

AWARE-LA

Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere - Los Angeles

~ www.awarela.org ~

Facilitator's Response to POC Interested in Attending

It is not uncommon for people of color to hear about AWARE-LA meetings and wish to attend. Sometimes it is because there has been a miscommunication or misunderstanding regarding the purpose of the meeting. Other times it is out of interest in just "being a fly on the wall." Over time, AWARE-LA has fielded many calls and emails regarding potential attendance by people of color. Our general response has been to enter as extended of a dialogue as needed, often via phone, until the person of color recognizes that their presence would either be unproductive for them or unsupportive to the work of the group.

There are, however some people of color and/or bi-/multi-racial people who recognize that they benefit from light-skinned privilege. For these individuals, AWARE-LA can be a wonderful resource space to work through their relationship with whiteness, white culture, and white privilege.

What appears below is the type of response that AWARE-LA provides to someone who has initiated contact about attending a meeting and we have asked questions sufficiently to know that the individual self-identifies as a person of color:

Thank you for your response. Thank you for sharing your racial identity and checking in about attendance at Saturday's dialogue. With full appreciation of your desire to learn and your effort to develop skills and knowledge to address racism, I want to explain a bit more about our structure and the reason we meet as a white affinity group.

AWARE-LA formed over a decade ago in response to calls from people of color that white people do their own work in relation to racism - which includes educating ourselves about racism and white privilege, support each other in unlearning racism and confronting internalized stereotypes, and developing strategies to engage our white friends, families and co-workers in conversations about racism or intervening when acting in racist ways. This was a call put out in the 60s when the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) asked white people to leave what was then a multiracial organization to act as allies to the black civil rights and black liberation movements by carrying a message of racial justice into the broader white community. This was echoed again to us some years ago and continues to be a call we hear regularly.

Below are the reasons we meet as a white affinity group. As you'll see, this work is supplemental to the greater goal of building multiracial communities and movements for social justice.

1. People of color shouldn't always have to be the ones to educate white people about racism and oppression. We are taking responsibility for learning about racism, our own white privilege, and how to challenge it as white people.

2. In order to challenge racism and dismantle white supremacy, white people need to unlearn racism and discover the ways we enact white privilege. This is a long, difficult, and sometimes painful process. It's helpful to have a space where other white people engaged in this process can support and challenge us, without having to always subject people of color to further undue trauma or pain as we stumble and make mistakes. Having a community of white anti-racist people gives us hope, helps us grow our practice, and gives us strength to stay in it for the long haul.

3. A commitment to anti-racist identity and practice as a white person can sometimes mean increased alienation and conflict in our lives, especially with other white friends and family who disagree with us. AWARE is a space where we can get support from people who are experiencing similar struggles as anti-racist white people.

4. AWARE-LA is a space for white people to figure out what it means to be an anti-racist white person and challenge racism in all areas of our lives. We cannot expect people of color to have all of the answers for us on how to transform ourselves and other white people. As white people we are well equipped to understand what it means to be white, as well as a white anti-racist.

5. AWARE-LA is a place where white people can begin to build a new culture of white anti-racism, and learn the skills needed to transform the larger white community.

6. AWARE-LA is a supplement to, not a replacement for, multi-racial dialogues and activism between white people and people of color. It's important that white people give space in their lives to learning from and bearing witness to people of color's experiences of racism.

7. A white space serves as a resource to people of color who want to work with white people but don't want to have to spend energy dealing with the racism of white people. Our dialogue space is geared toward white people doing this kind of self-exploratory work.

The space isn't structured or set up for multiracial dialogue - which would require facilitators of color and a racially diverse group of participants. We have had biracial participants in the past who chose to participate with a focus on exploring their own white identity or the ways in which they experience white privilege. They didn't stop being people of color in the dialogue, but they were involved from a personal place of investment in learning about whiteness to better understand themselves.

I just want to be honest and state that it may be a very awkward and unfamiliar experience to have a person of color in the room witnessing or observing this process. Not because we have secrets or can't be open with people of color in our lives, but I imagine participants will

be focused on what that person of color must be thinking or feeling as they hear the conversation - and I think that will shift in some way the purpose and nature of the dialogue.

*I want to support your learning, and I will honestly say that I'm not sure coming to a Saturday Dialogue makes the most sense. I can recommend another space that I think might be more helpful, organized by (**attach any information about local groups that might be operating in your area that are multiracial in nature**).*

Please let me know your thoughts.