



## The Faces of HMEA - July 2002

In 1995, **Boiyan Kpakolo** moved to Worcester from his home in Liberia, West Africa, to escape the civil war in that country, and to seek new life opportunities. When he arrived in the U.S., Boiyan saw a career in the human service field as a way to give to others. In 2000, he began working for HMEA as a Support Specialist in Sterling.

Boiyan brings with him a wide variety of skills and experiences that contribute to the diversity and exceptional quality of services provided by HMEA. Previously, he had had the opportunity to attend the Friendship University of Moscow, where he earned an MSC in geology; he has traveled extensively in Europe, and speaks several languages including English, Russian, French, Loma, Kpelle, Gbadi, and Kissi. He feels that it is because of his experience working and attending school with people from all over the world that he can “work with other from diverse backgrounds easily”.

Recently, the people we support have had the opportunity to benefit from Boiyan’s knowledge of Russian. When the parents of an individual served by another agency sought new opportunities for their son, the choice of Sterling Day Hab became clear. The family members, who are Russian immigrants, speak their native language to their family member. Having a staff person available who is fluent in Russian dramatically improves the communication with this man, and contributes to the services he receives.

Although Boiyan has lived in this country for more than five years, most of his family remains in Liberia, where civil war has ravaged the country. The war has made living in the countryside uninhabitable and unsafe, and people have moved to the city of Monrovia to find refuge.



There, people live in makeshift housing, making homes out of sticks and leaves, food is scarce, and medicine rare. This past March, Boiyan returned to Liberia to visit his family and to take much needed clothing, food and supplies. He also brought bicycles, much appreciated due to the fact that cars are unaffordable and people can use bicycles to travel further to find food and to visit relatives.

He is planning another trip to Liberia sometime during the next year. He hopes to take donations of used clothing, non-perishable food items, shoes, bicycles, medicine, and medical supplies. He says that there is a special need for crutches and wheelchairs since many civilians have lost limbs and/or the ability to ambulate due to injuries sustained in the war. He also hopes to take large quantities of rice with him. In Liberia, if a person eats three meals a day, he still will not consider them meals unless they include rice. “If you feed them all the food you have, but feed them no rice, they will say that they have not eaten.” If you would like to make a donation, please call him at his home at (508) 799-9839.

From his work with the Russian community at HMEA to his work providing relief to people in Liberia, Boiyan works with people from all walks of life. He says that respecting diversity is to “be understanding, respecting people as they are. It is to accept people as they are without imposing your ideas or views on them.” HMEA has benefited from Boiyan’s skills, kindness, and his respect for diversity; many, many others have as well.

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Thanks to **Dave Stanley**, Unit Supervisor at Sterling Day Hab, and a member of the Diversity Committee, for volunteering to conduct this interview with Boiyan.