

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

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Jarma WRIGHTEN: Hi! We're here today at the Parent's Place at the ECLKC, and we have with us today Katie, And Katie's going to tell us a little bit about herself and her son or daughter in -- in the Head Start program. Today we're talking about parents as teachers in the home, and parents being the first and most important teacher. So I want to start off first by Katie sharing a little bit about herself.

Katie Pinkertin: Well, hello, my name is Katie Pinkertin. I'm a parent of a -- well, she just turned four in April, so -- but this past year, she was a three-year-old Head Start student. She attended the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Head Start right there in Poplar, Montana. I have been a parent for years. All my children has been through Head Start, and my oldest is twelve now, so I've got a bunch of them. I've got four kids, so...[Laughs]

Jarma: Four kids, well that's a good -- that's a good thing. Katie: Yeah. Jarma: They all been to Head Start? Katie: They all been to Head Start and only one that hasn't graduated was my son because we moved to another area and they said that he had to be on a waiting list, so... And he didn't make it, so...

Jarma: Oh, we know about that waiting list, don't we? Katie: Mm hmm. Jarma: That's okay. They've had -- they've had the Head Start experiences... Katie: Yeah.

Jarma: ...so that's wonderful. Well, today as we share and talk with one another, I just kind of want to let you know that we -- you really mean a lot to us by being here, and we so thank you for having had all of your children in Head Start. That -- that's a great commentary.

And as a parent of children who were enrolled in Head Start, you know how important it is to be their first and most important teacher, and how much the home environment means to their growth and development, and their success later in life. There's quite a few research articles out there that talks about how the home has a lasting impact on how children grow and develop and then move forward.

So, in your role as the parent, and then as -- you can tell me also if you're a part of Policy Council or whatever have you -- but in your role as the parent, how do you feel you've supported your children's growth and development, and in what ways? And what kinds of fun things do you all do together to further grow that?

Katie: Well, actually, when I first -- working right out of high school, I was a teacher aide for the public schools. And my boy was only about two or three then, and then I enrolled him automatically into Head Start because I'm a Head Start child. I graduated through Head Start, and I was raised by my grandmother, so I was like, "You got to go to Head Start!" [Laughs]

Jarma: Head Start. Head Start, it is. Katie: Yeah. But what I do with my kids -- I read to -- read to them a lot, whether it's just a two-page book or article in the newspaper, you know, something that says -- has kids on it -- they're like, "Hey, what are they doing?" You know? Jarma: That's right.

Katie: And we do a lot of reading in our home. We do a lot of Discovery Channel watching. Jarma: Mm hmm. Katie: As well as "Dora the Explorer," you know, all that, you know, mumbo jumbo stuff. You know, you Color this, look for that, mapping, you know -- a little bit of math is in there. And we watch a lot of game shows.

Jarma: Okay, and they love that? Katie: Yeah. They love "Wheel of Fortune." [Laughs] Jarma: "Wheel of Fortune." So what do you think that they're gaining from watching "Wheel of Fortune?"

Katie: They're like -- they're trying to figure out the spelling, you know, and the alphabet, you know. And they're just going on and on and on, and I'm like, "Well, what one are they looking for?" And then my husband's sitting there, "Shh! Don't tell them!" Jarma: That's right.

Katie: "Don't tell them. Let them figure it out!" Jarma: So is that what you think is together-time activities? Katie: Yeah, yeah. And we play Monopoly... Jarma: Mm hmm.

Katie: ...with my boy and my oldest girl, who's seven -- and my boy who's twelve. And my other girls are slowly trying to get into it. You know, my -- my son helps, you know, my younger one who's five and who's just turned four. We've been helping them with Monopoly. The Candy -- Candy Land game...

Jarma: Mm hmm, Candy Land. Katie: ...that one. And then my son's been wanting to get my oldest daughter into the Life game... Jarma: Mm hmm.

Katie: ...where you go around this thing, but it's actually for... We try to stay away from the TV as much as possible, and all the games... I've never bought any of these new game things -- X-Box, PS2s, you know, all this other stuff. Jarma: You really know those games.

Katie: Yeah, and I don't care for them at all. My brother has them, and he's always trying to bring them over to our family, and I'm like, "No. My kids don't like that." It's either outside play, reading, or you got these little booklet things, you know, you can get at Wal-Mart or K-mart or whatever, that tells you the alphabet. You write them, you trace them, you do all that and it -- help you with it. And my mom says, "You were a born teacher aide." [Laughs]

Jarma: Yes, you are. I am sitting here listening to all those wonderful things. And I applaud you for no -- you know, I'm not saying not to have the technology... Katie: Yeah. Jarma: ...but it's a good thing what you're doing. You're enhancing their literacy and the language and the cognitive skills and...

