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Jarma Wrihten: All right, Courtney, I'm excited to have you here today... Courtney Haynes: Thank you. I'm excited about being here. Jarma: ...especially 'cause you're a dad... Courtney: Oh, thank you. Thank you. I try my best.

Jarma: ...and we need more -- we need more fathers to come -- to come out and just share their voices. Courtney: Yes, ma'am.

Jarma: So today you're going to share a little bit about your story, about how you became involved in Head Start, what spurred your interest, and how old your son is or daughter. And just kind of give us a little background about -- about the whole involvement piece.

Courtney: Okay, well, my son's name is Alexander Xavier Haynes. He's four years old. I'm 30 years old myself. This is my first child. I had him when I was about 24, 25-ish -- around there. Jarma: Mm hmm.

Courtney: And what made me want to get involved in the Head Start program -- I was in the Head Start program myself when I was a kid, and I just know that the program is a very good stepping stone for kids to kind of get social -- early social skills, early -- develop early learning skills so they can develop into a well-rounded child, young adult, adult.

And the reason for me being involved is that -- that, you know, I didn't have a father there. You know, my father was out the home at six. My paper was -- my father was out the house at six, completely out of my life at 16. And when my son came along, you know, I was a little nervous at first, "Man I'm a dad, no more partying. Ohh." Jarma: [Laughter]

Courtney: You know, "I'm not no old man, dang." But my heart -- my heart just wouldn't -- my -- my heart wanted me to be there, so my heart carried my body and my mind into it, and hence me being in there now, you know. I've been nominated for Father of the Year for this upcoming year, and the reason -- I volunteer a lot of my time at the school.

'Cause I mostly work at night, so during the day it leaves me a lot of free time to participate, and volunteer during the day. And I'm up there at the school so much, to the point where other kids in his room, "Oh, there go Alex's dad, there go Alex's dad," and I'm like, "Okay, that -- that feels good," you know.

Jarma: Yes, it does. Courtney: But that's the best feeling in the world to me so... Jarma: To know that you're that number one dad in his life. Courtney: I'm number one, right. And other kids are looking up, and, you know -- wow, you know.

Jarma: You think they see you as a giant when you walk through the door? [Laughter] Courtney: Oh yeah, I almost stepped on a few of them before. [Laughter] So yeah, of course. So, yeah... Jarma: So your involvement has really helped to build your relationship with your child in what ways?

Courtney: I mean, it's just -- he, you know -- he relates better to me than his mom 'cause, you know... Me and her aren't together, but we make it work. There's no -- we make it work for him. We got that clear-cut understanding, 'cause she has no other children -- he's the only one for her, he's my only one, so clear-cut, we're here for him.

Jarma: Mm hmm. Courtney: And, you know, with me and his relationship, I mean, it's just -- oh, I mean, I have a ball. I mean, I pick him up from school on Fridays, and I take him to school on Monday. So every weekend, whether I'm out of town or something like that, he's with me, or he's with my mom. So, you know, it's just -- it's cool, you know.

Jarma: So what are some together-time things that you all do?

Courtney: Oh, we go -- we go -- I've taken him fishing before. My father was the only child, and I'm his only child, so I was his mother's only grandchild. So at a early age, she exposed me to look outside of the box, look out -- outside of what's on the outside of a neighborhood. But even though we were in a small city, but there's stuff where you can use to your advantage: art museum; history museum; zoo. Jarma: That's right.

Courtney: And in St. Louis, the zoo and stuff like that is free, so it's not like it costs money, you just need a little gas to get there or whatever. But, you know, my son's four. We -- art museum, you know. I like watching the History Channel myself, you know, instead of all them cartoons. I mean, "Let's go down here and watch the History Channel."

I know they might be talking about -- ain't no telling what they might be talking about, but it's something you can learn from, you know. And, you know, like I said, I've taken my son hunting with me before. At four years old, he's been following me around in the woods before, not with a gun or anything like that, just that whole -- whether we catch something or not that day, it's just the whole experience of him being there with Dad that...

