

Head Start A Nation's Pride: Head Start A to Z

[Music]

Woman: I can remember it was like yesterday.

[Music]

Woman: I remember the first book I was given, which was great because I couldn't afford any books. Giving us books and sitting there behind our two little desks and reading. I can remember that. It was just such a pivotal point in my life.

[Music]

President Lyndon Johnson: Today, we're able to announce that we will have opened and believe operating this summer coast to coast some 2,000 child development centers. This means that nearly half of preschool children of poverty will get a head start on their future.

Teacher: Is that the same as this?

Students: Yes.

Polly Greenberg: From the absolute beginning, Head Start was never intended as just a preschool. The emphasis was on comprehensive services, nutrition, health screening, health care, social services. New careers for the parents with training and income. Helping people get out of the cycle of poverty and that includes energizing, giving people confidence that they can do this. And it's one step at a time.

[Music]

Narrator: Amid the decay, danger, isolation, and poverty in America there was a glimmer of hope for 2.7 million at-risk preschoolers and their families.

[Music, Carly Simon, "Itsy Bitsy Spider"]

Narrator: Over 12 million at-risk and handicapped children and their families have benefited from Project Head Start since 1965. A preschool program rooted in the Great Society legislation of the '60s and 80 percent funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start today is as dynamic and diverse as the 2000 communities in which it serves.

The comprehensive nature of Head Start incorporates early childhood education, health and nutrition components, social services, and the cornerstone of programming-- parent involvement. Teacher: The parents are the backbone of any Head Start Program. Once we have our children in the classroom, we need to work with the total family. That's where the parents play an important role. Parent involvement permeates almost every aspect of Head Start. All programs have a decision-making parent policy council, responsible for program decisions affecting children and families.

[Music, Carly Simon, "Itsy, Bitsy Spider"]

Narrator: In the Head Start classroom, children learn and become confident through success, sharing, cooperation, coordination, patience, as well as independence are encouraged, skills which helped later age-appropriate concept development.

Teacher: Our whole objective is to provide children with many experiences to give them a well-rounded education. Narrator: In more than 25,000 Head Start classrooms, qualified early childhood staff provide developmentally appropriate classroom and home experiences, which focus on self-esteem and self-worth.

[Music, Carly Simon - "Itsy Bitsy Spider"]

Narrator: An historical strength of Head Start has been its health component. The program seeks to acquaint and connect parents with a community-based health system on a permanent basis. Programs screen and assess the health of each and every enrolled child. All immunizations and appropriate shots are assured. Routine physical and dental examinations and necessary treatments are received by all children. Inconspicuous daily classroom monitoring occurs to help detect any health abnormality. And the teaching staff make sure that personal hygiene like brushing teeth becomes part of children's routine.

[Music, Carly Simon, "Itsy, Bitsy Spider"]

Narrator: Realizing that many disadvantaged children in America wake up without much food in the house and go to bed hungry, Head Start Programs participate in the US Department of Agriculture's Child Care Feeding Program.

Teacher: Studies do show that the nutritional status of a child will influence their learning abilities. Depending on the length of the classroom day, children receive at least one third of their daily nutritional requirements from meals and snacks served family style.

Teacher: Along with their nutritional needs, we also try to meet their cultural and ethnic needs by providing foods from different countries on the menu.

[Music]

Narrator: Social services components of Head Start Programs usually serve as the glue to keep much of the family focused in the program. Social services staff coordinate closely with other Head Start components and community resources to arrange training for parents, secure community-based services which family members may need, and when the severity of the situation demands, intervene directly in a problem like inadequate housing or child neglect.

[Music, Carly Simon, "Itsy, Bitsy Spider"]

Narrator: A special jewel of the Head Start population are the special needs children, which the program serves. Head Start is the largest main-streamer of handicapped preschool children in the nation. Consistently, over 10 percent of the total national enrollment has been these special preschoolers who are placed in the least restrictive learning environment to promote their growth and development.

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Narrator: Whether serving a Native American Pueblo in Santa Ana, New Mexico or a homeless family in Salem, Massachusetts, Head Start Program follow established federal quality standards. As the 1990s progress, it is evident that problems faced by at risk families in America can only be constructively addressed in a family-focused way, by the creative collaboration and collective wisdom of community-based services, the business community, and governments. A national laboratory of early childhood development, Project Head Start has led the way in providing quality, comprehensive services for over 25 years. It continues to be the pride of the nation which cares about children, especially less fortunate children and families.

Teacher: I felt worth something. This is real hard for me. I really felt I didn't have much without Head Start. I think because it helped me so much that I like being here to be able to help the kids and the families. And that's it.

[Music, Carly Simon,
Itsy, Bitsy Spider"]