

## The Faces of HMEA - July 2003

**Javier Pena**, Assistant Manager at Maranook Road in Worcester is a busy, busy man. He works full time for HMEA and part-time for another agency, working with children and adolescents. School is also on the agenda as he pursues a degree at Quinsigamond Community College to further his human services career. A member of the Diversity Committee (currently unable to attend meetings due to his many other obligations), he has also agreed to serve on the agency Personnel Committee and participates in employee grievance hearings. He likes to work on his computer and emails Governor Romney and other politicians about his anger over budget cuts to people in need. His message: “when the smoke clears, remember the people”.

Javier recently took a time management course because, in addition to his other responsibilities and interests, he and his wife Luz are currently foster parents for four children! He is “on duty 24 hours a day”. Six years ago, he read an article in the Worcester newspaper, ‘Vocero’ about a series educating Latino families to become foster families. Since completing the course, Javier and Luz have welcomed 15 children into their home; these children are waiting for permanent placement. They have all come from very different backgrounds and cultures. The youngest boy, 2 years old, is living with HIV and now has a secure home.



*Top left: Javier’s grandson, Luis age 7, top right Brittany age 7, Javier (center), to the left Eric, who is 8, Robin age 5 and Cameron age 4*

Javier describes himself as a person who likes to help people and see positive outcomes. The smallest changes he observes in the people he works with make him happy. At Maranook, one man is learning new words and another, who used to be reserved and closed, has opened up, and laughs and smiles. In Javier’s other job, a young woman who had been abused needed restraints for safety, but is now able to do things on her own. Javier believes that, when it comes to work, there is no cutting corners and he sets an example for cohesiveness – everyone helping each other out.

Originally from the Bronx, NY, he grew up in the projects in Worcester and used to spend time only with people from his own culture. As a teenager, he opened up his connections and learned much about diversity and the appreciation of differences in people. Javier does not like to limit himself – he refers to himself as “Latino” and “Christian”, rather than Puerto Rican and Catholic – preferring the broadest definition of himself possible.

Why is Javier so active? Because he loves to help and loves to learn. His father once said to him: “the more you learn, the more you know, the more valuable you become”. Javier Pena is certainly a man of great value in the lives of the many people he knows and helps. ◀

---

Thanks to **Mike Moloney**, member of the Diversity Committee, who interviewed Javier.