

WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program

Community Advisory Board Interview

George H. Brice, Jr., is a member of the Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies [WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Fellowship Program Community Advisory Board](#) (CAB). WinR is a community based participatory initiative focused on addiction advocacy and research. George has worked for over 17 years in the behavioral healthcare system in many roles, and has presented and published on peer-delivered wellness and recovery models, peer wellness coaching, and employment supports.

Q. George, you have been such an asset as a member of the WinR CAB. Thank you for accepting the invitation to be a member! What do you like most about your experiences as a CAB member so far?

A. I like being able to participate in a “space,” or an environment, of open dialogue. We’re engaged in open-minded commonsense conversation, coupled with research development. That approach, and this space to freely exchange thoughts and ideas, is well designed. As a member of the CAB, I can help to offer direction to the WinR fellows. I have also been enthralled by the talented guest speakers who have shared knowledge and expertise on service treatment gaps, especially for racialized people living with challenges such as trauma, mental illness, substance use, gender bias, homelessness, or justice involvement.

Q. This is great. I’ve also been impressed and humbled by the guest speakers who have presented during our seminars. A lot of the topics align with both my personal and professional interests. How does your participation on the CAB align with your interests?

A. Through the CAB, I see more clearly the impact of being a black African American living with a lived experience of mental illness and justice involvement. I further understand the implications of social, economic, and political trauma that people have endured. I’ve been distressed, frustrated, and angered by these injustices against black and brown people. My concerns have been exacerbated by what has happened to certain groups during COVID—the injustices and system failures. The CAB has helped me to view issues from a multifaceted perspective.

Q. Thank you so much, George. This is very important, and powerful. Thank you for sharing this. You helped me, personally, with my study in a couple of ways. We had some great conversations about language use, and you were very helpful with crafting my recruitment materials for the pilot study I’m engaging in. What other ways do you feel you have been or could be helpful by providing your experiences to guide CAS research projects?

A. Continuing to offer my personal experiences of helping people and what has helped me, including my wellness tools, might help others avoid unneeded treatments and premature Social Security dependency leading to a life of poverty. I am excited to share my experiences and learn from others, helping to guide CAS research projects that may help support people to live a fuller life.

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Q. You mentioned your wellness tools, George. What are some of those tools? Others may benefit from learning about what you do in your life.

A. In my own life, I focus on wellness by accessing resources such as yoga classes, parks, supermarkets and fresh produce, and transportation by using my own vehicle.

Q. Thank you for sharing that. And, thank you so much for taking the time to connect about your experience on the WinR CAB. As we close, do you have any additional thoughts about this experience that you think would be important for community members and researchers to know?

A. My experience on the CAB highlights how social determinants of health are real factors, especially in the lives of black and brown people living in a lifelong culture of inequality. As a recipient of behavioral health services, I understand what worked for me and what didn't. I was fortunate to use self-help, and gain support from family, friends, and mentors rather than traditional services. I am someone who could have easily remained institutionalized without employment. I want to help people to help themselves by not becoming overly reliant on treatment, but rather focusing on their wellness.

George H. Brice, Jr., a Program Development Specialist at [Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey, Inc.](#) (CSPNJ). CSPNJ, a peer-led not-for-profit organization, provides flexible, community-based services that promote responsibility, recovery, and wellness for people with lived experiences.

This interview was conducted by Crystal L. Brandow.

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