

Our Stories Keep Us Connected

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

(Music) Narrator: Laughing. Telling stories. Asking and answering hard questions. Going places. Doing things together. Meet six Head Start families who are discovering how to turn shared time into opportunities, opportunities to learn more about each other, to turn the stresses of one day into solutions for the next, and most importantly, to start young children on a lifetime of learning and building positive relationships.

These families invite you to see how day-by-day, moment-by-moment they share each other's experiences and learn together. Terri: "They didn't have buckets back then. They had to use their . . ."

Narrator: Terri Lazick lives with her four children on a twenty-seven thousand square mile Navajo reservation in central Arizona. Terri and her fiancé Lee, tell her children about how their ancestors carried water and food to an ancient campsite; stories that connect them to a place to learn about their own history just beyond their backyard.

Terri: "Not only that too, but when they get out . . ." Narrator: When she was pregnant with her youngest child Derris, Terri's husband Dennis was killed in an accident. Since then Terri has helped her children understand their emotions and answer their questions as honestly as she can.

Terri: "Something like that from those horses or sheep." Child: "Cows!" Terri: This last week was five years since their dad passed away and I never expected to see myself talking to my children about this; telling them that their dad would never come back.

Narrator: Feeling isolated after the birth of Derris, Terri had what she describes as a vision of a better life for herself and her children. Terri: "Weave it in and out with the first, the first strands that you did."

Narrator: The very next day Terri found herself at her local Head Start center, where she learned that shaping a better life for her family involved valuing her role as her children's most important teacher.

Terri: "The bowl and the pottery that are made out of mud. How do you say it in Navajo?" Child: "(inaudible) Pot." Terri: "(inaudible) Pot. Good hun."

Narrator: Terri soon realized that sharing her knowledge and stories of Navajo culture with her children was a way to grow closer to them. Terri: "(inaudible) (inaudible)"

Narrator: Head Start also helped Terri to learn other ways of connecting with her children, like finding out how they think, understanding what they see and hear, and creating a safe place for them to learn new things. Lee tells us how Head Start has helped strengthen his relationships with the children by learning to connect with what it is like to be a child and receiving information from adults.

Lee: "I've . . . learned from Head Start that there were . . . that kids on , you know, his level and you can't talk to them like way up here and at Head Start you had to like bring yourself down to their level. So . . . so, like if I was talking to him, I wouldn't just talk to him and say, '(inaudible) Derris'. I would come down to him and see him eye to eye. That way he understands me instead of looking up at me.

A child you have to look at them like that. (inaudible) (inaudible) You don't stand right there son. See? See what happens? You got burned a little bit, huh? See, that's why you have to stand away when mom's cooking right there, okay?

Narrator: Terri, Lee, Derris, Ashley, Dessen, and Dustin have come a long way together from loss and isolation to

forming a new family, connected by sharing an appreciation of their Navajo heritage and each other.(Music)

Narrator: Beverly Smith enjoys a family outing, a weekend afternoon at the park with her husband Chester and their daughter Janea. But for years, Beverly's picture of the world was shaped by her life story as an abused and neglected child.

Beverly Smith: I was moved from house to house, from parent to parent, from Aunt to brother back Aunt. I moved all over the place and it wasn't a good feeling. I was abused and I just really lacked my self-esteem.

Narrator: When she married Chester Smith and had Janea, Beverly was determined to break the cycle of violence and enjoy motherhood. As a single mother, things did not go well with Beverly's first child, her son Lydell. She tells us why.

Beverly: When I had my son, he's now twenty. I wasn't a good parent. I use to beat him. It's going to be whole lot different for me and Janea. I sit there and I was smoking dope. What woke me up was that I almost died and from then on I said no.

"I got part of them." Narrator: Once Beverly realized there was a direct connection between her drug abuse and her mistreatment of Lyddell, she knew that the next step was to learn new parenting skills. She enrolled Janea in Head Start on her fourth birthday. There, it was discovered that Janea had a problem with completing tasks.

Head Start helped Beverly to recognize that children had varying strengths, interests and abilities. She was encouraged to help Janea learn to concentrate by working with her on picture puzzles. Helping Janea improve an important skill by playing with her was a new and rewarding experience for Beverly.

Beverly: It was amazing. You know you (inaudible)always look at these kids and stuff you know and half of them spoke English and half of 'em were Spanish, half were Cambodian. It was just a mixture of kids. And my daughter, she just blended right on in. You know, she didn't cry, she didn't holler for me or anything. She just said, "Bye mom. See ya".

Narrator: Beverly works with Janea to set fair, firm limits an experience that sometimes challenges them both.

