

## Head Start: 50th Birthday Block Party

Clarence Small: Greetings, Head Start. Welcome to our Office of Head Start National Block Party Broadcast Celebration. I'm Clarence Small, Regional Program Manager from the Kansas City Regional Office. My staff and I work with many programs, large and small, in big cities such as St. Louis, Missouri, and in rural areas, like Hiawatha, Kansas, throughout the Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas region, which is the Heartland of America. And I'm pleased to be here to be part of this celebration. We're joining you live from Campagna Center, Annual Fall Festival in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside our Nation's Capital. I'm here with Tammy Mann, President and C.E.O. of the Campagna Center. Tammy, thanks so much for sharing your fall festival with the Head Start Nation.

Tammy Mann: Well, thank you, Clarence. I'm delighted to be here with our parents, family, and staff, celebrating this wonderful milestone. We certainly have a lot to be proud of, and I hope there are many celebrations going on across the country marking this great moment.

Small: Great. Programs all across the nation are tuning in from their local events, connected together for this historic virtual National Block Party to honor 50 years of Leading the Way. We have a proud history to celebrate. Let's take a minute to reflect back on how we got started and see some of the Head Start program's major milestones over the past 50 years.

[Video begins] President Lyndon Johnson: We set out to make certain that poverty's children would not be forevermore poverty's captives. The program was conceived not so much as a federal effort, but really as a neighborhood effort. And the response we have received from the neighborhoods and the communities has been the most stirring and the most enthusiastic of any peacetime program that I can remember. We called our program project Head Start.[Video ends]

Woman #1: Growing up as a migrant farm worker child, I can relate to a lot of these kids and what they're going through. And I just want to be able to provide a better future for these kids and let them see that an education is achievable.

Woman #2: I as a parent feel very part of what's going on with my child by being involved.

Woman #3: You know why I like museums? Because sometimes when I see a piece of art, it inspires me to read books I've never even thought of reading before! [ all singing in Spanish ]

Woman #4: [ singing in foreign language ]

Woman #5: You could feel it in the air in terms of the level of commitment that folks had to making sure that this program was gonna be there again. And this is a program where in terms of their facility was totally devastated.

Woman #6: The world of a child is bubbling with wonder and creativity every single day, and it is overflowing with limitless possibilities. They can be anyone, and they can do anything, and so can you.

Small: Did you like that? [ cheers and applause ] It's always good to know how Head Start began and to remember all that we -- and I said "we" -- have done in our 50-year history to help fulfill the Nation's promise of opportunities for children and families. As President Johnson said, Head Start was conceived as a neighborhood effort. So it's all of you at each and every one of your programs who makes Head Start extraordinary and meaningful for our children, our families, and our communities. Speaking of our neighborhood, we have a very, very special guest from "Sesame Street" to help us celebrate.

Elmo: [ laughs ] Hello, everybody! Wait! Elmo heard that Head Start is having a birthday -- a 50th birthday! Yay! Boy, to celebrate, Elmo learned how to count all the way up to 50. Here we go. 1...2 -- what? Huh? Too long? Oh, okay. [ laughs ] Boy, and just like Head Start, kids, Elmo loves school, too! And Elmo thinks your Head Start is very special. Elmo wants to thank everybody at Head Start for making a difference. Elmo lives on Sesame Street, so Elmo couldn't come to your block party -- boy. Oh! So Elmo will just say happy birthday, Head Start! Yay! [ laughs ] Elmo loves you! Thank you! Have fun!

Small: Can we all give Elmo a great, big thank you for the great wishes? Wow. Our celebration of Head Start would not be complete without hearing from the National Director of the Office of Head Start, Dr. Blanca Enriquez. Dr. Enriquez had the opportunity to join festivals with -- festivities, I should say -- with the program in Dayton, Ohio. And she wants to share some of the highlights with us all.

Dr. Enriquez: Hello, Head Start family. Happy, happy birthday. I am glad that you're joining us for this Head Start Block Party, and I am delighted to be with you joining in this party from one of our Head Start programs, the Miami Valley Child Development Center in Dayton, Ohio -- a very unique and very excellent program. This block party is perhaps the biggest party that the office of Head Start has ever sponsored, and I am delighted that joining us, are our Head Start programs, Early Head Start programs, Migrant and Seasonal programs, Tribal programs, and Early Head Start Childcare programs from across the nation in celebrating our 50th birthday.

But what are we celebrating today? Well, today, we're celebrating you. We're celebrating us. We're celebrating children -- over a million children ages zero to 5 who come to our Head Start programs and who are being prepared to be not only school-ready, but college-ready. We are celebrating 1,600 grantees who are high-performing organizations and leaders in the early-childhood field. We are also celebrating staff -- excellent staff across all of our programs -- who as a team are dedicated and passionate professionals, helping and preparing children not only cognitively, but linguistically. They keep the children safe. They keep the children nurtured. And, as I mentioned, preparing them to be school-ready and college-ready.

