

36th Annual National Head Start Training Conference: Parent Interview: Ebony Hinton

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrihten: Hi, Ebony. Ebony Hinton: Hello. Jarma: Thank -- greetings, and thank you for coming out to the ECLKC Parent Place today. Today, we hope that this opportunity will allow you to share your success story as parent as teacher in the home and different experiences with other parents. We want to spread this good news across the nation, so we'd like you to share a little bit with us about your child.

Tell us how old he is or she is, and then kind of give us a little bit of background about which Head Start program he attends, and -- and then we'll get started on the kinds of things we would love to hear from you about how you support your child's learning in the home and elsewhere.

Ebony: My son is four years old. He's currently attending the Bethel Head Start Lanefield Center in Buffalo, New York. He's learned a lot going there. Jarma: What's his name?

Ebony: His name is Bryce Hinton. He's -- he's learning a lot from this center. He's actually amazing me with how much he's learned. I mean, when he first started, I mean, I couldn't get him to do homework. You'd literally have to try to fight with him, but now he loves it. He loves it. I don't have a problem. He goes, "I have homework," and he sits down. He doesn't -- it's to the point now that he doesn't even want me to help him with his homework, because he says, "I can do it."

Jarma: So it's amazing that he likes to say "homework" instead of, "I have some fun things to do." Most kids will say, "I have fun things to play with," and he looks at it -- looks at it as homework now. Ebony: Yes, he knows he has homework to do, and he knows he can't do anything else until he -- his homework is done. And he knows that, but he takes pride in doing it by himself.

Jarma: So when he brings those home activities home -- I'm going to like to refer to it as "fun home learning experiences" or -- or "activities" -- that the teachers are asking you all to participate in as parents, how do you all use that time to just -- call it your "together time activities?"

Ebony: Oh, we do a lot of together activities on a regular basis. He likes to read. We read certain books. He likes comic books more, I mean, than anything. So if that's what he likes to read, then that's what -- that's what we'll read. I used to think he was able to read a long time ago, but I realized he saw objects and identified with it and pronounced it. A lot of times, we would be out in a mall or somewhere, and he sees something, he goes, "Oh, that was a word for today at school, and it's..." And he would, you know, sound it out for me, and I was just amazed by that.

And I was just like "Wow," you know, "he knows all the sounds and all the letters." And I was just -- I'm amazed at all the things that he's learned. I mean, I have two step-children that -- that's also living with me, a thirteen-year-old and an eight-year-old. And the eight-year-old never did go to Head Start, and I think he would have benefitted from it because he's having a hard time himself learning. So, I think, had he been enrolled with a program like Bethel, or Head Start program period, then he wouldn't have as many problems or obstacles that he has now.

Jarma: Oh wow, that's a wonderful comment to share because Head Start is one -- one of the -- the foundation. And I know that many parents come and tell us that Head Start's been a true benefit to their children, as well as to themselves. And just -- this segues very nicely. How has -- how has your involvement in Head Start helped you really develop yourself, as well -- in addition to developing your child, like helping him with things like sorting and matching and counting, and -- and, like you mentioned earlier, naming objects and identifying pictures, et cetera?

Ebony: Oh, he loves it. We were out to dinner, and the place we were at had a thousand TVs in it. I don't -- I mean, he got up and he's like, "Mommy, can I count the TVs?" And I'm like, "Go ahead." And I had -- and I mean, you had to

go to each room, and I allowed him to go to each room. He comes back, and he's like, "There's 20 TVs in here!"

I mean, he was just like, "They don't need this many TVs in here." I mean -- I mean, we do all kinds of things, like with the menu. The things on the menu item -- I allow him to look at the menu and tell me what it is that he -- he wants, and he can even sometimes tell me what letter it starts with, or he'll sound it out. And he -- he orders his own food; I don't have to do it for him.

Jarma: He's on a -- he's on a great path because he's learning to do all of that. So those exposures out in -- in the community as well, be it McDonald's, or wherever you typically go, he really learns -- he's learned how to gauge his conversations, and so there's good communication. Excellent. So, how do you feel you have prepared him for school readiness? Is he going to transition into kindergarten, or he will be returned to Head Start?

Ebony: Oh, with no problem -- with no problem. I mean, Head Start is an awesome program. I've also become a policy rep. At first I didn't think I really wanted to be involved, but it's -- I'm realizing more and more how much I'm learning and growing, and understanding how important it is for parents to be involved in their -- their children's education. I mean, it's -- it's so important. And they've given us tools to also grow as parents.

We also took the EPIC classes, which is Every Person -- Involved Children, right? -- Influences Children, I'm sorry. EPIC. But it was a four-week program that we did two hours once a week, and it was parents sharing ideas with each other. And we also had a facilitator who would -- you know, we had activities that we could do and learn. I learned a lot. I learned a lot because it's hard with, you know, the kids in the home, and I -- I actually went from no kids to three kids quickly.

Jarma: But it's a blessing, as well. Ebony: It was. It's definitely a blessing. And I'm learning -- and I'm learning every day. And I believe that I was put in the kids' life to, you know, help them grow. And Bethel Head Start has taught me to be a better person, a better parent actually.

Jarma: So if you had to summarize in just a few words, what would be your advice or tips or thoughts to share with other parents so that we can spread this to other parents in terms of being that parent as the first teacher and your influences are the mark that you -- you really are making upon -- upon your children?

Ebony: Be involved. Get involved with your -- your children's school, their education. Talk to their teachers; know what's going on with your child. A lot of people don't understand why their children are behaving a certain way, they're doing certain things. If -- if you don't get involved, how will -- how will you know? You know, they spend a lot of time at school. They spend eight -- you know, like literally, eight hours a day in a classroom with someone else, and then you have no idea. If you don't communicate with that person, you know, what they're doing every day...

...how are you -- how are you supposed to know what -- what they're doing when they get home? And you know, it explains a lot once you get home, and you -- you -- you -- you grow with that, you know? You -- you take your child home, every day you say, okay, you learned this, and you sit down and you talk to your -- your child and say, "Well, your teacher said you need to work on this," or "We're going to work on this."

I mean, it's -- it's not that hard. It's not that hard to be involved; it doesn't take that much time. And if you love your children, then you will -- you will make that effort.

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