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## WKU professor continues to give back, fight inequality

By AMY SMITH THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE  
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Donielle Lovell with her husband Jason and daughter Abigail.  
Submitted

### Getting to know Donielle Lovell

She has been married to her husband Jason for 20 years, and they have one daughter, Abigail.

Pets: a dog named Jake and a cat named Daisy

Favorite vacation spot: Sedona, Arizona

Favorite color: Turquoise

Favorite food: Spaghetti

Favorite genre of music: Hard rock

Favorite author: Jill Mansell

Hobbies: Beading

Dr. Donielle Lovell is a first-generation college graduate from the rural town of Salamanca, New York, which lies within the Allegheny Indian reservation.

Grateful for her rich heritage in community service and political activism, Lovell said wanting to give back comes naturally for her.

“I just grew up with really, really amazing examples of community service, and not just community service and volunteer service, but my family is highly political. A lot of them have found leadership positions in the Seneca Nation. I feel very fortunate that I’ve had both sides of that example,” Lovell said. “And so, it was just natural for me. As a child, I got involved, and then when I moved to Hardin County, it was natural that I found ways to get involved and serve my community here.” Lovell found a passion for serving others through her involvement with AmeriCorps. Having received a bachelor’s degree in social science education from Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, she was assigned to help inmates and other adults obtain their GED. “I was part of the AmeriCorps program, which is the domestic version of Peace Corps,” Lovell said. “And so instead of being sent overseas to do

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development work, you're paired with local organizations. I'm glad for that, because I wouldn't have chosen that, and I wouldn't have realized just how passionate I was about inequality."

Lovell said the work she did with the adult education program spurred her to ask more questions, eventually leading her to attend graduate school. "I was 22 years old and teaching these mostly black men who are incarcerated about balancing a checkbook. And I knew that this would make no difference whatsoever in what they were going to face when they got out of jail," Lovell said. "I went on to get a master's degree because I knew that's really where my heart was. I wanted to be able to use research to figure things out, and then to use evidence to create good programs and to hopefully make a difference."

Lovell, associate professor of sociology and department coordinator of citizenship and justice at Western Kentucky University at the Elizabethtown campus, has used her education, time and influence to do just that. "Just recently, in the last couple of years, I've spent a lot of time writing grants. We have worked on restorative justice initiatives, and worked with the school partnership initiative," Lovell said. "I was involved with the (Hardin County) Bridges Council, trying to bring training and solutions to Hardin County that provide alternative training options for kids who get in trouble. We felt really proud to be able to do that work and to bring that grant money to Hardin County." In 2017, Lovell started donating her time to Room In the Inn, a volunteer group that provides shelter for the homeless community during the winter months, as a monitor for their day shelter at Warm Blessings Community Kitchen and eventually headed up a serving team for Friday nights. "I'd seen a post on Facebook from Ms. Linda Funk, and they were looking for volunteers," Lovell said. "And I was like, you know, I have a flexible schedule. Why can't I do that? And so, I reached out to her. And then, I was enjoying my time there so much, I recognized that I could do more.

"In 2019, Ms. Funk asked if I would like to join the board," Lovell added. "I was really excited to join, and to learn and to be involved in helping to make good decisions and being good stewards over the resources we had."

In 2020, Terrie Burgan stepped down as chairwoman of the board for Warm Blessings, and Lovell said she was asked by her fellow board members to become the chair.

Dawn Cash, executive director of Warm Blessings Community Kitchen said she has worked "side-by-side for the past two years" with Lovell. "During her tenure, our organization has grown fourfold," Cash said. "We have become financially solvent and have responsible financial policies in place that guarantee the future of Warm Blessings. We now have a staff that allows us to serve the

community to our fullest capacity, and we are planning a capital campaign to launch in the spring so that we may build a new facility to meet the growing demands for our services to our food and shelter-insecure neighbors. “None of this growth would have been possible without Donielle sharing this vision, and her bravery and fearlessness to jump into the unknown,” Cash added.

Lovell is finishing her second year as chairwoman. “Of course, during that time, we’ve just had a tremendous amount of change,” Lovell said. “We’ve had just really exciting things coming down the pike with securing land for a new building and our very first capital campaign donation from Operation Roundup, which is a \$100,000 donation.” Lovell said it is an exciting time to be in leadership at the organization “working with such a forward thinking and strong compassionate group. “They are some of the best people in the world that you could ask to work with,” Lovell said. “I feel very honored and privileged that I’m able to be board chair right now.” Cash said Lovell’s impact extends well beyond the organization and its mission. “Her passion for diversity and inclusivity is enlightening and that is a gift to this community,” Cash said. “Whether it is sharing a lesson on culture with elementary school students or in a college sociology classroom or even a subtle example to those around her of how to understand and treat someone who isn’t just like you, this is how she makes a difference every single day, often without even realizing what a lasting impression she has left. Because that’s just who she authentically is.”

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