

Head Start 40th Anniversary Celebration: Family and Community Partnerships - Spanish Video

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

[Music]

Sarah Greene: Head Start reaches out to communities and let them know how they can and should be a part of the program. For example, I remember in the early years, local health departments didn't recognize transportation was a major barrier to poor people getting health services through the local health agencies that could serve them. And so we had to talk about their hours of operation. We had to talk about the need for them to get mobile units and come out to communities.

We had to form partnerships to help them see we could jointly do health fairs and things of this nature. The same thing happened as we went around to various social agencies that serve kids in foster care or children that were abused and things of that nature to explain to them how Head Start should make those children their priority in terms of enrollment and jointly doing family home visits together.

So Head Start really changed communities to help different agencies recognize they have a role to play in serving these children and it's beyond offices. You've got to get out. And so to this day, most Head Starts have agreements with all of these different agencies and have regular meetings with them to see how best to serve the family jointly so that you don't have the Health Department doing a visit, Head Start doing a visit, someone from Family Services doing a visit. So now, I think, the full community is engaged in the role they each play in making the child and family a part of the total program.

Jean Simpson: I got started in Head Start in 1965. I was placed at the Altgeld Gardens community housing development which is a remote economically disadvantaged community on the far south side of Chicago. And I felt then, not knowing that much about Head Start, that boy, if this works it will be because of the parent involvement. And lo and behold, that became one of the cornerstones of Head Start is parent involvement.

Sharon Lynn Kagan: And we worked really, really hard as every Head Start director does to encourage a lot of parent involvement and actually were having a lot of difficulty. And we planned all these wonderful sessions and we had food, and it was food that families liked, and food that families cooked, and we had potlucks. And still the attendance was really, really low. Finally, one day we ended up calling in a dentist.

And then the dentist came, and lo and behold, somehow magically, we had a 98 percent turnout of our parents. And so the lesson that I learned from that is that it's the job of Head Start staff to really find out what interests the parents and to begin planning those kinds of programs that will have meaning for them in their lives.

Ruth Neale: There's a tremendous sense of ownership for Head Start with the parent involvement. That's what it means. Can they all read a budget? No. Can they understand concepts that are in the budget? Sure. If we say we're broke, they know. They know from past experience, they know from their own experience, what it means and what we have to do to get the money. So parents are the key to what happens here.

Marvin Hogan: You can't just serve the child and lift the child out of poverty without concern with the family and the community. We started a whole new concept. We started focusing on job training, microenterprise development, business development. And they didn't like to call it business development. They liked to call it "self-employed."

So we said, "Whatever." But we realized that we had to do something in the community because if you take the child out of the home for 7 1/2 or 8 hours and put him back in the same setting the same day with nothing changed, I don't see how you lift him up.

Carol Brunson Day: So the supplementary training initiatives that began in the early years of Head Start I think have changed the course of the program. The Supplementary Training Initiative began as a way to make sure that the staff, who were hired from the communities where Head Start programs were operating, would have an opportunity to get further training to advance their skill base, to advance their formal education, for example, so that they could become employed in Head Start and programs outside of Head Start.

Lenore Peay: If you would check the public schools in this community -- the parent associations presidents, vice presidents of parent associations are Head Start parents. That's what we have taught them: to stay involved even in the public school, that the children's education is important.

Helen Maynor (Schierbeck): The other wonderful thing about Head Start is the way it works with parents and the families. It has really helped so many mothers find a pathway into the employment field and so many fathers so it's a program of real significance for America's children and in particular, Native American children.

Walter Jourdain: I was a single parent, and with my two children I went to college and got a degree and stuff while my children were little. And when parents would talk about how tough it would be to go to college I was able to say I've done it before, it's doable, it's not as bad as you would think it was. That's what my big thing about Head Start is -- encouraging parents and just bettering the lives of everyone. There's fathers more involved with their children now who weren't before because of the fatherhood project.

Eric Locklear: If there are questions of the capacity that is built with Head Start programs then those who ask those questions need only go to our tribal communities or our Alaska Native communities. Oftentimes, Head Start is not only a focus for the children each day but it's a focus for the parents, it's a focus for the elders, it's a focus for the whole community. And as such, if we are to keep our communities, we need to keep our Head Starts.

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-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

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