Beverly: "(inaudible)Let's read tonight, when we're ready to go to bed."Janea: "Mmhh mmm."Beverly: "Come on."Janea: "No."

Beverly: "Yes."Janea: "No"Beverly: "Yes."Janea: "No."Beverly: "Okay now . . ."

Beverly: One of the parenting classes had taught me to let her express herself. Okay, but then Janea got into expressing herself too much. I have to sit there and I say, "Okay, she's expressing herself. She's expressing herself," you know. Okay. Getting on my nerves now; you express it too much. And then a couple times I had to cut her short, you know, I say, "Okay Janea, okay. Enough is enough now," you know. You know, that's what they say, let them express themselves. It's hard.

Beverly: "Whose cup is that?"

Narrator: In addition to learning how to encourage self-expression from other parents and Head Start staff, Beverly also discovered that doing household chores with Janea creates opportunities for them to spend time together and for Beverly to observe how Janea is thinking and feeling.

Beverly: I know my daughter's feelings. I know when Janea is going to do something before she does it because I can see the expression on her face. It changes –her expression– and she will look back at me and see if I am looking at her. Her . . . she has got her own independence. I love that about her. The girl got self-esteem. I mean, it's up so high, her self-esteem is and all around she is smart.

Janea: "(inaudible)they all live in a house in the meadow of the forest."

Narrator: "Today, Beverly's story includes working as a classroom aide for Head Start. She's enrolled in a local community college, earning her degree in Early Childhood education to become a Head Start teacher.

Beverly: I like it out there in the playground. Get up there on the jungle gym, slide on down . . . slide on down. Then we can come play songs, and balls, and jump rope. I'm right in there with them. It's something different than my childhood, which is what I didn't have and it's what I enjoy. I enjoy that with these kids and with my own.

Narrator: Margarita Martinez and Hector Servantes have made their home a safe and supportive place for their four children to learn while coping with financial, cultural, and language barriers. Their youngest child, (inaudible)Homberto who attends Head Start, is learning how to care for the family's kittens by watching his older brother and sisters. (Cat miaows)

Narrator: Margarita shares a skill she learned as a girl in Mexico: planting and tending the garden. Like many other children, Hector Jr., Lories, and Yvonne enjoy learning by doing. Gardening with Margarita is one of their favorite ways of spending time with their mother. The combination of hard work and household chores have left Margarita little time to learn English.

Margarita: "(Spanish)"Narrator: During her daily routine, she speaks Spanish with the children and teaches them how to cook their favorite dishes. Today, Hector Jr., who is learning to cook while watching his mother, makes pasale.Hector: "(inaudible) is something. Can you read it please?"

Narrator: Hector and Margaritas' children also have a strong and positive relationship with their father, who teaches them to enjoy learning together, even though it is homework time.

Hector: "What's numero one? No . . ."Narrator: Margarita and Hector know that shaping a better future for their children begins at home by learning together, listening to their children, appreciating each child's unique abilities, and showing interest in what they do.(music)

Narrator: Allison (inaudible) relationship with her son Andrew began even before he was born. Allison: "Baby noises"Narrator: Head Start classes in childhood development helped her to understand that babies begin learning before the mother gives birth.

Woman: "Hello, hello. Nice to see you. Hi. Hey, Andrew!"Narrator: Allison's day begins by bringing Andrew to his Early Head Start program, where she describes her feelings about being a teenage mother.

Allison: I have to wake up early, fix my baby up, fix his things up, get ready. I bring him here. I go to school. Then I pick him up. I go back home and I cook and clean and at this time my boyfriend, he's working, he gets home at 5:30. I start doing my homework when he is helping me with my baby.

What I had planned my future was to graduate from high school and become a lawyer. (inaudible)After having a child, I never went out with my friends to have fun, I never went out partying, but I don't regret having Andrew because I know it's not his fault.

Narrator: Allison's busy day includes cuddling and talking to Andrew and taking him to the park where he can see the leaves blowing and the clouds in the sky and trees. Everything in the world is new and interesting to Andrew: a cool breeze against his skin, the sound of his mother's voice, and the warmth of her arms around him.

Narrator: Aoum (inaudible) and her children enjoy a family tradition they share almost every weekend: a Cambodian dinner at the home of Aoum's parents.

Aoum: (inaudible) (inaudible)Narrator: (inaudible) own childhood was spent fleeing the wartime battles in her native Cambodia for over ten years. Now, a divorced mother of four, she enjoys helping her children to learn every day.

Aoum: When I see my kid, it make me very happy. Life is fulfilling for me. I look to my kids and I look at myself, they're living the life I just did not have.

