

Jarma: Hi, Naomi, how are you?

Naomi: I am well, thank you, and you?

Jarma: I am well. I am well. And welcome to the...um...Parent Place at the ECLKC...

Naomi: Thank you.

Jarma: ...which is the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

We're happy to have you here today to share your awesome story. Heard so much about the wonderful things that you do and you've done, so I'd love for you to share how you became involved in Head Start, how you support your child's learning in Head Start, and...um...just give some strategies and tips and thoughts for what other parents can do.

Naomi: Okay. Well, I...uh...have one son. Quinton is four years old and that's my mini-me, so we do everything together. We...our time together is we spend...um...specifically usually Saturdays -- that's mommy and me time, and we take that day starting in the morning and fix breakfast together. We will play and dance throughout the house all day...um...picking up on little things...um...sharing...uh...exercise, nutrition.

We'll talk about it all. Anything he's doing in school that he wants to work on we talk about it all in games and fun, and he's learning the whole time. We

always have a special lunch together. He gets to pick the restaurant and we go out. We will...um...talk about his schooling and things he wants to do. He teaches me during these times so that I know how he wants to learn and how he's being taught in school. He really enjoys it.

Jarma: Wow. You all sound like you have so much fun together. And he sounds like a wonderful little boy. How old did you say he was?

Naomi: Four.

Jarma: He's four. Okay. And Head Start...wha...what's the name of the Head Start program?

Naomi: Bellville SIUE Head Start. I'm at the Bellville center.

Jarma: Okay, at the Bellville Center.

Naomi: Mhm.

Jarma: And since you've been involved in...in the Head Start, in, you know, it seems like you've been involved in so many ways, share with us...tell us about some of the things that you've done in Head Start to make your involvement meritable as a parent and as a teacher.

Naomi: Well, at Head Start, I am on the parent committee for the Bellville

center. I'm the chairperson there. And so I help to organize the parents and the things that we need to do in the classrooms for our children. Field trips that we need to help with and volunteer for.

If we're having special reading events or other...um....organizations may come in for holidays such as Easter or Christmas, they'll come in and dress up as Santa Claus, read books to the children, gives them...give them a little gift, and we'll have something focused around whatever book they're reading to teach them. We recently did one with...uh...The Little Gingerbread Man. That was fun, the children loved it.

We do dental...um...workshops and we do that through the college, so college students and interns will come in and do dental exams for the children and teach them about their...their dental hygiene. Uh...also I am a member of the policy council, so I am the representative for Bellville for policy council. Well, when I got there it just went on and on. I ended up the vice chairperson there. So I feel like I am busy, I am in Head Start. I am learning -- as much as my son is learning, I am learning every day.

And in that I'm teaching him that you never stop learning. This is something that Mommy's going to do always and you're going to learn too. And you're going to grow and succeed in it every day.

Jarma: Wow. And this...and you mentioned that you were Parent of the Year?

Naomi: Yeah.

Jarma: How did you achieve that?

Naomi: Well I was nominated for...for Parent of the Year in our Bellville center and really I couldn't tell you how I did it. I thought I was just being "Mom." I thought that I was just doing the things that mothers do. You pay attention to your child, you go to school events, you're part of the classroom, you have that special relationship with the teachers and the other staff in the center.

I thought I was just doing normal mom stuff and then I get this recognition. "We want you to write this essay, we're nominating you for Parent of the Year and also for Success Family." I was very proud. I did not make Parent of the Year but I still feel like it. I do.

Jarma: Wow.

Naomi: Every day.

Jarma: Well you brought this to share about the Parent...the essay. Would you like to read some parts of it?

Naomi: Sure. Um...part of it was we needed to tell about...uh...Head Start, how it supported us. What I wrote was, "The Head Start...um...has made it possible

to attend meetings, trainings made available to me. Everyday struggles are made easier by the things I've learned at Head Start trainings. We have special...uh...designation for the center...uh...fathers, called 'DUDEs.'" It's "Dads Undeniably Devoted to Education." We love our dads.

"The men of DUDEs have taught me to better appreciate my husband and all that he does as a father." As a mom, we don't always appreciate what our dads do. And they are really a strong influence, especially on our sons, or really just being in the lives of our children. They need that extra recognition to know they are a powerful force.

