

## The Face of HMEA



*CJ McGregor*

**CJ McGregor** has been the Supervisor of the Sterling Day Habilitation Program for the past six years. Under his leadership, the program has expanded from 21 to 50 people served, with further growth planned. Many people served in CJ's program came to Sterling with behavioral histories and have been successful because of the dedicated work of a diverse staff who come from 13 different countries. International staff feel as if they are treated fairly, get the training needed to succeed, and tell so many others about their experience that there is a backlog of applicants.

CJ grew up in northern New York state, and his values about people with disabilities were formed at an early age: he and his friends were accustomed to playing in the neighborhood with a young girl who had cerebral palsy and used a wheelchair.

He later volunteered in a recreation program for children with impairments and also worked for four summers at a camp in the Catskills where the campers had significant behavioral challenges. Camp staff came from countries around the world, which partly explains why CJ is so comfortable working with people from around the world, and issues of diversity.

His passion for working with people then took him to his favorite city, New York, where he began supporting people who lived in their own apartments in the South Bronx projects. The job was filled with urban realities of street life, including trips to court and

interactions with police. His next career move involved intensive work with families in Manhattan before moving to the Worcester area to be with his partner, Richard.

Richard and CJ, who have been married for four years, adopted two young children, Tony and Robert, who are now 17 and 19. Tony is Latino and Robert, African-American, and both have been diagnosed with special needs subsequent to the adoptions. This family "diversity" is not always accepted and has resulted in vandalism, aggression towards the children, and difficult dynamics with the school system at times.

Fitchburg is now the family's home while CJ pursues his Master's degree in Theology with the goal of becoming a Unitarian Universalist minister. He is also active with family advocacy and is a past President of the Central Mass Families Organizing for Change.

CJ "loves change" and credits HMEA for a supportive environment in which to explore differences. As a leader, he embraces many cultures and sets high standards for staff supporting people with various disabilities. He is known for his unique and effective leadership style by families, funders, and staff. CJ epitomizes the values of HMEA by offering a culture of open communication and recognizing that all staff have unique skills and talents. ◀

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*Thanks to Mike Moloney, who interviewed CJ*