

National Indian Head Start Director's Association Conference, San Diego, CA: Parent Interview: Rita Philips-Burnette

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Rita Philips-Burnette: My name is Rita Philips-Burnette. I am from the O'odham Gila River Indian Community. I am a parent, a Policy Council member. I am also awaiting my interview to start EHS. I have two daughters that go to Santan Head Start in District 4. My oldest daughter's four, my youngest daughter's three. I got involved in Head Start when my daughter started school -- my first daughter. I just wanted to be there with her -- be there with her every day, learn everything that I could about it. I -- I didn't intend to but it's what came out of it -- it's what came out of it. It was a good learning experience.

I started out as a volunteer -- just kept going, kept going. I did a six-week SI training to become a substitute teacher, and our director, Pat Foster, as well as Delores Terry, Beverly Allen, James Sendas, our cultural coordinator, they taught us everything from disabilities to bus monitoring, hand washing, tooth brushing -- every aspect in the Head Start area we have learned, and it was a great experience. It was a great experience. We had our graduation.

At the time, I was in high school and the -- the hours that I used for that training, they plugged in for my high school, and I had officially graduated high school. And I was very proud of that, and I have thanked all of them for that and helping me out. From there, I enrolled with the CDA classes, where I enrolled with South Mountain Community College, and it is wonderful. They provide us transportation, they pay for it. Our director, Pat Foster, is able to teach it to us so we -- we stay together as a group from the SI training. We stayed together and we go to District 6 in Laveen to take our classes Tuesdays and Thursdays and it is -- it's very informative.

There was things that I didn't know that I had learned, and I would think that when they were coloring, it was just scribbles, but it's not. They're learning their fine motor skills. When riding a bike, they're -- they're learning their gross motor skills. And those were things that I was excited to learn about. So the things that I was learning that I didn't know, I was informing the parents that would come in. And when they would ask those questions, I'd be -- I'd -- I'd know how they felt because I would ask the same questions. I like it, I enjoy it. I enjoy the kids; I love the kids.

When I'm in my center, I ask questions -- that's what I do. If I don't know how something works, I ask. I find out. I go into each classroom. I learn how each teacher works, and they -- they all have a different teaching technique and it's wonderful to -- to learn every aspect of the Head Start area. I ask the FA what papers that she is doing, how she's doing it. I go in the cook -- I help the cook -- assist the cook, wash dishes, prepare snack. I -- one of my strengths and my goals that I wanted to do was to go to parenting classes, and the Head Start informed me when they were gonna start enrolling for parenting classes. I took parenting.

I graduated from parenting while I'm still going to school. We should be graduating in December, hopefully [Laughs], for our CDAs, and I intend to keep going after that for my AA, for my BA. I -- I appreciate Head Start so much. When times get hard and we do not have food, there's Head Start right there to, you know, supply you with food for food boxes, things that you need. If there's a resource that I'm looking for, they help me. It -- it's wonderful. It's a great experience.

It's -- just to learn everything... And the kids -- the smile on the kid's faces, the way they make you feel when you walk in, the way it makes you feel when you see them at the store and they're looking at you like that -- like they know you from somewhere and they want to say something to you but they just can't -- they're just too much in shock. I enjoy it. I love it. To -- to parents, I would say to be involved. It's the -- it's the biggest thing ever.

It can -- they help you so much. They help you so much, and I honestly believe that if it was not for Head Start and -- and me and, you know, getting involved, I would not be where I'm at today, and I thank them so much for it. I thank them so much for it. It -- it's great -- the dental, the screenings, everything. They inform you when, you know, they see something in your kid that you wouldn't see because you -- you're not a dentist, you're not, you know, the hearing

impaired. And they inform you and we go, we check up. And it's just great, I love it. I love it. And if I -- I get upset at myself because I did not get into Head Start earlier.

And I intend to stay with it when my kids transition. When they leave, I intend to stay with it. I intend to work there and make as much of it as I can. Coming to these conferences out here is wonderful. All the information that we learn, I plan to take back. I plan to go to my community and inform them on all the information that we learned. I plan to help strengthen our staff, as well as, you know, the -- the things in the classrooms that they do -- give the teachers new ideas that I had learned with help, with staff strengthening.

And I just took one this morning on bullying, and I didn't see it as a big issue until then, so I intend to go back and inform them of all the information that I gathered here today and take back with me to my community to help them and strengthen them. I'm grateful that I have a supporting team. My significant other, Dylan Norris, my kids' father, he also gets involved in fatherhood activities. He loves them. He gives his input on what he thinks that they should do. He lets us know -- he's also in Policy Council. And I -- we had just enrolled him also in the CDA classes, so he goes up there with us and he -- he enjoys the CDA classes, also.

And, right now, he's currently going there -- Head Start is helping him receive his Master -- his GED, should I say. And he loves it. We both love it. We both love being involved and we -- we get a lot of compliments because, you know, that's what they want, fathers -- fathers to get involved. And so to the fathers, you know, it's fun -- it's fun, as well. There are things if you have boys -- whether you have boys, whether you have girls, there are different things that you can do with them.

And he will sit down and have a tea party with his daughter and does not care if they laugh because he's spending time with his daughter. One of our other daughters is a -- is -- is a tomboyish, so he loves going out and playing basketball with them. But it's good that -- you know, that, as a family, we -- we get involved. We get involved in Head Start, and we love Head Start and we thank them so much for being here.

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-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

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