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Wade Horn: My name is Wade Horn. I'm the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Among the 65 social programs that I oversee that are designed to help disadvantaged families, one stands out as especially promising for improving the well-being of children.

That program is Head Start, a vital project that involves more than 212,000 staffers who serve more than 900,000 disadvantaged children in more than 20,000 centers and nearly 50,000 classrooms nationwide. Since its founding in 1965, Head Start has touched the lives of more than 25 million children.

That's a remarkable accomplishment for a program that was conceived of during the turbulent 1960's when Congress wanted to do something about poverty but wasn't exactly sure what strategies would be most effective. I'm pleased to report that after 40 years and \$86 billion, Head Start has emerged as a key player that makes a real difference in the lives of young children. Yet Head Start is more than just an effective social program.

It also reflects America's commitment to a big idea -- the idea that no child should be disadvantaged in their education because of the circumstances of their birth. By bringing programmatic life to this big idea, Head Start extends the guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to every American and that is something certainly worth celebrating.

Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson: This summer, half a million children children of low-income or no-income families will need your help. A Head Start volunteer helps children to trust the stranger who would teach them.

E. Dollie Wolverton: 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: One foot right in front of the other.) 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 basic Head Start model -- not only the Parent-Child Centers with Zero to Three and Child and 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 public school.

(Lyndon Johnson: My fellow Americans,) Jerry Gribble: I remember when Mr. Johnson started Head Start and when he signed 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 Seventies to the early Eighties. 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.

Jaunita 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.

Lilian 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 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 that 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. (Teacher: The red means what? Child: Stop. Teacher: Green means... Child: Go.)

Dorothy Harris: So many of our parents who started out as volunteers and who were even reticent to come to the classroom went on to get their G.E.D.s 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 is 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 their 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 so absolutely unique to Head Start and is very powerful and empowering to individuals but also to groups. (Woman: 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. (Male reading: "I saw a black cat looking at me.") 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 C.D.T.A. 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.

(Child: 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 forty years that it's cost-effective. It's certainly beneficial to the community that Head Start does allow that child to flourish. (Teacher: 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.

Joan Lombardi: It wasn't, however, until the Nineties where we began to see much more attention to the very youngest children and their families. In 1995, we finally saw the launching of Early Head Start, which has become really a beacon of hope for low-income children and their families, from pregnancy to age 3. We're finding that when we start early, when we do well-implemented programs, when we focus on both children and their families, we can get very positive results before children start preschool.

Carmen Bovell-Chester: This is the kind of work I want to do. I want to work in this program that respected and honored diversity, that respected parents and included them in decision-making about how their children will be cared for, who will care for their kids. I mean, it was awesome. And I got involved and was sucked in. (Teacher: Good night, my babies. Night-night.)

Jerry Gomez: The thing that stands out is the dedication and commitment of so many people for some forty years, the fact that you could have that for so long with people keeping this program afloat by sheer dedication and commitment. And that's the thing that seems to me so unique about this program.

Jenni Klein: I really thought we were going to change the world for children and I do think we made a great deal of difference. There should be more programs like Head Start because it says that no matter where the families come from, what their income is, what their skills are, that children can develop fully if you help them with good programs.

David Pearson: This is our anniversary, and I tell you it's a great fortieth anniversary and I'm glad to be a part of it and I hope for the next forty years that we keep giving these same opportunities to our family, children, and most of all, to the staff who promote well-being and positive child-development environment.

Carol Brunson Day: The explosion of services to children four years old and younger really began with the Head Start Initiative and so Head Start has just been a real gift to the early childhood profession.

Woman: All you have to do is walk into an Early Head Start or a Head Start program to see that it's an oasis for young children and their families. It's an investment that will pay off for years to come.

Sharon Lynn Kagan: [Drumming and singing in native language] Head Start really, as Ed Ziegler said so wisely, is the premier legacy of the nation's war on poverty and to me embodies what is best not just about early childhood education but is really best about this country. Head Start represents the national mecca for high-quality early childhood education.

Frank Fuentes: We have just seen a wonderful retrospective of a program that has improved the lives of over 25 million children over the last 40 years. The challenge for Head Start, in the future, is to build on its best traditions and to provide leadership in working with others in the early childhood care and education and build bridges of collaboration so that we serve more children.

Second, to look at what we've learned from research and to put that into practice in our classrooms and in our playgrounds across the country and finally, to continue to champion the role of parents as the first educators of their children.

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