

Eliminating Racism: ABLA Advisory Board Member, Emily Williams, Honored by the YWCA

By Kerith Dilley, A Better LA

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A Better LA Advisory Board Member, Emily Williams, received the prestigious Racial Justice Award from the [YWCA-Harbor Area](#) on March 5, 2008.

YWCA-Harbor Area, in its 90th year of existence, was founded around the objectives of empowering women and eliminating racism. Six years ago, the YWCA-Harbor Area initiated an annual event, the Golden Circle Award Dinner, to recognize and celebrate the important contributions of local community leaders.

In 2008, YWCA-Harbor Area honored Dr. Mary Auth, Professor Emeritus at Cal State Dominguez Hills and the Honorable Michael Gin, Mayor of Redondo Beach. It presented its time-honored award, the Racial Justice Award, to Emily Williams.

Emily first took steps toward ensuring racial justice in the Harbor Area as the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission's liaison to City Council Districts 8 and 15, which include the areas of South Los Angeles, Watts, the Harbor Gateway, Harbor City, Wilmington and San Pedro.

Some of these very communities are part of ABLA's target community because they are adversely affected by gang violence. Within the Harbor Gateway, racialized gang violence erupts periodically unless affected stakeholders come together.

In 2003, after a rash of gang-related shootings, Emily co-founded the Normandale Park Task Force, a collaborative of residents, local businesses, schools, community-based organizations and service providers. The task force secured increased services from the City, provided bicycle patrols during students' egress from school, encouraged residents to report truancy, tagging and other early indicators of gang affiliation and built trust between community members and law enforcement.

Within one year, gang-related homicides were non-existent and violent crime overall had decreased 50%.

Emily has been a panelist at the YWCA-Harbor Area's annual Racial Justice Workshop for the past 2 years, addressing the topics of racial profiling and racism in the workplace.



Emily currently oversees human relations training and programs at the Los Angeles (City) Fire Department. Training topics include leadership, ethics, communication, and diversity. She is also an adjunct instructor at the Los Angeles Police Academy.

As a founding Board Member of ABLA, Emily has taught community members within the target area as well as those who provide service to these communities how to create a common language of hope to affect positive change in their communities.

Emily helped A Better LA forge a historic collaboration between law enforcement and gang intervention workers.

Emily was honored and humbled that she and her work toward promoting racial justice were recognized in such a public fashion.

She acknowledged how long and far the cause of racial justice has come when she shared how her mother, upon immigrating to the U.S. from the Philippines in 1963, was asked (politely, but ignorantly), "Where is your tail?"

She also recalled her father's stories of police storming his home demanding the return of a library book because Jim Crow laws prohibited African-Americans from using library services in the south.

Emily looks forward to the day when the vast majority of people feel empowered to root out the seeds of bigotry *before* they take the form of violence in our communities and harassment in our workplaces. Identifying any kind of prejudice in its earliest stages requires integrity and courage – but it is a powerful deterrent.

A Better LA salutes Emily for her tremendous and valuable contributions to the community.

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