

Giving Back: Head Start Changed Me

Melinda George

JARMA WRIGHTEN: Hi, Melinda, thanks for coming. I heard that you have a true story to share with us today, and I am so excited to hear all about it. So as we get started, I'd like to – for you to just tell me how you became involved in Head Start and where you are today.

MELINDA GEORGE: Great. At 18 years old, I entered East Baton Rouge Parish Head Start. I had adopted – my husband and I inherited a child because a family member died. She was four years old – went into Head Start with her. I was – I hadn't gotten a degree in anything. I was real young, newly married, didn't know what I wanted to do in life, and I went into the Head Start center, got her started, and the teacher saw something in me. She kept telling me, "You're a natural for this. Why don't you teach? Why don't you teach?" Well, I got a job as a teacher's aide.

Head Start paid for me to go back to school. I got my AA degree in early childhood education, turned it into a Bachelor's in early childhood education, got a Master's degree in business administration, and I'm now working on my PhD in education and curriculum involvement. During that time, I became a teacher's aide, teacher, center supervisor, content area specialist, social services, and now I'm the assistant director for East Baton Rouge Parish Head Start.

JARMA: You have had a real journey.

MELINDA: Yes, I have, and Head Start's taken it with me.

JARMA: And you are on your way to some great things. But, you know what, you're still in Head Start so that's what's really important, that you've – you've gained it in Head Start and you're still giving it back to Head Start. What advice would you give to other parents about their professional growth and development and how to take this journey that you did?

MELINDA: I think the best advice I could give is what the lady gave me, the "yes, you can" attitude. It's not too hard. A lot of times when I was 18 and I looked at professional people, it was so far from what I thought I could achieve. I never saw myself as a professional like you. And as I began to grow, I began to see if you want people to want more, then you have to show them that it's achievable. That's what Head Start did for me.

JARMA: Wow. You're a true testimony to success, and Head Start should be so proud to have you amongst the professionals, as you would call us. I mean, I'm just one of Head Start's – I started out pretty much on a Head Start foundation, too – a passion to work with young children three to five. But we're happy to have you and know that you have given much. And like they always say, "to much who is given, much is received," and you are doing just that. So we appreciate you.

We thank you for all that you do. And the last question before you leave – how, now, do you take the time to just enjoy life and then share these moments with your children? What are some of the teachable moments?

MELINDA: Well, some of the things that I enjoy doing – I want my children to learn to give back. It's – it's the Christmas season, and so one of the things that I've learned about Head Start is that we have to keep giving back. So my children, they don't do Christmas lists – lists for themselves. They have to do a list for somebody else. Tell me something that we, as a family, are going to do for somebody else. And I think – I learned that in Head Start. It's about giving back. You don't just make it, you reach back and you help somebody else, too. So that's what I do for my family – that's just part of who I am now. Head Start has changed me.