On Friday, January 18th, ORCA hosted the first ever Counselors of Color Reception. More than 50 counselors, social workers, psychologists, counseling students and counselor educators who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) gathered for an evening of community, celebration, and support. Human Rights Chair Neil Panchmatia collaborated with President Gianna Russo-Mitma, Past President Dr. Joel Lane, and myself to make the night a success.

It was important to Neil and I to make intentional choices to center the voices and experiences of Black and POC counselors every step of the way when planning the event. The reception took place at Olive or Twist, an elegant Black-owned martini bar in the Portland Pearl District.

The evening’s guest speaker, Summer Brown, identifies as a Fat, Queer, Black woman. She provides therapy with an Intersectional Feminist perspective to kids, teens, and adults who identify as LGBTQIA+, Gender Diverse, all body sizes, types, and abilities, especially folx in a bigger body or folx who identify as BIPOC. Summer also provides supervision and delivers presentations, including delivering the keynote address at the 2017 ORCA Conference, “Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World.”

Another intentional choice was to extend the invitation only to counselors who identify as BIPOC, rather than including White allies. This choice proved to be especially meaningful and poignant. **Several attendees teared up when Summer asked the last time anyone had been in a room full of Black and brown faces. For many, it had been over a year.**

Graduate students and counselor educators from Portland State University College of Education and Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education and Counseling were in attendance, as well as counselors from Portland, Hillsboro, Tualatin, Lake Oswego, Tigard, and West Linn in Oregon, and Vancouver and Woodland in Washington.

The event marked the Oregon Counseling Association’s continued commitment to equity and inclusion. Last year, ORCA established a state division of the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling (OALGBTIC). Next year, ORCA hopes to establish a state division of the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (OAMCD).

The first step towards increasing representation of BIPOC counselors in the professional community is acknowledging and addressing the systemic barriers that prevent their participation. One such barrier is financial access. Another is feeling welcome.

The ORCA board is thrilled to announce the development of a new scholarship to make participation and leadership accessible to students and emerging professionals of color. Inspired by the first Black woman to be elected to congress, Shirley Chisholm’s famous quote, “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair,” the scholarship will be known as A Seat at the Table. Recipients may apply funds towards Association membership and professional development and continuing education. Congratulations to the very first A Seat at the Table recipients, Cyrena Zbib, Soraya Mortimer, Rebecca Velazquez, and Alheli Tica Figueroa! We look forward to everything you will bring to the table in the coming year!

**If you are interested in making a donation or serving on the committee to develop the scholarship fund, or would like to help plan and lead OAMCD, please contact me at secretary@or-counseling.org.**

More details will be available at or-counseling.org this spring.

Sofia Jasani serves as part of ORCA’s executive council. She is the Education Program Director at NAMI Multnomah, and is also a pursuing a Master’s degree at Portland State University with a specialization in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling.