

Lillian Sugarman: I'd like to introduce the panel to you. I'm going to introduce to you a wonderful friend of Early Head Start , Migrant Head Start and Head Start, who has come especially to introduce the parent panel because parenting is one of the things that are near and dear to his heart. Join me in a warm welcome for the Deputy Director of Office of Head Start, Frank Fuentes. [Applause]

Frank Fuentes: I won't say anything about superstar status. Have you all seen that yet this morning? Very entertaining. Everybody enjoy their lunch? Wonderful. Wonderful. I appreciate being here. I always appreciate Lillian's invitation to come and be a part especially of this segment of the Zero to Three conference. Earlier this week we saw, maybe perhaps some of you saw the obituary for Dr. Julius Richmond.

And what I knew about him was he actually was, in spite of what you might hear from others, was actually the first director of the Head Start program. What I didn't know, what I had forgotten was he also had been the Surgeon General of this country. I mention that because we continue to benefit 44 years later from the wisdom of people like Dr. Richmond.

When they created the Head Start program and insisted and designed what continues to be a cornerstone of Head Start and now Early Head Start , the involvement of parents, they truly put in a safeguard and a jewel, not just for the children but for the program as a whole. So the parents that are here on the stage this afternoon and then others that may be in the audience, we truly appreciate the important role you have, not just in becoming or being the first educators of your children, but influencing their experience.

And I'll mention two paths, not just for what you do for your children but what you end up doing for the program. 30 percent of our Head Start staff are former parents. [Applause] And the volunteer time that parents contribute to the program continues to be the sole largest nonfederal share source for this program. [Applause] So parents not only work in the program but they help finance it as well. Which, in these tight times, is very important. Very important.

You know, the Zero to Three conference has really this year come on the heels of two very new aspects and makes it a very timely conversation, particularly what parents will be sharing with you in just a few minutes. Zero to Three is on the Office of Head Start's minds. Perhaps Amanda and Pat yesterday mentioned that we are looking at that whole provision for conversion slots. Something that you all have, I know, been anxiously awaiting.

But the other aspect that shows the importance and attention on infant toddler -- delayed reaction. Is there like a ten second time warp? [Laughter] Satellite, all right. The folks in the back of the room, thank you.

But the other aspect that to me at least says a recognition of the importance of infant toddler care and the work that all of you do with the Early Head Start is that there is a requirement in the new state-based TA system, the only, am I right, the only specialty that is specifically required in that system is an infant toddler specialist. So I thank you all for that. [Applause] I'd like to address a little more immediately what the parents will be sharing with you. That's the issue of culture.

And that also cannot be too timely. 33 percent of the children served today in Head Start are Hispanic. 25 percent -- 25 percent only speak Spanish. Now, you look at that figure and we're talking what's 25 percent of almost a million. 250,000 kids. And then you look at places like New York City where the Head

Start program represents 138 different languages and cultures. The importance of giving these children the fullest, truest Head Start experience is recognized in the way that the Congress wrote this reauthorization.

Language and culture are inextricably connected. The way we convey culture is through language. Sometimes that has a humorous aspect to it. I don't know how many of you remember the Nova, what was that, 30 years ago, at least? General Motors lost their shirts in Latin America because they didn't change the name of the automobile. In Spanish we pronounce it Nova, which means it won't run. [Laughter] Okay. Can you imagine trying to sell a car that in the name says you can't count on it?

The other aspect of it is, of course, is that a number of years ago when American society was not as tolerant as it is today, there was this very [inaudible] minister who went to do some missionary work in Mexico and came back after a couple of months and was talking with one of the elders at his church and he said, "I cannot tell you how shocked and appalled I was at what I saw in the streets of Mexico." He said, "I don't understand how these people could live this way."

So his friend said to him, "What do you mean?" He said, "You know what, I went past a number of mattress stores, outlets, and each one of them had a big sign up on it in big red letters, 'sin pronto'." Think about it. [Laughter] Of course in Spanish that means "without a down payment." You know what, language and culture has its positives and its negatives, depending on how well we understand it, how well we can convey it and have the skills to appreciate and respect the differences and build on those differences.

And what we know from the dual language effort -- there's going to be a conference in October, hopefully you've all heard about it -- what we've learned from that effort and the recent science around this is that you need to support children. Particularly Early Head Start, Head Start children in their home language and culture, even as they attain proficiency in the English language. [Applause] What's interesting is Hispanic parents, Latino parents may be the more difficult to convince of this.

My own experience when I ran the my grant program I'd ride the bus at 5:30 in the morning just to get a chance to talk to the parents and talk about the children. I would say anything you'd like the program to do that maybe it's not doing or that you really appreciate. Every single one of them said to me in Spanish, "I want them to teach them English." So, it's not that there's a resistance it's how best we feel that need on the part of the children their desire for their children to do better but also for their children's ability to learn.

So I've taken up a lot of time. I want to share one particular personal note as to why I have a renewed appreciation, have always had an appreciation for the parents, particularly of preschoolers, but why I have a renewed appreciation. About two and a half months ago I became the stepfather to a preschooler. This is after having raised six children, the youngest of which is 24. So as I think it was it Casey Stengel that said it's *deja vu* all over again. He's a wonderful boy. Very intelligent.

