

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT

A Message From The Heart

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director

In Loving Memory of Dionne Greenlee

This month I want to share a truly heartfelt message by paying tribute to a remarkable woman whose light was dimmed prematurely. Dionne Greenlee had a big heart and she dealt with heart illness. The following information was shared at the celebration of her life.



JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Red Angle Photography

When Dionne relocated to Swannanoa, NC to be closer to family, she quickly made an impact on her paternal family's home region. She spoke frequently and fondly of her time with Building Bridges, an Asheville-based anti-racism project. She also worked at the United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County. Her commitment to change and disrupting systemic inequality led her to work at Impact Health, where she pioneered a national model of public-private partnerships to grant more North Carolinians access to health care services.

She was equally passionate about the Black history of Black Mountain, following in the footsteps of her late aunts, Elizabeth "Lib" Harper and Dorothy Jones of Black Mountain. She served as the chair of the nonprofit board that preserves the original Thomas Chapel in Black Mountain, one of the earliest remaining African American churches in the town and a site on the National Register of Historic Places.

After the tragedy of Hurricane Helene, she coordinated food distribution for Black Mountain residents and personally delivered meals to relatives and friends for months.

As an homage to Black history month and heart health month, Dionne's life holds a dual story of impact. She worked for community and literally gave her heart. In our last conversation, she was checking in on me and urged me to make sure I was taking care of myself. If you are a Black woman reading this, I also urge you to take care of yourself. A death certificate will officially document death due to heart failure; yet that certificate will never read that death was due to chronic or toxic stress.

Dionne and I had conversations about being in leadership as Black women, the toll it takes, and the difficulty of stepping back or giving up. Unfortunately, the election and other recent events exasperate the reality of what Black women in leadership weather.

Black women often face multiple layers of discrimination, dealing with both racism and sexism in professional settings. The statistics paint a troubling picture, with 72% of Black and minority women reporting experiences of racism at work.

This persistent exposure to discrimination and microaggressions can have serious health consequences. Ongoing stress not only takes an emotional and psychological toll, it can produce physical symptoms. Those may include headaches, an upset stomach, tense and aching muscles, insomnia, and low energy.

Heart disease is another potential stress-related problem. Stress may lead to high blood pressure, which can pose a risk for heart attack and stroke. According to Dr. Ernesto L. Schiffrin, physician-in-chief at Sir Mortimer B. Davis-Jewish General Hospital in Montreal, "Chronic stress has been shown to be associated with increased cardiovascular events." A 2017 study in *The Lancet* found links between stress and cardiovascular disease episodes. Brain activity was studied along with bone marrow activity and artery inflammation. "These findings illustrate mechanisms through which emotional stressors can lead to cardiovascular disease in human beings," Dr. Schiffrin concluded.

While the workplace landscape remains challenging for Black women, increased awareness and resources provide hope for positive change. Supporting one another and sharing experiences helps build stronger communities and safer work environments for future generations.

I would like to thank local champions and allies who don't just talk about building stronger communities, they are intentionally supporting spaces and sharing experiences. If you employ Black women, or if you are friends of Black women, please renew your support of them this month and annually, 365 days a year.

Sources: American Heart Association (www.heart.org); American Psychological Association (www.apa.org); and Rolling Out (rollingout.com).



Dionne Greenlee



Celebrating 21 Years of Being the Community Health Connection for Asheville and Beyond

Help Us Celebrate Our Birthday by Gifting ABIPA a Donation of \$21

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



Kelly White, MHE, MPH. Photo: Red Angle Photography

The ABCS of Heart Health

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

At just about the size of a fist, we often take our beating heart for granted until something happens.

Just think about it; we don't feel it but the heart beats without us even thinking, pumping 2000 gallons of blood through the body in one day. Without a second thought, the heart knows how much blood to take in and exactly how much blood to pump back out with every beat. It's powerful enough to keep the body going.

There are at least 1.5 million heart attacks and strokes every year, yet both can be prevented. We can reduce our risk of either if we are able to improve our heart health. Take your first step by learning the ABCs (Aspirin, Blood pressure, Cholesterol, and Smoke) of heart health.

Check in with your provider to see if a daily aspirin can help to reduce your risk of stroke or heart attack. It is never safe to start a regimen like this on your own, so you will want to plan with your provider first.

Control your blood pressure by taking your medication as directed. If you

are not on a medication, get to know your numbers. Remember, not everyone is the same, so it is best to have a conversation with your provider to know what your blood pressure should be in order for you to have the healthiest outcome.

Manage your cholesterol. LDL (Low-Density Lipoprotein) cholesterol is often referred to as the "bad" cholesterol. You want your LDL to be low because too much can cause a buildup in the arteries leading to heart attack or stroke.

HDL (High-Density Lipoprotein) is sometimes called the "good" cholesterol because it helps remove other forms of cholesterol from the bloodstream. Your HDL should read high.

Don't Smoke! Smoking causes high blood pressure and has other bad properties that are not good for the body. Seek support from your provider if you are having trouble quitting.

Following the ABCs of heart health and taking care of other chronic diseases can allow us to experience a longer, healthier life.

Source: millionhearts.gov

Upcoming Events at ABIPA's Life's Center

ABIPA's Anniversary Sunday Brunch

Sunday, February 23 – 12-3 p.m.

Black Family Health Expo

Saturday, March 15 – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sponsored by The Asheville, NC Chapter of the Links, Incorporated. ABIPA's Free Shop will be open for supplies.

Free Sunday Shops

February 23, March 9 & 23 – 3-7 p.m.

Directions: From Hendersonville Road turn left onto Old Airport Road (angle will be on your right). Turn Left onto Continuum Drive (you will be at the Fletcher Commerce Park sign). The building is at the end of the cul-de-sac, 220 Continuum Drive, Fletcher, NC 28732.



ABIPA

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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.

