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Jarma Wrihten: Good morning. How are you today? Corey White: Great. And yourself? Jarma: Great, thanks. I want you to share your name for me, and tell me where you're from, and a little bit about your son or daughter before we get started with sharing your story this morning.

Corey: Okay, my name is Corey White. I'm from New Orleans, Louisiana. I have two kids in Head Start, in -- at Kingsley House, and I -- I enjoy Head Start. I -- I love Head Start. What -- what actually got me involved into Heat Start was that my -- my -- my oldest son, he -- he had a speech impediment, and he needed to take speech. So I was -- I -- I actually have enrolled him in Kingsley House for -- to make sure that he could actually go to school and his speech would be in -- actually on the same premises of the school.

And -- 'cause -- we had a problem with the -- the -- the speech therapist coming to the house at different times 'cause we worked different hours or whatever. And I was on a waiting list, and Kingsley House opened up the door and he -- his speech has went -- whew, he went through the roof. And, like -- it's like he -- he jumped two levels. He was -- he -- he -- he -- he like -- right now, they're -- they're actually thinking about skipping him a grade because he's jumped so much, and -- and I'm pretty sure a scholarship's going to come.

I mean -- and -- and my involvement just -- just with the school -- since he's been at that particular school, I've -- I've -- I've actually go to the classes and read with them. I go on more field trips. Everybody in the -- in -- in the whole school knows me, because I go on -- I go to different classes for field trips. At first, I used to go to other classes 'cause he couldn't really adapt to me leaving without him after the field trips, he would cry or whatever, but he -- I mean, he -- he became a big boy concerning that part.

And we just -- I mean, my interaction with the school, I was so into -- into the school to where I became a treasurer on a parent committee. And for the last two years I've been the president of the Parent Committee at Kingsley House. And -- I mean, the level of education just keeps going up every year -- every year. Every year they learn -- we learn so much about it, and it's... The only thing that, you know, we want to encourage more is more father involvement.

We want the fathers to come in and say, "You know what, this is -- this is my child, too. I want to go in there and sit in these classrooms and see what my child is doing, what -- who -- what they're teaching my children." You know, and it -- it's an important role, because a mother can only be a mother and a father can only be a father, and they need both of that as balance, you know, 'cause there's a lot of single-parent families in Head Start.

And the women are very independent, so you have to come at them with information, but you can't be overly aggressive, because they're -- they're very stern when they speak, you know. So I -- I -- by me being voted in twice, I'm pretty sure that I -- I've kind of mastered it a little bit. So I try to be more or less like -- if we have a problem where, "I think that we should do this..." "Well, you know what, we're going to get together and we're going to have a vote on it."

"All right, how many people want to do this? How many people want to do that?" That way it doesn't look like I'm a dictator; it's more of the parents are in control of everything that's going on. And Kingsley House has been a blessing -- I mean, my -- my daughter, she -- because he's jumped a level, she's feeding off everything he's learning, 'cause he's coming back to teach it to her.

Jarma: And how old is your son? Corey: My son is four. Actually, he just -- he's just making five. He makes five December the 14th. Jarma: Okay, turning five.

Corey: Yeah, yeah. And my daughter just made four October the 17th, and she -- she loves Head Start. I mean, she's

just -- she's -- she has all these brothers, but she's the girly-girl because she's around all these girls at school. And she loves to go to school because it gets her time to interact with the females -- with the girls. And I love it; I just love it.

Jarma: So you... [Clears throat] Excuse me. You mentioned that you'd been involved in Head Start for two years, and after having been there, you've created a wonderful relationship with your child, your interaction is strong. How's your interaction with the classroom teachers?

Corey: They -- I mean, they -- I -- I actually started something, a -- a teacher appreciation week. I do it every week, where we go in as -- as parents. We don't -- the faculty really doesn't have anything to do with it. We go in, and -- and we take a -- we pick a teacher out, and she becomes the teacher of the month. And, you know, we -- we shower her with different gifts -- not really costly gifts, but just appreciation gifts where, "You -- you've over exceeded what you need to do for this particular month."

"You've over exceeded it." So that's what we do as far as anything goes -- for the parents. We just let them know, 'cause they're our children that we're keeping, you know. So the faculty, they have to do their job but we also have to show appreciation because you don't want the -- the teachers in there with -- with -- with that -- with that mixed mentality like they're -- we're bringing our children there to be babysitters.

No, we want -- "We want them to learn, you know, and we want you to know that we care about them learning." Like, I actually started doing fire drills at my house with my kids, you know, to... Jarma: [Laughter] And how they -- how did they receive that?