And therein lays the challenge. You know? But I will tell you that I had forgotten how literal preschoolers can be. We were out taking a hike over, right here across the river on Roosevelt Island. Beautiful nature center. Lots of beautiful trails. And so he could see a little better I put him up on my shoulder. We were walking along. And I noticed that there was this low-hanging branch as we were approaching it.

And so I said to him "Alejandro, duck." And what he said -- he said "Duck, duck, where's a duck?" Boom. [Laughter] So I leave you with that. I have, as I said, a new appreciation for what you all deal with every single day. At least I'm not changing diapers, although I know how to do that. Even the old-fashioned kind with a pin. Thank you all very much for coming. It's been a pleasure being with you and now I will turn the program over to Amanda. Thank you. [Applause]

Amanda Perez: Thank you so much, Frank. It is absolutely my honor to be here with all of you and to be here especially with all of you. I want to introduce to you Leticia Mata. Jason Schlender and Melo Lawson, parents on our panel today. We're so pleased to have them. We're thrilled they're going to come and share a little bit of their stories about parenting and cross cultures. Before we get into their stories, I want to share a little bit of context if I can.

As we know, the Head Start program performance standards -- oh, Carlos -- As you know, the Head Start program performance standards require that the program support and respect the home language, culture and family composition of each child in ways that support that child's health and development and well-being. In addition, when a majority of children speak the same language, at least one classroom staff member or home visitor interacting with those children regularly must speak the same language.

Why? If we are in the business of preparing children for success in school, why is it so important to use home language when possible to offer respect to home culture? The research is absolutely clear on this, because that is where you start. You give infants and toddlers especially a strong foundation in a home language and a culture that is familiar and comfortable to them and that nurtures the bond between family and child.

This benefits development across the board, provides children with a sense of pride and confidence in who they are. Now, as we look at what that means for our daily work, Frank was talking about the number of languages and the statistic I heard was 140 languages spoken in Head Start program languages, in programs. Wow. Wow. Providing each of the families with the programs and quality of services required under the standards that are rewarding and really tough.

In an effort to support programs in this work, the Office of Head Start funded 44 Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs to participate in the dual responsiveness and educational project, participating teams came together for a training, they talked about that research that I just described, shared stories and strategies for dual language learning and cultural responsiveness.

And then for the next nine months those programs received follow-up support as they went home to review their policies and procedures to talk with other people on the staff about what they had learned and to implement some of the things that they were thinking about in their own unique communities, which was very exciting.

And we're really excited about the opportunity to learn from the experiences of those programs. And one way we have an opportunity to do that is in this session. The families on this panel are from programs in the CRADLE initiative. I have a few additional points to make. First, we'll be using interpreters for a few panelists today. Frank talked about why that is so important. If you've never had the experience of listening to someone's language who you don't understand, we hope you'll take note of how that feels.

That's sort of an experience to hear only secondhand what somebody is saying. We want that to be sort of an extra element in how you learn from our panel today. The second piece is we're defining culture very broadly as we speak. We have differences in languages and ethnicity across all four of us here. And of gender, of course.

I don't want people to get stuck there. We also have differences of beliefs and traditions and family practices and family composition, goals of children, how children are dressed, how children sleep, the whole thing. There are a billion factors that make up culture. Parents you serve are constantly going from cross-cultures. The culture they build at home to the mother's culture house, might be what formed that culture at home, or maybe not. The culture at your program.

The culture at the neighborhood library. Those are all cultures that they're negotiating and parenting across, of course. Every family who you serve also has a unique story about who they are, their practices and daily routines, what they believe and what guides them. We hope that you will take the messages of this panel to apply to the way that you build relationships with each of the families who you serve. And part of that process, of course, is of learning from families and asking them about their stories.

And so we're going to get started with that. We're going to begin with Letty Mata. We're so glad she's here. She's from the Oregon Child Development Coalition, which runs the Migrant Head Start program throughout Oregon. We are thrilled to have you. And I want to start at the very beginning. You were born in Mexico. Tell us how you came to Oregon.

Leticia Mata: [Spanish followed by English translation] When I was one year old, my father left for the United States and left my mother and my sisters back in Mexico. Never really kept in touch with us. When I was 11 years old he came back to Mexico to bring us to the United States. That is how that I got into Oregon.

Amanda: And he was working in agriculture, yeah?

Leticia: Yes, he was an agricultural worker.

Amanda: And what was that move at 11 like for you?

Leticia: Things were very different when I came. My mother and my sisters and I had a family. When we came here, we had to reestablish contact with our father, and so we had that person to interact with, plus very different surroundings.

Amanda: Yes, different language, different surroundings. The whole different thing. I think the point about your father is so important, particularly to all of us, as we're working with infants and toddlers, you were 11 when you moved. So that was a very different experience in a way for you. But I think sort of a building relationship with families, we sometimes assume that that's going to be a really quick thing to happen.

And it's not always quick. And for infants and toddlers we really, as programs, have a responsibility to understand some of those stories to really offer families some understanding what infants and toddlers are experiencing as they move from place to place. They might be grieving for people that they left behind.

They don't always know the families who they come to and so there's a lot for us to offer as programs as we're working with them for sure. You told me in our conversations about how different life is here for your children than your life was when you were little. Can you talk a little bit about that, Letty?

