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Jarma Wrihten: And welcome to the Parent's Place at the ECLKC. Arline, I am excited, thrilled, elated -- all those words, attributes to describe how happy I am -- to have you here today. Arline Fraire: Thank you.

Jarma: I know when I met you earlier we were talking about your role as parent as leaders, so today our conversation and your story is going to be guided towards how you have become involved in Head Start and have taken off in your leadership role. It's all yours.

Arline: My job in Head Start now is a Parent Involvement Coordinator, so I work directly with the parents. My involvement in Head Start came several years ago when I was a Head Start parent. When I came into Head Start, I did not have a high school diploma. I did not want to go back to school because I didn't like school, but I had children that I had to be models to. So when I came into the program, I came because I needed a job. First thing I had to do was go back to school and get my high school diploma, so I did that within a few months.

After that, the program hired me as a classroom aide, and... I also had two young children who were Head Start age, and they came to Head Start. When I brought them to Head Start as Head Start children, they were four- and five-year-olds. I got involved with the program, like I said, because I needed a job. But because the staff recognized my role as a parent and an involved parent, I was one of the candidates for the job when a job became available.

So as my children grew up and got older, I realized -- after getting my high school diploma and going on to college for early childhood, I realized the importance of being involved, getting involved, and being -- and remaining involved with your children throughout their high school and college years. And as a result of that, all of my children have college experience, some have finished. I have six children.

I have two children that are engineers; I have one that's a mail carrier; one that is in Head Start now as an assistant teacher; I have one that is a pastor in Buffalo, New York; and I have one son, my youngest son -- it took him a while to go back to school, but he realized that he needed more. So he was my youngest Head Start student, and he went back to school a few years ago, and he is now a -- a heating and cooling tech, and he's certified in residential -- residential and commercial, and he's certified nationwide.

Jarma: You are phenomenal. Arline: So all of my children have college experience, and they -- as a result of me being involved and remaining involved in their life throughout their school-age life, all of my children were raised without me having to go to jail to get one of them. I just modeled the good behavior that I was taught as I was growing up, and I was blessed to have raised my six children without -- to this day -- any of them having any run-ins with the law.

Jarma: And that took you all -- you have been some places. You are a strong woman; you sound like my mother, handling what she needs to take -- handle and take care of.

Arline: As I continued to be involved in Head Start, I worked my way up, but I had to go back to school. And so an opening became available as a lead teacher. Well, before that, we needed bus drivers, and we didn't have any more money in our grant, so all of the assistant teachers had to become bus drivers and assistant teachers. So at one time, I was a bus driver and assistant teacher. And I continued to be a part of Head Start, continued to educate children, and I had another chance to move up to a -- a lead teacher.

So when I became a lead teacher, I was only a part-time lead teacher. So -- and I remembered I need to be there, so I stayed as a part-time worker. And then a full-time position became available, so I was hired in a full-time position. Also, after being in the classroom for 19 years at Head Start, another position came available. I applied for the position, and I received the position as a parent involvement coordinator. That thrilled me because I knew by then

what the importance of being a parent advocate was.

My role then was to involve parents as leaders and as volunteers in the Head Start program. So I set goals for myself and for the parents to come in and involve themselves in their children's life at a young age. I learned at a early age that -- as a young mother -- that I was my child's first teacher; and I teach the parents -- because we have a lot of young parents -- that they are their child's first teacher. And a lot of them, like myself, didn't realize that. It is important because we are models for our children.

Before our children go to any kind of school, we are teaching them. Everything we do around our children teaches our children, and they will learn, because at a early age they learn faster. The first five years of their life, they learn at a very fast pace, so it is important for parents to remain good models -- good role models for their children.

Jarma: Okay, you have said so many wonderful things about parents as teachers, parents as leaders, being a good role model, following your dreams, 'cause you'd had -- you took a path, and you set goals for yourself. And in between setting those goals, you became the woman that you are. And your children learned to be equally as strong and -- and - and guided by your -- by the way that you set the -- the stone for them.

So you are one wonderful lady, and I think that you're doing a good job being in your role as Parent Involvement Coordinator -- that's where you still are today? Arline: That's where I am today. Jarma: And so now, what advice would you give to the other parents? What would you tell them?

Arline: My advice to parents in Head Start and anywhere would be to get involved with your child as soon as possible -- at birth. Get involved, stay involved. Be good role models and your children will follow your lead. Always remember, your children come before you. Always remember that they are watching you; their little eyes are on you at all times, and what you do they're going to do. So my advice would be: get involved with your children at an early age, and remain involved with them. It makes a difference.

When I was raising my children, unfortunately, their father took another road, and I had to do this job by myself. So at one time, I was in college and I had four children in college, and we were going to school trading off cars. And one time I -- I was -- I needed to go to class, and I looked out the door and both cars was gone. So the children were gone to school and I had to miss that night, but I am proud of my children because I chose to bring them up teaching them good values, and it has paid off.

Jarma: And that's what you need to hear, to know... Arline: Right. Jarma: ...that everything you put out -- you made those deposits. You made those deposits into that piggy bank so those children now are reaping the benefit of all those deposits that you made.

Arline: Right. And Head Start is a school that give parents a chance to be involved. Unlike many preschools, Head Start involves the parents, and it's very important that parents stay involved. When the children go to public school, they will not have the opportunity that they have in Head Start. Head Start allows them to come in any day of the week. It allows them to come into the classroom without being announced in most centers.

It allows them to be involved with the field trips without having a criminal history. It allows the parent to be involved in that child's life, every day of their school life, while they're in Head Start. When they go to public school, this will not happen. So while they're still small and preschool-age and they're in Head Start, they should get involved, they should stay involved, because this opportunity is not going to continue.

Jarma: That's right. Arline: It is something they need to take advantage of, and they need to realize that this is something that will help that child throughout their life.

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