Jarma: And what are some of...you mention the DUDEs, so what are some of the fun things that your husband and your son engage in? What are their together times and how does...how does...how does he promote the learning in the home?

Naomi: I married a tool guy. So they are always into tools. They built a go-cart last summer. And Quinton is finally tall enough to reach the pedals so he's driving the go-cart through the yard at his grandfather's house, up and down the street.

It's a slow street, so he's all up and down the street driving the go-cart.

They...um...build other things out in the garage. If he's working on his old car, they will...will...he'll get out there with a wrench and twist..."Look, Mommy, I'm fixing it." We've got it all on video tape watching him fix the car, work on the go-cart, hammering things. We recently redid our bathroom. Quinton

was in there. He paints. He wanted to spackle and do everything.

Jarma: [Laughs]

Naomi: So I let him write his name on the wall. Said that, "This is your mark, this is your bathroom. You're here forever." And I let him write his name on the wall and then I let him paint over it. "So you know it's there, it's just special for you."

Jarma: Oh, wow. That is impressive. And I bet Quinton enjoys having good parents like the two of you.

Naomi: I think he likes us. [Laughs]

Jean Simpson: So...so what would you say to other parents. What other tips would you give other parents about being that support system in the home and just being the role model for their children. What would you leave them with?

Naomi: I would tell them that, "You do have time." I've heard a lot of parents say, "I don't have time to teach my child the...the numbers and letters and colors. I don't have time to sit down and do this." You do have time. Don't sit down and do it. We dance and sing ABCs. We do colors in laundry. "Sort the laundry. You're going to sort, I'm going to fold.

So while I'm folding, you're going to tell me what colors you've got and where

they go. Reds for colors and yellows and blues. We're going to do blacks and grays and we're going to do browns and then we're going to do whites. You're helping me, you're learning how to do your laundry so I don't have to do it when you go to college but also right now you're learning your letters. We're going to count when we go up the stairs to go to bed."

Then I put construction paper on the floor in shapes with words written on them:

"Rectangle"; "Red." "So when we go up the stairs you're going to see 'Red Rectangle.' You're going to read this word and you're going to tell me what this is. So you see 'Red Rectangle' 'Blue Square' 'Purple Circle'."

Jean Simpson: Mmhm.

Naomi: And that's how my son learned his colors. He learned his colors and how to count going up stairs and doing household things. He can mop the floor and he runs the vacuum and he loves it.

Jean Simpson: And you've done a great job because he's learning every...in every way all throughout the house every day. You make your daily routines a part of his learning experiences.

Naomi: Yes.

Jarma: And that's awesome. I want to share with you something that we have from our Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, it's "Seven Super Things Parents Can Do." You're probably already doing half of these things or maybe all of these things, but I want to share it with you and that way you can share it with other parents who are, you know, becoming part of this whole

phenomenon of being parents as teachers in the home.

And then I want to give you a bag to say thank you for your participating with us today and let you know that we have a toolkit inside that's called the Head Start...um...Parent Toolkit, it's an information kit, and we're going to share this with you and hope that you'll review the materials in there.

There's a CD about development and then we also have a resource packet that ha...tells you how to get on to the Learning Center and also some information about preparing your child for future school success. And we want to say thank you and this is our thank you token of appreciation.

Naomi: Thank you.

Jarma: And then before you leave, just ha...one...one last thing. What would you like to see in the future of Head Start?

Naomi: I would like to see Head Start be more...um...public...more out there. I didn't know about Head Start. I kind of just stumbled onto it and now every time I turn around I see people who, women who are pregnant and I tell them, "You can get in Head Start. This is going to help you.

There are benefits out here and things," and young mothers who maybe don't have mothers who are there to teach them things that they need to know in becoming a new mother. Head Start is very beneficial in that. It starts from before birth.

If you sign up for Head Start that early you start then and your child will be already enrolled for development.

Helping you to grow and succeed, that support when you need it, when you just feel like nobody understands, you've got Head Start and they're there for you.

So I would like to see Head Start really be...just get some commercials out there or something to let everyone know the great benefits of Head Start from the very beginning of birth.

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