Leticia: Yes, things were very different back then, because my father was here and he did not send any money to support us. My mother had to work. And I helped my mother. I went to work at a restaurant. I was eight years old. I was a dishwasher at a restaurant. I remember that I had to climb on a stool to be able to reach the sink to do my work.

They did not pay me in money. They paid me with a container of food. Things are very different for my children now. Here I can offer them education. I can offer them clothing, food, doctors, medical attention; things that I did not have as a child.

Amanda: You came here for all those opportunities and your family brought you here for all those opportunities and you certainly took advantage of that one. You came, you learned English. You got your high school diploma. You got your infant and toddler CDA. Yea! [Applause] And of course you're now working towards your preschool CDA as well. You're working in the migrant program. How did you get involved with Migrant Head Start?

Leticia: Well, I have twin sisters, and when they were very young, they were six years old, they entered the program. And they stayed in the program until they were five years old, until they went to kindergarten. I could see the splendid opportunities that were being offered to them and I became very interested. So when I graduated from high school I applied for a job there and that's how I became involved.

Amanda: Wow. Your family has been involved for a long time. So let me get some pictures of your family up here. So tell me who this is.

Leticia: In the picture on the left, the first person you see is my husband Anthony. Next to him is my father. In the picture to the right is myself with my son Anthony and my daughter Lindsay.

Amanda: How old is Lindsay?

Leticia: She is five years old. And my son is one.

Amanda: And he just turned one. He just had a birthday?

Leticia: Si.

Amanda: They've been involved in Migrant Head Start.

Leticia: Yes, my daughter has been in the program since the start. She's now ready to go into kindergarten, and so she will be leaving the program. But my son is still involved.

Amanda: Wow. Letty, let me ask you, let's talk a little bit more -- who is this?

Leticia: That's my mother and my son Anthony.

Amanda: Tell me about, because many of these pictures that we sent a camera and many of these pictures were taken -- was it at your home?

Leticia: This was at my sister's house. We were roasting some meat and the whole family was there.

Amanda: When you say the whole family, how many people are we talking about?

Leticia: I'm talking about 18 persons more or less.

Amanda: And every Sunday you all get together; is that what you were telling me.

Leticia: Yes, every week we all get together.

Amanda: Who are these folks?

Leticia: The ones in the corners are the twins. The other one is my other sister. Their names are Jessica, Mary and Melissa.

Amanda: Look at those beautiful Head Start graduates. And who are these folks?

Leticia: The picture on the left-hand side is my grandmother with Lindsay. On the right of the top picture is my grandfather. He was just coming in from work. And in the picture in the bottom is my two children, two nephews of mine and some young cousins.

Amanda: Beautiful. Such a big extended family.

Leticia: Thank you.

Amanda: How do you teach your children about your home community in Mexico, your Mexican community?

Leticia: Well I show them, we eat Mexican foods. I show them pictures and Mexico is in our daily life. I want to convey to them our culture, our tradition and I want to bring them to Mexico so that they will feel the same attachment and pride that I have.

Amanda: It's all around them. It's all around them you said to me. It's all around them. Tell me about Spanish. Tell me about how they've learned language.

Leticia: Well, my husband speaks English to them. But I told my husband that I wanted the children to learn Spanish, because it is my language. That way they would also be able to communicate with my parents and my grandparents and the opportunities would also be expanded. Besides the opportunities that they could get that it will be additional to everybody else, this is part of me.

Amanda: Frank was talking about how language and culture are so tied and they are learning the culture through the language, too. They hear Spanish in their infant/toddler migrant Head Start classroom too. But as you told me as we were planning together that your language has not always been welcomed in your community.

Leticia: Indeed the language is, the speaking language has not always been well received in my community. I even remember a situation in which I was in a store and we were speaking Spanish and the woman turned around and said to me, we are not in Mexico. I felt bad. But I didn't say anything. And you can tell the stores don't often treat the Spanish-speaking person as everybody else. They look at you differently. I don't know what's going on. Maybe they think that we are talking about them.

Amanda: That story, unfortunately, is not uncommon. It's something we've heard in a lot of different ways. And I think absolutely Amanda was talking about the trajectory that we have an opportunity to change trajectories for families.

And I think when the trajectory in the community is so negative, I think that Early Head Start and migrant seasonal Head Start programs have such an opportunity to provide a welcoming culture, a welcoming community and just in that piece the trajectory has changed. And I think the confidence of you and your family to do all the things that you do is really a part of that, yeah?

Leticia: Yes.

Amanda: How does your program help with that, with some of the welcoming piece and dealing with some of those negative aspects? How does your program help connect the children to the community? I mean to their family and community?

Leticia: The program is very helpful. It helps me communicate and establish contact with families at the center.

Amanda: Can you tell us about the photographs that the children use?

Leticia: When the children first come to the center, the picture is taken of them with their mother. And that photograph is then exhibited in the center so the children come to see the picture of their mother. They feel connected to her. They get excited and thrilled and walk around with it and they feel close to the mother that way. We show children posters, pictures, songs, teach them the language. That helps them also establish, retain the contact.

Amanda: It becomes a part the of the culture in that program?

Leticia: Si.

Amanda: Very lovely. Letty, thank you so much for coming today and sharing your story.

