

National Indian Head Start Directors Association 19th Management Training Conference, Oklahoma City, OK: Parent Interview: Glenda Billy

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Jarma Wrighten: We're here today at the National Indian Head Start Director's Association Conference, and we have with us, sharing her parents as teacher in the home story, Glenda. And I'm going to ask Glenda to share a little bit about herself and then we'll get started.

Glenda: My name's Glenda Billy. I come from the Navajo reservation. I have a five-year-old son and a three-year-old son with the Ganado Head Start on Ganado, Arizona, on the Navajo reservation. I encourage my son through traditional and, you know like, basic Head Start educational work. We do homework; we do reading; we do field trips. We volunteer at the -- my work place, which is with the elderly; so we kind of do story-telling at the -- my facility.

And we do a lot of field trips, then we do a lot of traditional teaching at the same time. So I encourage him to be more outgoing, active, help other people, be responsible, and whatever else he needs. You know, if he needs to go to speech therapy outside the program, I'll get services available for him. I'll also help them by being on the Parent Committee at the local level, which is the center level. Then at -- with our -- we have agency level, which is seven agencies within a little part of our reservation, so I run that committee. Then as all the agencies get together, I run the Policy Council.

Jarma: Okay. Glenda: So I'm more involved either way.

Jarma: So in your role in the Policy Council, you've been very -- you just said you're -- parent committee, policy council -- you're really active in -- within the Head Start community. And how's -- how has all of those roles that you've played for Head Start help in a -- helped to affect or impact your ability to teach him different things at home?

Glenda: It's like the trainings they send me to, the meetings they send me to -- like one training, where I went to Atlanta, Georgia, on child abuse and neglect. I try and observe child abuse, not for me, but also for the kids in the center, you know, parent responsibility and, you know, being more of a leader.

Not just for my child, but I'm also for the 20 kids in my center, and also the 20 times -- maybe a 174 in our agency. So I think about other kids and other programs that I try to help out as much as I can. And what I learn at that conference, I bring back at the local level, at the agency level, and at the policy council level. We give reports back. So we work more with everybody at the same time.

Jarma: And that sounds like you have really taken your role seriously, that you -- you're able to transfer all the information and share it with other parents, so that helps other parents become more effective. Glenda: Yeah.

Jarma: If you had to share things with us about how you've built your child's confidence level up so that he could succeed in school and life, what would you tell us?

Glenda: You know, as a single parent, it's different. But it's not just me, it's my family members. It's -- they help him be responsible to where sometimes I'm not there and he picks up things. When you get feedback from his center he says that this little kid helps other kids. He helped, you know -- like a child with disabilities, he's over there helping that child, saying, "Don't pick on him," "Can I help you?"

So he does it on his own, and that's something nice to hear when you tell him, "You need to behave in a certain way." But he's -- he -- he's learning it on his own, without me teaching. From other people, and then the family members, he learns to help out. And he's always questioning; you know, little kids drive you crazy with questions, but he's always there asking.

Jarma: But we know questions are part of growing and learning. If they don't ask those questions, they don't get the answers. That's curiosity, exploring, discovery -- and it sounds like -- that -- he's doing the right thing, because he knows that you're going to give him the answers. If you had to share words of encouragement to other parents, like -- what kinds of tips and thoughts would you leave them about being that first and most important teacher in your child's life?

Glenda: I think it's always value their traditions, their language, their culture. Always encourage parent involvement because, you know, it influences child from the beginning to as old as they get. They -- they have no -- they never leave you. They're always by your side, always asking questions. And always, you know, do that hands-on thing; when you take them somewhere, always tell them do this, do that.

And, you know, hands-on is more better than reading a book or a computer. So we take them on a field trip, take them to the zoo, tell them to count, describe. And sometimes they do things that they never recognize. If you take them to speech therapy, you do these cards and these kids say things that they wonder, "Where did they learn it from?" So a lot of it comes out of common sense, but what they learned when you taught them, maybe, a while back.

Jarma: And you use speech therapy a lot. Has he received speech therapy? Glenda: Yes.

Jarma: And how effective do you feel that you have been as a result of having his -- having him go to the therapist? Like from the things that the therapist teaches him during the therapeutic intervention to what he has to come home and share with you, do you feel you've been very helpful?

Glenda: I sit there with him. But then we also invite his younger brother, the three-year-old, so they do things together. And the three-year-old is picking up what the five-year-old is, so they're learning together. And, you know, we come back and try to encourage every time we learn something different. And it -- it's helping him from where -- at the beginning of Head Start he really didn't know anything, but now he's ready to go to first grade, which -- it's like he's skipping kindergarten.

Jarma: Wow. Glenda: So he's becoming more advanced than what we thought he was going to, you know, amount to. So a lot of encouragement helps him jump ahead.

Jarma: So those together-time activities are very instrumental for him, for his other siblings. What are some other things that you all do together?

Glenda: We -- we do a lot together. We do -- you know, we work at the -- my nursing home. We work with the elderly on a daily -- daily basis, or weekend basis. When I get off work they're over there hanging around, playing with the old people. And they love to hear their stories so... Then we do traditional things every other week, or every other month.

Jarma: Can you share some of the traditional things? What might be some examples of... Glenda: In our tradition, we have a lot of like, you know, squaw dances, dances, you know, basic -- like rodeo. Then your basic, you know, herding sheep and -- and tending to the livestock -- you know, horses, cows, sheeps, chickens, dogs, cats, you know. We take care of that stuff and they learn how to be responsible for them.

Jarma: Right, and you used the word responsible a lot, so that means in your -- in your culture, in your family, in your home, in your community, responsibility means a whole lot. And if -- and when your child is learning that you've -- well, you can obviously say -- I can obviously see that your main -- making sure that that transcends or transitions from home to school to wherever he goes.

Glenda: Because, you know, as a single parent, you're not just doing the mother part, you're doing the father part, which -- my dad, my uncles, my brothers step in as the fatherly figure for him and -- or for both of them, and they like to do that. They just like to help out. They learn stuff from them, then what I can teach them.

Jarma: So if we had to say -- if you had to tell us today the things about Head Start, what would be the one thing that you value most about your Head Start experience, the Head Start experience for your child? What would be some --

one -- the one thing you could share? Or maybe even a few things?

Glenda: Like, you know, I once was in Head Start. I went two years, so I'm also a Head Start graduate, and I've seen a lot of changes. I've seen how it makes you, like, a better person and helps you succeed in life. Because they teach you some things that we are very limited to what we were taught. And, you know, leadership is what he's learning from -- "My mommy spends all this time at meetings, but she comes back and spends time with me. And she's trying to help - not just me, she helps the other kids."

So, you know, when I come to a meeting, he's, "Oh yeah, that's my mommy sitting right there. She's the president, and she's doing all this for us, not just me." And he -- you know, he loves that. "My mommy's on this... My mommy helps me here." They work with the old people. "I know where my mommy works." And, you know, spending time with him is what he loves. And I don't mind spending time with him whenever I can.

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