Jarma: That just makes it a real...

Courtney: 'Cause my dad didn't -- it was stuff I was into -- my dad didn't teach me that, because he was off doing his own little thing or whatever. I had to learn a lot of the stuff on my own. It's just like I was telling some people earlier, I got over the -- it took me 'til I was about 16 or 17 to get over the fear of touching fish. My son, four years old, will reach down in the bucket and grab a catfish like it ain't nothing, and...

Jarma: [Laughing] Courtney: ...I think that's just so cool. [Laughing] Well, yeah, just... Jarma: Well, that is cool, because now you're teaching him a lot of -- that's just -- that's science, believe it or not. That's getting messy, and it's okay to stick your hand in and...

Courtney: Yeah, he done -- he done took a fish in my mother's room one time -- the fish was dead, of course -- and Granny looked, and she rolled over, and "Aah! What the hell!" And I'm like, you know, "Dude, you trippin'." [Laughing] So... Jarma: It was just the fish. So she's scared -- he's frightened Grandmom. Courtney: Mm hmm. Yeah, with a dead fish before. [Laughing]

Jarma: [Laughing] Courtney: So, he's picked up snakes in the backyard, and I'm like, "Hey, dude, put that down." Jarma: You're really -- you're teaching your son to be sort of like a -- a dad -- a -- a dad shadow, the builder kind of dude, where he will learn how to follow everything that you do -- he's your shadow.

Courtney: Yeah; yeah; yeah. Jarma: And he -- and it's okay with you, right?

Courtney: Yeah. And you know, I also understand that sometimes he might have to hurt his self to learn. Just like, case in point, with the catfish. "Dude, you can't grab -- you got to grab him a certain way, if you don't, you will get stuck." He's got stuck. So he knows you can't grab them -- you got to grab them a certain way. But he learned -- it was a hard way to learn, but he learned, you know. So...

Jarma: So what advice would you give other fathers about being involved, and coming out to the Head Start program?

Courtney: Just got to be open-minded. It's not all sugar-coated, you know. 'Cause most fathers probably think, "Okay, Head Start, oh it's going to be somebody talking for two, three hours." It's not like that. It's for the child. Regardless of what you're doing in life, take that hour out from the street or whatever. If it's a hour, and you come and sit down with us, hey, that makes a difference, you know. No matter what you're wrapped up in, just be open-minded -- just be open-minded.

Jarma: That's very essential. Well, I'm going to share one handout from our Learning Center with you, and it's called "Fathers are Important for Real." And that's one of the things that we like to give out at most of the conferences because we know that dads have this special place, and it's unique. And you get to share, you know, some of the real

deep things with your children. And these are some tips and strategies from the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center that can benefit you, as well as other fathers.

Courtney: Okay, that's right. Jarma: We talk about wanting dads more involved; we need to have some resources available for them. Not only just come for -- like we shared in our session yesterday about: dads typically like the sports, and -- and that's what we always, you know, lean to -- what you continue to lean to -- not we, but dads.

Courtney: Mm hmm. Jarma: But, with this information, you can share it and tell them that there's -- there are other things out there. I liked how you shared about looking at the History Channel. Courtney: Yeah. Jarma: That's -- that's deep. That's good.

Courtney: National Geographic, Discovery Channel, you know -- ain't always got to watch cartoons all the time, you know. And like I said, I like watching the History Channel for myself. I mean, I'm just into stuff like that. And trying to teach him, you know, you can't learn to go forward if you don't learn about the past, and that's whether you're black, white -- it's history, anybody's history. You can't move forward if you don't know nothing about the past.

And that's something I'm trying to instill in him at four years old, until the rest of his life. 'Til I leave this earth, I'm going to keep teaching him: learn from your mistake; learn from other people's mistakes; learn from an experience that might not have been a mistake, but learn from it. Okay, if you come across that experience again, how can you make it better?

Think about what you did -- even if you was 18 years old when it happened, and you're 30 -- "Okay, this happened when I was 18. Okay, how did I make it out of that when I was 18, and I'm 30 now?"

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