Leticia: Gracias. [Applause]

Amanda: Our second panelist today is Jason Schlender. Jay is from the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Early Head Start and Head Start program in Bayfield, Wisconsin. Jay, thank you so much for being here. Jay had something he wanted to say in his language before we began.

Jason Schlender: Can I stand up?

Amanda: Please.

Jason: I'm not used to sitting down and talking. What I'm going to do probably just say a little invocation in my language. And usually when we do ceremonies back home we always say something to acknowledge the spirit, acknowledge our creator and the things that are around us that help us, help us do our work every day. So with that I just want to -- I'll say something real quick and then I'll introduce myself.

When I'm completely done I will translate in English and then all the translators can catch up. [Laughter] [Ojibwe] I want to say I just acknowledged my creator and the direction, and the spirit and those directions that help me that guide me in my path of life. [Ojibwe] I just wanted to say that in English, I said that I greeted all of you.

In our language we say buju. For some of people that's the French influence, but that's a different way of how we say in a traditional way, because there's a way we say anenen, like hello. And buju is a ceremonial way. It means more; it's a more sacred way of saying hello. I want to convey that message that I'm honored to be here. I said [Ojibwe].

That's my name, my spirit name that the creator named me before I became a human being. And that means spirit wind. Monadue is a spirit, noondin is the wind. So with the wind I'm always glad to acknowledge the wind as my helper that helps me do my work as an Indian person in the United States and then throughout the world. [Ojibwe] it's just saying I'm an Ojibwe-speaking person, and [Inaudible] person.

And buju [Inaudible] is linx clan or [Inaudible] is the clan. And that's my extended family within my tribal community, is that within my family that I have my kids and my wife. Beyond that is my brothers and my

uncles and my aunties that helped raise me. They might not necessarily be my biological family but they are in our traditional community they have every right to tell me to sit down and behave or quit messing around and listen and pay attention.

They have every right to do that. Then I said that I'm from a place called Chief Lake, which is located in a place called [Inaudible] back home in Wisconsin. That's where my family is from. My grandmother and father were born there. My grandmother was born in a wigwam. And so that's where I trace my roots from. That's my family, and that's where I come from, and that's where I was raised.

I was actually born in Madison, Wisconsin, when my dad was going to law school. And then I said [Ojibwe] I'm glad to be here with you all. [Ojibwe] it's this great city of the chiefs, because it's -- because this is actually, that's just the literal translation. What it actually means is [Ojibwe] means like a big knife.

When our people were introduced to the Americans, they always had big swords with them along with their, whether it was their gun or whatever else they were carrying with them. But that's how we recognized them. So in our language we say, if we acknowledge somebody that is an American, we say that they're [Ojibwe], that they're the people of the long knives.

So we just call this place [Ojibwe] like the great [Inaudible] is the President of the United States. And this is the place where he does his work and lives. So I just wanted to acknowledge that. And I just said that I was glad to be here. [Ojibwe] means that I am determined in my work. I'm always determined.

And I love to do my work that I do to help the people, help my people in my community live and learn. And then I said [Ojibwe]. Thank you for listening to me. [Applause]

Amanda: Jay, we actually have some pictures. You were talking about your grandmother, and we have a picture of her. There she is. Can you tell us a little bit about her?

Jason: I'll try to do this without crying. But her name is -- her English name is or was Pansy. She didn't really have a common English name. Her Ojibwe name was [Ojibwe] What that name meant was that the star, the last star in the sky before the sun comes up. That's what she was named after. She's a female, so she has that quay part to it.

That means a woman. That's basically what her name is translated into English. Then I said [Ojibwe] guy is like a past tense. That means she's no longer -- she's no longer alive. She passed away in 2000. That's basically what her Ojibwe name is.

Amanda: Can you tell us a little bit about her story?

Jason: She was born back home and you know she, from the beginning she had a real hard time, because during that time in the 1920s, you know, federal American or federal policy was to either assimilate the tribes into the United States or exterminate them. So it was a lot of times in our communities we were the ones that were adamant about protecting language and culture, they hid that. They would conduct their ceremonies and speak the language not out of the house.

They would keep that inside and be very quiet. But for some of them there was also that boarding school era. My grandmother was -- she was supposed to go to a boarding school, but she was stung in the eye by a mosquito and with that an infection took her vision. So she was sent to a blind school in Janesville, Wisconsin, which was technically a boarding school anyway but just for blind kids. In that

school she was taught that her Ojibwe language, her first language, was not accepted there, that she would learn how to speak English.

That she would become an American through that way. And she was basically -- she was punished a lot and made to feel embarrassed to speak her language. But then eventually she lost her language to the point where she could only listen and understand it if she was spoken to. But she lost the ability to communicate back. I remember stories she would tell me. We would have ceremonies at my dad's house or in our house and we would be like, "Grandma do you know what they're saying?"

"I understand but I don't know how to talk anymore because I don't have anybody to talk to." And then I think there was a gradual process, because I remember at one time when I was younger, her friends that she grew up with, those guys, those people they were stronger with their language. So they would come over and have coffee and sit down with my grandma, when she used to live with us. And they would just speak Ojibwe, and I was really young. I was playing with a car or something.

