



## The Faces of HMEA - October 2002

**Joyce Orton** has the honor of being the first person in a support position to reach 20 years of employment with HMEA! Having taught in public and private schools for many years, Joyce decided to return to school for her master's degree. One of her course assignments was to read a book about mental retardation or visit Wrentham State School. Joyce chose to visit the institution, and was surprised at what she experienced there.

Shortly after, she answered an ad in the newspaper for an agency named "LIFE". She was hired to work with adults with developmental disabilities, and began her human service career. HMEA was awarded the contract from LIFE, and Joyce and several of her co-workers met with executive director Susan Darnell and decided that they would work for Wrentham Research Foundation (HMEA's former name). One of her favorite stories is that of traveling to the state house with Susan to testify before the legislature. Joyce said that, if anyone else had asked her to speak about funding for people with disabilities in front of such a huge audience, she would never have done it!

When asked why she has remained here for 20 years, Joyce said she has never had a boring day at the agency. She stated that there are always little achievements, always something that can be done, and that the people she has worked with over the years are great companions. Some of the people she first worked with now attend New Ventures II and Community Partners. Although she no longer works with those people, she has fond memories of them.

Currently at Bellingham Day Hab, Joyce feels that her job means that she should assist people to be in the community as much as possible, and



to help them be as successful as they can in that environment. Joyce has developed a reputation as the "crafts person". The people she supports go with her to get crafts supplies, and have become known and well liked at the local crafts supplies store. For many years, she has made crafts for sale, and the proceeds are used to benefit the people she works with every day.

On a personal note, it's easy to see that Joyce has instilled her love for the work and respect for the agency in her children. Joyce is the mother of five, and the grandmother of four. All of her children have worked and/or volunteered for HMEA. One daughter and one daughter-in-law are currently employed in supervisory positions. As if working full time and raising a family of 5 weren't enough, Joyce has also bred rabbits for 15 years. When two of her children were small, they wanted rabbits as pets; one thing led to another, and by the time they left home, Joyce was left with a barnful of rabbits. At that point, she had become too interested and involved to stop. For 15 years, she was one of the top 10 breeders in the United States, and was a previous winner of the national "Best of Breed" award from the America Rabbit Breeders Association.

Joyce considers herself lucky to be able to incorporate her love for crafts and for animals into her workday. She's obviously a woman who loves her job. She said that she has "met some of the most wonderful young people that have heart and soul in their work. Knowing these people gives you hope for the world."

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*Joyce was interviewed by Karen Slowick, chair of the Diversity Committee.*