Narrator: By offering new learning experiences to each of her children, Aoum has discovered that knowing what they are thinking makes sharing time with them special. For her oldest daughter Crystal, it's cooking.

Aoum: "You know what I'll let you do, I'll let you cut up the chicken, okay?"Crystal: "(inaudible)"Aoum: "No?"

Crystal: "I don't like cutting up chicken. Last time I tried to do that and I ruined the whole thing."Aoum: "You know what, you're lucky to have chicken to cut."

Narrator: Until she was seven years old Aoum enjoyed moments just like these with her own mother, set in the abundance and beauty of her family's farm.Aoum: "I remember the most is the flower; fields full of flowers. You would look out and see rice paddy fields and it was beautiful. And summertime, when we don't have school, my cousin and I use to go out and catch fish.

Narrator: Although it is a difficult subject, Aoum is honest with her children about the past and encourages them to ask questions about their families life in Cambodia.

Girl: "Did any of your family die?"Aoum: "Yeah, one of my brothers died."Girl: "How many of . . ."Boy: "How did he die?"Aoum: "He was trying to get away and they shot him from behind."

Narrator: Determined that her children received the education she never had, Aoum turned to Head Start to help them learn the social and academic skills she thought they would need.

Aoum: Head Start helps, you know, your child, Jennifer my child, to learn a lot of basic. The important thing is self-confidence. Also, to become independent. Help herself when I'm not there. To cope with her peers when I'm not there. And also, learning to read, play well with the classmates and she has learned a lot and I really like that.Child: "My name is Grace."

Narrator: Aoum is raising her children in two worlds: the traditional world of her parents and the contemporary world of American culture. Aoum knows that by watching her with their grandparents Jonathan, Tiffany, Crystal, and Jennifer are learning how families can manage differences and build strong relationships with each other.

Aoum: We do not talk back to our parents. We sit down, we don't jump up and down. Also, right now we do adapt to American ways, but we still have to respect the way my parents are doing.

Narrator: In Aoum's native Cambodia, stories are told through dance and music. Today, as she teaches Crystal a traditional Cambodian dance, Aoum keeps her children connected to their culture, to her, and to each other.

(inaudible): Someday they'll look back and uh . . . when they have their own children they can have a story to tell them of where I come from.

Narrator: Carol Lice, a mother of five, has always had good instincts about raising her children and managing a large family. Like many Head Start parents what she needed was support and a vote of confidence.

Carol: I think that I have always had the parenting skills, but I think Head Start opened my eyes to that fact and gave me the confidence to utilize them. My kids are all different ages and we have a great time together and they have a lot of fun together.

Carol: "We have enough room for that one, right here." They've learned that they're not all going to get the same thing at the same time. They can't all have my undivided attention at the same time. My husband and I, we take turns doing different thing with . . . we try to do things with all of them when we can. When we can't, it's the turn system, you

know, it's your turn today, but it's his turn tomorrow.

Girl: "I don't mind waiting for my turn." Boy: "The first person who gets to do it, just doesn't get to do it last." Girl: "Sometime we have to sharing." Carol: "Yep."

Narrator: When Carol and her husband Rick moved to rural Massachusetts so that he could find work as a roofer, their youngest child Sarah was an infant. The move left Carol feeling lonely and isolated, but she found help from her local Head Start home-based program, which provided a home visitor on a regular basis.

Carol: "How 'bout that Jenn?" Then when the home visitor came, she came to my house once a week and we'd plan activities to do with the kids and there was also parent meetings to go to for home based. There were socialization groups and field trips. So all of a sudden my empty calendar went to so much. There was one or two things going on every single week.

"That was very good that you let the little toad go 'cause now he can go back with all his friends and that way he will be able to find food. Just let him . . . cover him up and he will come out when he is ready. Good job. This is where all his food is. We don't have toad food at home" Girl: "(inaudible) Does he need a bowl?".

Carol: "Underneath the pine needles is the toad's food. We don't have toad food at home, so we'll leave him here. Leave him alone. There he is. Do you hear the big frog?" Girl: "Where?!" Carol: "Let's go see if we can find him. "

Narrator: The experiences Carol and Rick share with their children are planned to make the most of the valuable time they spend together. Time to discover how their children's thinking is changing, how they can continue helping their children to learn and how having fun with their children strengthens parent and child relationships.

Narrator: The stories of the lives we share with our children are created every day. Everywhere we look, something is happening. Not just in books or on television, but in our own lives. The daily experiences our families share, respecting each other, having fun while learning, are shaping our real life stories - stories that keep us connected.
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