

## Reflections, NT - 40th Anniversary In Celebration of Head Start's 40th Anniversary 2005 - Reflections

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

E. Dollie Wolverton: [Children singing] I've been with Head Start from its inception -- the spring of 1965 -- and 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 the families with children, very young children in a program called Head Start.

It's my belief that it has had this longevity because it is a comprehensive child development program, because it involves the parents and the community, and when you have the involvement to the degree that we do and have over the years in Head Start, people are very committed. They're very eager to stand up for the program and when there are anticipated -- or have been anticipated cuts in its history -- the first people that the Hill hears from is parents and community members from all over the country.

Richard Johnson: I think that one of the most important pieces of history in the Head Start program is the advance of the involvement of parents in the programs and the roles they began to play not only contesting but also helping to plan programs working with the staff as they plan the programs. Parents even developed their own Parent Head Start Associations where they met at the state level, the regional level, and there's a national Head Start Parent Association.

Carmen Bovell-Chester: I think about Head Start as the sun that came out and dried up all the rain and I see the itty-bitsy spider as the parents or even the children but more so, I see them as the rain being all of the adversities, all of the harshness of life that they encounter. And then to have the sun shine in the form of Head Start; a staff who - And I'm getting emotional.

Lenore Peay: I remember we furnished our classrooms going through the streets on Saturday picking up furniture and bringing it back. Picked it up in the street. Taking it to the classroom. Teacher made materials. I mean, it was wonderful.

Dorothy Harris: And in those days - remember, this was 1965 when people still got commodities and they would get these bags of flour and there was sugar and powdered milk, powdered eggs. There was a sort of a liver paste that I think they gave and a lot of those things would be thrown out. And because of all of the nutrition importance also that Head Start brought, we got the Opportunity School which was an adult development school in Denver and you would have to have about 25 people in a class and they would come and teach the class.

So we had them come, and they would help the parents. One of the classes was on homemaking and they helped the parents mix -- you know, you use the flour, the sugar, the egg powder and the lard or whatever it was, and make biscuit mix. So that then you would -- and we would make canisters in art classes. So the parents, then, would have the canisters and they would put this biscuit mix and they would be able to use the commodities in a healthy way.

Polly Greenberg: Far and away, the most famous Head Start project in Head Start's early days, was C.D.G.M. - the Child Development Group of Mississippi. It was huge. It was the second biggest Head Start in the nation the first summer and the biggest in Mississippi. But that isn't why it was extraordinary. It was extraordinary because it was organized and run -- many, many Head Start centers -- by extremely poor Black people in extremely remote rural communities.

While professionals all over the United States were rushing around and struggling and scrambling and saying, "We can't organize this program in our community in such a short time before the grants are going to be announced." But these poor parents went from center to church to church and trudged from door to door and signed up thousands of children by name and address; fixed their rickety little framed churches to be Head Start centers.

Marvin Hogan: And I went to the people, and I asked them -- what did they want to see in their community? That is, coming out of these churches, getting out of the churches, and going into buildings, and getting buildings, and trying to see if people wanted to make a difference in their lives and would they help us do this? And in three months, we expanded from 1,200 children - or 2,200 children, I'm sorry - to 5,500 children. We went from 348 employees to 969.

Jerry Gribble: I think I attended the first national Head Start meeting. It was at the Jung Hotel, I think, in New Orleans. And I had a good experience at that hotel learning about early childhood development.

There was a lady by the name of Allie Mitchell from Texas Southern University and she was telling me, she said, "Jerry, the only mistake we'll probably ever make in Head Start is we will not give the kids everything that they can learn. They're like little sponges. You don't know how much they can learn. So the mistake you'll make over the years is not providing enough information to them because we don't know how far they can go."

Robert Coard: One day, there were child development programs. The next day, when the Act -- O.E.O. Act -- passed Congress, they all of a sudden became Head Start programs because one of the things is that ABCD was developing the model for what would be in it and what it would be called. Not only ABCD, but New Haven was another major area that this development took place and other places in the country.

JoAn Knight Herren: Head Start changed the course of the field of early childhood education, of which I was a part. I had had experience being a nursery-school director, a day-care director. We were the experts. We knew early childhood education. We felt quite confident about that. And then along comes a Federal program that says it will be comprehensive. And it had, of course, attracted experts in all these other fields - pediatricians, nutritionists, people across the health perspective, people with such a vision.

Kathy Starr: These children came out of homes where they, in many cases, were undernourished. They were dealing with poverty as an everyday way of life. They came in the program covered with sores. A normal day in Head Start in 1974 started off with morning inspection. We had number-three tubs. We had to bathe children, wash their clothes, and get them ready just so that they could sit down at the table and learn and feel good while they sat next to their peers because a lot of those kids didn't even have --

They came from home having slept in their clothing all night because some of the facilities at home didn't even have running water. So life was tough.

Gertrude T. Hunter: The nutritional program was always an integral part of the program. Sue Sadow, who had just come from the Peace Corps -- she was 65 years old and she stayed on top of that nutrition program. Those programs that kept height and weights of the children would actually see a difference in their weight when they're in the program.

In Puerto Rico, they kept a chart of the mean weight of the children over time and when they were not in the program they'd fall off the curve down about twenty-five below the fifty percent. And then they came back in the program and they'd come back above the fifty percent. So that was a very integral part of the program.

Ruth Scheffer: I had no idea what it was but it was very apparent to me that there was something dreadfully wrong with this child. He was very small. He seemed to be like a little wizened elf. He didn't look like a regular little boy. And I asked his parents if they had ever had him examined by a doctor and they said no, and they kind of felt that this was God's will for them and they were doing their best to take care of him within the love of their family.

He had a condition that was called myxedema which is a total lack of thyroid hormone. She put him on medication that day and within six weeks time, we saw this child change in front of our eyes into a normal boy. It was beyond anything that we had any right to expect.

Just at that time, we got word that Lady Bird Johnson was searching for the Head Start child of the nation and to our great delight, he was chosen as the Head Start child of that year for the nation. The child, his mother, and his teacher

were given fully paid trips to Washington, D.C. to meet Lady Bird Johnson. They were feted around the city. They were shown the sights. They were introduced to the President. And this was an incredible experience for them as you could imagine.

Barbara O'Hara: I wanted to take a visit of all of the lands that were there that were under native Hawaiian lands and, sure enough, I saw a Head Start center out there. So, I said, "Do you mind if we stop off and stop in at the Head Start center?" The children all lined up and went and got their own toothbrushes which were lined up on a wall with their names and brushed their teeth, and they did it religiously.

Now, that doesn't sound like much to many people, but over there in Hawaii those children had very poor teeth, and most of the time, they grew up with that because when they were young and they didn't know what to do, their parents would give them some sugarcane to suck on and would really, really decay the teeth. So they were doing a beautiful job of that. So the whole dental society gave them new toothbrushes throughout all the Hawaiian homelands as a result of it.

Georgie Sparks: I want to say about twenty years ago, we saw the effect of dental caries in our Head Start children, and because resources are so limited in our communities the focus had been on school-age children. And about twenty years ago, the Head Start Bureau entered into agreement with Indian Health Service and said, you know, we need to focus on preschool children.

And so we entered into that agreement and the primary focus of that agreement was dental health. And so it's been cyclical, in that we started out in this partnership with Indian Health Service focusing on dental. It has gone from dental to medical to environmental health and it's now coming back to dental again.

John Rossetti: I started working with Head Start programs on the Apache Indian reservation in New Mexico. When I was there, I was part of the Indian Health Service. There were probably 60, 70, 80 Head Start children with numerous cavities - maybe five to maybe ten cavities in each child. And to say the least it was a challenge for me the first years. I said, "What did I get into?" It took me an entire year to treat the entire population. And you're going to have to remember this is back in the early Seventies.

So there was so much disease there that I knew I couldn't address it. But the Head Start program was so enthusiastic and so willing to work with me that we put together an entire program.

John M. Chavez: What was really interesting was that the same parents who had criticized the program later on said, "You know, I didn't realize that my child would receive nutritional services or they would receive, you know, social services or they would get this, which we never had before.

