervals at Cape Town terminal resulting in improved site safety, reduced environmental fugitive emissions and improved cost savings.
- Sep 2021: Supported bp South Africa's hydrogen workstream on market studies and value chain modelling for net-zero initiatives.
- Nov 2020: Reduced false overfill triggers at the bp Cape Town Terminal road loading gantry through cross-disciplinary root cause analysis and Management of Change.
- Jan 2020: Received a Platinum Safety Award for zero personal safety incidents over three years on high-risk operations.
- Oct 2019: Conducted performance tests on the firefighting system at Cape Town Terminal to confirm that the equipment met the original design standards and complied with requirements for the most challenging fire scenarios.

6. Each candidate is evaluated on individual merit. You may include/attach other acknowledgments.

Below is a list of suggested items. This list is not exhaustive nor required.

- a. Awards
- b. Publications
- c. Articles
- d. Letters of Recommendation (Limit 2)
- e. Certificates

**Upload documents here.**



AMIChemE Cert\_3682.pdf



CTT Tank TAR improvements summar... .pdf



BP International Limited\_ 10 years of ... .pdf



Energy Instite Associate Member Regi... .pdf



IChemE Young Engineers Awards for I... .pdf



One Young World 2017 Summit - bp d... .pdf



Girls in STEM event - LinkedIn\_7638.pdf



TechWomen Program 2024 Certificat... .pdf



TechWomen Program 2025 Certificat... .pdf



TechWomen Program Confirmation\_... .pdf



UCT Student Leadership Awards\_2097.pdf



UN Breakthrough Innovation Challeng... .pdf



Wadzanai Nyabeze BScEng Certificate...pdf



W Nyabeze B McFadzean 2016 public... .pdf



Wadzanai Nyabeze MScEng Certificat... .pdf



thesis\_ebe\_2015\_nyabeze\_wadzanai\_... .pdf



Whiting Weekly Publication - MOC das... .pdf



NWIIWA Nomination Recommendatio... .pdf



Separator pit and site drainage syste... .pdf

## **7. Describe any community involvement, volunteer activities, and length of service and/or offices held at services organizations.**

In September 2017, two colleagues and I won the United Nations Breakthrough Innovation Challenge in New York for our digital solution to influence consumer behavior on food waste, aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goal 12. That same year, I was selected as one of 20 bp delegates (out of over 300 candidates globally) to attend the One Young World Summit in Bogotá, Colombia. I also worked with bp Ventures - bp's corporate venture capital arm to identify investment opportunities for low-carbon start-ups to accelerate innovation in energy transition. I've been a One Young World Ambassador ever since, volunteering as a project advisor for sustainable energy projects driving social change, offering both strategic mentorship and technical expertise.

In 2024 and 2025, I served as a professional mentor through the TechWomen program, a U.S. State Department initiative connecting and supporting emerging women leaders in STEM from over 20 countries. My role was to support my mentees' professional development, open doors within bp, and help them build the networks they'll need to reach their full potential. I was recognized for these contributions in both program years.

I joined the bp Whiting Refinery Women's International Network (WIN) in September 2024 as an Outreach core-team member. In 2025, I planned and led our annual Girls in STEM event, hosting 25 high school students and educators from Hammond Career Center, Whiting High School, and East Chicago. I helped to secure 30+ refinery volunteers to run hands-on learning activities and career conversations, developed information packs for the refinery bus tour and fire department visit, and coordinated logistics on the day, including sharing scholarship resources with the students. The event received press coverage in NWI Life and the Chicago Tribune, and I was recognized by the Whiting Refinery leadership team for driving its success.

I've also been recognized for volunteering across other Whiting employee resource groups such as helping plan the Black Collective's Juneteenth celebration, joining a panel discussion with bp's HBCU Fellows to share my journey, and supporting fundraising for the IWIN (Indiana Women In Need) Foundation through Breast Cancer Awareness campaigns.

## **8. Please upload a professional headshot here.**

Each candidate is asked to provide a professional headshot photo of themselves. This may be used for recognition and banquet purposes.

