

The 2nd Annual Community Engagement Ambassador Institute
Day 2 - Faith-Based Wellness & Community Resilience

Meet the Planners and Speakers

Click a speaker's name to go to their biography page!

Planners

Gwendolyn Devins, MPH, CCHW

Jada Jackson, MEd

Kendra Jason, PhD

Charlene Whitaker-Brown, DNP, MSN, FNP-C,
PMHNP-BC, RN

Speakers

Victor Armstrong, MSW

Kojo Bey, Drums 4 Life

Crystal Currie, PhD, LCMHC

Vikki T. Gaskin-Butler, MDiv, PhD, PLLC

Yolonda P. Holmes, PhD

Tabatha S. Howard, MSW, LCSW

Keisha Lewis, OTR/L, MS, CDCES, CAPS

Sonya Richardson, PhD, MSW, LCSW

Kimberly Scott, DrPH, MPH, CHES

Aubrielle Wallace, MPH, CCHW

Gwendolyn Devins, MPH, CCHW

Community Engagement Manager,
Mecklenburg County Public Health | Institute Creator

Gwendolyn Devins, a native of Silver Spring, Maryland, serves as the Community Engagement Manager in the Office of Health Equity for Mecklenburg County Public Health. She has over two decades of experience in health education and public service. Throughout her career, Gwendolyn has been a champion for equity, supporting community efforts by fostering cross-sector partnerships, engaging and uplifting diverse communities, and implementing strategic and innovative activities that directly address health disparities and the advancement of health equity through the power of authentic, meaningful and impactful community engagement.



Gwendolyn's path to public health leadership was not a straight or easy one. She will be the first to tell you that she was not the smartest student in the room. In fact, she often struggled in school—wrestling with self-doubt, academic challenges, and moments where giving up felt like the easiest option. There were times when the weight of it all made her and family question if she belonged in spaces she aspired to. But what she lacked, she made up for in resilience. Through faith, hard work, and an unshakable desire to serve her community, Gwen pushed forward, step by step. Her journey is proof that perseverance, not perfection, is what creates leaders who truly understand the people they serve.

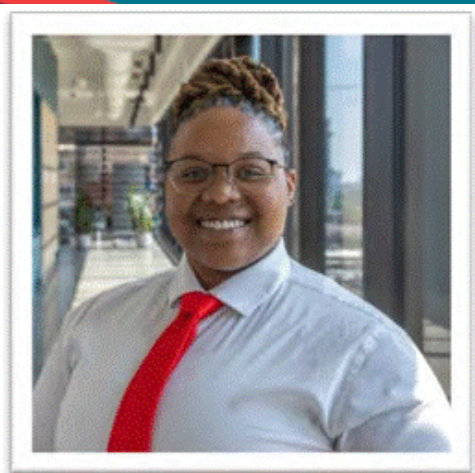
With heart and hustle, Gwendolyn has a vibrant spark for public health. Whether she is championing faith-based wellness, supporting grassroots organizations, or mentoring the next wave of health leaders, she brings infectious energy and unwavering purpose to every space she enters. Her commitment and gift for connection have made her a trusted voice and advocate both within the department and throughout the greater communities of Charlotte.

She holds a Master of Public Health in Community Health from Indiana University at Bloomington and a Bachelor of Science in Health Education and Community Health from Johnson C. Smith University.

Jada Jackson, MEd

Associate Director of Academic and Community Partnerships

Jada Jackson, M.Ed. (they/them/theirs), is a dedicated leader in higher education and community, serving as the Associate Director of Academic and Community Partnerships at Northeastern University-Charlotte. With a strong background in academic partnerships and social impact, Jada works to build meaningful collaborations between the university and local organizations to expand access, resources, and opportunities for all communities. A Raleigh, NC native and proud HBCU graduate of North Carolina A&T State University, Jada earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology before obtaining a Master of Education in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from NC State University. Currently pursuing a Doctor of Education with a concentration in Workplace Learning, they focus on innovative approaches to strengthening academic and community partnerships.

