

The Benefits of Head Start

Rachael Morales

JARMA WRIGHTEN: ...and we have invited Ms. Rachael Morales to come in and share her parents as teacher in the home story with us. And so I'm going to start off by having Rachael tell us a little bit about herself, and get in a little bit about why is it important for parents to be teachers in the home. So, Rachael, you share that with me first – a little bit about you.

RACHAEL MORALES: My name is Rachael Morales. I am a mother of four boys. They are 12, nine, and a three-year-old set of twins. When I first moved to Oklahoma, my oldest son was non-verbal, and we were having some issues with that, and everywhere I took him basically said, you know, "Well, that's – that's – you've pretty much – that's what you've got, and that's how he's going to be the rest of his life, and, you know, there's not much he'll be able to do as a typically developing child."

Well, I took him to the Head Start – Opportunities Incorporated Head Start that was in El Reno, because I did not know about the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Head Start at that time, and Head Start encouraged me to enroll him. They worked with him. They set up speech and language with him, occupational therapy, and they brought in Oklahoma Parents as Teachers into my home once a month for, like, 45 minutes to an hour, and they'd give me things to work with my children at home.

And that little boy is now 12 years old. He is in – about to be in the seventh grade. He's getting a 3.3 grade-point average in all typically developing classroom work, plays on the basketball team, interacts great socially. And my nine-year-old also attended Head Start – at the same Head Start as my oldest child, and he has been – since he's been in Head Start and then went on to the public school system, he has never received less than 100 percent on any spelling or reading curriculum.

JARMA: So that's to say a great commendation to you as being a mom, and, of course, maybe your – the father in the home as well, and then having had the Parents as Teachers come in and facilitate those instructions so that you know how to road-map your way through getting services for him. So you had the support of the speech therapists and – and any other related service personnel?

RACHAEL: Actually, Carrie Overholser was our family service coordinator, and she's now working with me, because I'm now the family service coordinator for the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Head Start in Concho, Oklahoma. And she's working with me because she's now the coordinator of the WCD-WIC program in El Reno, Oklahoma. So she works with us to train our parents, do parent trainings on nutrition, and portion sizes, and activity levels for their children, and things like that. So...

JARMA: You have really done a remarkable job, so – and you said you had – the 12-year-old was the one that they were sharing those experiences with, that he experienced those issues with. But he's now grown up, and – you know, not totally grown up, but, you know, he's matured, he's growing and developing.

So, in all of what you've done, how did you impart your experiences with them in terms of being that mother and that caregiver in the home? What were some of together-time things that you all did to make his learning experiences fun?

RACHAEL: Well, and I still do it to this day with my three – my – my – twin three-year-olds, but, like, when I go grocery shopping and I'm going to get peanut butter, I tell – I tell them what it is that I'm getting off the shelf, and what letter it starts with – that's how I started it.

When we go home and we put things away, we – I have everything labeled, because I had a home day-care for six years, so everything in my house is labeled as to where it belongs. So that way – especially anybody knows with four boys, they're not real good at picking up after themselves, so this makes it a little easier. I got baskets around the house for everything. And they've just – they would help me put things away.

And, well, they know, "This is corn," and there's, you know, the word "corn" and a picture of it. So they – so I just work with them.

JARMA: And it sounds like you're pretty organized, and you sound like you have a...

RACHAEL: Yeah, and our bathroom's the same way, you know. The mirror's labeled, it says "mirror," and doors are labeled, and cubbies where it says, "This is where the combs and brushes go, this is where hair dryer goes." It's all labeled with pictures so that they know what they're using and what they're putting away.

JARMA: That is an organized home.

RACHAEL: You have to be.

JARMA: So how would you say your involvement in Head Start has helped you to this degree? Because you seem very organized, you're now a Family Services advocate, or worker, and – some programs might use – and how is your involvement really helped to pave the way for you to become more effective in your role as parent?

RACHAEL: Well, actually, it was the support and the guidance from Head Start with my own child that got me to go back to school, open up my own home day care, receive my Associate's. Because I figured if I could do this with my own child, there's no reason I couldn't make a day better for another child out there. And so I just went to school and received my Associate's, and had my home day care for six years, went out into the corporate day care world and received the opportunity to attend the Head Start for employment.

JARMA: Wow, you – you really took a great path, so you've really enhanced your own personal and professional development in terms of growing and making a difference for – not only for your child, but for yourself.

RACHAEL: Right.

