

Charting the Course for Parent and Family Engagement in Head Start Forum, Washington, DC: Parent Interview:  
Darwin Cuch

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Darwin Cuch: Hi, my name is Darwin Cuch. I'm a Northern Ute out of Utah. I'm affiliated with the Reno, Nevada Head Start. The Head Start is the Reno Sparks Indian Colony. I'm here to tell you my story on how I became a -- a Head Start parent and Policy Council member. It started seven years ago as -- as I was battling an addiction, and it was a -- a struggle that I had overcome with the -- the powers of -- of my prayers and my willing -- willingness to stop my addiction. I had made up my mind that I wanted to become a better person and -- and raise my child in a -- a positive manner.

And I had moved from my home and sought out a way of awakening, that I can -- I can become a better person. And through this time, I had -- had thoughts and prayer and -- and wondering where I'm going to go next. And during that time, I had -- I found myself wandering in long hikes with meditation, and I -- I thought back to what I used to do. I -- I once was a wildland firefighter. So I went back and I became a wildland firefighter and moved up in the ranks. And at that time I had met my companion that I'm with now.

And she was a Head Start staff member, and she had helped me along with my struggles. And it was a very -- I guess you could say it was a blessing for me to be affiliated with her in -- in her -- her -- her life. And at that time, I had -- hadn't known that my ex was pregnant with my daughter. And while -- while we were together, my mother told me about my daughter. And I talked to my mom about it, and she says, "Yeah, I got your daughter here. You know, she's three months old. What do you want to do? Her mom is still on drugs and -- and -- and, you know, what -- I don't know what to do."

And I told her -- I says, "Well, bring her to me, you know. I'll -- I'll care for her." And since she was three months old, I -- I took her in. And my girlfriend, she had -- you know, God bless her, she took us both into her home, and we lived there with her for -- you know, for the next three years. As my daughter was growing up, she had become Head Start eligible. And, you know, being a wildland firefighter, I was away from her and my daughter every summer; and at that time, she was pregnant with my son.

And, you know, she told me -- she said, "You know, you've got to find something else. Every summer, you're gone." And I says, "Okay, you know, there's got to be something else out there." And, you know, I prayed, you know, that I could find another way, and -- and I became an ironworker. And -- and now I am going through my apprenticeship and, you know, living that positive lifestyle that she had lived as a Head Start staff member. I had gone -- grown accustomed to the style of -- of positive surroundings, and it made me grow spiritually and mentally to where, you know, I just wanted that positive image.

And now, I'm -- I'm proud to say that I'm a -- a member of the Head Start Policy Council, where I'm helping guide our -- our staff and our members and -- and other parents to positive and new things, kind of opening the door to, you know, a better change for -- for -- for everyone, and myself as well. And Head Start has helped my daughter a -- a great deal. She -- she was born, I -- I think, with a few minor delays, but you can't see it because of the teachings of Head Start had blossomed her into a very smart young girl that, you know... I'm proud to be her father.

She's the top of her kindergarten class, and that makes me feel good. And now my son's in Head -- Head Start and he's -- he's going -- you know, he's got a good head on his shoulders. And -- and, you know, with the -- the teachings and the -- the motivation that Head Start gives to families, it -- it -- it's helped me -- helped me to raise my children in -- in a manner of -- of where they have respect and they have knowledge. And it's helped us to grow stronger as a family and to make sure that we are where we need to be in our lives as a family and being strong together.

And, you know, for those who are out there struggling with addiction, you know, it's -- it's tough. It's hard to get out of,

but I got out of it. I feel good. You know, I just filled my life with positive things, and now there ain't nothing that's ever going to, you know, tell me I didn't do it, because I did it, and you could do it. So, be strong, and be safe, and remember, family first.

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-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

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