



The Faces of HMEA - February 2004

Stefanie

Salome, a Coordinator in the Children's Services Division, leads a busy life. As a Coordinator, she works with many different families and schools to design educational programs that will help children with disabilities live a more independent life. She is also enrolled in the HMEA on-site Simmons graduate program in behavior education, with its demanding coursework. And still she finds time to pursue her favorite hobbies, among which is a love of traveling.

When Stefanie was completing her teaching degree work, she learned of an opportunity to gain additional teaching experience on the Navajo reservation. She jumped at the chance. She recalls being confronted with major lifestyle differences upon arriving in her new position. Teaching in Cambridge, MA was quite a change from teaching on the Navajo reservation! As a young Caucasian woman, she found that many of her students had some initial bias towards her. Kids would say "look what your ancestors did to mine", referring to the Long Walk and the resettlement away from traditional tribal grounds. But most of Stefanie's experience was positive; she speaks with enthusiasm about the many cultural experiences that she had, the history that she learned, and how much she was able to learn



about the particular group of people by living and teaching on the reservation for four years. Learning about the customs, participating in traditional dinners, and learning some of the Navajo language are among her fond memories.

It is no surprise that Stefanie has ended up here at HMEA in a job that emphasizes teaching, as she clearly loves both teaching and children. Initially uncertain about what direction she would take, she heard of an opportunity to work in the Early Intervention

program and decided that this was the right move for her. She began as a therapist, and was promoted to a coordinator position, and she clearly loves the work she does.

Stefanie is enthusiastic about home-based services, saying that it is really wonderful to be able to see what a big difference the help she provides makes for a child and the child's family. She is equally enthusiastic about the opportunities for professional development that the agency provides to her, as well as the support she receives from her co-workers. Her words are "*wherever I go, whatever I do, I know someone else is there whenever I need them.*" Stefanie balances many things in her life: school, work, frequent trips to explore other cultures, but she does so with clarity about what is most important to her: family, career, and education.

Thanks to **Jan Bolton**, Diversity Committee member, who interviewed Stefanie. ◀