



(left to right) Mary Ellen Fallon, Shani Dowd, Casmir Marwa, and John Abraham

► The Faces of HMEA

Diversity Conference

In October, HMEA held its first annual agency-wide diversity conference. About 75 people were in attendance at the DoubleTree Hotel in Milford. Guest speaker was Shani Dowd, Director of the Institute for Cultural and Linguistic Skills, of the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care foundation. Shani is a frequent presenter at major teaching conferences and a sought after consultant. She is Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and a member of the Center for Multicultural Training in Psychology at B.U.

After Shani's keynote speech, she led the group in a cultural explorers exercise; the purpose was to explore how it feels to try to determine what the cultural norms are when you're not of that culture. An employee panel then shared with the audience personal stories of where they were born, how they were raised, how they came to HMEA, and what it's like to work here. Audience members were moved to tears and laughter by the stories of the panelists.

Another exercise after lunch involved making judgments about people based on photographs only. It was an eye opening exercise, and made people think about what personal perspectives caused them to make those judgments. A second panel, consisting of family members, ended the day. Family members talked about what it's like to have a family member supported at HMEA, difficulties and rewards in cross-cultural work relationships. John Abraham, parent of a son who is supported residentially, perhaps said it best when he said "it's about the language of love".

Feedback forms were overwhelmingly positive: comments such as "fantastic program", "amazing", "no recommendations, just gratitude", "emotional, wonderful", and "proud to be a HMEA employee" were repeated again and again.

Next year, we hope to expand the scope of the conference. Diversity Committee members are already discussing what the conference might be like next year. ◀



(left to right) Fatou Ndiaye and Albertine Sadio

No single tradition monopolizes the truth. We must glean the best values of all traditions and work together to remove the tensions between traditions in order to give peace a chance."

—**Thich Nhat Hahn**,
Vietnamese Buddhist Monk and scholar