And not only that. You know what? I qualified. So I don't have to pay because I qualify as a Head Start parent and I can say this." So it just came to show that sometimes, even now at this time, there still are misconceptions about the program, even though it has provided the best approach in dealing with early intervention.

Amanda Bryans: This mom didn't say a whole lot in the focus group but afterwards, she said she wanted to talk to me and she said, "You know, when my first child came to Head Start and they said parents could volunteer and you could come to the classroom whenever you wanted to, I couldn't believe it. I loved coming to the classroom and I got a lot of credit for it. I got Parent Volunteer of the Year and all those kinds of things but what people didn't know is that I was learning right along with my daughter."

She said, "For example, you know, in Head Start meals they always teach the kids about how you set the table, how you put out the food, and it's all family-style, and they teach the children about passing food and saying please and thank you." She said, "And when I grew up, we never had a family meal. My dad had a drinking problem and it was just always kind of chaotic and people just got something to eat and the kids ate whatever was around."

"But we never sat down. I didn't know how to set the table and I could never tell anyone I didn't know how to do that. So while they were teaching the children how to set the table in Head Start, I learned, too." And she said, "And since

my first daughter went to Head Start, every night we have a family meal at home."

"We set the table, and we put all the food out in serving bowls, and people pass and the kids know for sure that's a time when my husband and I are there and we are available to talk to them and hear about their day, and we can talk about our day." And she said, "I think that's made all the difference in our lives."

Don Bolce: My first experience with Head Start was that I was the janitor at the Head Start program in the summer program in 1968. I graduated from Berkeley in 1970 and realized that I really like studying science but that wasn't what I wanted to do and I began to get interested in young children.

And the thing that really sort of took me to thinking about early childhood was the fact, you know, recognizing that these tiny little children are going to grow up in a world that I can't imagine and it's going to require skills and knowledge that I can't imagine. So I felt like if you focused on young children, you really got to think about the whole world.

Walter Jourdain: But my first experience with Head Start started when I was fourteen years old. It was 1967. They had started this "war on poverty" thing a year, maybe a couple of years before, and they were hiring fourteen-year-olds and I applied, and I was told I was hired and we met at a center point, and I was looking forward to cutting brush all summer and doing the kind of the work that guys my age did, you know.

And, you know, to my and my friends' surprise they called my name and sent me over to the Head Start building. Ha ha. Which it was disappointing at first because I wanted to be with my friends. But once I was there and the buses start pulling in, you know, and all these little Indian kids getting off the bus you know, I thought, oh, man, that was cool, you know. And I worked there all summer. And, um it, um and it has stayed with me ever since.

Alex Antonio: I like Head Start because, for many, many years I've always wondered how I could have an impact on the lives of children because I've always been touched by children. And as an accountant, I never did figure out how I could ever be in contact with children.

Fortunately for me, fate has deemed that I be in contact with children because my first job at the foundation was to deal with a program that was in shambles and it had to be the Parent-Child Center which eventually led on to the Head Start program. And for seventeen years now, or is it more than that? I can't figure out -- that's how bad an accountant I am -- I've been involved with Head Start and I just love the program.

Marilyn M. Smith: Jenni Klein had me involved in the plan-variation study which she helped design at the Office for Child Development so that people in all the different colleges especially and were designing curriculums that they were saying they had THE curriculum for Head Start programs.

So she put together a research study that let many of these programs take theirs -- and they were randomly assigned as to which curriculum would go to what program in the field. They would go out to that program, do the training in that Head Start program using their curriculum. I was asked to be a plan-variation consultant meaning I would get assigned randomly to one of the curriculums, get trained in it and go out once a month -

I went to Fort Walton Beach, Florida, once a month -- and observed and recorded in great detail. We were to write very detailed records of what they were doing, to record were they doing the curriculum that they were supposed to be doing, in the way they're supposed to be doing it, and what was happening, what were the results. So that, again, was another way of being involved in Head Start.

As a footnote, the result of all that was that it didn't matter as much which curriculum as long as there was a very carefully thought-through curriculum that the people at the site and the agency in the program had been involved in selecting. They believed in it, and then they could implement it well. And those were the most important factors rather than some one or two groups have THE final curriculum that everybody should use.

