

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Mark Excel: My name is Apostle Mark Excel, a missionary from Nigeria. I -- I father of six children, and I've been blessed with wonderful children. But the last two have passed through Head Start. One of them is still in right now, and it's been a wonderful experience with these two kids having passed through Head Start. And I happened to know about Head Start through a friend who came to me and said, "There is a program for low income people," and she gave me the address. And I ran in there and I completed the form.

It was as simple as ABC. And I was accepted, and my children were accepted into the program. And since then I got involved in Head Start program. It's been fun; it's been wonderful. Head Start has helped me personally and professionally. As a minister of God, I -- I get to learn more. I've traveled; I've gone to -- attended conferences organized by Head Start; and I've also learn more. I compare what I learn with my Bible and I've come to understand that no knowledge is lost. I have had useful information that has helped me to get more close to my children.

Now, by my background, I had to pass through a civil war in my childhood that I was separated from my father for three full years. We never met. And after this civil war that turned me to a refugee and I went through a lot of thing after the war, three more years I met my dad -- he died. So I never really enjoyed parent/kid joy and happiness before in raising of children. And I have made a promise to God, if you would bless me with children, I would really get involved in the lives of my children. And that I have been dreamed and Head Start has actually brought me closer.

I -- Head Start is like trying to build a -- a -- a -- a building, a solid building. And like my Bible put it -- say you have to dig deep. Therefore, we... Digging deep is taking this child to a solid foundation. These two children have showed me that they have actually learn at home is fun. Whenever I come to meeting, I come with them. I -- I love them and they stay around me. I have personal time for them, and we talk together. I have a -- a family time that we share together. I also have personal time with each of them through what I learn in Head Start conferences and seminars. And it's been wonderful.

You see the rate of development in how these children will ask me tough questions. I -- I can't just imagine that at their age they know that. And another thing is my son, Gospel Excel, having passed through Head Start for two years and after kindergarten, was promoted to second grade. He never did first grade because at -- at the end of Head Start, he had already started reading, and at kindergarten he was already expert in reading. So -- and -- and he is so intelligent. Even in second grade, he is doing very great. Therefore, he has a very solid foundation.

And I would encourage other parents to send their children to Head Start. They should do everything to send their children through this program because this is the best program for children to grow. And you lay a good foundation for a building, that building can carry any number of floors you -- you want to build upon. And, therefore, it is just like trying to build a mansion. This is just a foundation-laying stage. And I'm so proud to have to be this. And now I think that I [Inaudible] children, because I remember my son Gospel coming to me, we just playing, having fun at home and doing all that,...

...and he came to me, "Daddy, when I grow up, when I have my own wife, I will love my wife the way you love my mom." I mean that was since that day sang into my spirit. I say watch -- so these children are watching us at home. So the encouragement I want to give parents is that they have good relationship in their marriage at home so that these children will also grow up in a better way and come to be good citizens of this great country.

So, I am -- I -- I -- I have so much to say, I don't know if time will permit me because I -- if I want to sit down here and analyze and explain and talk about the goodness of God through Head Start that God has brought me into... I have represented Wyandanch two years in the Policy Council, and when I moved to Central Isle I continue. This has been my fourth year in the Policy Council, and I tell you my children are the one keeping the -- the -- they keep the roster,

they keep the time table.

They are the one to remind me, "Today is the meeting, we have to go." And it's fun. [Laughs] They love it. I love it, and I tell you these children are great. So, I thank you all, and join me by sending your children to Head Start. It's a better place to start.

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