

National Head Start Association 37th Annual Parent Conference, San Jose, CA - Parent Interview: Virgie Wynn Martin

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Jarma WRIGHTEN: Hi, Virgie. Thank you for coming today. I'm so excited to have you come share your story about Head Start and how you've been involved as a community rep or policy chair, and also how you are involved in your child's educational world. So I'd like you to get started with sharing what it's all about.

Virgie Martin: Well, my daughter is Mikayla Martin and she is four years old, and this is her second year in Head Start. I'm very fortunate for the program and just -- some family advocates came and approached my husband and I about being involved 'cause we were volunteering regularly. And we said, "Well, let's give this a try." Being -- I started on the -- on the Parent Board and from there volunteering led us to the SPPC.

And from there I'm the secretary on the SPPC and went to the city-wide Policy Council -- made me a delegate. And I said yes, I'd be the Sergeant-of-Arms of the city-wide Policy Council. It had been a great reward with all the tools that I'm learning from the other parents and the advocates in the community and community reps. Taking some of that information and applying it in our -- at our Head start location and getting more parents involved in their children's lives because they are our future. They're the wonders of the world. So it's been very rewarding.

Jarma: And we so appreciate you. And you mentioned SPPC; can you tell us what that is? Virgie: It's a -- it's a -- it's in between. It's a state -- it's a state thing far as our location and what we do is -- it's a governed body for the actual Parent Board. Jarma: Mm hmm.

Virgie: So basically, we make the decisions on that board to help policies go into law for our bylaws for the Parent Board and implementing new ideas. We bring, also, those ideas to the city-wide Policy Council and then, again, it goes to the state level of boards.

Jarma: Okay, very good, very clear. So now that you've shared all that and you've been enroll -- in -- involved in Head Start for -- for this period of time, how does it -- how has it helped you or influenced you to be a parent as a first teacher for your child? What are some of the values in -- in it?

Virgie: It's definitely made me a better wife, a better mother. Just being more involved has made my daughter much happier. I know growing up my parents weren't able to do those things for us. I was a latch-key child. They always were constantly working. And I now have the opportunity to make a change in my daughter's life by being able to read to her, going on classroom field trips, taking seminars and classes on, you know, how dealing with just the social and emotional things that goes on in her life, how to approach those things in a way that she can understand and that I can understand her,...

...taking the time out to talk to her at her level, and she appreciates that. She appreciates -- you can tell in the behavior; you can tell the -- the relationship we have. And as a four-year-old, you wouldn't think that a child has so many questions and so many ideas, and the imagination is so broad. It has -- Head Start has took her from, you know, learning her ABCs, 123s to learning how to read at four years old -- learning sight words and colors and shapes and sizes.

And teaching other children and helping them... It's just -- and then when we take it home, we remember that it was a nurturing environment at Head Start and to bring those things amongst other kids, far as maybe my nephews or my nieces or other family and friends, and passing the materials along for their -- to their parents for their children. And it's just about making a change, and if you pass along that information, I've noticed, at least in my community and my family and my Head Start family -- I call all of them my children.

You know, I have over 150 kids cause they're my children at Head Start. I feel responsible for them, and it's helping me to -- and my family and other people -- advocating to them and letting them know that your word and your opinion does count. And that helped by -- you know, when we tell these parents your opinion counts, but the advocates and the people that works with us -- excuse me -- they support us. Jarma: Mm hmm.

Virgie: They make you feel that way. You can feel the love when you go into a classroom. You can feel that that teacher cares. When my daughter misses school, they call and say, "Hey, is Mikayla okay today? You know, we were concerned; we didn't see her in school." Or if I may miss a meeting or something, they're gonna call me before I call them... Jarma: That's right.

Virgie: ...to let them know. Just being on top of what you know best and -- and that's what makes a difference.

Jarma: I love the way you summarized it all. Head Start does make a difference, and just being a part -- it seems like you really found a lot of value in participating and sharing your love and your -- your experiences with the children and the teachers. So we always say thank you because we need more parents like you in the community. What would be the advice you would give to other parents as we begin to think about moving Head Start forward? What's the one thing you would tell other parents?

Virgie: I would say -- sorry, it's just -- it's -- that's -- it's my family, you know. I would say do the very best you can in being part of your children life. We rush our children to grow up and we can't wait 'til they get older. But we -- if we stop back and just watch our children, we could advocate for them -- advocate as they go into high school and middle school and elementary school.

Jarma: Mm hmm. Virgie: Be a part of their life. Stop and talk to them and see how they're feeling. Just ask questions -- because we, as parents, can leave our children but our children can't leave us. Jarma: That's right.

Virgie: And go with what you know is best, because you know your child better than the advocates, better than the teachers. Go with your gut feeling and just spread the word. If you can spread that word and just say, "I can take one hour a week, or maybe even two hours a month to go to a parent meeting," just that two hours -- we go to work...

Jarma: Mm hmm.

Virgie: ...forty hours a week... Jarma: That's right. Virgie: ...but we can take the two hours a month just to be part of our children's lives and their atmosphere. It makes a world of a difference.

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-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

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