

National Indian Head Start Directors Association 19th Management Training Conference, Oklahoma City, OK: Parent Interview: Sammi Berndt

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Jarma Wrighten: ...the National Indian Head Start Director's Association Conference, where we've invited several parents in to come and share their parents as teacher in the home stories with us. And so we'd like to, again, thank you for coming out and just taking a few minutes of your time just to highlight what you do at home. So share with us, or tell me a little bit more about who you are, what you do, what your child's name is, which Head Start program...

Sammi Berndt: I'm -- right now, I'm the -- I'm second-year Policy Council. This year I'm chair. My son just graduated this past May from Head Start, so he's going to be going into kindergarten next year. His name's Adam, and he really likes Head Start. Jarma: How old is he? Sammi: He just turned five.

Jarma: He just turned five. So he's making that big transition, so now you're getting ready for kindergarten -- as they would call it, the "big school." Sammi: Yeah. [Laughs] Jarma: Yeah, getting ready for the "big school." So in your -- in his experience in Head Start, or even now going to kindergarten, you -- you are Mom, you support his learning in every way, and how he grows and develops.

How -- what are some examples of some things that you've done to support him, and then how do you all spend your together-time with each other? Sammi: Oh, we do all kinds of things. [Laughs] He -- well, around the house we read books and we count, and he -- sorry. [Laughs] He plays outside, we play football, or we play baseball, and he just started wrestling this past year, so we take him on wrestling trips, and a lot of -- we do a lot of activities.

Jarma: So he's really into the large muscle things, he likes to use his... Sammi: Oh yeah! Jarma: ...large muscles. So he loves sports? Sammi: Oh yeah, every sport.

Jarma: And that typically makes him feel really good about himself after he gets out there and hits somebody hard, or...? Sammi: Well, he's been doing wrestling, and he just went to State this year for wrestling. He's got tons of trophies, and he likes to carry them around and take them to school, and... Jarma: Okay, so he likes to showcase his skills, Sammi: Oh yeah.

Jarma: So you've said you're Policy Council. So you've been actively involved in Head Start for how long now? Sammi: Two - this is my second year. Jarma: Your second year. So as a Policy Council member or chair, you have volunteered in the classroom and been a part of all of the decision-making efforts. Tell me, you know, how has your role as Policy Council been effective in helping you to become that parent as the child's first teacher?

Sammi: Oh, well, I didn't realize there was so much in Head Start. A lot of stuff in Head Start, so, I mean, it -- it helped. I learned what they need to -- what he, you know, needs to know, and I try to work with him at home on it. And then I have a daughter coming up too, so it's going to help with what I need to -- to start teaching her. But she knows from him already that -- she can count to 12. She's two, she can count to 12, she can say half of her A-B-C's, you know, just from having her brother in Head Start, and he teaching -- him teaching her, so...

Jarma: So they really do a lot of little collaborative things together, even though they're not -- well, we know they're not collaborating, it's -- he's helping her to learn in the home. So those are positive attributes that the younger one carries over from school to home. So what kinds of fun things do you all do? Sammi: Well, we're in the middle of nowhere. We do a lot of outside activities.

The park. He rides his bike, just everything outside. I mean, now that it's nice out, and we don't have any snow. Jarma: And where did you say you lived? Sammi: South Dakota. Jarma: South Dakota, okay. Yeah. No snow. I understand that.

So you've helped him in the classroom, and you've helped the classroom teachers. How have you built his self-confidence? I mean, you've been in the classroom with him, when you're not there, do you think he's, like, really this confident little kid? Tell us a little bit about that.

Sammi: Oh yeah. He is... God, I think he runs the classroom. He's just a typical little boy. He's loud, [Laughs] wrestles with the other kids, you know. They have to settle him down all the time, but when I'm there he -- he sticks beside me, but I always hear -- "Did you hear my son at school today?" You know, a teacher down the hall, or across, "I don't know if he -- I didn't hear him, Sam. I don't think he's there."

Jarma: He's missing. Sammi: Oh, he's there, I know he is. But the teachers, you know, down the hall can hear him. He's just... Jarma: So, you think he's -- he sounds like he's really confident, then. Sammi: Oh yeah, he is.

Jarma: And then you think that the Head Start resources have been of value to you, like what kinds of the -- what are some of the resources that you've used since you've been in the Head Start program that's been supportive in your role as a parent? Sammi: They have the in-kind store for parent involvement. You get points and then you go -- you can pick out, like -- they give you laundry detergent or Pampers or... I've used that.

I don't know what else they really... They don't... [Laughs] Jarma: Tools like books and workshops and trainings, and...? Sammi: Well, this is the first workshop that I've been to. I don't really have -- oh, actually I've been to a couple at home for Policy Council, but...

Jarma: Okay. So what would you say would be the one big valuable thing that you've gained as a result of being in Head Start, and that you've been able to transfer into your home? Sammi: Just the -- well, the -- the teaching ability. You don't -- you -- you know, you don't realize that you're doing it, and Head Start kind of showed you, "Well, you were doing this at home already, and just keep doing it." And I think that helped to teach him at home, I mean, more than just...

I mean, they give him booklets. I take home the booklets, and we'll do booklets at home, and, I mean, they helped him learn a lot. Jarma: And so if you had to share other words of advice, or tips and thoughts to other parents, what kinds of things would you say?

Sammi: Oh, definitely send your kids to Head Start. I mean, the -- the interaction with the other kids, and -- my kid can count to 100, you know? [Laughs] Jarma: Impressive. Sammi: And he just turned five! Yeah! I mean, it's just -- they -- he learned so much at Head Start, and he had -- he likes his friends, and his friends are -- but it's a good experience for all kids to go to Head Start, I think.

Jarma: Okay. So is there anything else you want to tell us about how you help him out, or, you know, what value it's been for you just to come today to this -- to the workshops this week?

Sammi: Well, it's kind of hard being here because I'm away from him, you know. But I've learned a lot here at the workshops, and I -- I'll have more knowledge to take home and help him, and my other -- my daughter learn things, too. So it's good experience, coming down.

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