

36th Annual National Head Start Training Conference Parent Interview: Zachary James

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrighten: Okay greetings, Zachary, how are you today? Zachary: I'm doing fine. Jarma Wrighten: Welcome to the Parent Place at the ECLKC, we're happy to have you today and happy to get ready to listen to a wonderful story about your role as parent as teacher in the home. But before we get started, I'd like you to kind of share a little bit about...um...you and your child in Head Start and what program he attends or she attends?

Zachary: Well, my children that I did have in Head Start, they all moved on. I have eight kids: Five boys and three girls and...uh...they all went through Head Start. Jarma Wrighten: All right. Zachary: The oldest is 24 to...down to the youngest is 11 years old. They all have moved on.

Jarma Wrighten: They've all moved on, but they were definitely products of Head Start. So since you had, you've had all of your children enrolled in Head Start just share your story. Tell us your story about what Head Start has done for you, how Head Start supports you and how Head Start's made a difference in the lives of your children.

Zachary: Um...first...uh...it started out as me going to the Policy Coun... going to school to drop my kids off and just that's all I was doing. Then one day they needed someone to represent, to be on the policy council for it and that's how it all started. And I just said, "Well I'm not going because a bunch of ladies just be talkin' stuff. I'm not going." So, I tried it and now...when I got there I see the bunch of people, "I'm not sitting in this." And then I got the idea what this really was all about and then I've been doing it ever since.

It's almost been 15 years now. And the role hasn't much that changed in what I had...that I had learned so much. Especially with one of my daughters where I was...I was a father where... I couldn't read or write at one time and I had to go back and get my information, get my GED. But it got to a point where my daughter would ask me to read a book and I couldn't read a book to her. And I pretended, "Oh, go tell Mommy," or, "Go tell somebody else." But that part played a big effect on me.

Here's a grown person who don't know how to read or write. So, one day I decided to go back to school and learn just to read and write to my children. So my daughter... Went back and got my GED. I was tested at a...first time I got tested it was like...I was at a third grade level. So worked from three months -- I went from a third grade level to a...to a tenth grade level. And then after that, another three more months I got my GED and guess what? I was excited now.

Jarma Wrighten: I bet you were. Zachary: And guess what I did? My daughter comes to me, "Daddy. Read this book." And guess what? Not only did I read the book, I called all my children and set them all down and read the book to them and that set me on highest height. I never been back the sa...I've never been the same ever since.

And that was a great experience of my life. And...so I learned a lot dealing with the value of being informed, of being with your children, doing the do's and the don'ts and how important that...uh..parents are...whoever's in they child's life can be important if they apply themselves to do the right things and I had to learn the hard way.

I came a long ways but now I have high standards of what...for my kids...what they should be doing, why they should be doing it and let them know the reasons why – that you don't have to be, don't know how to do nothing, all you got to do is ask for help and swallow your pride and get you some help when you don't know something, say it.

It's hard, you know, don't know something, but it's more problem for you if you don't say nothing and you know you need help and you let yourself go on because you're ashamed of somebody saying that you're dumb or you don't know how to do something, so I encourage that in them and dealing with Head Start I learned that the...uh...the curriculum they have from transitioning from...from Early Head to get them to the next level when they transfer them to elementary school.

It's the same different but the standards is different. So the values that we was taught in the Head Start helps them move along that much and they look for certain teachings and doing things descending order, so they look for structure and...um...that carries up so now I'm able to be involved in my kids' life even at another level after Head Start. But Head Start was the key point of getting my family where they supposed to be.

Jarma Wrighten: Wow. That's a beautiful story. So now that you have done all of those things, you've made your own accomplishments and you've been able to transfer those into the home environment, what kinds of things, even at this point do you see that your children are doing differently as a result of your gaining all that experience?

Zachary: Well, I look at my kids now I'm like, they're more motivated and they're...they're excited to do the work and when they do it, they do it. When they put they minds to it and...um...they encourage other people to...uh...get engaged with their homework...to who...to express themself more better. All my kids now be able...they be able to express themself instead of being quiet.

They more...will come tell you to listen. And they know that if you ain't listening to them, they move on to where they can get some help. They don't take "no" for an answer. So... Jarma Wrighten: That's beautiful. Zachary: That helps me out.

Jarma Wrighten: That helps you out so in your role as the parent and the teacher now, you've made great strides and so as you continue to teach them, what...what do they say back to you in exchange? Zachary: Well... Jarma Wrighten: For being that role model.

Zachary: Well they look for me...they're...they're studying more say...say stuff...they do stuff with me more like challenge me of...uh...giving me things to do. Asking me questions and to see the excitement...that...that I have. The energy that I show, puttin' emotion what I do for my kids. They want to see that more out of me. And that brings the best out of me to make me try more harder. There's something I don't know I don't get as scared as...I find out for them.

And...and that's the thing...and I like, "Look. Daddy may not know everything, but I'm going to get you the best help I can." So...it helps one for another so when they do they task...they...I look at they grades and I just look back and say, "Wow." I know how far they come from. And I know when they can do better. And I tell them, "You know you could have done better in that because you ...you do those stuff around the house, you do stuff around your friends.

So why did you...explain this little C that you gave me for this report." And they begin like, "I try harder." And then they brings it up and it...and it...it's wonderful. I mean from when they couldn't have low grades because now when we set the standards of who they supposed to be, they grades in school have changed tremendously. So...I mean we tried the home school and that became tremendously for them so when they got back into regular school it was like sky...sky's the limit for them. So...

Jarma Wrighten: So have you had to say...share with the parents today, Head Start parents and even, you know, parents who aren't in Head Start, what would be some of the things that you would leave them with? What kind of words of wisdom or tips or thoughts that you would share to them about influe...being that influence and a role model in the home as your child's first and most important teacher?

Zachary: Well...to the parents I would say that you have to have the love for what you do and if your son or... if you have the love for what you do, you will go the extra mile of putting all your effort at the door doing what you have to do to make your child have a...uh...possible life.

Where you are the first teacher like they say, but I think that anybody's in that child's life are the first teacher because the parent may not be there so anybody that come around with children, you are the first impact that they see and they feed off your energy -- who you are and what you all about. So that...that pressure you give them can make them or break them.

And you got to understand the importance of what you doing for the children can make them or break them so when you lower the standards or what...what the way you supposed to be or how you supposed to act, the kid going to follow it. If he see you acting a little kind of weird he's going to act the suit. And that is true. If he see you doing stuff that's not positive, he's going to want to do not positive because you show him a image that...that it should not be.

To him he think that's the way it's supposed to be because you are in his life or that person's life, so it's very important so I would tell parents to be all you can be and set the goal...to not lower the standards of what is right for you and for your family or your friends standards...everywhere you go not just because that's the child...everywhere you go you sort of keep the standards up high that way you would not rai...lower the bar for anybody can just do anything to you at any given moment.

I have learned that. You know me, I have learned that education is...uh...it only do designed to make you better, so education...knowing education make me make better decisions in life, so it's important to have education. But if you don't have education, I be finding myself making the wrong decisions, doing stuff that I ain't supposed to be doing without education, so it's important to keep the standards high at all times.

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