

discover.

Spotlight on

KITCHEN TABLE STORIES PROJECT

by Melissa Raman Molitor, ATR-BC, LCPC



I GREW UP OUTSIDE OF Detroit and moved to Evanston via Chicago in 2011. Like many, I was drawn to Evanston because of its ‘diversity.’ As a South Asian & Pacific Islander daughter of immigrants, where I grew up not only did few people look like me, but there was also a general rejection of anything outside of the ‘norm.’ There is deep trauma associated with racial othering in childhood, and I was determined to raise my family in a city where my children could identify with others. We live in a space and time where our young people are faced with so many social and psychological uphill battles, and I take some comfort in knowing that at the very least my kids see faces and families that look like theirs, in their everyday lives.

”

There is much work to be done around equity and anti-racism in our city, but I am truly grateful to live in a community that is willing to have the necessary conversations and with people who are doing transformative work within these structures.

Although we are fortunate to have a diverse offering of globally-inspired cuisines and cultural representations and I personally have deep love for our foodie gem-of-a-town, there is an ASAPIA presence beyond the food industry. We need to ask ourselves: Who are the people behind these and other ASAPIA-owned businesses? Where are their stories? How did the owners come to live here? What are their experiences living and raising families in Evanston? Where are the artists and cultural organizations that are telling these stories? How does Evanston support and uplift our ASAPIA community?

My personal passion and professional work centers on storytelling through art. I believe the way we strengthen a community is by building relationships

ASAPIA

Asian

South Asian

Pacific Islander American

and creating opportunities for us to discover the many ways in which our identities intersect. Art in all its forms is an innate way that we connect with humans, other living beings, and nature and that connection is key to our survival. Kitchen Table Stories is an art-based multi-media healing justice project that seeks to create a platform for our ASAPIA community in Evanston and its surrounds. Through art exhibition, community art making, and web-based media the project aims to center the stories and experiences of ASAPIAs, to bring ASAPIA history into our community consciousness, and to raise awareness

and education around the issues that affect us and are important to us. There is power in collective voice and action and the Kitchen Table Stories Project endeavors to create space for the ASAPIA community to build solidarity with each other and with other communities of color in the pursuit of equity and social justice.

The ASAPIA diaspora is not only an umbrella to an endless number of cultures from over 40 different countries around the world, it is inclusive of the many intersections of identities that exist in our communities.

Evanston's ASAPIA residents make up close to 10% which is not a small percentage, and that number does not reflect people who identify as mixed race or their other races which is common among ASAPIAs in Evanston. The lack of visibility of the ASAPIA community perpetuates the myths that fuel discrimination and racism. **Spotlighting ASAPIA-owned businesses, patronizing them, funding their initiatives, and sharing platforms where they can write about their own stories and promote their own work is how we build a strong community.** Our local ASAPIA restaurants and shops are in the business of community care and building community by sharing their food, their art, their wares, their culture and their knowledge. To support their work, recognize their challenges and successes, listen to their stories, learn from them, and collaborate with them is to establish and strengthen a community that truly values and participates in diversity. 🌍



Photo of Evanston ASAPIA Heritage Month Arts Festival taken by Kids Create Change