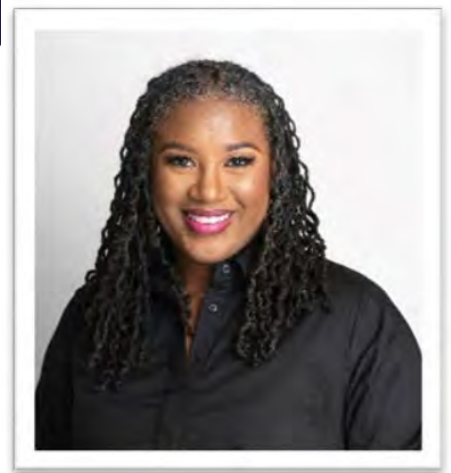


Since moving to Charlotte in 2019, Jada has led strategic initiatives that elevate community-centered programming and foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. At Northeastern, they develop partnerships with schools, healthcare institutions, and community organizations, advancing initiatives that support all populations. Their expertise spans academia, counseling, and operations management, with a career deeply rooted in holistic wellness and social justice. As a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated, Jada has shared insights at conferences on student engagement and multicultural counseling practices. Their current work emphasizes DEI representation, increasing enrollment through community engagement, and cultivating corporate partnerships that provide long-term institutional support. Passionate about fostering inclusive networks and sustainable growth, Jada remains committed to strengthening Charlotte's academic and community ecosystem. Their leadership bridges education and social impact, ensuring that partnerships with Northeastern University-Charlotte drive lasting, positive changes.

Kendra Jason, PhD

Associate Professor, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Founder, Work 4 Change

Dr. Kendra Jason (she/her/hers) is the founder of Work 4 Change, a workplace equity consultancy. She is an Associate Professor of Sociology in the College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Dr. Jason is an interdisciplinary health disparities scholar who examines the multi-level factors that influence the relationship between race, health, and desired workforce participation. She has a particular interest in how workplace experiences shape the health and well-being of marginalized workers. She is also passionate about home-insecure Black mothers in Charlotte and the latent impacts of COVID-19.

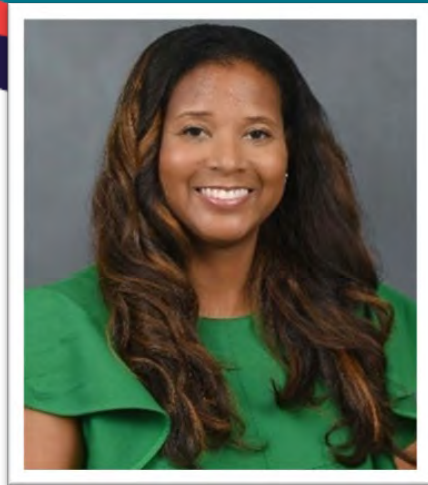


Through her community-based work with the urban CORE Institute at UNC Charlotte, she has been active on the I-85 Corridors of Opportunity project focusing on wellness in the West Sugar Creek Corridor. Dr. Jason's research on these issues is published in *The Gerontologist*, *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *Journal of Aging and Health*, *Occupational Health Science*, *Social Currents*, *The Journal of Sociology and Social Work*, and *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*; and has been featured on *Forbes.com* and *PBS Next Avenue*. She is the editor of *Race and Social Justice: Building and Inclusive College through Awareness, Advocacy, and Action* (2023).

Charlene Whitaker-Brown, DNP, MSN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC, RN

CEO & Founder, The Mindheart Institute and Wellness Center

Dr. Charlene Whitaker-Brown is a dual-certified Family and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner and a Clinical Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Dr. Whitaker-Brown's contributions to the field of nursing education, her dedication to fostering community partnerships, and her advocacy work for Alzheimer's awareness have made her an invaluable asset to both UNC Charlotte and the Charlotte community.