And I would say, "Grandma what are you saying?" And then my grandma and her friend, my uncles, they would look at me and say, "Oh, you keep playing we're just talking Indian here", as if it was -- there was that always that sense that you know sometimes they wanted us to learn English so they wouldn't be -- so they could save us, I guess, from being treated like that, how they were treated. So that's a little bit of my grandma's story.

Amanda: Wow. And we know that a lot of families have very similar stories. That was a similar story for a number of the folks in your community, that they had a very similar story to that. Tell me about the language right now, about the Ojibwe language now.

Jason: Well, right now, in fact, I just read an article in I think it was in Newsweek. It says there's only 10,000 fluent Ojibwe speakers left in North America. But right now -- and I'm part of this, but there are people, just from my generation that are starting to reacquire their language academically. So there is like this language and cultural revitalization movement, and that's really popular in our area. There's people like Anton Triller, from the Leach Lake Band of Ojibwe which is located in Minnesota.

He learned the language by immersion but by also learning it academically just like anybody would learn Spanish or German or something that was taught in school. And then there's other people like Keller Pat who is from Red Cliff, where I live.

Along the same lines, and we're all closely knit together, because we all kind of -- we all tried to learn our language again and kind of pick up, because in our traditional stories and our oral histories back home, when we're together, there is that philosophy we have that we knew that something bad was going to happen to our grandmothers and our grandfathers at that time, that they would lose that. They would be forced to put down their bundle, we call it.

In their bundle is their ability to speak the language, the medicines that they have been taught, their drums and their songs that they were being forced to put that on the side of this path of life. But it's now our responsibility, they say, as our younger generation, to pick up that bundle again -- to open up that bundle and start to speak the language and sing our songs and use our medicines and use our traditional practices in order to revitalize our people so that we can live.

Amanda: And that is work I know that you are very involved with. And we were able to talk a little bit about that. Before we get to some more specifics about your efforts to revitalize that in your work with the Head Start and Early Head Start program at Red Cliff I want to talk about your father. Your father had a very different story.

Jason: Are we going to go to the.. The lady on the left -- the people that are in the picture, the picture on the back of the head, is her name is Big Marge we called her back home. To the left of her is my cousin Bucky. Bucky and my dad were real close. But he was also an example of somebody that lost their language that was, his mother is that person my dad is kissing.

She was raised in a boarding school and taught that the only way that she's going to be able to contribute to the United States or to be an American is to learn how to cook, to clean, and that she won't be able to do anything else, and that she has to abandon her language and her basically her people. She was forced to go into like this, I think it was like a nun's school, I don't know what you call it. I don't know. Convent. I don't know. Something like that.

I'm not really familiar with Catholicism and all that or Christianity too much. With that, she's close with my dad because my grandmother, she was an alcoholic, to be just honest. With her story is a reason that you find out why things happen, the traumatic events that happened in my grandma's life led to the reason or led to her drinking and just being -- eventually what I found out about my grandmother is that she, just recently, is that she witnessed her dad being killed.

And we kind of put pieces together as we live our lives about my grandmother and I can understand a little more why she did that. She was hurt. She didn't have her language to fall back on, her traditional societies to fall back on, because she was forced to live in the city, to relocate from the place where her roots were at.

So that eventually led to my Aunt Rita, my dad's Aunt Rita, she raised my dad because my grandmother was struggling with alcohol, so she was an unfit mother. And my dad was in and out of foster homes. Every now and then when he wasn't running away or causing trouble, my aunt Rita would take him in, cook him food and make sure that he would take a bath or whatever. Some of the stories -- so that bond was with my dad until my aunt Rita passed away. She passed away in 1994.

Those are probably like his two main people. He was real close with his grandma, or with his mom. But he was real close with his auntie, too, in which he said she's just like his mom practically raised him.

Amanda: And he got a lot of -- he had a lot of experiences with men, too, in the community, yeah?

Jason: I'm sorry?

Amanda: He had a lot of experiences with men, you told me they were mentoring him and teaching him to hunt and do that.

Jason: The thing about my dad that was a good thing, is that he was born back home but basically lived in the city during the fall, winter and spring months, but at wintertime he got to go home. That's where his uncles were at. His uncles taught him how to fish, how to hunt, and how to use different things, different aspects of our traditional life. Using tobacco in a proper way and the medicines that are in the woods taught him how to do that. And how to keep connected to where his family is at and his traditional ways.

Amanda: Here he is. We have another picture of your dad. Tell us about this picture.

Jason: My dad was -- he graduated from law school in 1978 from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Eventually he got involved with tribal politics and the reaffirmation of treaty rights for Ojibwe people in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. He spent a lot of his time in Washington D.C. dealing with politicians and legislators and Supreme Court Justices and senators and Congressmen and really working, doing a lot of work here in this city.

And what he's doing there is in 1998 the Supreme Court, there was a Supreme Court case that was being -- there was a trial in Washington D.C. with the Mille Lacs versus Minnesota case, and my dad was one of the attorneys that was working on that case on behalf of the tribes.

So what they did and what -- how we do a lot of things in our communities is that we do, we try to add that traditional component to it, because there's always the fact we can go to Washington put on our suit and tie on and do what he's been taught in school; how to read law books and kind of interpret federal Indian policy. But one of the things that he did, he said that we should do like a spirit run. And it was called the Waabanong Run, and it was in 1998. What they did was they left from Wisconsin.

