

City of Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities

Diversity Forum Minutes for July 19, 2006

Capitol Hill Library, Seattle, WA.

Panelists: Truc Thanh Nguyen, Cultural Competency Training Program Manager, MEDC; Dipika Nath with Trikone NW; Kathie Townsend-Executive Director of Sistah to Sister; Victor Vander Beng Hui Loo, Substance Abuse Service Program Manager, Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS); and Florentino M. Lopez, Program Manager, Entre Hermanos.

Facilitator: Jacque Larrainzar, Policy & Outreach, The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR).

Jacque welcomed everyone to the SCSM forum and explained it was an opportunity to discuss the contributions of LGBT organizations of color as well as the challenges within the LGBT community that hinder communication and maintain institutionalized racism. Jacque asked the group to think about respect, difference, similarities and political views including issues such as sex and gender identity. She wanted everyone to think about how diversity affects how we talk to each other and the government. Afterward, Jacque announced that the Seattle Channel is taping this event to be aired at a later date, and then she asked each panelist to introduce themselves and the organizations they are representing.

- **Florentino** is the Program Manager for **Entre Hermanos**; an organization that provides support and social activities for the Hispanic community in Seattle. It was established 15 years ago and acquired non-profit status 3 years ago.
- **Kathie** is the Executive Director of **Sistah to Sister**, which is based in Tacoma and serves women of color from Olympia to Seattle. The mission of Sistah to Sister is to provide support for women of color by creating a welcoming space, and it has been in existence for 6 years. The group is associated with the LGBT center.
- **Victor** is the Program Manager for **ACRS**, Asian Counseling and Referral Services, which has been around for 30 years and has 501 status. It provides mental health and diversity/social awareness through 11 programs. Last year they were involved with Out and Loud.
- **Truc** is the Program Manager for **MEDC**, Minority Executive Directors Coalition, and facilitates the cultural competency training program to address institutionalize racism. MEDC is an advocacy organization for communities of color with the goal of creating critical mass of support for activism in politics an education in communities. The group has been doing work for 25 years.
- **Dipika** is with **Trikone NW**, which is an organization for South Asian queers and their allies who advocates for race and migration policy. Trikone NW started 10 years ago and is working toward 501 status. It is housed in the LGBT Center and has board membership of 9. The organization includes both social and political activities.

After each person introduced themselves and their organization, Jacque asked each panelist to answer some questions to get the discussion going at the forum.

How are we defining diversity: is everyone part of the public space and civic forum?

- Kathie stated that diversity can be perceived as a "white" word, and it encompasses many levels like class and gender identity, which can affect access to services like health care. Kathie pointed out that there are multiple levels of diversity.
- Truc asked why we were defining diversity given that it is a multiplicity of items such as race, culture, ethnicity, class. Although it is a term strongly based in world view and context. Tokenizing occurs and whose faces do we expect to see when addressing diversity and whose faces are missing?
- Dipika stated that to formulate an identity sometimes is defined by space that can be paradoxical. Diversity performs different functions.
- Victor stated that there are multi-layers to this definition and can involve empowerment and social mobilization.

Who benefits from diversity?

- Kathie explained that the benefit of diversity is financial such as grants. However, it turns into tokenism rather than diversity. Fundraising and outreach by organizations doesn't necessarily reflect "color" on their board, especially when you look at the locations where events are held and the food and entertainment that is provided.
- Florentino stated that the word diversity needs a "refresh" to look at the multiplicity of the term. For example, Latino immigrants share a common heritage, but there is diversity among them.
- Truc asked about who has the power and pointed out internalized racial oppression.
- Victor mentioned that there are many layers to consider and that it's all about perception. Assimilation and acculturation occur. We are constantly trying to make ourselves visible.
- Deepika commented that when a percent of a board has to be "x" it can be uncomfortable, and there can be uniformity in a non-white space.

How is diversity being framed?