Notably, Dr. Whitaker-Brown served as the second Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program coordinator from 2014 to 2018. Under her leadership, the DNP program thrived, leading to a historic moment when she became the first DNP program coordinator to graduate the first post-master's Doctor of Nursing Practice students from the School of Nursing. Beyond her role within the university, Dr. Whitaker-Brown has played a pivotal role in establishing vital community partnerships with local clinical entities. Her clinical tenure of eleven years with the Sanger Heart and Vascular Heart Failure Clinic at Atrium Health was instrumental in forging these connections.

Currently, Dr. Whitaker-Brown continues to be an active and influential member of the community while engaging in scholarship and service. Some of her community service relationships include well known agencies in healthcare in the Charlotte community. She serves as a Community Advisory Board Member for the Care Ring Nurse Family Partnership, Clinical Director for Harmony Health, she is a Community Partner with AmeriHealth Caritas, general body member of Piedmont Black Nurses Association, and a key collaborator with the MindHeart Institute and Wellness Center [a mental health company she founded to answer the need to the mental health provider shortage in the state of North Carolina (www.mindheartiwc.com)].

In addition to these achievements, Dr. Whitaker-Brown has been recognized for her outstanding contributions to Alzheimer's advocacy and nursing leadership. In 2022, she was selected for the Inaugural UsAgainstAlzheimer's Brain Health Equity Nurse Fellowship, and in 2023, she was asked to stay on as a mentor to the new cohort of fellows. In the same year, she was appointed to the National Black Nurses Association's Committee on Brain Health and selected to be a fellow in the Inaugural Association of Black Nursing Faculty's Leadership Public Policy Fellow. Moreover, in 2023, she was chosen to participate in the mentorship program for the National Collaboratory to Address Elder Mistreatment. A trailblazer in her own right, Dr. Whitaker-Brown made history in 2023 by becoming one of 2 Clinical Professors in the school of nursing and the first African American female in the School of Nursing to hold the title of Clinical Professor. In her distinguished role, Dr. Whitaker-Brown has been instrumental in translating research into practice. Her clinical focus has primarily centered on improving the quality of life for heart failure patients and identifying ways to assist these patients in coping with depression and anxiety. However, since 2018, she has expanded her scope to incorporate more brain health initiatives and elder maltreatment into her work with heart failure patients. This expansion of her work was motivated by personal experience, as several of her family members were diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia. Furthermore, Dr. Whitaker-Brown's dedication to her field was recognized in 2021 when she was selected by the Point of Care Network (POCN) as America's Top NP in Cardiology/Heart Failure, underscoring her expertise and leadership in this critical area of healthcare.

Victor Armstrong, MSW

Vice President for Health Equity & Engagement
The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

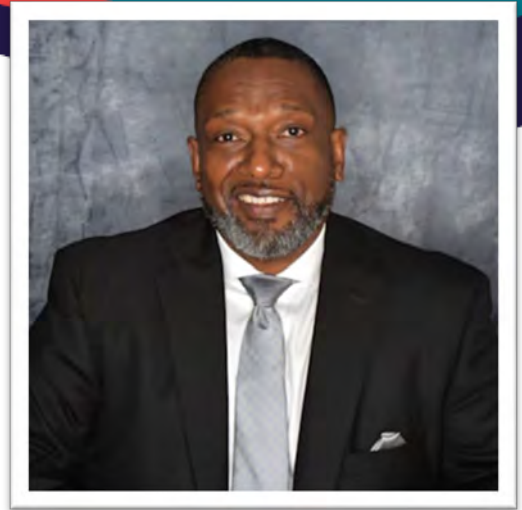
Victor Armstrong serves as VP for Health Equity & Engagement with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. He is a nationally recognized speaker on issues regarding suicide, health equity, and access to healthcare, particularly as it relates to individuals living with mental health challenges.

Victor previously served as North Carolina DHHS's inaugural Chief Health Equity Officer, with responsibility for leading the overarching strategy and operational goals to promote health equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Victor also served as Director of NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (Mental Health Commissioner). Prior to this role Victor served as Vice President for Behavioral Health with Atrium Health in Charlotte, NC.

He is the host of "Strong Talk", a monthly podcast dedicated to the discussion of equity, access, and impact as it pertains to mental health and addictions.

Victor currently serves on the Steering Committee of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. He also serves on the Board of Directors for i2i Center for Integrative Leadership, College for Behavioral Health Leadership, and McLeod Centers for Wellbeing. In addition, Victor serves on the board of advisors for East Carolina University School of Social Work. He is a member of the NC Institute of Medicine and National Association of Social Workers.



Kojo Bey

Director, Drums 4 Life

Drums 4 Life was founded by Kojo Bey who has over 30 years of experience as a student of African drumming and dance. Drums 4 Life was started to give individuals and groups the opportunity to experience the benefits and healing of the drum. D4L was founded in the New York Tri-state area and moved to the Charlotte community in 2008. We all exist with our own rhythm-our heartbeat. D4L gives participants the opportunity to connect hearts.



Drums 4 Life primarily uses jembe drums, doundoun drums, and shekeres during sessions. D4L Instructors are all drummers and dancers from the family-based professional troupe SOUNDS OF AFRIKA 3G.

Crystal Currie, PhD, LCMHC

Healthcare Executive, ThriveWell Strategies and
Compass Life Skills & Counseling

As a licensed mental health clinician and Healthcare Executive at ThriveWell Strategies and Compass Life Skills & Counseling, PLLC, Crystal R. Currie is a transformative leader in trauma recovery. With a profound commitment to helping individuals break free from toxic cycles and cultivate healthy family dynamics, Crystal's work is centered on healing the lingering effects of trans-generational trauma. Her unique expertise in this area is deeply rooted in her own experiences, which have shaped her understanding and approach to therapy.



With over a decade of experience in the mental health field, Crystal has worked in diverse settings, including detention centers, residential treatment programs, and community organizations focused on family reunification. She has collaborated with prominent organizations such as HuffPost, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of Public Defense, Women's Magazine, and the International Congress on Interpersonal Rejection & Acceptance; all while continuing to expand her influence as a thought leader. As a licensed mental health clinician and Healthcare Executive at ThriveWell Strategies and Compass Life Skills & Counseling, PLLC, Crystal R. Currie is a transformative leader in trauma recovery. With a profound commitment to helping individuals break free from toxic cycles and cultivate healthy family dynamics, Crystal's work is centered on healing the lingering effects of trans-generational trauma. Her unique expertise in this area is deeply rooted in her own experiences, which have shaped her understanding and approach to therapy. With over a decade of experience in the mental health field, Crystal has worked in diverse settings, including detention centers, residential treatment programs, and community organizations focused on family reunification. She has collaborated with prominent organizations such as HuffPost, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of Public Defense, Women's Magazine, and the International Congress on Interpersonal Rejection & Acceptance; all while continuing to expand her influence as a thought leader.

Vikki T. Gaskin-Butler, MDiv, PhD, PLLC

Licensed Psychologist; Founder of Rest and Re-create, LLC

Dr. Vikki T. Gaskin-Butler is a licensed psychologist (clinical and health psychology), ordained clergy person, and yoga teacher. She is licensed as a psychologist in Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, and maintains a small private practice via telehealth (Vikki T. Gaskin-Butler, Ph.D., PLLC; <https://www.drvikki.org>). Dr. Vikki is also the Founder of Rest and Re-create, LLC, a wellness business that focuses on curating healing spaces for women and enhancing healthy workplaces for businesses (<https://restandcreate.com>). Dr. Vikki is an engaging speaker, preacher, workshop and retreat facilitator, and consultant.

Dr. Vikki received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Spelman College. She received a Master of Science and Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Florida. She also received a Master of Divinity degree from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

Dr. Vikki has served as a psychologist in university counseling centers, clinic director in an interfaith-based counseling center, and director of a university psychology clinic. She has led clergy consultation groups and served as a consultant and trainer with church/church-affiliated and non-profit organizations. She has supervised numerous students in pursuit of psychology, mental health counseling, and social work degrees. She has served as a faculty member at the College of William and Mary, the University of South Florida St. Petersburg and the University of Central Florida. Dr. Vikki served as the first Chief Diversity Officer at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Dr. Vikki has also served as a minister of education and an associate pastor in several churches.