Rose Barquist: My job with the Head Start supplementary training was to take the teachers of Head Start in fifty-two

villages in Alaska, some of which were available only by air, and teach them how to be nursery school teachers. That was trailblazing because never before in the history of education in Alaska had there been local control of anything. They had had to take what the government sent them in the way of teachers.

Barbara Ferguson Kamara: I decided to go to graduate school to get a Ph.D. in health and I went to work for the governor to direct a program that he had. And the week before I was going to Raleigh to work for the governor, I received a call from Jody Powell, who was working for President Carter, and he said, "You have been recommended to come to Washington to be the Associate Commissioner for Head Start and for Child Care."

And I said, "Oh, gee. No, I can't do that. My mother told me you just don't go from job to job. I'm going to take a new job." But, of course, I went to Raleigh and the President called the governor and the governor called me in, and he said "You know, you could help North Carolina more by going to Washington, D.C."

Jean Simpson: One of my personal goals in my professional career in the field of early childhood education has been to highlight the contributions of African-Americans in the field. And because of Head Start, I've been able to look back at some of the many individuals who have made significant contributions to Head Start like Barbara Kamara, J.D. Andrews, Carol Brunson Day, and many, many others and they influenced Head Start greatly.

And we have Helen Taylor, who did so much as far as initiating Early Head Start and being an advocate of teamwork within the Head Start Bureau. And that was a change from some of the other approaches to bringing people together as professionals.

Samuel E. Miller: In Head Start, we had probably the most diverse population of people anywhere. We were out in the Pacific, in Micronesia and all of the -- what shall we say? -- information that the kids were looking at was Spot and the fire engine and all that kind of -- They didn't know anything about this. So Mary and a group came up with, "Well, let's do a book." And we got a photographer out there who was doing some work for us.

"So, let's have him put together a book of things these kids know about, are used to and live with every day." So we put together a heck of a book.

Mary Lewis: Since there were no books and since there were some twenty-seven or so different dialects in Micronesia we made picture books of life on each of the islands so that the children would have opportunities to turn the pages of a book, name things that they recognized, and go over that day after day and make up stories themselves. The teachers could tell the stories from the pictures.

Helen Maynor (Scheirbeck): We have maybe a hundred native languages still being spoken in this country and when you realize we had about 550 in the past. At the time of Columbus we probably had about a thousand languages. Well, if you are down to a hundred that tells me we're an endangered species in terms of language. So we did.

We worked with Gary Kimball, who at that time was the commissioner of the Administration of Native Americans, and he funded about twenty-two Head Start programs a year to begin language and cultural training in their classrooms. And we have to remember that a generation of parents, my age and younger, were not taught their languages. So we are really re-educating many parents now on how to speak and use their language and we're doing that, a lot of times, through Head Start and its children.

So, I think, as new immigrants come into the country, Head Start has some important lessons to teach them about cultural diversity, respect about language retention, and about how to really work to carry out diversity.

Sarah Greene: There was one child that was Hispanic and at that time, we didn't have many Hispanic staff people working in your program, and I knew one or two words. And she came to me, and I went to this little girl and I said, "¿Cmo te llamas?" "Me llamo Hilda!" And she went rolling on in Spanish. She thought I could speak Spanish.

I saw her eyes light up, and I could say no more because, you know, I... And now I know the importance of being able to relate to children in their own language. And during that time, we made home visits to the parents and we did have

on staff one person that went with us to home visits and was able to translate for the parents.

Barbara Cleary: It was exciting working in New York City and meeting people from all different cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups and I've had my first classroom, I had children speaking five different languages. By the end of the year, I could say "Mommy is coming," "Here's your food," and "Do you need to go to the bathroom?" in all five languages.

Richard Gonzales: Head Start, you know, began back in the mid-Sixties and now we're at 2005. You have many people who in these past, I'll say, five, six years had been Head Start directors or had been in Head Start programs 20, 30 years and they're now aging out, they're now leaving the program. And one of the things that you also saw was that oftentimes there was no capturing of the history the knowledge of that person had. So when a person left, the program could be functioning fabulously but when that person left the knowledge left with the person.

