

Head Start 40th Anniversary

[Music]

E. Dollie Wolverston: When I think about the history of Head Start I really get very nostalgic, because I remember the fervor that we felt that spring. We got word that this legislation had been passed -- it was part of the "War on Poverty" -- and that we were going to have a role, we thought, in eradicating poverty. And we were going to start with very young children in a program called Head Start.

Teacher 1: One foot right in front of the other.

E. Dollie: The thing that I remember the most was about the wisdom that went into the planning of this program. And it all started with the convening of a group called the Cooke Committee, and they had the wisdom to see that you needed a healthy child to have a child that would be prepared to learn; that you had to involve the parents to really be supportive of that child's development and learning; and also that the parents, in turn, would learn from being part of such a comprehensive program.

Gregory Peck: Sadly, there are little children who are already headed for lives of frustration and misery. No one ever read them a story, taught them a nursery rhyme, showed them about colors, letters, and numbers. When they start school in the first grade, they'll be so far behind the others that they may never catch up. But there is hope. Write Project Head Start, Washington, D.C.

Richard Johnson: Many different kinds of pilot demonstration programs arose from the -- the basic Head Start model. Not only the parent-child centers with Zero to Three and Child-Family Resource Program, but there were a number of others.

Sarah Greene: Well, I think all Americans now know from research that the earliest you can start giving children rich experiences, the better their quality of learning is, the more they are prepared for a more structured setting in-- in public school.

President Lyndon B. Johnson: My fellow Americans...

Jerry Gribble: I remember when Mr. Johnson started Head Start and when he signed the -- the Head Start Act, and I remember working with Head Start on the Indian reservations in '64 and '65.

Helen Maynor (Scheirbeck): Head Start is such a wonderful program for all children in America, and in particular for Native children because it gives them a chance to learn about their culture, their language, and it has a social-service program that catches health issues very early -- and that has been so significant for all children in America.

Richard Swartz: I went to a Papago reservation that was outside of Tucson. Here you see not just a bilingual education but trilingual. They were learning the Indian dialect, learning Spanish dialect, and then, English. Exciting stuff. Eating the native American foods, good nutrition. The culture was pride.

Winona Sample: In every instance that I talked to Indian people, I asked them: "How did you become a teacher? What are some of the reasons that you are able to be an administrator or a nurse?" Most of them said, "It's because of the Head Start parenting."

Hank Aguirre: I was the migrant coordinator for several years, and then, I became director of the Indian Migrant Programs Division in the late 70s to the early '80s. Most of our centers were open 10, 12, 14 hours based on the working hours of the farm workers. When the Standards came in, we did develop a curriculum, specifically designed for the mobile population.

Juanita Dennis: One of the guiding principles when we started on it was these standards not only have to be realistic, but they have to be standards that could be implemented in Alaska. They had to be implemented in the mountains of Tennessee, in very rural areas, on reservations. And I always like to think of the one -- they had to be able to be implemented at the Head Start program in the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

Lillian Sugarman: Wherever you go, the cornerstones of Head Start – the Program Performance Standards -- the whole philosophy is portrayed in its own way across the country, and you can walk into any program and feel that familiarity and see the same kinds of goals and -- and such being carried out.

Betty Kelson: I was one of the very first employees of Head Start Bureau, back in 1965, and at that time toys for children in child development were just almost nonexistent. So, what we would do, we had a person on the staff that developed a book called "Beautiful Junk," and it was what you could do with these little things that you have around the house -- spools of thread, cartons from milk, cartons from eggs -- and all the toys were really developed with very innovative ideas.

Sabrina Taliaferro: My mother, out of seven children, decided to send me to Head Start. And something happened during that time I was in Head Start, and I don't think I'll ever forget it. It's been with me all of my life. They took our class to a clinic and they gave us all immunizations. And so, at first I was kind of devastated because I'm like, "What's going on?" And that was my first time actually receiving an immunization, but my mom said from that point on that I was interested in health and medicine and I would ask for doctor's bags or nurse's bags. And as I went on through school, I decided to go into the field of public health education and it just stuck with me for a long time.

Edith Grotberg: Head Start tried something different. And they said, "Look, we want parents to have some say in how the money is spent, how the program is developed, what is happening to the children. Get them involved in activities." That was a major, major shift in any program the government had ever supported.

Father: The red mean what?

Girl: Stop.

