

Evanston arts groups unite to promote diversity

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A group of [Evanston](#) arts organizations have joined forces in an effort to make their performances more racially inclusive both on the stage and off of it.

The group, dubbed Enrich Evanston, is hosting a free diversity workshop that will delve into Evanston's racial history and how it relates to the arts. The event, scheduled for next Wednesday, is open to members of the public who are interested in the arts and how they can be used to overcome racial, ethnic and cultural divides in the community.

Enrich Evanston, which formed last year and is comprised of representatives from the Actors Gymnasium, Evanston Dance Ensemble, Evanston Symphony Orchestra and North Shore Choral Society, aims to make performances more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience, and the performers and performances more representative of the city's diverse community, according to Penelope Sachs, chairperson of Enrich Evanston. Sachs is also a violist with the Evanston Symphony Orchestra.

The organization has been working on this effort with Gilo Kwesi Logan, an educator and diversity consultant who has also worked with the city's police department on diversity training.

The goal, she said, is to "do a better job of getting art and performances out to meet all of Evanston." Sachs said most of the work the four groups showcase is rooted in "classical, white European backgrounds." Embarking on this effort was something she said the organizations felt they could do a better job of "together rather than separately."

Logan, an Evanston native and the founder of the nonprofit arts organization S.O.U.L. Creations, is leading a four-part training series with Enrich Evanston. The training focuses on creating a framework for racial equity by defining what it might look like in Evanston. The goal, he said, is to develop strategies leaders within these arts organizations can use to begin to diversify their organizations.

"A lot of it is really about taking these arts organizations off of a white island and into the broader community in Evanston and making the broader community in Evanston more aware of who they are and what they're doing and what they're trying to do," Logan said.

The upcoming workshop is separate from the training work he's doing with Enrich Evanston, Logan said. Sachs said the workshop was made possible with funding from three organizations, including the Evanston Community Foundation.

Logan will facilitate the workshop alongside Dino Robinson, former acting director of Shorefront, a past board president at the Evanston History Center, Evanston Neighborhood Conference and co-founder of the Chicago chapter of the Organization of Black Designers.

Logan said participants at the workshop will be able to ask questions and make suggestions about how local arts organizations can better reach the entire community.

"We need all voices at the table and this is an opportunity for all voices to be heard as it pertains to diversity, how arts can serve as a vehicle for change, how it can serve as a bridge between different cultures and communities and as a conduit for learning about each other and expressing our identities," Logan said.

The workshop is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 19, at the Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center, 1655 Foster St. Child care and refreshments will be provided.

Lee Gaines is a freelancer.