

36th Annual National Head Start Training Conference Parent Interview: Eugene Neal

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrihten: Well hello, Eugene, and welcome to the Parent's Place at the ECLKC, which is our Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. And so today we're excited to have you with us because we want to hear your story about how you in your role as a father have become that parent as teacher in your home for your child. So I want to learn about all the wonderful things that you do to support your child's learning and you can tell us a little bit about your child or children if you have several in Head Start. And then kind of give us some ideas about things that you do together and take it over from there.

Eugene Neal: Okay. I'm a single father of four. My youngest daughter is five. She attends the Cap Community Action Program in Waukegan, Illinois, and she's at a school Yeager. I'm very active with her in and outside of the home. I reinforces the things that Head Start teaches her at home by reading to her, playing a lot of activities with her, cooking with her. She's involved in a baseball program where I'm a coach. So I'm pretty busy with her.

Jarma: You're pretty busy. So she gets a lot of physical activity. In addition to those things, because they all sound like fun and great things for daughters and dads to do together – I love that daddy and daughter time – what in addition do you do for together-time?

Eugene: We read a lot. I read to her and then I have her read to me. We do a lot of shapes, colors. When we are riding in the car like the other young lady we have her pick out buildings or landmarks, things that she likes. When I take her to the grocery store I teach her how to...what's nutritious, I teach her about obesity and how to try to limit that. I teach her different type of fruits and carrots are good for your eyes, bananas a source of potassium, just many things.

Jarma: That's wonderful. So you are involved in Head Start, so what is your involvement and how do you feel that since you've been involved in Head Start, Head Start has helped you...helped support you in your role as parent?

Eugene: Yes, I volunteer at her school. I'm also a member of the policy council. I'm here to try to get a male-involvement program started. It helps me out because it helps me teach her more. Head Start is a place where it's a fundamental grounds for her learning and statistics shows that more children when they enter Head Start usually go on to further educate themselves.

I'm very active because this is an economy now that is global. It's not just the United States and you're not just competing against people in the United States for jobs; you're competing globally and I want her to understand that at an early age so that she will have a better chance at having a successful life.

Jarma: Wow, I love that. Well stated. And that's so important because we are moving into the new age, technology and all of that. So in your effort to continue to be that supportive role model, what advice would you give to other parents who are seeking to do the same thing – become that first role model for their child? Be that teacher. Be that parent. Be that support system. What would you say to other parents?

Eugene: I would say to other parents to get involved. Know what your child is being taught. Be a part of your child's teaching. Be a part of teaching your child how to communicate, how to broaden their skills. And if you're involved and they see you doing things, it's more likely that they will follow up behind you and become more...you will become their role model. And it won't be for just your child, but for other children in the program, who don't have the father figure or the mother figure, whose parents are not involved in their life. If they see you're involved in your children's life they will take on and model after what you do.

Jarma: So what's the one big thing that you feel Head Start has done for you and as we look towards the future and growing Head Start, what would you like to see Head Start become or do? How would you like to see Head Start move

forward?

Eugene: One big thing that Head Start has done for me is I'm an engineer for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway and I injured myself so I was off work for two years. Head Start not only helped me in providing my daughter schooling and teaching, but they helped me get on my feet. They helped me by introducing me to different programs in the community that could help me out in ways that will help me establish myself back once I had fell down.

What I would like to see from other Head Start programs or Head Start in the future, is to get more involved into the community and get more literature out so that other communities – because it's a lot of people out that need help that's not aware of the programs that Head Start has available. Teach the staff how to be more friendlier sometimes or how to get out information to those parents who otherwise don't know that it's available by just coming in and dropping their children off.

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-- Permalink for viewing (requires Flash and JavaScript)

<http://videos.sorensonmedia.com/HEAD+START/000111-Eugene+Neal+Parent+Interview-2009-SD360p/be95ead5P2b70a424be94e4ke3c93e3bee87>