Katie: And a little bit of our own Native American language, too. We -- we -- you know, we add in that, as well as our Head Start -- we -- we do that too, but I do it also in the home. As well as, you know, other spiritual things, you know, that we got going on in our -- where we live, we have our kids do that. All of my kids dance, except for my boy, but he's kind of like in the mourning process right now so he has to wait another year and then he's going to start dancing.

Jarma: So when you said you embed a lot of the native language in the home, what... Katie: Well in their counting -- counting... Jarma: ...what is your... Okay.

Katie: ...and talking in our native language. Well, right now -- we're just in the basic colors and numbers with our girls right now. But our oldest girl, she's way more advanced. So is my boy, because my grandmother practically helped me with them. So they're more advanced. It's just our -- our smallest children that we got now are five and four -- so we're learning with them, with just the numbers and the letters and...

Jarma: Do you want to share any numbers with us in your native language? Katie: [Laughs] Jarma: Do you know any? Katie: I can count to three for you. [Laughs] Jarma: Sure! Sure!

Katie: Well, in the Dakota language, it's wanzi, nonpa, yamni. That's three. So I usually do that with my girls, and then they just -- they take off. Jarma: And they take off. Katie: They take off. My four year old already counts to ten... Jarma: Wow.

Katie: ...in our native language. And she's learning the colors slowly, but the main one she knows is black because that's what -- that's what she named her dog. Black. Because he's full black. He's a part Collie, part Lab. Jarma: Mm hmm. Katie: So he's -- she's like, "Sapa! Sapa! Quit doing that! Sapa! [Laughs]

Jarma: [Laughs] Katie: And I'm like, "Why did you name your dog Black," you know. And it's... Jarma: Okay. Well, that's another color that she knows.

Katie: And that's another color that she knows. And another one is -- oh, there's all different kinds of colors. But, you know, that's her favorite color. And that's, you know, the color of her dog, and she likes it and... But she don't really call him that anymore. She's going to another name of "Sunka..."

Jarma: Mm hmm. Katie: ...which means dog. Jarma: ...means dog... Katie: So I'm thinking, she learned that somewhere because I never taught her that.

Jarma: Well, that's a good thing. You're sharing a lot of wonderful things about how your family dynamics really folds -- unfolds into the household. And you're keeping your culture. And you're not straying away from, you know, what's -- you know, what they'll need in -- in today's... Katie: Yeah.

Jarma: ...everyday society. Katie: So I keep asking her teacher, "What are you guys doing, are you learning language?" And she goes, "We're into the animals now." And I'm like, "That's where she got it," because sunka means dog. So they were in their animal process in Head Start then. So I was like, "Oh, okay." So I went in there -- and I work at Head Start right now with Family Services...

Jarma: Okay. Katie: ...so, I go up when I'm on -- when I'm off work or during lunch -- I have lunch with her. And there's all kinds of animals there, and I tell her, you know, "Tell me what this is and what that..." That's how I found out where -- where she came from.

Jarma: So you said you work at Head Start now, so you feel like your involvement in Head Start now has helped you a whole lot in being able to teach your children? Katie: Mm hmm. A lot. Mm hmm. Jarma: Okay.

Katie: After I was a teacher aide in the public schools, I got a hint that they were looking for a teacher aide in Head Start. So I was like, "Oh, cool!" So I put in my application, and they put me on substitute. And then my daughter was in Head Start, and they wanted parent -- parent meetings going on and a bunch of other stuff, you know -- bring your kids, you know -- all this -- and we'll learn policy council. And then I was on Policy Council for three years... Jarma: Wow.

Katie: ...as a secretary. And then this one day they said, "Family Services is open, you should try it. You know, you -- you seem pretty good. You know -- you know, you know a lot of families and you know what it is to be a Head Start parent. And you're actually Head Start anyway because you were -- you know, you -- you graduated through Head Start." I said, "Oh, cool." And so I did it; and I'm here now, three years later. [Laughs]

Jarma: And that's -- that's wonderful, because that's what Head Start is about. Head Start is to help you move up. You start as a volunteer maybe, you participate in every way you can and you take advantages of the programs that are available. What would be the one thing you would say that you've gained most from Head Start? I mean -- and then -- then I'll ask you, like, to share some words of encouragement that you would give to other parents.

Katie: It would be the parent involvement. You know, being there in your child's classroom environment, you know? Some of them say, "Well, I don't want to go in there because they'll act up." Well, go into another classroom and, you know, see what the other kids are doing. You don't have to just go into your child's class, you know. You can go into another classroom, but it's the involvement of being there.

You know, you can peek your head in there and say, "Hi," you know, "I'm here." And go into another classroom or kitchen or whatever. But it's, you know, parent involvement. My -- my parents weren't really in my, you know, in my life -- right. It was always my grandmother and my grandfather. Well, that's what she taught me.

She was always there for me, you know -- School functions, she was there. So I was like, "[Inaudible]" And then Head Start came and that's what they, you know, were always talking about: parent involvement; parent involvement. So I went up there, and that's -- that's what I got out of it.

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