And oftentimes a new person came in and found out that systems weren't in place. So, some of the effects of a system's monitoring process now is, at least, that programs are looking at ways to develop systems and hopefully capture some of that information for systems development that will help them retain the information they need for new people as they come into the program.

Jaunita Santana: The office is decorated with pictures of babies all over the place and then, you know, there's some toddlers, there's some infants, there's some four-year-olds. And then we had some families who come back sometimes and they say, "Oh, I know that child. That's my comadre's son. And that's so-and-so, and I know them and now he is twenty-one years old and he joined the Navy and he's pursuing a career in the Navy."

And then we decided, "Oh, my God. We should go back and try to find these children." So we went back and found those kids and we brought them back and, you know, talked to them about their experiences on Head Start. So, we used that as a project to, do you know, like talk about it in the community about the impact of Head Start and the impact the program has in people's lives. And it was just the most wonderful experience.

Frankie Hoover Gibson: I was reflecting on some of the stories in my early time working with parents and I think this really exemplifies hundreds and thousands of stories that are out there about a young mom and a father who had a profoundly deaf daughter and the mother was very quiet. The father was certainly reserved. She got very involved in the program and, I guess to make a long story short, jump to today.

Her daughter is happily married and has two young children of her own and this mom is now the Early Head Start director in the community, you know where I was working with that local Head Start program. She just recently was able to broker a huge, huge, beautiful new facility and this happened because a young man just walked in off the street one day and said, you know, "I grew up in this community. I was very poor. I was in Head Start. I now have a lot of money and I want to anonymously build this." You know, it's just the dream come true.

Marci Massei: The Head Start teacher called and said she needed some help with this particular child. He wasn't toilet-trained. And my job, in terms of teacher training and as the school's psychologist and child developmental specialist, was to assist her and this child. I immediately, in assessing the situation -- This child, he was a very bright young man. Fifteen minutes, he was trained.

And then I realized this young child, this four-year-old boy named Julian, understood that his mother needed to have him be her baby. So when this mother called me, I said immediately to her, "Of course I remember you, and I will call upon you because this year is Head Start's fortieth anniversary. And tell me about Julian." He is a district attorney. He has had a wonderful career in school.

He wasn't always able to live with his mother but she always kept in contact with him and she said, "I just want you to know that we're here for Head Start and that this program should never end because I'll never forget what it did for me and for this young man."

Maria Fort: So, this one person stands up. He was a Hispanic. I believe he was a school principal. And he said, "I was

a Head Start child." And, of course, that brought the house down. And then he said, "My mother told me that Head Start saved my life." So it was just, you know, it's still spine-tingling but we get these all the time. You know, sometimes we will try to arrange logistics for a meeting or something and we'll talk to the catering manager in a hotel and they say, "Oh, I was a Head Start child."

Ruth Neale: I met this family during my first years in Head Start. The mother was very anxious for all of her daughters -- and she has three of them -- to be part of the Head Start community. She walked in the cold carrying two babies and holding onto the third. And today, two of the three daughters are physicians and the third one is a physical therapist.

Winona Sample: I was at a southwest conference for Indian staff and a girl came up to me and said, "I want you to know that you came to Phoenix a couple of years ago and gave us some training on parents' responsibilities and roles and I was so impressed that I went back to my center, and I volunteered and then I became an aide and then the teacher," and said, "And now I'm the director." But that's not the end of the story.

A few years later, I was riding around the roads of Arizona, and I looked out and saw a very large billboard, and it said "Congratulations" and this lady's name "to the Arizona teacher of the year." And that's about as high as you can get.

Judith Jerald: We were visiting this family in a home-based model but when we found that the child was with the grandmother we also made some additional visits to the grandmother. And we didn't like what we saw at all. But what we ended up doing was going and visiting more regularly with the grandmother.