Corey: Oh man, they're already doing it at school, but they -- but they was like, "Daddy, which way we go?" So I had to show them how we go, how we step outside of the house, and how we get out. And, I mean, they've learned the addresses, phone numbers. They know both the -- the cell numbers. I mean, they -- they're...

Jarma: You sound truly involved, and that's a brilliant idea to do the fire drills at home. Corey: Yeah. Jarma: I mean, that's a good first step to safety and precaution, and I love that. I love that you integrated that.

Corey: Yeah, yeah, well -- well -- well, you know, the parent involvement specialist at Kingsley House, she gives me a lot of ideas. And, you know, some parents just take those fliers and go home with them and they don't really use them, but she's advocate about safety.

That's her thing with the -- especially with the -- with the car seats, and so many accidents have been happening. And she informs -- as soon as she gets the information, she informs. And I inform the parents immediately, because I feel like -- the information, it's going to be your choice to use it, but you will be informed, you know.

Jarma: Exactly, you're correct. What advice would you give other fathers to -- or strategies and ideas to get them more involved? I mean, you are doing such wonderful things, I mean, having taken a role as the treasurer, the -- the president... How do you see their involvement being instrumental in the strategies that you use to bring them into the program?

Corey: Well, what I used to do -- what I try to do to bring them in was I -- like, we're doing a father/daughter dance, you know. I know that's their -- that's their weak points. They love their sons, don't get confused, but that -- that daughter does something to your heart where you'll be like, "Daddy, I want you to go to the dance." "Okay, I'm going to be there."

You don't want to disappoint either child, but that daughter will center into their heart. So once I pull them in with the daughter -- the father/daughter, then I use the boys on -- on the sports. Right now I'm trying to get the -- the New Orleans Saints to come out and set up a little exhibition -- a little -- a little playground exhibition where they actually come out and play with the kids.

Jarma: That would be awesome. Corey: Now, that's gonna -- that's gonna pull the fathers in, guarantee. Even if they don't have the time, they want to meet the Saints themselves, and that -- then they're going to see what they was

missing. 'Cause we -- I... Actually, last year, I did a -- I did a basketball tournament for the fathers, and all the kids get -- got to sit in the gym and watch their fathers play.

Jarma: And what better example of being a role model in that -- in that instance? That was awesome. And -- and so, what did -- how did the children react to see their dads on the courts?

Corey: Oh yeah, there was screaming, and they had all the teams and -- and the classes, 'cause a class was screaming for their -- for each dad. They were taking turns screaming for each dad in the class. So they basically -- so they had five or six dads come out of one class, then they'll scream for one dad, and then whoever scored: "That's your dad," and they'll say, "Jacob's Dad!" you know, and just clapping. It was -- oh man, it was beautiful.

Jarma: That is so heart-wrenching to see -- to know that kids really, really, really understand that, you know. It's important to see their -- their dad, or their mom even, doing the fun things that they -- you know, that they would want to be involved in. And I think that the more you all do that, the more it strengthens the relationship with the children because they know that you're out there supporting them.

Corey: Yes. Jarma: And it's beyond just doing everything at home. What is the most important thing that you would like to teach your child? I mean you're their -- you're the role model. What's the most important thing?

Corey: Well, the most important thing is -- is respect. I -- I want them to have a... 'Cause -- 'cause these days, the kids that growing up, they're not -- they're not learning what respect really is. Respect is respecting someone's beliefs, their own opinions, you know. If someone is different than you, you shouldn't judge them. Let them embrace themselves, let them be themselves. So I teach my children to be yourself, don't become a follower.

You set your own pace, you set what you want to do, and that's what you want to do, and stay focused on that. Don't let anybody crush your dreams, 'cause you can be whatever you want to be. I -- I push -- I push their imagination. If they say, "I saw the monkey jump over the roof." "Oh really? What color was the monkey?" You know, and I -- and I try to keep pushing, and -- 'cause I don't want to crush their imagination, 'cause me -- me as a child, you know, my imagination was crushed.

Me as a child -- my father wasn't there, so I'm an advocate about going toward doing anything for my children. I'm not going to give up doing anything for my children. And the fact of it is, there're a lot of -- there're a lot of sons out there that are now fathers, that are not -- that are -- that are actually repeating that cycle. But what they really need to think about is, "Remember how you felt when you were in that situation, when you were looking for your father to come to school, and he never came."

So I -- I -- I really push them to be involved because the mother's always involved. So it's time for you to stand up and be a man, and be involved in your children's life no matter what goes on outside, in the outside world. Your child is your responsibility.

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