Father: Green mean...?

Girl: Go.

Dorothy Harris: So, many of our parents who start out as volunteers, and who were even reticent to come to the classroom went on to get their GEDs, and, then went on to community college, and were assistant teachers in the classroom.

Janice Webster: I started Head Start in 1985 as a parent. My daughter's now 23 years old. She's a college graduate, and I'm so proud of what Head Start has done for her. And I'm now the disabilities services manager with the San Francisco Head Start Program.

Cynthia Walker: They don't only just embrace the child. They embrace the mom, the dads, and the entire community. I have interviewed parents who told how they went from being a bus driver to a cook, from a cook to a teacher aide, from a teacher aide to a lead teacher. Believe it or not, from a lead teacher to, like a family service coordinator. And I had one experience where even the person had become a Head Start director.

Frankie Hoover Gibson: Shared decision-making and then, the whole formal structure of program governance is -- is so absolutely unique to Head Start, and is... very powerful and empowering to individuals but also to groups.

Woman 1: When they do transition to kindergarten and they're able to...

Beryl Clark: It's the wisdom of the founders of Head Start to recognize that parents, along with the community can work very well together and can make a really important difference in the lives of children no matter who they are.

Jean van Keulen: What you see happen to families, to young children, to communities... It is absolutely incredible.

Man: "I saw a black cat looking at me."

Jean: I don't know of any other program that works so well to impact and change people, change homes, change communities.

Edmund Clark: I started with Head Start in 1968. I joined what was called the CDTA division -- that's Career Development and Technical Assistance Division. And we were, at that time, responsible for all the training and technical assistance activities for Head Start. I think our program, working with the colleges and universities, helped them to begin to develop child development curricula. And I think that's one of the things that Head Start helped to influence throughout the nation.

JoAn Knight Herren: In 1965, I was at the University of Iowa, and that was at the very beginning of Head Start. And, there was only summer programs, so the university was asked to conduct in-service training for the teaching staff. And so, my colleagues and I put together a series of classes for the Head Start teachers. It started by saying that every classroom should have a certain number of children and that there should be an aide in the classroom. I remember that being amazing, you know. It made such an impact on the field. It was such a breath of fresh air, and it's never stopped being a breath of fresh air.

Ernest Clark: Mary Lewis taught us that we weren't to tower over the children, that we should sit in the seats or we should bend to the point that we were meeting the children, so they would have someone to speak to and relate, as opposed to a great big adult.

Mary Lewis: If you individualize for every child in the Head Start program, then no child gets to flunk Head Start. No way. And that is a real success, in my opinion -- when people understand that the individualization not only covers children with very special needs, but it covers every child, and makes every child a winner and every parent happy.

Rhonda Davis Page: In 1968, schools were integrated in the state of Mississippi, and Head Start provided me with the opportunity to be prepared to enter into the school system. I think that the Head Start concept and the Head Start model gave me the understanding of learning and the desire to learn. And to this day, I feel that that's what enabled me to continue all the way through my secondary education as an honor student, as well as to be a graduate of Emory University.

Richard Gonzales: People were talking about: "Prove that Head Start works. You've been in existence a long time. How do you prove this?" Now, anybody who's run a Head Start program always knew that Head Start worked. They saw children who came in not speaking all of a sudden speak. They saw health problems be addressed. They saw parents going on to get jobs or become public speakers. And so, we always had these success stories.

Boy: Attention! Attention!

John M. Chavez: And the longitudinal studies that have been carried out by High Scope, through the Perry Preschool Program, has surely shown over the past 40 years that it's cost effective. It's certainly beneficial to the community that Head Start does allow that child to flourish.

Teacher 2: Doctor, doctor. This person is not breathing.

Irelys Ramirez: My daughter, she had great experiences in Head Start. And she always remembers the passion the teachers had for their work. And she also remembers the family-style servings, the meals, and she would do that at home. She would have us eat as a family. And the other things that she really, really recalls is the activities in terms of literacy, music, and songs. And she developed a strong passion: Books.

Diane Trister Dodge: The amazing thing about Head Start is that from the very beginning, the principles on which it was founded have remained true, you know...that belief that we need comprehensive services for children who come out of poverty homes; that we need to spend time thinking not only about their educational needs, but social services, parent involvement, health needs, nutrition. The whole comprehensive approach of Head Start was there right from the beginning, and that was absolutely right.