

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

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Jarma Wrihten: We're at the National Indian Head Start Director's Association Conference, and today we've invited Ms. Brenda to share her parent as teacher in the home story. So to get started, I'd like Brenda to tell us a little about herself.

Brenda Nance: My name is Brenda Nance, and I reside in Caddo County, in a small town -- Gracemount, Oklahoma. And I became involved with my daughter -- you know, with her Head Start -- as a parent Policy Council member. And I later became involved when I wanted to do more than just volunteer in the classroom; I also wanted to work for the Head Start program.

Jarma: All right. So, they're lucky to have you, then. Brenda: Yes. [Laughs]

Jarma: So, today we're going to talk about how important it is for parents to be role models for their children. We know that in the early years, it's so important that our parents are involved in our lives. There's vast experiences that we get because Mom and Dad are there -- or some significant other, adult -- and so what we'd like you to do is share how you have supported your child's growth and development. Tell us what your daughter or son's name is.

Brenda: Her name is Hannah Steinberg, and she's currently five years old. Jarma: She's five years old. So, is she still in Head Start or transitioning to kindergarten? Brenda: No, she's just graduated, so she is in transition.

Jarma: Okay. She is in transition. So, now you've got both ways -- both -- two angles to go from, so we'd like to kind of get you started on the foundations. Just tell us, like, how did you support her learning while she was in Head Start? What were some fun together-time activities that you all were involved in? And, you know...

Brenda: Okay. Well, I'd like to begin with -- it started really with my son, so I'm also a past parent -- Head Start parent, and at first, I used to utilize the Head Start program as a child care, and I didn't do the parent -- I didn't understand, you know? And it was, you know, over 10 years ago. But when my daughter was enrolled, you know, I became more involved and had an understanding how essential it was in our community.

So it did -- I did a little volunteer, you know, in the classrooms, and they had their election for parent, you know, Policy Council, and -- and I said, "Okay, I -- I'll -- I'll join. [Laughs] Sure, go ahead and elect me." And I became a chairperson, and then I got to know the staff and the teachers more.

Jarma: Mm hmm. Brenda: And so I regularly visit the -- you know, the classroom to see how my daughter is doing, you know. Spoke with the teachers -- What can I do more at home? -- you know, because she started off as the three-year-old program -- you know, as far as ABC's and recognizing her name, and spelling her name. And -- and they gave me wonderful activities, and they had us participate also in the family nights for their workshops.

Jarma: What were some of the things that you all did on the family nights?

Brenda: Just a lot of things -- maybe food experiments, and also crafts -- making crafts. But you participate with your child, you know -- you have your child paint and -- and everything. And how I utilized that at home was -- my husband is an artist, and so now we do that at home. We have like at least one hour a night where she paints -- and it's all different kinds of paints, you know, including watercolors and -- and we have her express herself that way artistically.

Jarma: And that's such a really good way to say, "Freedom," you know, and then they're learning more than just the art

when they're doing that. Brenda: Yes.

Jarma: So, if you had to talk about her self-confidence or her confidence level, how would you describe what you've done as a parent and a teacher to help build that self-confidence in her?

Brenda: Well, she was definitely a -- a shy child, you know. She was -- she expressed more when she was at home, and she became more sociable -- wouldn't play with the other children, speak to other adults. And so I found dramatic play was -- you know, was the best and to help with her socialism.

Jarma: Okay. So social skills have been really enhanced as a result of that. Brenda: Yes. Jarma: Yes. So how would you describe your -- the way -- or just tell us actually, how you see Head Start as a value to you in your role in Policy Council, in your role as a parent and a teacher -- how do you see its value?

Brenda: Community involvement, you know, especially with -- you know, with your children, is -- is very essential. And it's not only essential for yourself, but it brings pride into your child. It brings honor into the family when you participate, even if it's one time a month. You know, your child is actually proud, of, you know, Mom or Dad, you know, or the grandparent, you know -- that Mommy was there, you know, Mommy helped me and -- and everything, but not just also your child, but the classroom itself if you volunteer at least once a month. Yeah.

Jarma: And I think several parents said the same thing, so I guess that's validation enough to know that being involved means a whole lot to the children. Even when the other children see you, they say "Oh wow, her mom comes all the time." You become a familiar face; you're a family now. It -- it makes it a whole family. If you had to give other parents words of advice or encouragement, what would be some of the things that you would say about being the first and most important teacher in your child's life?

Brenda: Participate. Participate -- just take that time, you know, maybe one minute a day. It really does make a difference. Jarma: Mm hmm. Anything else you want to share about just being that role model for your child?

Brenda: Well -- [Laughs] -- now it's harder because, you know, she's going to kindergarten. Well... It's just being there, you know, in her classroom, and everything, I learn more about my child. Jarma: And so, what will you do to make the big difference for her as she transitions, because kindergarten is a bigger step, and -- new friends, new teacher, different from the Head Start environment -- how would you support her?

Brenda: Well, first off, you know, visiting the school -- even pointing it out throughout the summer, you know, "This is where you're going to go." And when enrollment comes, be there with them during enrollment, meet the teachers, and especially first day of school. [Laughs]

Jarma: Especially the first day of school. Brenda: Especially. Jarma: Those are the days that become the most hectic -- not only for the teachers, but for the child... Brenda: For the parents... Jarma: ...and for the parents, as well.
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