Dr. Vikki draws on her knowledge of human potential from her experience as a psychologist, ordained clergy person, and yoga teacher to support the psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being of all people. Through her first-hand knowledge of life as a wife, mother, musician, professor, clinician, minister, and yogi, she has the insight to support the holistic mental health needs of adults. Dr. Vikki reserves space in her practice to support women, performing artists, clergy, and health professionals. Copyright Vikki T. Gaskin-Butler, M.Div., Ph.D. December 2025



Rev. Yolonda P. Holmes, PhD

Founder & Owner, D'Vyn Wisdom, LLC

With the heart of a cleric, orator, and educator, Dr. Yolonda P. Holmes finds her greatest purpose in guiding others along their life's journey. Her passion lies in weaving together words of inspiration and wisdom, delivering messages that resonate deeply with the human spirit. Through sermons, speeches, workshops, and retreats, she empowers individuals to discover their inner strength, embrace their unique path, and live lives filled with purpose and meaning. Dr. Holmes considers it a profound honor and blessing to witness the transformative power of inspiration and to serve as a catalyst for growth and positive change in the lives of those she serves.



Tabatha S. Howard, MSW, LCSW

Mental Health Clinician, Mecklenburg County
Department of Social Services, Clinical and
Contractual Services

Tabatha Howard is a licensed clinical social worker with over 30 years of experience. She is currently employed with Mecklenburg County Clinical and Contractual Services. She works very intentionally to build trauma-informed/trauma-responsive spaces and to educate about the prevention of suicide. She is very passionate about doing this work in black communities and houses of faith. Tabatha is certified with Soul Shop Movement as a Soul Shop for Black Churches Suicide Prevention facilitator. Other certifications for Tabatha include being a Certified Resiliency Educator and Resiliency Listening Circle Facilitator with Resources for Resilience, LLC, Eye Movement Desensitization

Reprocessing Therapy trained, and certification in Gerontology. Tabatha holds a Professional Certification in Trauma & Resilience: Level One from Florida State University.

Tabatha received her master's degree in social work from the University of Pittsburgh and a bachelor's degree in social work from South Carolina State University. She is married with two adult sons. She has been a member of Ebenezer Baptist Church for 26 years and serves as co-lead for the Mental Wellness Ministry.



Keisha Lewis, OTR/L, MS, CDCES, CAPS

Founder of Welldom, LLC, Occupational Therapist,
Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialist

Keisha is a Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialist and Occupational Therapist with over 23 years of experience in healthcare. Throughout her career, she has witnessed firsthand how the current healthcare system often focuses on reacting to problems rather than preventing them—an insight that inspired her passion for a proactive, personalized approach centered on education and prevention.

Her professional journey has been deeply rooted in aging, caregiving, and diabetes self-management. Caring for her grandparents and working closely with clients have given her a profound understanding of the real challenges people face every day. Keisha is known for her honest, straightforward approach—sharing what people need to hear, not just what they want to hear—while leading with patience, creativity, and compassion. And she believes that meaningful progress can (and should) include moments of joy along the way.

Driven by this mission, Keisha founded Welldom to help bridge gaps in traditional care. By blending her expertise in occupational therapy and diabetes education, she delivers services directly to homes and communities, making care more accessible, personal, and impactful.