And we are celebrating our parents -- our parents who entrust their children to us every day and who volunteer and extend their culture and their wisdom to our Head Start program staff. Head Start parents are the voice of Head Start, and we are also celebrating our community partnerships -- those people in the community that work hand in hand with us and help us to strengthen our families and our communities. Today, we are celebrating 50 years of this success, and I salute you today. Thank you. So, today we are celebrating Happy Birthday of Head Start. 50 years! Can we say "yay! 50 years!"?

Girl: Yeah!

Dr. Enriquez: And we are going to say a cheer for Head Start. Are we ready, boys and girls?

All: Yeah!

Dr. Enriquez: All right. 1...2...3.

All: !!musica! a la bio, a la bao !!musica! !!musica! a la bim bom ba !!musica! !!musica! head start, head start, rah, rah, rah! !!musica!

Small: Thank you, Dr. Enriquez. And special shout-out to the children and the staff at Miami Valley Head Start. What a wonderful example of how unique and special each program is. Miami Valley Head Start program I understand is located on a working farm. Our programs truly reflect the many cultures and languages of our children and our family. And because of the variety of neighborhoods and community environments of each Head Start, we know that programs are often a lifeline to our families. What better way to bring that ideal to life than to hear a personal story? With me, I'm inviting up Ms. Sonia Middleton. Her children went to the Albany Community Head Start program in New York. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Sonia Middleton: Thank you for having me.

Small: Great. How are you and your children doing?

Middleton: They're doing wonderful. I have four children who went to Albany County Head Start program. Three of them now are in college, and one is a senior in Northwest High School in Germantown, Maryland, so I'm very proud of them.

Small: All right! Great. [ applause ] Please, just share with us how you and your children and you as a parent benefited from Head Start?

Middleton: My first child was enrolled in the Albany County In the Albany County Early Head Start home-based Program. I was 19 years old. And with that program, Vicki Proper, who was my family support advocate and home visitor at the time, even at the young age of 1, when my daughter was enrolled. and she helped me to grow, not only as a parent, but also professionally, and really helped my children to grow and aspire to be something within the four years they had at Head Start, each of them.

Small: Talk a little bit about the professionalism. How has it helped you?

Middleton: I call Head Start my stair-stepper. When I was 20, I was interviewed for a bus monitor for Albany County Head Start. And from there, I also became a teacher assistant, a teacher, a family support advocate, and now I'm an Early Head Start Director for Centronia in Washington, D.C.

Small: All right! Thank you. [ applause ] You are such an inspiration to all of us. And while we were setting up, I heard you say that Head Start was -- how did you say it? -- was a bloodline.

Middleton: It starts in my blood. [ laughs ] From the moment I met all the staff at Head Start, they became my second family. to this day, I keep in touch with every Head Start person that helped me in Albany, New York. When I told them I was becoming Director, they even came and celebrated me just for becoming a director. They're there, they're encouraging, they're empowering, and they've been like that since I was 20. So they're in my blood, and I talk about Head Start everywhere I go. [ laughs ]

Small: All right. Well, thank you so much.

Middleton: Thank you, Clarence.

Small: Glad to have you here to be a part of the celebration.

Middleton: Thank you. [ applause ]

Small: As we just heard, all of you in local programs influence the lives of children and families each and every day. Would you like to know what we do as the Head Start Nation each and every day? Well, we were supposed to have Yasmina Vinci, Executive Director of the National Head Start Association to be here with us during this great celebration, but unfortunately, she became sick. And we do wish her a speedy recovery. But we have Tammy Mann, who's going to come and stand in her place and share with us and just give us a glimpse of what's happening in Head Start Nation every day and every year. So, Tammy, come on. tell us a few things.

Tammy Mann: Thank you, Clarence. You know, sometimes, in the busyness of being on the ground in our programs every day, we can lose sight of just how much is happening around the country. It's amazing when you stop to think that every day, more than 1 million children have access to comprehensive high-quality services being delivered in communities across the country, urban and rural, in Alaska and as far away as the Pacific Islands. Every day, 116,000 teaching staff are devoting themselves to helping to inspire learning and a love for play in our programs around the country.

Every day, Head Start provides 130 children with special needs with access to early-intervention services. And every day, 45,000 children who are homeless have access to meals and Head Start services. Every day, 20,000 family-service professionals partner with families in our communities to help them plan and achieve their goals.

Every year, more than a million parents and volunteers across the country devote themselves to volunteering in programs to help support our children. Since 1965, together, we have provided 32 million children across the country with access to high-quality comprehensive services in Head Start. We have so much to be proud about, and it is my sincere hope that as we celebrate on this day that we will rededicate and commit ourselves to making it possible for many more children to come to enjoy the benefits that this rich program provides.

Small: Wow. 32 million reasons to be proud. And it takes all of us, federal staff, program staff, families, and communities, working hard to bring Head Start to life every day for all our children. Yes, children are the Head Start passion. They are who and why we exist. And the children are just as diverse as the programs are. What kind of celebration would it be if we didn't have our children represented?

