

WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program

Community Advisory Board Interview

Jacquese Armstrong is a poet and author who has worked extensively to educate, inspire, and motivate minority populations from a mental health perspective, as well as working to reduce mental health stigma, for the past 10 years. She has written memoir essays based on her lived experiences related to mental health, including a recently published work titled *Birthing Yourself Naturally: Motivational Reflections on a Mental Health Journey*. Recently, she also published a collection of poetry called *Blues Legacy*, illustrating mental health challenges and the healing process, as well as the history and legacy of African American culture. Jacquese is a member of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) for the Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies [WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Fellowship Program](#).



Reclaiming the Narrative—Searching for Healing Spaces

My voices insisted on a Black psychiatrist, in no uncertain terms. I'll spare you the dialogue, but in 1981 in West Virginia, even expanded to the tri-state area, my parents could not find one psychiatrist that my voices and I could relate to, at least visually. Further inspection yielded an answer that only 2% of the psychiatric doctors in the U.S. were Black.

And, at this time, I felt no cultural humility or competency from my present doctor. I seriously wondered that, if and when they "got through" with me, I would be some type of Oreo psychiatric system clone.

That's when I stopped talking.

So, last year when Dr. Swarbrick described the WinR Community Advisory Board member position that was opening, I didn't quite understand the totality of the concept, but I was intrigued.

The WinR Fellows' projects were what won me over though. Finally, I was witnessing people address, at least in research, some of the problems I've nursed in my lived experience and hoping they will be alleviated in the near future. Also, even among the members, there is such attention to language and empathy. It's a very healing experience to be inside of.

In my adult life, the totality of my lived experience, I have been searching for spaces attentive to healing as well as treatment. I have found few. The research and WinR CAB program as a whole inspire promise in this area. For those crossing the bridge after me, I wish nothing less than this always. This is why I think we all willingly give and share our recovery journeys; to make it better for those coming through now than it was for us.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, I have just recently found that personal healing space I sought with someone who looks like and understands me, and the ways in which I must navigate the system. I can finally unbraided my hair and reclaim the narrative I let go of so long ago in substitute for survival. This is something no one should have to select. I live for a day where there is a healing space for everyone.

So, I know the premise of this program to be valid. People need to find spaces that are sensitive and empathetic to their core beings in order to heal, to thrive. And thriving is what we aspire to, anything less is strictly survival.