This work matters to me because it's quite literally building the world I needed when I was fifteen and got diagnosed with anxiety with auditory hallucinations. I grew up in the South Asian community in the Triangle, and the culture of silence within my community made me absolutely terrified that I would lose my social, cultural, and religious connections if people found out about my diagnosis (certainly not helpful for someone trying to get to recovery from an anxiety disorder). It wasn't until I was able to speak openly about my mental illness that I was able to really be ok, and now I have the absolute honor of not only sharing my story and experiences openly, but creating spaces and cultural shifts that allow Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the state to do the same.

Pooja Mehta, AAPI Community Lead at DMH/DD/SUS