

# Moving Forward to Serve our Community: Diversity in Action

## By: Stephen Manchester, Member of the Board

As a member of the CMHA-CEI Board of Directors, I'm on the front line of many activities in Community Mental Health Authority. One of the most important is representing the Board on the Diversity Advisory Council (DAC).

In 2003, the Board and Senior Management at CEI decided to push greater diversity in our workforce as a way to better serve our diverse community. Mental health service delivery involves human interaction on an individual-by-individual basis. We need a staff with two particular kinds of competence. One kind of competence derives from a trained, experienced staff that is up-to-date in the best ways to deliver mental health services. The other competence derives from understanding the challenges commonly faced by people in the community. CEI staff is highly competent in the first way; we want to improve the second competency.

Thus, the DAC has examined the diverse backgrounds of the CMHA-CEI clientele and asked whether our staff had a diversity of backgrounds that match the diversity of its clients.

CMHA-CEI has, for years, done a decent job of promoting this kind of diversity. For example, we have consumers of our services on our Board of Directors and various committees. Some of our employees are consumers. At the same time, we can improve.

A needed are of improvement, however, involves middle- and upper-management. We do not have enough diversity at the top. The DAC believes this problem arises from the reality that inequities inherent in our society bars people from achieving the level of education required to obtain management positions. The main path to management involves a post-graduate college degree. Quite frankly, higher education in our state and nation does not promote the kind of diversity we need at CMHA-CEI. The DAC will explore new ways to help staff get the education needed to move up.

The Board of Directors supports the DAC and CMHA-CEI as they develop a more diverse workforce. The Board realizes the task will take some years, but it will be patient (and insistent). The Board appreciates the steady support of CMHA-CEI's top management and looks forward to future successes.

Stephen Manchester,  
for the CMHA-CEI Board of Directors