



The Faces of HMEA - January 2003

Clara Maben has worked for HMEA for more than seven years. She began her employment here as a part-time secretary for New Ventures; she's now the full-time secretary at Community Partners in North Attleboro.

Born to a family of nine brothers and sisters, Clara's heritage is very interesting. On her father's side, she has Blackfoot and African blood, and on her mother's side, she has relatives who were Libyan, and a great grandmother who was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. Her great grandmother walked "The Trail of Tears" (*government-forced movement of 5 tribes from the southern states to Indian Territory - now Oklahoma*) when she was three years old. Clara identifies herself as a black woman.

For 25 years, Clara worked at Nynex (now Verizon); she had many different jobs at many different levels within the company. She began as a long-distance operator, but when she left, she was a manager at the computer data center in Burlington. Clara was first offered a junior supervisor's job six months after she started, but she was afraid of the responsibility and refused the offer. She states now "*when an opportunity comes along, always try, because if you don't try, you can't succeed. If you don't succeed, at least you will have tried.*" She had to wait seven years for another offer of a supervisor's position. In the meantime, she transferred to another department where she was a clerk, an assistant, a secretary, and finally, a manager.

Offered an early retirement package in a time of layoffs, Clara decided to leave Nynex. She found herself in need of some extra income. Jewel Hardmon, a former employee, told her about the two-day-a-week position at New Ventures. Clara was apprehensive because she had had very little experience with people with mental and physical challenges. But she knew that she was capable of handling a challenge, so she decided to try it.



The word that Clara used when asked about her first impression of HMEA was "compassion". She was struck by the interactions between the staff and people who were supported by them. She was moved by the ease and comfort level of the employees who worked with people who obviously looked and acted very differently from anyone she had known. She found herself looking at these people in light of her own experiences with prejudice and harassment as a woman and as a black person.

She was able to look beyond the obvious differences and find the similarities that they shared.

Clara has come to enjoy working with many of the people at Community Partners, and has become the "go to" person for one of the young men who often has difficulty with his behavior. Known for his challenges with behavior control, this man has spent much time with Clara with no inappropriate episodes; Clara is very proud of this fact.

When asked what she's gained from working at HMEA, Clara points out that she's encouraged by the degree of community involvement for the people supported at Community Partners. She understands that some goals are very, very difficult to achieve, but the rewards are the small successes along the way. She's demonstrated her understanding of this by her own work experience, and her concern about and commitment to the people she works with. In the past, she was a large part of the success of the basket fundraisers; she took on much of the responsibility that kept the baskets in production and the funds coming in.

Her work world today is very different from her work world of more than 30 years ago. Clara has demonstrated that you can learn from your own negative experiences, turn them around, and use them as the basis for showing empathy for others.

Clara was interviewed by Ethel Peters, who is a member of the Diversity Committee.