Linda Smith, who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development for the Administration for Children and Families in Washington, D.C., will find out what Head Start means from some of our children here in Alexandria. So let's hear from them. [ applause ]

Linda Smith: Thank you, Clarence. And I have here with me four very special guests, and they've been very patient waiting for us. And we really want to talk about Head Start and all of what they do. So, first off, let's tell them our names. What's your name?

Caden: Caden!

Smith: Good for you. what's your name?

Rita: Rita.

Smith: Rita. Okay, and your name?

Oduna: Oduna.

Smith: Can you say it louder so everyone can hear you?

Oduna: Oduna.

Smith: There you go. And?

Arianna: Arianna.

Smith: Big voice. That's great. Well, we're gonna talk a little bit about Head Start. And all of you go to Head Start. is that right?

Caden: Yes!

Smith: Yay! Okay. So, I want to hear, what's the best thing about Head Start for you?

Caden: Play outside!

Smith: Play outside. That's good. How about you?

Arianna: Stay in.

Smith: Stay inside? You like to stay in? Okay. And how about you?

Rita: Play in the playground.

Smith: Play out in the playground. Well, that's great, because everybody needs to get a lot of outside activity, don't they, so we can stay fit? Do you all eat lunch at Head Start?

Caden: Yes!

Smith: And what's your favorite food?

Arianna: My favorite food is -- my favorite food is apples,

Smith: An apple? Oh, that's a good one. How about you?

Oduna: Doughnuts.

Smith: Doughnuts? You get doughnuts at Head Start? [ laughter ] Okay. What do you like to eat when you eat at Head Start?

Rita: I like ice cream.

Smith: Ice cream. Everybody likes ice cream, don't they?

Caden: Me, me!

Smith: Okay.

Caden: Apple!

Smith: You like apples? I think they're the best.

Caden: There's something else.

Smith: Okay. You can say something else.

Caden: Pumpkin pie!

Smith: Oh, pumpkin pie. That's another good one, isn't it?

Arianna: I'm talking about candy apples.

Smith: Oh, candy apples. Well, we're having a little fall festival.

We'll see what they have over there, okay, when we get done with this? Okay, so, you know, today, we're celebrating a birthday party for Head Start. and Head Start is 50 years old. Now, how old are you guys?

Arianna: I'm 6, I think.

Smith: You think you're 6? How about you?

Oduna: 6.

Smith: 6. Oh, I think we're maybe upping it here, huh? Uh-huh. And how old are you?

Caden: 5.

Smith: 5. Okay. So, Head Start is 50. So, how is that? Are you even close to 50?

Caden: Uh, no.

Smith: No. Who would be close to 50? Really? I thought you were gonna say me. [ laughter ] I was only hoping.

Caden: You!

Smith: Thank you. I like that. Okay. So, what we want to do now is talk a little bit more about your favorite things. And, so, besides, you know, what you do every day, what else do you come to school, and what's fun? What are you learning?

Arianna: We learn at school letters.

Smith: Letters? Oh, that's good. What are you learning?

Rita: Uh...

Smith: Huh?

Rita: To play.

Smith: To play. And that's really important -- learn to play well -- isn't it? And how about you? What else do you learn?

Caden: [ speaking indistinctly ]

Smith: Remember, we have to use loud voices so they can hear us.

Caden: [ speaking indistinctly ]

Rita: I get to go...

Caden: I want to do it. After I clean up, then after I go to sleep, then I go to the park.

Smith: Oh, go to the park. Okay. All righty. Well, what we really want to do now is something special. And that is we want to say thank you and happy birthday to Head Start. So, before we do that, we're gonna have some friends join us here so they can help us wish Head Start a happy birthday. We want to say thank you to all the parents here and all over the country that help support Head Start and make it such a good program and the communities and the staff. We have really good teachers, don't we? Do we all have good teachers in our Head Start program?

Caden: Yes!

Smith: Yes. I know we do. So we want to say thank you to everybody out there who's been so important to Head Start all over this country. So, I think what we want to do now is end by wishing head start a great, big, happy birthday. Can we all get our flags? Okay. Let's get our flags. Are you not gonna get your flag? Okay, okay. Okay, so, what we want to do is when I say --

Arianna: Where's mine?

Smith: Okay. You don't have one? Here's yours, sweetie. or did I take yours?

Arianna: You did that one.

Smith: Oh, okay. Well, this one will do. They're all the same. Okay? So, now, we're all getting together, and what we're gonna do is I'm gonna count to three, and we're gonna say "Happy Birthday, Head Start." Okay, can we do that?

Caden: Yes!

Smith: 1...2...3.

All: Happy Birthday --> Head Start!

Small: Oh, Linda, I know we can do better than that!

Smith: Okay.

Small: And let's get the folks in all across America. On the count of three, let's say it together. 1...2...3.

All: Happy Birthday, Head Start!

Smith: Yay!

[ applause ]