

WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program

Community Advisory Board Interview

Yewande Ogunkoya, who goes by Wande, is a graduate student in Social Work and a member of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) for the Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies [WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Fellowship Program](#).

Wande has experience as a drug and alcohol counselor (CADC) intern and peer support specialist, offering invaluable expertise to the CAB and the WinR scholars.



Q. Wande, can you please share why you accepted the invitation to participate in the CAB? In other words, what about this work resonated with you?

A. My interest in participating in the CAB is tied to my belief in giving back. Peggy Swarbrick has been much like a mentor to me over the past 3 years, having trained me in my role as a peer support specialist. Any invitation from her is typically a “yes” if I have the available bandwidth! I also support the Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies and what they offer to the Rutgers community. The education and access to resources that they offer has had significant impact on my own personal and professional journey.

Q. We’re very glad you accepted that invitation! It’s been wonderful having you as a collaborator in this program. What’s been one of your favorite experiences on the CAB so far?

A. While I’m looking forward to the WinR conference in June 2022, I have really appreciated having a front seat to the scholars and their projects. It fascinates me that a small idea or desire for change can gain so much internal and then external traction to a point where they are now waiting for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals to turn their ideas into formal studies. Studies which will undoubtedly further inform the fields of wellness and recovery.

Q. Right now, you’re working freelance as a social media manager, going to graduate school, and participating on the CAB. That is a lot to balance. How does your participation as a CAB member align with your personal or professional interests?

A. Participating on the CAB aligns mostly with my personal recovery program. As a CAB member, I’m encouraged to bring my experience as a peer supporter to the table and to add to the conversations around how I work to maintain wellness while balancing all my other plates. What I love most is that the other CAB members are doing the same. We all make the time, I believe, because we all know the importance of wellness first.

Building a wellness foundation has allowed us to be invited to participate in such rooms. Professionally, participating on the CAB forces me to stretch myself. When I first joined, I suffered a bit with imposter syndrome, not feeling like I truly belonged or had a voice to offer any true insight. Over time, I have learned that such a narrative simply isn't true. It's okay to have the feeling of uncertainty but what I do with that feeling is most important and showing up to meetings, listening and participating disproves that false narrative little by little.

Q. In what ways do you believe that you have contributed to the work of the CAB so far?

A. I believe my greatest contribution to the work of the CAB has simply been in my showing up, being present and using the voice that I have. The scholars are using their talents to create tools that speak to wellness and trauma; both of which I work on a daily basis to maintain and recover from.

Q. You worked with Rutgers as a Peer Support Specialist previously, and are maintaining that relationship as a CAB member. That's wonderful. As we close, is there anything you'd like to share with community members, researchers, or service users about the work at Rutgers in mental health, addiction, or trauma?

A. I think if there is anything I'd like to share with the community, it's that, in some way, shape, or form, we are all peer supporters. I have found the proof of that in my interactions with many. All of us have some sort of lived experience that can offer support and comfort to someone else. If we take responsibility for our individual journeys and be willing to share even the smallest parts of them with someone else, we are doing the world a service and solidifying our right to be in the room and use our voices.

Q. Thank you so much for your time.

This interview was conducted by Crystal Brandow.

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