

36th Annual National Head Start Training Conference Parent Interview: Anna Walker

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrihten: Hi Anna, how are you today? Anna: I'm doing fine, thank you. Jarma: We're so happy to have you. Anna: Thank you.

Jarma: ...here at the Parent's Place at the ECLKC. You know, today when I spoke with you earlier we were just going to talk about what you do to support your child's learning in the home as the parent -- as the first teacher -- the first and most important teacher. And I know that you're involved in Head Start in several ways, so I want you to tell us a little bit about you and about your child and then kind of start sharing with us what you do at home and how that learning evolves.

Anna: Well first of all, I am a former Head Start student myself. Jarma: Okay.

Anna: As an advocate for children and parents, I think it is very important that we utilize every asset we have, every available resource that is out there. As a mom -- not planning on being single, but I am -- I'm a mother of seven children and all seven of my children went through the Head Start program and it was a great asset for each one of my children. This is the first year that I've actually gotten really involved in the Head Start program on the level of policy council and being a part of the board -- part of the executive board. I think Head Start is one of the best kept secrets in every city.

I think more families need to be aware of all the resources that Head Start and the grantee offers in their city. One of the things that I like to do at home is -- you can use this book because it deals with the colors and I...this is like one of my favorite books, and I think all of my children learned their colors through this book because as you go through it, you'll see that it deals with colors, and it talks about the brown bear and the red bird and there's a purple horse and a...a blue horse and a green frog, and so we use these and I also help my children to separate clothes.

And so doing a laundry day, being a single mom, you use this to separate clothes, so they are matching colors while they're separating clothes, getting ready to do the laundry. The other thing I like to do at home with my children that helps with the counting and measuring is during dinner time we cook together. And so my son who is five, well he's been doing this since he was three, sets the table. So he has to count out how many cups, how many forks and plates to set on the table, and it also teach that we have a family-style dinner each night with our children.

The other thing is the reading -- is that we take the TV and we allow him to find the channel, so we'll say, "Eleven." And he'll say, "Well Mom, what's eleven?" I say, "It's a one and a one." So now he knows his numbers. Eleven are two ones together. So he'll turn the TV on but then we'll end up turning the TV all the way down and putting the captions on and so we'll either read it or one of the other kids will read it and so it enhances his reading ability, and so the children are able to see that.

Jarma: Wow. You are really a phenomenal woman! Anna: I.... Jarma: It's so great to hear that. So, you know, you've shared so much, and I love the example of "Brown Bear, Brown Bear" because there's, you know, so much of the literacy involved, the language and literacy is so important, and you're just taking it to another level by helping your child learn to sort, learn the colors, glean how to measure, so they're getting a lot of experiences.

If you had to share with us... can you just tell us what is the one thing that you would tell other parents about being a parent and a teacher? What kinds of things would you tell other parents?

Anna: I think the most important thing is to have goals; but then, when you have your goals, allow your children to see you accomplish and reach those goals, and have them help you celebrate, because once you do that, it will teach them -- that they have their own goals, they set their own goals, and they can reach... I think the one thing that I do in my

house, and people look at me like, "That's strange," but it works.

And my children -- because there's so many of them, they have to share everything, and so there's some things that I buy them -- like they have their own cereal, nobody has to share that, because they also -- children need a sense of, "This is mine," but then you're teaching them sharing, they have to share everything else, but the one thing that is theirs, is personal, is their cereal, and that they don't have to share with anyone.

Jarma: Well that, so you teaching them that, that's good social skills. Anna: Yes. Jarma: So now they learn to share! If you had to say in so many -- few words, how do you feel that you have influenced your children's lives, to be able to succeed in life and in school, so that they're ready for school?

Anna: I support them. I'm there, and I learn what they have to learn. I educate myself by having relationships with teachers before my children actually have those teachers, I figure out what it is my child's supposed to learn before they get to that grade, and then I start working on them during the summer so they'll be ready for school. Jarma: Beautiful. And so as we think about Head Start and how Head Start is growing and moving, what would be the one thing that you'd like to see evolve as a result of the new growth and the new era as we move forward in the future?

Anna: One of the things that I would like to see Head Start do is to, somehow in each community or each grantee or delegate, offer scholarships or grants to parents who would like to continue higher education, because it's one thing to say, "We're going to help you be self-sufficient," but how are you going to get that when you need past a high-school diploma to get a decent job to become self-sufficient?

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<http://videos.sorensonmedia.com/HEAD+START/000013-Anna+Walker+Parent+Interview-2009-Year-SD360p/ba5f2b28X51e3Z4896e8dd529b86be7c0b38>