- Kathie stated that tokenism leads to assimilation such as organizational boards attempting to include people of color.
- Truc explained that we need to look at how racism is institutionalized and how it plays out in policy, procedures, mission and organizational staff. Institutionalized racism has solidarity with other forms of oppression such as homophobia. She stated that oppression is already in place; it's in full operation.
- Kathie stated that institutionalized racism affects how services are directed and who benefits. She explained there needs to be a legitimate dialogue with communities of color who will direct services that will benefit community.
- Truc emphasized that the educational system is designed to develop a working class but not a critical thinking class. Further, there are issues of cultural appropriation and how the media is defining beauty within the LGBT community.
- Victor explained that diversity could be in small capacity such as holding hands in areas where gay couples are not visible all the time.

How does one address racism and discrimination?

- Kathie suggested going out and reading literature and access information from the perspective of communities of color. We don't know other people's stories. We see what is presented to us.
- Dipika stated that we need to come up with a language, a critical language of diversity. Language maintains divisions.
- Truc suggested looking at organizations and how they work. Leadership has to be ready to address these issues. MEDC is generally straight. She asked how we can balance aspects of diversity such as class, sexual orientation, and nationality. Other forms of oppression are already in operation.

Jacque expressed that policies, practice, and procedures are set up in a way that does not benefit communities of color. Deeper change is not happening.

How we can start making changes?

- Truc commented on community empowerment. We wouldn't need the services we do if there wasn't a disparity already. Schools are set up to develop a working class, not critical thinkers. Ability, religion, class, and language are all factors. We need to learn the truth of others. White people need to find out their roots in order not to acculturate. What is considered beautiful? When I came out it was white. Supremacy doesn't allow us to be included. People with privilege in whatever area need to speak up.
- Victor said that we wait for others to take action. We hide in our own voices. There is ignorance when relating to certain agencies that we work with. Dialogue needs to happen. We need to take small steps such as finding out what we can learn from each other.
- Deepika said that we need to find a common language. Race means different things. Elitism exists among leaders of people of color organizations.

The forum was then open for participant involvement with questions to panelists or comments. Participant questions and comments follow that are summarized and some questions were asked more than once.

How does a white organization/person develop a coalition with organizations of color?

Panelists suggested focusing on a true coalition where each organization supports the issues of each. Traditionally, organizations of color would support issues without reciprocal support. Panelists and audience members pointed out that it is important to approach communities of color without an agenda and be willing to take time to get to know people before alliance building can occur.

How can organizations of color get together like this more often?

Panelists stated that there are opportunities to come together and make connections especially supporting each other's events like the theatre event that QPOC is doing at UW.

- Sue from Radical Women announced her organization and welcomed participation.
- Participant suggested making new friends and learning their perspective.
- Julie Nelson announced that there is a group called the White Coalition Against Racism.
- An audience member pointed out that there is a divide and conquer mentality out there when it comes to diversity issues so that different groups don't get their rights.
- Deepika suggested more community dialogue and action and a larger critical conversation about what is dividing us. Support and solidarity is necessary. We need to become visible to each other.
- Kathie pointed out that access to health care is affected by race and sexuality. Language, culture, and cash are all factors. There is stolen history in Seattle. This is affected by who controls the media, etc. Whites need to learn the history of people of color. Kathie also pointed out that there are political ramifications of attending certain events for those who aren't out.
- An audience member pointed out that it's important to get younger people involved in our present actions in order to preserve history and continue current change into the future.

Summary

The three points Jacque summarized were:

1. How can we get the resources, skills, to design outreach and coalition building strategies that empower people of color and their communities and support ally work?
2. How can we learn from each other's mistakes to do better at designing programs and services more equitably?
3. How can we create spaces were this discussion continues? I think you have an opportunity to use the rest of the forums to address some of the disparities in health etc, that were brought up yesterday and have a community brainstorm on how to be strategic about addressing these issues in the LBGT community.