

## Standing Tall Through It All With Head Start

Tess Dunlap

JARMA WRIGHTEN: Welcome, Tess. We're happy to have you here.

TESS DUNLAP: Hi.

JARMA: We're here the Parent's Place at the ECLKC and I am so excited that you decided to share your Head Start story with us, and I can't wait to hear it.

TESS: Thank you.

JARMA: So I'd like you to get started.

TESS: Okay. Well, my name is Tess and I'm a past parent, and my child is now 30 years old. And she attended a Shasta Head Start in Redding, California. When I first heard about Head Start, I thought, "Wow, free babysitting." Little did I know that Head Start was nothing like that. I was talked into volunteering in the classroom and I watched how the teachers worked with the kids. And it was – it was the positive way they spoke to the kids; it all seemed like play, but – but soon I understood that all the kids were learning. That was really neat.

And this learning could be done at home with dishes, with food, with laundry, games, in areas such as math and science and motor skills. But, in the meantime, our home was a disaster – living with an alcoholic in it and a drug addict. But not only did Head Start help my children in the learning but they helped me. My home visitor referred me to child care and counseling and – and that was just really helpful. It just helped me through a real hard period in my life. But because of Head Start, my children had a wonderful, wonderful, positive experience – learning experience. And – and I learned I could teach my kids at home.

JARMA: That's right.

TESS: Yeah, that's really neat. And – but most of all, I was supported by a loving, caring staff. And I became a productive member of society and was able to move forward to receive my Bachelor's degree and to support my kids. So I've been working at Head Start now for 25 years, and I just thank you, Head Start. And I thank God, too, and – for all those who support Head Start.

JARMA: So you sound like a true testimony of a gift to Head Start. Head Start's been a gift to you, but you've been a gift to Head Start and we're happy to have a parent like you. And in your role now as a part of the Head Start community and being a parent, you mentioned some things that you do to engage your child at home, and that's like working on the maths and the arts and the sciences. So what other things do you do to spend together time?

TESS: Well, my daughter is 30 now, but we just... I mean, going back, I remember just learning – we were poor and we learned with – I had my pots and pans out. Those were the toys; and the toys were books that were on the bookshelves. She could look at them and – and I went to yard sales to get things, and just laundry and those kind of things. So I just tell parent – would like to tell parents, you can do learning without all the expensive toys. You can learn with things around the house. That's how your kids learn, with simple things around the house, and it's free. You already have it. So...

JARMA: You're right, it's free, you already have it so you don't have to go out and spend all that money. And I think you added that you've gone on to achieve some goals. You mentioned getting your Bachelor's degree. And, because you've received that Bachelor's degree, how do you feel you've made a difference in your life?

TESS: Well, getting the education was just – I didn't ever think I'd get a Bachelor's degree, so for my self-esteem and my confidence, it helped me – helped me in my job, be, like I said, a productive member of society. I didn't think I'd ever get off welfare. I was on welfare and I thought how am I going to ever get off welfare? I didn't know how that was going to happen. So – but I was able to because of getting my degree, because of Head Start. So...

JARMA: And Head Start's proud of you, too.

TESS: Thank you.

JARMA: And so am I.

TESS: Oh, thank you.

JARMA: I mean that was a big step; that's a giant step and you did it.

TESS: Thank you.

JARMA: And so what advice would you give to other parents now?

TESS: Oh boy, just to keep on trying. It's really hard, you know, with the way the economy is, but to keep on trying. And also, through Head Start they have so many services and referrals and resources, use them. If there's something out there, take advantage of it while you can because I know when you're poor there's a lot more resources out there. Use them; don't be embarrassed, and use them. And it'll help you move forward, I mean, we have things at Head Start – we have all kinds of resources and – I don't know – take advantage and use them.