

36th Annual National Head Start Training Conference Parent Interview: Elissa Foreman

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrihten: Hi, Elissa, welcome to the Parent's Place at the ECLKC. We're happy to have you. And the ECLKC is our Educational Learning Online Center, and so we're happy to have you come out today and share your parent as teacher story with us because we know you have a lot to share about your experiences with your child. So I'd like you to start off by telling us a little bit about you and your child or children that are enrolled in the Head Start program.

Elissa Foreman: Well, my son is enrolled in the Head Start program. I have two kids. My son is the youngest and then my daughter's a little bit older. She's one grade ahead, so she's in kindergarten this year, but my son is...this is his last year in the Head Start program and he's five.

Jarma: And he's five. So tell me, what are some of the things that you do at home to support your child's learning. As you know, we're talking about parents as teachers in the home and you are the first and most important teacher in his life although he might attend Head Start and participate with other family members. You have so much that you do as the parent and the teacher.

Elissa: My husband and I work a lot with our kids and it's something we've been doing since they were born. And one of the things that we work with them a lot on are things like their alphabet, their counting, and now beginning reading at his level. And Head Start's really been able to support what we do as parents. And that's been really great. One of the activities that we like to do a lot is that when we're traveling and things he likes to count. He likes to count things.

And so the old game "Slugbug" and stuff my kids are always counting them. Every time they see one of those Volkswagon Beagles driving down the road so then we count them and when we haven't seen one for a while, I'll ask them, "Well you just saw two and now you saw one, so how many is that all together?" and we have them adding.

And they pick it up really fast because they're kind of able to keep track of it on their fingers and they start understanding what those words like "one plus one equals"...those "plus" and "equals" things, those are new words to the kids and it's a nice way for them to be able to learn how to do early addition that's fun for them. We count dogs and cats and things like that around the community. And then we always do a lot of counting in the car. Because we live in a very rural area, so it takes us forever to drive anywhere so we do a lot of activities in the car.

Jarma: So you just shared a great amount of together-time activities and I know that the children have to enjoy that. So as you're engaging in that, how has that...or what do you find most rewarding as you're experiencing your teaching in that moment?

Elissa: It amazes me sometimes how fast they pick things up. And even as a parent, here we're teaching the concepts and yet it surprises me sometimes just how quickly they pick it up. And my son will add numbers, bigger numbers than I thought...I didn't expect him to be able to do. I mean he'll be sitting there, he'll be like, "I saw six and then four and that's ten!" And I'm like, "Wow," you know? I didn't expect him to be able to count maybe that high and be able to add those up like that.

You can kind of expect "two plus one" or something, but he'll surprise me at times. And it's really rewarding to think, "Boy, they really are catching on to that and they're really getting it." To watch them learning and growing it's really enjoyable.

Jarma: I know I always find great pleasure just in looking at my children all the time, even if they're just like sitting next to me and they say one big word that they heard it somewhere. Elissa: Right.

Jarma: So if it didn't come from home, it came from school, but they've learned it. So as you've been involved in Head

Start, what's been your role and as an involved parent in Head Start, what would be the one or two things you might give to other parents in terms of encouraging and supporting their children's learning in the home?

Elissa: Well as a Head Start parent then I try to be very active in the school. And that's been really good because it's given me a lot of ideas and a lot of extra tools that I can use. And then when I go home then I'm able to put some of those in practice and then add on to the things I have.

So my advice to other Head Start parents, or people that are looking at putting their kids in Head Start, is to just really see how much of a value and how much that supports the extra work that you're already doing in the home. And I think it's a great addition to what you're doing. I mean, versus something like daycare where the kids are just sitting and playing all day. It's a lot different environment.

Jarma: Okay. And then when you think about Head Start and the growth of Head Start, or the future of Head Start, how would you kind of envision, what would you like to see Head Start become or be as we continue to grow?

Elissa: I think the same kind of things. Just more of really encouraging that academic focus because our world is becoming more and more academically focused. It's harder to find work without a college degree. I mean it used to be as long as you got your high school diploma, you could still find pretty decent employment and it's getting harder and harder for that. And when kids start out loving school and they start out loving learning, then it encourages them to go that extra mile when they're older. It sets the stage.

And I know just from personally, I was one of those kids that didn't have a good start. I had dyslexia, I lived in a school district that nobody knew, and I didn't learn to read until I was much much older and I hated school. And it was very much a struggle for me. And I see my daughter and my son who here are reading at kindergarten and pre-kindergarten levels and they love going to school every day. If they're sick they want to go. And that to me is such a rewarding thing to see that difference in them and understand that it's really that foundation because when you're good at school you love school.

Jarma: That's right. Elissa: So I think that's one of the most important things. And when we give our kids that head start, that literal head start with Head Start, they love learning because they're good at it. And kids that maybe wouldn't be good at it, if they didn't have that extra boost, have that opportunity to really enjoy education.

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-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

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