

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Charmayne Thomas: Hi, my name is Charmayne Thomas. I'm currently working with the school district of Philadelphia. I tell my story, and it begins... I have three children who were all Head Start children. As a Head Start parent, it was the family service worker who encouraged me to get involved with the program. As a parent, I began to come in and volunteer with my children, be -- became involved with the center level and then went to the Policy Council level; became the Policy Council chairperson for two years, and also the Policy Council treasurer.

As I began to bloom into Head Start, and began to learn about advocacy in Head Start, I began to get involved with the reauthorization of Head Start and what that meant to parents. I believe in Head Start because Head Start works. A lot of times people want facts and stats of how Head Start works, and I come to you today as a witness that Head Start has truly enriched my life, my husband's life, and my children.

And that has happened. I have a 22-year-old who went to college after high school, had never missed a day of school, honor roll from first grade all the way to 12th grade, and he went off to Penn State. I have now an 18-year-old who, as the same, never missed a day in school, honor roll from first grade until 12th grade, and is in a private college as we speak. And I still have a nine-year-old who is now in the fourth grade, who is honor roll and still living the Head Start tradition.

One thing that I found Head Start did for me was not only to enrich, empower, and educate my family, it enriched, empowered, and educated everyone around me. And that happened through support of the teachers, the family service workers, the health coordinators, the parent involvement people, and that only trickled into my life. I became passionate about four years ago as I spoke as the keynote speaker for the parent award banquet, and went on to go to the state association board and the regional association board where I'm currently a member.

As I moved on into the journey of Head Start, I became employed in Head Start. And as wonderful how I -- what I've learned, I'm giving back to other parents for them to tell their story. One thing that I believe that Head Start is, is Head Start is a premiere program that should be given to children of all ages, and not only from three to five, but --and somehow we need to incorporate Head Start philosophy and advocacy into the K-to-12. I believe in Head Start; I believe Head Start works.

I hope that those who come after me know that this is a program that we must fight for, that we must honor, and we must cherish. I am passionate about what I do, and I believe passion just spills over. And once you touch a family in Head Start, they will never be the same. Thank you.

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-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

<http://videos.sorensonmedia.com/HEAD+START/000645-Charmayn+Thomas+Parent+Interview-2010/8d3d34bfd0c0434d138b675a27316a5fb943>