

Head Start: Educating Kids, Empowering Families, Changing Communities

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

Narrator: Forty-five years ago, President Johnson announced Project Head Start. Beginning as a summer program dedicated to fighting the war on poverty, the program has helped millions of children get a "head start." Today, Head Start programs continue their core mission, assisting the most vulnerable children and families wherever they reside.
[Music]

Lourdes Villanueva: I started with Head Start as a parent. At the time, I was taking my kids to the fields. They stayed in the truck, so it wasn't like they were out in the field running about. We would normally find shaded areas, and would park the truck far enough that they wouldn't be in the way of things, but close enough that we could hear them. As a parent, you come in not knowing -- I mean, you just go thinking that they're just gonna teach them something, just teach the kids, and keep them safe.

So that was basically all that we were expecting. But it was really much more than that. I mean, they started inviting you to parent meetings, inviting you to parent trainings, and it was, you know, just one of those things that I felt that I was learning just as much as the kids were. With us traveling back and forth, we really didn't have any support -- family -- around us. I'm currently working as Director of Farmworker Advocacy. I have always worked with families. That's really -- probably who I enjoyed the most. Only because I -- I guess I see myself in a lot of those moms.

And now, I guess I see now ourselves as that extended family that I don't have. What I think that Head Start had done for my children is that they were able -- all three of them -- to finish school, go to college, and that they are contributing citizens. And I honestly believe that that has to do with the start that they had -- the "head start".

Alonso Felix: [speaks in Spanish] For me this program is very important because I could see a new vision. I could see my children, I don't know, in ten years as professionals, people helping other people. This program is not just of benefit to children, it is also a system that helps us get ahead.

Flora Sanchez: I've seen a parent who's very quiet, and then the next year, start maybe going for a position in the elections. You know, now they're, um -- maybe they can see that maybe they can hold a position as a president or a vice-president, secretary. And then from there, they go to the Policy Council, and now you've seen how they've grown.

I've seen them just blossom and grow so much that they're able to now make appointments for themselves, or go to the doctor because maybe now they've learned to tell the doctor, "My child is sick," or "My child has a stomach ache." You've seen how we've been able to work with our families to make them become advocates for themselves.

Patricia Batalla: [speaks in Spanish] This program, Head Start, has changed me a lot: my way of seeing... things, of educating my children. For my son, it has done a lot -- I am grateful to the program. My son came here at 1 year of age. I had no way to get somebody to take care of him and the program helped me a lot. I have a girl older and with her I also apply all that the program has given to me. I think that my daughter would have been very different if I have had the opportunity... I'm sorry...

... if I have had the opportunity of this program. I don't want to stop here. I want to keep learning, because I want that my children have success. I want them to be better than me.

Gilbert Ventura: I have four kids. Three of them attended Head Start, one of them didn't -- and you can see the enormous difference between the ones that attended and the ones that didn't. Our oldest one that didn't attend, you can see difficulty in English, since English will be his second language, educational behavior, communicating. The most important thing I've learned as a parent in Head Start is to focus and be a part of your child's education.

Head Start's changed my family in the way that we view life in a different perspective. We have dreams that we're going to try to accomplish, and we're pretty sure, with the help of Head Start, our kids will have those dreams and be accomplished.

Norma Flores Lopez: I started full time around the age of twelve; that's when they actually got me on the books that, you know, that's when it was legal for me to start working. My work week would be probably anywhere between 70 or 80 hours a week when it was the peak harvest. And during the summers, and I would be going out there for 12-hour-long days, working out of the corn fields. I believe that if Head Start wasn't around, we would be seeing a lot more children out in those fields at very young ages.

Many of the parents can't afford to have day care, or anybody to be able to watch after their kids, and they end up taking them out to the fields which can be very dangerous. Growing up as a migrant farmworker child, I can relate to a lot of these kids and what they're going through, and I just want to be able to provide a better future for these kids, and let them see that an education is achievable, and that it's very possible, and that they have the power to be able to change their lives around and not have to continue this cycle; that they can be truly whatever it is they want to be.

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