

## The Faces of HMEA - April 2007

**Raymond Edi-Osagie** is the Uxbridge Area Residential Coordinator; he was hired in the beginning of December 2006. Born in Sapele, Nigeria, Ray is the oldest son of five children. He has two brothers and two sisters. His father was a school principal and his mother a teacher. In fact, she was Ray's English teacher when he was in school.

While Ray boarded at high school, his mother traveled to Wales to study special education. (In Africa, once children finish elementary school, most go on to boarding schools until they finish their high school years.) Unfortunately, she was unable to complete her advanced degree due to the death of Ray's father. Upon her return to Sapele, Ray's mother formed the Society for the Mentally and Physically Handicapped; it was the first of its kind in the state. She was then responsible for establishing classrooms for disabled kids within the local schools. Ray and his siblings were all taught to become involved in their communities, and in civic responsibilities. While in Africa, Ray was a member of the Red Cross, and his mother is now the Vice President.

After graduating from Edo College and The University of Benin College of Education in Benin-City, Nigeria, Ray came to the U.S. in 1986 for graduate studies at Northeastern University in Massachusetts. Ray had friends who had come to school in this state, and when they returned home, they brought photos of the snow. Ray liked what he saw and came to experience it firsthand. One of the first things he did upon arrival was to get into a snowball fight; Ray says that he loves winter.

In the 20 years since he came to this country, Ray said that his overall experience has been one of kindness. People have been very good to him, have given him shelter and money when he didn't have any. However, one event that happened very soon after his arrival might have easily caused him to have a very different opinion. Ray was working in



Boston, and had gone out to a club after work. There, he met a girl who said she was from New York, and needed help moving some things. Ray offered to help, and they left the bar together. Once outside, Ray was accosted by men with guns and knives. One of the men held a knife to his throat, dragged him into the car with the others, drove him to a nearby bank and forced Ray to withdraw his daily limit from the ATM. He was ordered not to tell anyone, including the police, as they said they knew where he lived and would find him (they had taken his

ID). The terrifying experience caused Ray to move to central Massachusetts where he felt safer. He also discovered that the area was the "hub of human services" in his words.

He quickly began working in human services; he has worked with troubled kids, children with autism, adults with developmental disabilities, and as an administrator for DYS. Ray said that he loves this work, that he feels that one person can make a difference in someone's life. He has worked in lots of places where ideas were stifled. Here, he feels that he has a lot of support from management staff, from the managers that he supervises, and from the individuals that he supports. He feels that he has the opportunity to be creative. Ray arrived right in the middle of preparation for Survey and Certification and says that it was a great learning experience.

Ray lives with his wife and two children, Benjamin and Tiffany, in Worcester where he owns his own home (something he's very proud of). He also has a foster child who lives with him. The young man is someone whom Ray met when he was a house parent. Ray has had lots of experience in his 20+ years in the U.S.; he's worked with kids with special needs, adults with disabilities, and he's had experience with geriatric adults as well. He feels that he offers a wealth of experience to HMEA and is very happy that he's employed here.

*Ray was interviewed by Karen Slowick. ◀*