

## The Faces of HMEA - May 2006

**Maria Lourdes DeJesus** was born in Yabucoa, a small, country town in Puerto Rico. Maria is the youngest of nine children; she has five sisters and three brothers. All her sisters are named Maria and have different middle names; Maria's nickname is Lupe.

Her father was a contractor and was often gone from the home, as he traveled for work. All family members worked on the farm where they lived; there were pigs, cows, chickens and horses to feed, and some of those animals to slaughter for food for the family. Maria milked five cows every day before school; for that, she was paid \$.50. All the children had to earn money; nothing was given to them for free.

Maria's mother not only worked the farm, and raised the children, but a sister of hers suffered from mental health issues, and was taken care of in the home as well. Sunday was her mother's only day off from work, and that was to attend church.

When she was still a teenager, Maria gave birth to her son, Dimas, and a few years later, her daughter, Polita. When she was 25 years old, Maria moved to New York and lived with her sister. Her best friend also lived in NY, and when she and her husband



were moving to Maryland, she begged Maria to move there also. Maria agreed, and she and her two children moved to Maryland. When Dimas began college after a few years; Maria was lonely and missed her family, so she and Polita moved to Massachusetts, where Maria worked at Wrentham State School, then came to HMEA.

Tragically, when Dimas was 20 years old, he was robbed and killed by a former high school friend and fellow college student. It was a very difficult time for Maria and her daughter. Maria traveled to Maryland for three different trials, and was finally able to learn that the man who had killed her son was sentenced to prison for life without parole. Maria and Polita had to build a new life for themselves without Dimas. Now, mother and daughter share a duplex and Maria can visit with Polita and her new grandson, Edward, any time she wants.

As an employee of more than 7 years, Maria states that she loves to help people who need help, she thoroughly enjoys the people with whom she works, and enjoys working for HMEA. She is now an Assistant Unit Supervisor in Plainville Supported Employment Program. Maria also serves on the Diversity Committee.

*Maria was interviewed by **Karen Slowick**, Chair of the Diversity Committee*