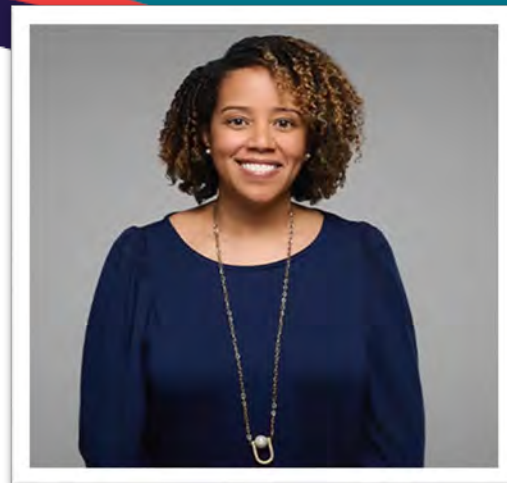
Outside of work, Keisha enjoys traveling, savoring great food, and creating joyful moments with family and friends. She looks forward to connecting with others and supporting their journey toward better health and well-being.



Sonya Richardson, PhD, MSW, LCSW

Assistant Professor at the UNC School of Social Work and UNC Department of Psychiatry; Founder and CEO of Another Level Counseling and Consultation, Charlotte, NC

Sonya Richardson, PhD, LCSW, is an Assistant Professor at the UNC School of Social Work and holds a secondary appointment with the UNC Department of Psychiatry. She is also the founder and CEO of Another Level Counseling and Consultation in Charlotte, North Carolina, which provides counseling services, corporate wellness workshops, and organizational consultation. Dr. Richardson is a nationally recognized speaker and thought leader who helps audiences move beyond barriers and step boldly into healing, growth, and purpose. With over 20 years of experience as a clinician and wellness advocate, she brings a rare blend of professional expertise, cultural insight, and authentic storytelling that resonates with diverse audiences.



Dr. Richardson is a dedicated health equity scholar whose research focuses on identifying and removing barriers to mental health treatment for Black youth and adult populations and developing interventions to support their persistence in mental health treatment. As a community-engaged researcher, she has extensive expertise in generating knowledge to enhance wellness among diverse populations and in creating interventions that address their specific cultural needs.

Dr. Richardson is the author of *Experiencing Greater: An Intimate Journey with God*, a powerful book that guides readers through 31 transformative lessons designed to dismantle spiritual roadblocks and embrace a life of alignment, clarity, and faith. Her voice challenges, empowers, and inspires audiences to seek deeper meaning while equipping them with practical tools for personal and collective change.

Kimberly Scott, DrPH, MPH, CHES

Interim Director, Mecklenburg County Public Health

Dr. Kimberly Scott serves as the interim director of the Public Health Department, one of four departments that make up the Mecklenburg County Health and Human Services Agency. She is responsible for managing all public health and environmental health activities in Mecklenburg County.

Previously, she served as assistant Health director of the Population Health Division and was responsible for facilitating resources to design, implement, and evaluate public health programs and initiatives, building relationships between County Public Health and community partners, increasing access to local public health priority data, and overseeing the operation of the Public Health Department's Offices of Chronic Disease Policy and Prevention, Violence Prevention, and Health Equity.

Scott has over 15 years of experience as a public health practitioner, working in various settings, including local government, nonprofit organizations, and academia. Scott earned her Bachelor of Science (Biology) degree from Albany State University, her Master of Public Health (Community Health) degree from Georgia Southern University, and her Doctor of Public Health (Public Health Leadership) from the University of South Florida. She is also a Certified Health Education Specialist and a National Diabetes Prevention Program Certified Lifestyle Coach.



Aubrielle Wallace, MPH, CCHW

Public Health Educator, Mecklenburg County Public Health

Aubrielle Wallace is a public health professional with five years of experience in program planning, health communication, community engagement, and health promotion and education. She received a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science and Master of Public Health degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She currently serves as a Public Health Educator in the Office of Health Equity at Mecklenburg County Public Health (MCPH). She began her career at MCPH, as a Health Equity Fellow in August 2023, and transitioned to the Public Health Educator role in December 2024. As a Certified Community Health Worker, she is dedicated to building relationships, educating residents, and connecting individuals to culturally relevant resources. Aubrielle is a member of community health coalitions, public health professional organizations, and has acquired a vast array of health certifications. She is very passionate about community health, advocacy, and advancing health equity. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with family, friends, and working out.

