

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT

Early is On Time

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director

*Sometimes community can steady us,
even when the day unravels.*

This month I was really at a loss for what I would share with you. Then over the weekend it came to me. Friday was my birthday, and although there were a flurry of work tasks and other commitments, all I wanted was a simple, intimate night of playing cards with a handful of friends, no frills. Those who know me know that this is unusual because I LOVE birthdays. However, it was truly how my spirit was feeling.

JaiEssence, my oldest daughter, offered the clubhouse at her apartment, and I got exactly what I asked for: ten friends and a few hands of Spades. Additionally, JyAire made a specially rdequested pink lemonade cake and cupcakes, even though she was baking for a baby shower and preparing to vend at the Team Us R&B Soul Picnic.

Saturday was packed. I had three commitments:

- The R&B Soul Picnic (set-up at 9 a.m.; event from 1-9 p.m.)
- A friend's daughter's baby shower from 3-6 p.m. (I made cabbage and created food-station signs)
- My aunt's birthday gathering from 6-9 p.m. (I made mac & cheese and took photos)

You can imagine, your girl was tired!

On Sunday, the YMI hosted the College Send-Off, and I had volunteered to decorate using the ABIPA collection because decorating is one of my happy places. I was also scheduled to share a greeting at the beginning of the program. I got up early to decorate, and with the help of my best friend Johnetta, her husband Tony, and friends Tiffany and Felicity, we finished by 1 p.m. I had two hours to get home, freshen up, and return in time for the 3 p.m. start. A good, safe window, until I got to Walmart.

I needed to purchase forty gift cards for the students attending the event. I gathered the cards, complete with perfect "back-to-school" art-



JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Red Angle Photography

work, and headed to customer service. Only then did I learn they could only sell me twenty gift cards, and they would not allow two separate transactions. My two-hour window was suddenly being chopped away with an axe.

I was then forced to improvise. I had to quickly shop for additional supplies for my table since I wouldn't have enough gift cards. I decided to buy Tide pods because everyone needs to do laundry in college. Yes, I cleared the shelf because I was preparing for 40 students.

I still had to go home and get dressed. Needless to say, I did not make the 3:00 start. After searching for parking, I found a spot, parallel-parked the Suburban (ABIPA1), and made it inside at 3:45, missing my place on the program to give welcoming remarks.

I was internally disheveled because I hate being late, and I had to pull my spirit together. I had also encountered a couple of microaggressions during the day that felt race-based, and they were still lingering.

When it was time for my spot on the program, Sean said, "We missed you, friend." Then the crowd echoed, "We missed you, friend."

At that point, I shared a quote from one of my professors during my freshman year in 1992 at Oakwood University: **"Early is on time. On time is late. And late is unacceptable."**

I told the crowd I had failed this mantra today but would make up for it by giving a crisp \$100 bill to one of the students present—fresh off ABIPA's win for Best Decorated Tent at the R&B Soul Picnic by Team Us. (Shout-out to the student winner, Serenity, and Team Us!)

I share this story to elaborate on the quote. Being early is not only about honoring the boundaries of timeliness. More broadly, it gives you space to be centered, prepared, and at ease, ready for any mishap that may affect assignments, presentations, or everyday work.

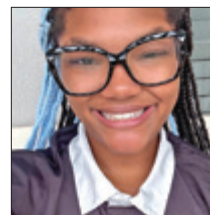
Do I always live up to the quote? No. But it stays in the back of my mind because it respects the time of others as well as my own.



Celebrating 22 Years of Being the Community Health Connection for Asheville and Beyond

Help Us Celebrate Our Birthday by Gifting ABIPA a Donation of \$22

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!



Tyja Lassiter

My CAYLA Experience

by Tyja Lassiter, 2026 Summer CAYLA Intern

Participating in the CAYLA program has been one of the most meaningful experiences I have had.

Throughout the program, I had the opportunity to meet new people, serve my community, and learn valuable life lessons I will carry with me long after the internship ends.

My favorite part of the experience was helping distribute food to people in the community. It was rewarding to know that something as simple as providing a meal could make someone's day a little better. Seeing the gratitude on people's faces reminded me that many individuals are going through difficult situations, and even small acts of kindness can have a big impact. Those moments taught me that giving back is not always about doing something huge; sometimes, the smallest gestures mean the most.

Another part of CAYLA that stood out to me was spending time with people who genuinely cared about others. Whether it was the staff, volunteers, or community members, everyone worked together with compassion and respect. Being surrounded by people who were dedicated to helping others inspired me to become more thoughtful about how I treat people every day. Their kindness showed me that making a difference starts with having a caring heart and being willing to help whenever you can.

One of the biggest lessons I learned during CAYLA is that a little goes a long way. A smile, a kind conversation, or a bag of food may seem like a small act, but it can make a significant difference in someone's life. I also learned that everyone matters, no matter what they are facing in life. A person's financial situation, job title, or background does not determine their worth. Every person deserves to be treated with dignity, kindness, and respect.

This experience also helped me grow personally. It encouraged me to become more understanding of the

challenges others face and reminded me not to judge people based on their circumstances. Instead, I learned the importance of showing empathy and looking for ways to support those around me.

As I move forward, I will always remember the lessons I learned through CAYLA. I hope to continue serving my community and making a positive impact wherever I go. This experience has taught me that helping others not only changes their lives but also changes your own. I am grateful for everything I learned and for everyone I met along the way. CAYLA has shown me that kindness, compassion, and service can truly make the world a better place, one person at a time.

CAYLA: City of Asheville Leadership Academy

Announcements



FREE Sunday Shop

Sunday, August 30

Shop for free supplies from 3-6 p.m. at the Friendship Center, 142 Shiloh Road in Asheville.

Donate to ABIPA

Send a donation in honor of JéWana's birthday. Mail your donation to PO Box 448, Asheville, NC 28802. Send a donation via Cash App to \$ABIPA2004, or go to abipa.org.

ABIPA

PO Box 448, Asheville, NC 28802

Office (828) 673-8195 • Fax (828) 251-8365

Facebook.com/ABIPA.CARES

www.abipa.org

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.

