

YWCA Witnessing Whiteness Groups

Since 2011, the YWCA has been organizing and leading Witnessing Whiteness (WW) groups as part of its mission to eliminate racism. Over 4000 people in the St. Louis metro area have participated in the program. Until 2023 the work of WW groups drew on the book *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It*, by Shelly Tochluk, 2nd edition. We developed an approach using that text along with processes for group discussions, experiential activities, and personal reflection that yielded verifiable change in attitudes and behavior. In 2023 we began using the third edition of the text – *Witnessing Whiteness: The Journey Into Racial Awareness And Antiracist Action*.

Witnessing Whiteness (WW) groups are for people who are racially categorized as white, are 18 or older, and live in the metropolitan St. Louis area to come together to uncover and explore the impact of our white racial identity and the operation of racism in our lives and communities. Participants learn the history of the invention of whiteness and the myth of white superiority, and the operation of white supremacy in us and the U.S. Participants are able to confront their personal biases within a supportive setting. Finally, we learn how to interrupt racism and act as agents of change. Our approach is designed to “build knowledge, skills, capacities and communities that support anti-racism practices” (Tochluk).

We ask that participants commit to attending all of the 14 scheduled sessions. If they are not able to do so we ask that they wait for another group that better accommodates their schedule. Each session is 2 hours, and they are scheduled approximately every week.

This program is for adults (18 and over). We recommend there be no reporting relationships within the group (i.e., supervisors with those they supervise) as we have found it can lead to less open and honest discussion for both parties in that relationship. Additionally, we would ask those participants who are attending with a family member (spouse, adult children, siblings) to consider carefully the impact of their relationship on their ability to be honest and open in uncomfortable, difficult discussions.