

36th Annual National Head Start Training Conference Parent Interview: Yolanda Yancey

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrihten: Hi, Yolanda, and how are you today? Welcome to the Parent's Place at the ECLKC, which is the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. We're happy to have you with us today. Yolanda Yancey: Thank you, I'm happy to be here.

Jarma: So, we'd like you to share a little bit with us, and tell us about how you support your child's learning in the home. You know, they have a lot of research out to say -- to share about parents as being the first teachers in the home environment, and how the home environment supports this long-lasting, loving effect on the children, and they have this impact on school success and readiness. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your son, and how you're involved in Head Start, and how Head Start is supporting your child -- if there's a partnership...

Yolanda: I'm a Special Ed -- Education -- Coordinator, in Annapolis, Maryland for the Head Start program there, and I have a son who's three years old, who is diagnosed with DiGeorge Syndrome, and I found out that he had DiGeorge Syndrome when I was four-and-a-half months pregnant, and because of my connection with Head Start and working with Head Start for ten-plus years, I was able to utilize the Infants and Toddlers program while I was pregnant to help me prepare for my son when he was... when he was to .. when he was to arrive, so they were able to work with me and do things, and just to support me...

... and to prepare me for a child who had DiGeorge Syndrome, and what to expect, how we were going to work through those challenges as they arrived. Jarma: So with the Infant and Toddler program, is that a program that partners with Head Start, or is there some collaboration?

Yolanda: Yeah. The Infants and Toddlers program collaborates with Head Start -- we have a partnership, we have a mirandum of understanding, and we also have a partnership with Part C and Part B services, which is the ChildFind program with the commun... I'm sorry, with the public schools. So we partner with the public schools and the Infants and Toddlers program as well, so we go from birth to five.

Jarma: Okay. So tell us a little bit about how you support your child's learning in the home. How.. what's his name again? Yolanda: His name is Gregory. Jarma: Gregory. How do you support Gregory's learning in the home? What are some things that you all do for together-time activities, and how much fun do you have in helping him learn and grow and develop?

Yolanda: Oh, our whole home is a learning environment, and those are things that I learned because of my connection with Head Start, using my home as a learning environment. We even have on our sun porch at our house, the entire half -- one half of the sun porch is a library, and there's a library over there, and there's different books, and there's at different stages, and we have a table over there, and the table has built-in cups, so we can go from -- we take the books to the table and there's a bench, and we work together and we do things from our library.

And when we do our nature walks, we count signs, in the fall, we collect acorns, and everything, everything that we do, is about learning without Gregory even knowing, and so that's pretty much what we do every day, and everything that we do has some sort of learning piece to it.

Jarma: How has your involvement in the Head Start program helped to support your ability to be an effective parent as well as teacher? I mean, I know you're in the role as a staff member, so how does that -- how does that involvement help you? Yolanda: I think it prepared me, because being in the role of a Special Ed Coordinator, you know, you do your day-to-day thing and you can work with parents, but then when it comes and sits right at your door, it's like, "How do you handle it?"

It's a big shock, and I think for Gregory's father, it was really overwhelming, but for me, because I had been through it, I was able to bounce back a little bit faster, and being able to say, "Okay, this is what's going to happen. This is what it is, and these are the steps that we have to take to make sure that Gregory gets all of his needs met."

So we started out with the Infants and Toddlers, and then from there, we were able to really work with the community partners, because not only do I work in the county, but I live in the same county so I was able to pool all my resources from my Head Start partnerships and make sure that my son had the best of the best in the county working with him, so it made it more passionate; it also made me more compassionate with my parents.

They were able to receive that their children have special needs because I was able to share that "We're going to get through this together. I truly understand, because I am a mom of a child who has special needs," and that makes parents trust you, when you can really connect with them on some kind of level.

Jarma: Oh, that's beautiful testimony to share about how the connections impact the relationships with other parents. If you had to give parents advice or words of encouragement, what would you say would be your maybe three words or words of wisdom to help them go through this process?

Yolanda: To just be patient and understand where they are today, they're not going to be there next year, and that you really need to use your resources, and early intervention is key, and being a part of Early Head Start and Head Start, and really utilizing those services that they offer will help your child to be -- to have a head start once they get to the -- to the early-- I'm sorry, to the elementary age -- you know, getting those early pieces in, in part, will help in the long run.

Jarma: And so in your effort to see Gregory succeed in life and be ready for the next stages -- for the transitional period, what kinds of things are you doing now, or what kinds of things have you done? Yolanda: Well, I've become a real advocate -- not only for Gregory, but for like all the children I work with. I have 63 children on my -- that I'm responsible for with diagnosed special needs, I've become really active in politics by working with the Senator, getting resources for rolling access, not only just for my son, but for other children.

Really researching all of the different types of opportunities for children with sensory, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech -- what are the tools that we can use to help them get there that are maybe not as traditional as usual -- as, you know, the speech therapists or the OT coming into your program, but what are the other resources out there that can also benefit -- and so, we were able to get a lot of resources because of the connection with our Senator, and just being involved and tapping into so many other resources that we didn't even know were right in our community. -- End of Video --

-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

<http://videos.sorensonmedia.com/HEAD+START/000345-Yolanda+Yancey+Parent+Interview-2009-SD360p/d01a325eR93eb94d6be9803x7b9df8b250b5>