JARMA: And so Head Start really has given you that extra boost. So what would be the one thing you would say that stands out most about Head Start and the experiences?

RACHAEL: Well, as anybody knows, raising children is difficult. But then when you have a child that has challenges, and they're very prominent challenges, and you're being told by all these other professionals that, you know, "He's never going to do this," or "She's never going to do that." And you're going, "Well, I'm just the mom. I mean, they're the ones with the Doctorates, they know what they're talking about."

And Head Start never let me believe in less than what they would believe to see. You know, they – they just – they pushed me and Sean – my son – through everything. They helped us, they guided us, and they never let us give up – on each other, on ourselves, you know. It's – and sometimes when things aren't a success, it is hard as a parent to keep putting your child through that, you know, because you don't want to make them cry, or make them upset. You're supposed to be the one that makes everything better.

JARMA: That's right.

RACHAEL: And then again, as the parent, when you can't make anything better, you're just like, "Well, then let's just leave it alone." You know? "I can deal with this; let's not make him feel bad." But they always said that, you know, every – for every time he falls down, that there'll be, you know, two-three more steps that he could take later on in the future.

JARMA: And you – you sound like you're a really good mom. You're doing a phenomenal job, you're...

RACHAEL: I try.

JARMA: ...there to support them in every way. And parenting never ends. It's like from the time they come out of the womb, until the time – like, I even look at myself as an adult, you know, Mom and Dad were always there. So, you do – you know, it's a big job.

RACHAEL: Yes, it is.

JARMA: Would you say you've really encouraged his self-confidence? How did – how did you really boost that, given all the challenges that you've faced?

RACHAEL: I – I've just always taught my sons that, no matter what, as long as you try you do not fail. And Sean brought an F home one day on a paper, and I was like, "It's okay. Did you try your hardest?" Was that the best you could do right now?" And he was like, "Yeah, Momma, I tried." And I said, "We'll work on it, and maybe next time it'll be a D, and the next time maybe it'll be a C. As long as you never give up trying, then you never fail." And that's what my grandparents had taught me. So...

JARMA: That is a very good mantra. That's a good motto to follow. If you had to give other parents words of advice, what would be something you would say, or some things you might share to encourage them to be really good parents as teachers, and enforce that is so important?

RACHAEL: Well, with as hectic as everybody's schedules are now-a-days, no matter what, just take the time to talk to their teachers. You don't always have to agree with the teachers, whether it be in Head Start or public school, you don't always have to agree with where that teacher's coming from, but if you want the best for your child and you want your child to succeed, you do have to support the teacher. You know, you wouldn't want...

Me and my sons' father, we do not, you know – he doesn't necessarily agree, maybe, when I put one of them in time-out because they did something they were told not to do. He will not discuss that until the children go to bed, and then him and I have a discussion about that. You never undermine the other parent or teacher in front of the child, and that way your child will learn to respect both you and the other adult in their life.

JARMA: And I think that's really excellent, because all children need to know that there's some kind of balance in the home, and through it all, as being supportive parents, it's like you all are showing that you have that support for one another, so that they know they can't play games and say, "Mommy said...", "Daddy said..."

RACHAEL: Right. Exactly. And I mean, you know, if you look at it, teachers spend about the – or, the same, if not more time with our children because of our work schedules in this day and age than we do, so they're not ganging up on our child, they're telling us what they're observing because we can't, because we're at work.

JARMA: And you said something really key when you said the teachers spend the most time with the child, but we know that the children really ultimately look up to you – to Mom and Dad – you're the role models.

RACHAEL: Exactly.

JARMA: So that everything you do – your attitudes, your beliefs, and – and anything you show in front of them, display in front of them – they're looking at you.

RACHAEL: And if you show that teacher disrespect, then your child's going to, and you'll be called to the school more and more. Just give her the respect, or him the respect, that they deserve as an educator, and sit down and talk to them without the child there, work it out, and then go from there.

JARMA: You're right.

RACHAEL: You know, but we have to work together to raise them.

JARMA: And that's important – working together – so you all became this team, and it's the teaming and the collaboration that really made it – made it effective in your home, it sounds like, in my opinion.

RACHAEL: And when Sean went on to public school in El Reno, Oklahoma, Lincoln Elementary was right there by my side, all the way up until he left there in the fourth grade. And I still run into his first grade, second grade, third and fourth grade teachers, and they're like, "How's Sean?" and da da da da. They –

he's still very close to them, when we run into each other, he'll go sit with them at a – at a ball game, or anything.