The grandmother ended up coming and taking courses with us, doing training sessions. Ended up, we helped provide that grandmother with some safety things that she needed - plugs for electricity and the kinds of things that would help make her home more safe for babies; gates and so forth. She ended up becoming a family childcare provider licensed by the state and learned a lot. I think what's important about that story is that she had already raised eight children and she was still ready to learn more and do even better for her grandchild.

Pamela Collett: I remember one woman, Elvira and she was a parent in the program and she was from a very rural area of Mexico and so she was not literate in Spanish. But she was a volunteer, of course, in Head Start and she loved the children and she was great with the children. And I watched her, and I said "Elvira, we want you to be a teaching assistant." She said, "But I can't read and write." I said, "You'll learn." And she did. And she learned Spanish, then she learned English and then she went on in Head Start. I'm not sure where she is now.

Head Start Social Worker: I started out with Head Start a long time ago as a three-year-old child. I had a speech impediment. It was known back then as tongue-tied. Children didn't care what you called it. They would actually make fun of me make fun of the words, my pronunciations. However, there was one teacher named Mrs. Ordell. Mrs. Ordell, she was a speech therapist and what she did, she took me aside and she worked with me one on one.

My vocabulary, my pronunciations got exceedingly well. But I enjoy talking, and that is what led me to go into the United States Marine Corps. Another part that Mrs. Ordell told me -- "You can do anything you want, Tim, as long as you believe in yourself." So I served my country. I ended up going through Desert Storm. Sitting over there, I remember Mrs. Ordell - "You can do anything you want. You can make it back home alive."

George Askew: Head Start represented for me and my family a chance to get over the hump and that's what we needed -- a chance to get over the hump. I graduated from Harvard University with a degree in psychology and social relations.

I graduated from Case Western Reserve Medical School in my hometown of Cleveland. And I have lived and studied in Africa, Nepal and the World Health Organization in Geneva. And I think if I could leave you with one thought today, it would be that I hope you all recognize that the work you do, and the work that you are going to do, is so very important and makes such a large difference. It certainly did in my life. Now I feel like I am in a position to do the same for a bunch of other little kids just like me and families like mine.

Anna Maria Mui; 1/2oz: It's been twenty-two years since I attended Head Start in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and since then

I've accomplished a lot of things in my life. After graduating from high school, I attended college at New Mexico State University where I graduated with honors and attained a Bachelor's of Science degree in wildlife science.

Currently, I'm a fisheries and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I work in the Endangered Species Branch of the New Mexico Ecological Services field office. So, when considering all of my travels and my accomplishments, some may see my Head Start experience as being somewhat insignificant when, in fact, it is quite the opposite. For me, Head Start is where this great journey of mine began. Through Head Start, I learned a lot more than just my colors and my shapes.

I learned how to be self-confident and how to interact with others, both of which were a great challenge to me because I was an extremely introverted child and I didn't do very well in social situations.

Eric Locklear: I got an opportunity to see a lot of my classmates who I graduated with, high school. We started talking about what's long been said about our class, the class of 1982. It's said that we're one of the last classes that really had goals, aspirations, focus, connection with each other.

And everyone else has said that about us but we'd never really talked about it ourselves. And we started talking about it, those who I had a chance to pass during the powwow, and we observed that we had greater capacity for appreciation of each other. We had better communication skills. We had longer friendship. And when I said what I thought caused all of that, my classmates agreed. We were all in Head Start together.

We have scientists, we have teachers, we have independent businessmen, we have presidents of banks -- all in that class. And I believe the foundation that gave all of those people their opportunities for their futures began in a white building with a sign out front that said "Robeson County Head Start".

Oh, happy anniversary, Head Start. No one ever thought we'd last this long, but we did. [Speaking native language] Happy fortieth anniversary, Head Start. Many, many more. Aniversario feliz y muchas gracias. [Speaking native language] It's not over. We're just going into another phase. So I'd like to say happy fortieth anniversary, Head Start. [Speaking native language] Happy fortieth anniversary, Head Start. I've enjoyed being a part of you.

[Speaking native language] Happy fortieth anniversary, Head Start. You have done wonders. [Speaking native language] Happy fortieth anniversary, Head Start. And thank you for being part of my life. And happy birthday, Head Start. You helped me become who I am. I thank you.

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