It was a group of runners, I don't know the exact number. They left from Wisconsin and they ran all the way from Washington D.C. It was a relay run. And so he walked, but -- [Laughter] he was a little bit older, I think. But they ran as a core group from this place called Lackaflama Wisconsin, over by the Minok/Woodrough area. They ran together as a group. Took 17 days to get from Wisconsin to Washington D.C.

And every day they would have a pipe ceremony, they would sing songs to each other as a way to share their love for each other and the message that they're doing, but also to pray for the people, pray for the people in which the treaty affects both people, the tribal people and the government also, because the treaty and the treaty is signed by both people. So they reach everybody as a way to show their solidarity with the United States. So it took 17 days.

And then when they got here they did like a little ceremony on the steps of the Supreme Court. And so that's what happened. So just a little, when I come, it's exciting to see the monuments and all the attractions that Washington D.C. has. But I was always kind of sad that I couldn't be here with him, because he asked me to. He would always like, "Come on son we're going to do go do this."

At that time I feel guilty because I was in love with this -- [Laughter] with this woman at the time. And I was like, "No, dad, I'm going to stay home. I'll be thinking of you." But now I think about now I have my own children and I have my wife now. She wasn't the woman then, but...[Laughter] so I think about that story. And some of the things, you know, in a way that you talk about priorities in your life and the time that you get to spend with your parents. My dad's no longer alive.

And so you regret some of the decisions you make, and if there's one thing I could take back. [Applause] The one thing I would take back is I would have spent more time with him.

Amanda: You all are very close.

Jason: Because that's one thing that I think about when I'm walking around. Because over the last couple days since we've been here, me and Donna, she is one of the teachers at the center. She's a part of our CRADLE team. There's a couple times where I'll just zone out and she'll look at me. I'll be kind of like just

in a different place, because I imagine my dad being here. [Applause] I just wanted to say something real quick.

So that's just kind of, if there's a message in that, which is like spend as much time with your mom and dad as you can. Because you never know when they're going to be -- in our way we say called back home. Because you don't want to miss those times. Sorry about that. [Applause]

Amanda: Let's talk for a moment as we're talking about your dad. Let's talk for a moment about your sons and your daughter and your wife.

Jason: This part will be a lot easier. That's me on the left. I'm in both pictures. But the one on the left, the baby, that's my son Ande. In our language it means crow, like the black crow. And that's like my great, great grandfather's name we looked at the annuity rolls in the back 1800s. That's the name we traced back as we go back from a census point of view or from a governmental way of doing it.

My daughter is on the right there. Her name is Anita. Her Ojibwe name is Sagata. Means sunshine. Because when she was named, this person that named her talked about the ray of sun that comes through a cloud. And that's basically how you treat that. That's me. I had less hair. And what I'm trying to do now is I'm trying to grow my hair out so when I graduate from college I can braid it. So I can have a braid. I've never had one ever. I think this is the longest my hair has ever been.

On the right side is my wife [Ojibwe] that's her name. And in the language it basically means like a red tailed hawk. But her English name is Elana. And then that's my daughter and my son is in the middle and then the little guy on the right side with the Superman shirt on, his name is Dalen. We adopted him. He's five years old. He's actually our nephew, but he was abandoned by his mom. And his dad, in a polite way, is just not ready to be a dad yet.

So we took it upon ourselves to adopt him in a traditional way. It's not really legal yet. We take care of him and do the best we can with him. And he has two Ojibwe names. And the reason we did that is because he has -- I think he's been diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome and he has attention deficit disorder. So he's really hyperactive. Keeps me really busy and breaks a lot my stuff. [Laughter] but his Ojibwe name is [Ojibwe] that means like a king bird and then his other name is [Ojibwe] that means like a foggy day.

Both of those names came through dreams from myself and then my brother, we named him together in a ceremony that we did just last month. So that was to explain that part. In these pictures, it's Ande. That was the picture, he's got my dad's hat on. My dad passed away in August 2005, August 30th, 2005. When they took this picture one of the last times that my dad saw Ande. So he was still alive when he took that picture.

Then my daughter, Jada, is dressed in her regalia. She's a fancy shawl dancer, and she's also a jingle dress dancer. In our traditional communities, when we dance at powwows, women have, there's a certain category you can dance in or whatever. She dances jingle dress, with jingles on there and she dances, and also she dances fancy shawl. Then there's Dalen. That was the day of his naming ceremony. So it was kind of a neat way to kind of show how happy he was that day.

Amanda: Look at the joy in that face.

Jason: Pretty active. Pretty active guy.

Amanda: Jay, tell me a little bit, as we're thinking about these kids, about your involvement in the Early Head Start / Head Start program. I know you've been super active with them since you got involved.

Jason: Well, currently I'm the chairman of our policy council back home. And I've been active on the policy council for three years, about three years. And it was right when I moved to Red Cliff, I got my daughter was in the Head Start and my son was real young at the time, was home-based. So somebody would come over to our house and show him how to put blocks and lift stuff up and do different things.

