

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT



Our 2023 Summer CAYLA Interns

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director

It is our summer tradition to introduce you to our amazing City of Asheville Leadership Academy (CAYLA) interns.

JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Pro16 Productions

When you see them out with us, or moving independently throughout the community, please share an encouraging word or networking opportunity.

They are always such a breath of fresh air and youthful inspiration, reminding us why we do what we do, in addition to bringing innovative elements that we can integrate into our work.



Introducing Sara Benitez-Cerritos

My name is Sara Benitez-Cerritos and I'm a 17-year-old rising senior at Asheville High school. I am the daughter of two Salvadoran immigrants who traveled to the

US for better opportunities, safety, and a better future for me.

From a young age, I was interested in learning more about humans. At first, I wanted to be a doctor, but as time passed, I began exploring other possible career paths. After the Covid-19 pandemic hit, many people, including myself, struggled heavily with mental health issues. I struggled a lot with the year of isolation and I felt completely lost and alone.

After some time of reflection, I decided that I was going to get the help I desperately needed. Going to therapy made me realize that life is valuable, and sometimes it's hard to figure that out on your own. I realized that it wasn't easy asking for help, especially growing up in a POC household where topics pertaining to mental health issues can be taboo.

When looking for a therapist, I couldn't seem to find any who looked like me, and if I did, it was rare. I realized that my struggles were probably a common issue in my community and other ethnic communities, which truly worried me. After attending therapy for some time, I began to grow more and more curious about the psychology field. I decided that my passion was

psychology and I decided to take a class, which I truly enjoyed.

I believe that representation is important and young people, or anyone in general, should feel they have someone they can relate to and who looks like them. The psychology classes I've taken and will continue to take will be just the start of a career and journey where I can be a part of the solution that is desperately needed in our society. I hope that I can make a difference in people's lives.



Harmoni Jackson

Introducing Harmoni Jackson

My cousin Ashley named me Harmoni because she always believed I would be very unique and peaceful.

My last name is a very important part of me because I am very proud of the family I come from. We all have problems sometimes but that's any family. No matter what the circumstances are, I will always be there for my family.

Me, my mom, my grandma, and my aunt all look pretty similar. I think if you saw us out in public and didn't know us you would probably assume we are sisters.

Growing up I have always loved watching *Untold Stories of the ER* and *True Crime Daily*, but I always knew I would want to be a nurse. It wasn't until recently that I discovered forensic nursing. I became instantly interested because the two things I love most combined into a job seems fun.

When I graduate high school I hope to go to UNC Charlotte, then move to either California or Florida and create my own small family there. I also hope to raise enough money to be able to buy my mom a house close to mine so she doesn't have to be far away from me.

My main goal is to be able to help people get the medical care they need and to investigate things. Another one of my personal goals is to travel to the United Kingdom and stay there for a month and explore different places.

ABIPA promotes economic, social, and healthy parity achievement for African Americans and other underserved populations in Buncombe County through advocacy, education, research, and community partnerships.



CELEBRATING 19 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Help Us Celebrate Our Birthday by Gifting ABIPA a Donation of \$19

Tax deductible donations can be made by sending a check to ABIPA, PO Box 448, Asheville, NC 28802; or online at www.abipa.org. Thank you for your support!



Kelly White, MHE, MPH. Photo: Pro16 Productions

Cord Blood Awareness

by Kelly White, MHE, MPH,
ABIPA Health Education Program Manager

July is cord blood awareness month.

Last September, we brought you a story about a local family whose son, Kadir, was born with a very rare genetic disorder.

After getting the full diagnosis and care plan, the family found out that their precious baby boy would need to have a very big procedure that would give him a better health outcome and the best quality of life. He needed a stem cell transplant, a procedure in which the "bad cells" are replaced by healthy cells that carry important proteins. Having a procedure of that caliber is a big deal, not only for a baby but for the parents and other family members. The first big step was to find a match before the transplant could happen.

Kadir was said to be the hardest match for the specialist to find simply because of his ethnicity, and she has been transplanting stem cells since the '90s. Luckily, his transplant team was able to find three possible close donors for him; the 1st choice from a cord donor which is the most nutrient rich and carries all of the natural elements of blood. The 2nd and 3rd options would

be for him to go on a registry where he would wait for either a matching adult or child donor.

Kadir was able to get a cord donor match from another country. There is only a 29% chance of finding a match for an African American recipient; the chances for a Caucasian recipient finding a match is 79%.

Unfortunately, it is not as easy for a lot of other Black and brown children with the same diagnosis as Kadir. If the best option for transplant fails, there may be no other donors for backup. Just think, if that 29% was 79% for our race, others needing a second transplant would have multiple options upfront.

What most people do not know is that cord blood can be used to treat more than 75 different diseases, but there is not enough literature or awareness spread to our community about the importance of being on the donor registry, or a mom simply donating her cord at delivery.

One way to begin to get involved is by checking out www.bethematch.org. It is free to become a donor, and they will mail you a kit that only requires a cheek swab. While they would prefer ages 18-35, anyone can donate.

Source: Ashley Avery, cordbloodbank.com.

Listen to ABIPA's Body & Soul Radio Show on WRES 100.7 FM, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30 a.m. on wresfm.com.

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The ABIPA Black Out

Sunday, August 6

Join Us As We Celebrate JéWana's 49th Birthday and ABIPA's 19th Birthday

This annual celebration features music, food, fellowship, and amazing raffles. The event begins at 6 p.m. at the Friendship Community Center, 142 Shiloh Road. All black attire requested.

There is no cost to attend, but thank you in advance for your gift of a donation to ABIPA.

RSVP to jewana@abipa.org. Bring a little money for the raffle.