

Listening In: Reflections from November's Listening Circles

Three community Listening Circles took place in November, for the purpose of reflection and visioning related to diversity, inclusion, and equity within Women Writing for (a) Change. Thirty individuals joined in on these sessions, which were facilitated by Executive Director Lisa Rocklin. The bounty of unique voices contributed many thoughtful reflections for ongoing work centered on "radical hospitality."

The most important takeaway was that the Listening Circles need to continue in order to deepen the dialogues that were started and move from dreaming to doing. Dates for ongoing Listening Circles will be announced soon for 2021.

A sampling of the many questions, dreams, and reflections that were shared from the three circles:

- Question: What do we need to heal in ourselves and what are we becoming?
- Dream: Visit other organizations who are doing community-building work and listen to their stories.
- Question: In what directions are we seeking inclusion and equity?
- Dream: More nonwhite community members becoming board members and facilitators.
- Reflection: I saw each speaker as non-dogmatic, as if each were laying down a piece of a quilt on the floor between us for consideration. Not "the truth" but truths from different experiences and perspectives. In other words, brave AND safe.
- Question: How do we welcome trans and nonbinary people in our community?
- Reflection: Good to name the barrier to participation of the cost of classes and reticence of students to ask for financial aid, a chronic problem for women.
- Reflection: The list of personal questions to ask, (How am I shutting out what I want to open up to?), among others, was helpful.
- Reflection: I really like that we're talking about living our mission by including people, not saying "only this" or "only that" is allowed.
- Reflection: The challenge is the largeness of the work; the gift is a listening circle that brings possibilities and ideas that are doable. Intention with action steps, grounded in principles.
- Dream: I'm thinking of YW [Young Women's] programming as the heart, future, way forward for WW's transformation.
- Reflection: I sensed less defensiveness and more shared language, which are signs of movement. Grateful for the opportunity of this space and encouragement to step into discomfort.

- Reflection: The word "feminism" can sometimes feel hostile, especially to older women of color who were not included in early waves of the feminist movement.
- Reflection: Any conversation about racial equity + internal transformation has inherent and severe limitations with only or almost only white people at the table.
- Question: How do we transform this mindset: "I belong to my class but not to the organization"?
- Question: If we are an organization already in motion toward diversity, inclusivity, equity, intergenerational ways of being (and I believe we are), will a committee serve to slow us or propel us forward?
- Reflection: While I understand how disheartening it is to work hard to create welcoming space and then not have it always perceived that way, I wonder about the impact of defending past actions and practices when in the midst of trying to understand how to move forward in realizing the vision.
- Reflection: It [WW] is a place of feminine energy coming from a place of feminine strength. I don't feel like the men we invite in diminish it, because it is still run by the feminine with the feminine as its strength.
- Reflection: I wanted to talk about gender diversity too. And making our classes accessible for working people, financially and in terms of schedule. We need socioeconomic diversity as well.
- Reflection: I believe in our practices but we have to manifest the promise of radical hospitality. We have to distinguish between the perceived experience and the actual experience for participants.

Thank you to everyone who participated! We look forward to holding regular Listening Circles in 2021.