And one of the things that I asked the home-based teacher, I said, "What kind of work, how much Ojibwe language and culture are the students at the center getting?" And she said, "Well, really not that much." So what I did and I told -- I brought it to the policy council. I said let's try to use more language so we would -- there's a newsletter that comes out for Head Start. So we'd print a word list in Ojibwe and how to use it. Simple phrases like "I'm hungry" or "Stop watching TV. Go outside and play."

[Laughter] just simple things like that. "Listen." "Be nice." "Give her that toy," lots of different little phrases that we try to use. That's like the majority of what I do at the center. Because my wife is real involved with the kids. She always goes to like their play days and stuff because I'm busy doing other things. So what I try to do is try to bring a cultural language component.

Amanda: Jay, we didn't talk about this, but for infants and toddlers, do you do that in an oral way for -- since they're not reading, the words that folks are getting, they're speaking to their children?

Jason: We kind of use both. Nowadays, with the urgency of trying to preserve the language, we've kind of adapted or adopted the philosophy that we need to use everything that we can to help preserve the language. So we use CDs, videos, computer, Internet, there's different websites that the teachers can go to and that parents can go to to these interactive websites that can -- sometimes cartoons. And they'll have it all in the language. So those are some of the things that we use.

At home I use more of an oral way. I'll sing songs with my kids, our traditional songs, and I have a little thing that I use in ceremony but I use with them. And the belief is that it's important that language and culture be passed on and the way we do that is to have them there all the time. Whether they are paying attention or not, because we don't want to force them to pay attention, because then they'll get mad. When I say, "Why don't you pay attention?" "No, I don't want to."

So we just kind of let them do what they -- kind of do what they want while we're in ceremony. And eventually they just stop playing with that car and they'll come over and, "Dad what you doing? What are you doing? What song is that you're singing? I like that song." Sometimes they'll even dance.

And with that, through the immersion, we kind of put everything we kind of surround them with culture and language and at home for me one of the things I'm proud of is that a lot of things, especially animals and stuff outside, is that my kids they don't know the English terminology yet. Because my philosophy, my belief is that they can get that later. They can learn what an eagle, how to say eagle or how to say seagull or a dog or a car.

But what's important is that they be able to say these things in our language first. So they'll say, "Oh, Dad, look at that [Ojibwe]" and that's Ojibwe for eagle and they don't know any other way to say that.

That makes me feel good that at least I'm doing something to preserve that, because I'm not a fluent speaker but I use all what I've got to share with them, to live every day using our language as much as I can. Try to, people that know more language, kind of surround myself and my children with people that know the language as their first language.

Amanda: And bring that to the program. [Ojibwe] thank you very much for being here with us today.
[Applause]

We're going to talk, last but not least, with Melo Lawson. You work in Parents in Community Action Early Head Start in Hennepin County. In the Minneapolis part of Minnesota. Melo was originally from the country of Togo in West Africa. She's trilingual. She speaks her language west and French as well. We've asked her to speak today in French. She learned English as well in Minnesota. Melo, tell us how you came to be in Minnesota.

Melo Lawson: [French then translated to English] We were actually lucky enough through the university education program, my husband and I applied for Visas to that program and able to get a visa to come here that way.

Amanda: What were you doing in Togo before you left?

Melo: I was an accountant and also a specialist in information technology. I studied for two years in France and I worked for two years in an insurance company. I also then got a job in my own country with a big insurance firm, which I held for 10 years.

And then when this opportunity arose to come to the United States, I took advantage of that. I thought of it as a way of living in another culture, and I'm learning. And I did that when I was in France. I learned a lot and that's the reason I'm here as well.

Amanda: How did you get involved in Early Head Start ?

Melo: At first, when I came here, I didn't have any help, and I was put in touch with this program called Grow. And there I met somebody named Sosha my social worker and she was the first person to introduce me to Head Start. When I first came here I couldn't speak English. In school, back home, we learned British English but that's quite different from American English. The words are the same but there are places I would go and I would speak in English and people wouldn't understand me.

And I would have to write everything down. People would be surprised at how I could write English so well but couldn't speak it. So I'd have to explain what we learned in my country was British English.

Amanda: Wow. And so you got involved with Early Head Start through the program that you were with?

Melo: Could you repeat the question?

Amanda: You got involved with Early Head Start through a referral from the program you were with?

Melo: That's right.

Amanda: How old were your children at that time?

Melo: At that time my oldest was four and a half and the other was two.

Amanda: We have some pictures of your children. Tell us who this is.

Melo: The oldest is in white. She's carrying the baby. She's nine years old. The one on the far left is Abla, she's seven. And the little guy who is in traditional dress, he's the first to be born here and he's now

three years old. His name is Joey. I had forgotten to give their names. And the little one who is saying hi, that's Roseannena and she is one.

Amanda: When I got these pictures I asked you if these were the personalities of your children, and you said yes. [Laughter]

Melo: Yes, absolutely. The little one, the girl who is seven, she always keeps really busy and then -- I apologize, let me go back, the first one, the little boy he's always really busy. He's always really serious. He always stands up to his sisters and he says he's the head of the household and he is the one gives the orders.

The seven-year-old, she's always making faces and having fun and the oldest girl, she's very serious. She's always looking for something to do and the smallest one, Roseannena is here with me and I'm very grateful for that. And she just learned to walk.

Amanda: And tell us about your husband.

Melo: I arrived here alone with my children. We didn't have enough money to buy tickets for all of us. He was able to come to us after four months. And after that he had to go back home, back to Lamay; he's the oldest in his family and for that reason he had to go back to take care of some things there. And he was unable to get together the necessary money to come back. And I was not working either, so I was not able either to send him anything.

So he stayed out of the United States for more than a year and the visa that we had or have does not allow for a person to stay outside the U.S. for more than a year. When I started working at Head Start I was able to get enough money together to pay for his ticket and he did come back.

But when he came back at the border they took away or at the airport they took away his green card because of the fact that he had been gone so long. And they gave him a visa to stay here for three months. So now I'm here alone with the four children. He was not able to come back again without his green card.

Amanda: And we have some more pictures of your children. The best part, right? We have some more pictures. There they are. Now, we see from these pictures, the way you are -- some of the ways you're sort of teaching your children about your home culture in the home in Togo. And we see Roseanna and we see the clothing they're wearing. Tell me what Alba, what she is using there.

Melo: Abla is using a musical instrument we call gong-onet. On the weekends and sometimes when I have time, I teach them traditional dances and songs and we have decorations around and, of course, the clothing from Togo. They really love that.

Amanda: And these are some more of the decorations, yeah? The gong-onet.

Melo: That's absolutely right. The gong-onet is an instrument. It sounds like a real drum; it's really loud.

Amanda: What is Abla doing there?

Melo: Abla in this picture is making a type of traditional dish we call Cumay. I try even though it's expensive you can find all the ingredients where I live for our traditional food. And I get those so they can have that experience, and I teach them how to make these things and have them eat them so they can learn.

Amanda: How is life here different, Melo, than life was in Togo? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Melo: Yes, absolutely. Life here is totally different from life back home. We live a community life. Here you live a more solitary life. In Africa, really everything is centered on the family, even if you're talking about distant family. Even if they're not your own children, your cousins, your aunts, everyone is part of a big extended family. What really shocked me here when I arrived is that you can live in an apartment and not meet your neighbor for five years or more, not even say hello.

You basically hide all by yourself in your apartment with your children. The other thing that I noticed that's different here is the festivities. There they're a source of great joy for the community.

So as far as the festivities go in my country, everyone gathers for a celebration, whether it's a baptism or birthday or any kind of celebration, nobody needs to be invited, it's announced that you're having a celebration of some sort and everybody shows up.

Also, there's a lot of working among neighbors. I might cook something one day and invite my neighbor. She would do the same thing, invite me over the next day. Or I can go to her house and open her refrigerator and take something out. She can do something with me. It's a really widely accepted and generally practiced way of living in a community.

I also noticed something else here. The things are rather limited. In Togo, for example, if you're sick or you need help you just call on your neighbor scream loudly I need help and somebody would be there to help you. Here what I found out basically 911 is your neighbor and if you need help that's what you have to do. Your neighbor is probably too busy. Nobody has time. Everybody's busy and you're pretty much -- that's a big difference.

Amanda: Melo, you also told me here we also have a stronger sense of time and we like to be on time for things. I realize we have gone over, but I'm going to ask one more question, if I can, if that's okay. I'm so sorry. I hoped that you could tell us a little bit about how Early Head Start helps you in your efforts to raise your kids in both cultures, and this is something you've been really passionate about.

Melo: Head Start has helped me a lot and continues to help me in educating my children in two cultures. I find that in the classrooms at our Head Start, there are traditional musical instruments. There's something that looks like a gong-onet. There's a tomtom. Something that reminds me of a traditional tambourine. There's a book on traditions where you learn in various languages how to say, "Hello, what's your name? Do you want to eat?" or, "I'm hungry," or "I want to eat."

The Somalian Kenian languages are represented and that diversity helps a great deal. Also, in December, we celebrate what we call an international holiday. And it's really a community-based activity. Every class represents a country.

My class represented Togo and every class has to bring the food, decoration, flags, all of those things that represent the country that they are working to represent. And so this is really something that brings together the community. We invite all the parents. Many come. And to me this is like building a type of community here.

Also, Head Start organization tours for the children to, takes them to different communities. They go to malls, all sorts of different places. It's very interesting, and it's kind of like a community exchange. They learn a lot that way.

Also, with the money that I earn at my job at Head Start, I send that to Africa, and there my friends and family buy me traditional clothes, traditional instruments, and when it's not so cold as it is in winter in Minnesota, in the summer -- when it's not cold, that is, in the summer, not in winter, I have my children wear only traditional clothes, that way they have and keep a really good memory of Togo.

Amanda: Melo, what's so striking to me about your story is how thoughtful you have been about each aspect of that, and it's really exciting to learn. Merci beaucoup for coming today. [Applause] I want to say the other thing that Melo told me as we were talking together.

She said that when she came to the United States, I'm going to quote you, she said this in English to me. She said, "When I came to the United States I felt like a fish out of water. She said I don't want my children to ever feel that way. I want to raise my children to be fish in both waters." And I thought that that was so lovely. [Applause]

<time begin="1:33:10.0"/>And I think in the programs you have an opportunity to do that you have an opportunity to nurture children in both waters to make them welcoming and open to learning about these families. Thank you for all so much for being here today and for the work you do.

-- End of Video --