

## Happy 55<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Head Start!

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday, dear Head Start and Early Head Start. Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday, Head Start! We're here to celebrate today.

This is my birthday blog. And you know, we're quarantined, so I didn't have a birthday hat at home; I made this one out of construction paper, a birthday-like present bow, and I have got clothespins in my hair, and I happen to have a cupcake, that was awesome, and a candle and a lighter, so we're all good to go. We're here to celebrate. Happy birthday, Head Start! We're going to have lots to talk about today. We know that on May 18, 1965, President Johnson announced, "Project Head Start" during a Rose Garden speech.

It started as just a summer, short preparation for kindergarten, and grew into the greatest school readiness program that serves pregnant women, all the way up until the child is ready to enter public school. And of course, supporting not just the child, but the family, as well. And through that family support, we give children a foundation upon which they can grow for many years after leaving the walls of a Head Start program.

You know, when Head Start first began, it served about half a million children, which was no small potatoes. But of course, since then we have served over 37 million children and their families. And if you think about how many family members are in each of those families, we know that we have influenced just so many people in this country, in such a positive way. Each year, Head Start serves more than a million children and their families currently, and we do that in centers. We do that in family homes and family child care. We're in urban areas, suburban areas, and rural areas. We know that in any community in the country just about, you can find some kind of Head Start presence in all 50 states and territories.

And you know, we serve our tribes and our migrant and seasonal families in particular—making sure that those programs are unique for those populations. One of the things that stands out the most is that Head Start knows that parents are the child's first and most important teacher, and we carry that theme throughout everything we do. And by doing that, we empower parents who ultimately become the secret to the success of a child, because they can carry what they learn at Head Start far beyond.

And when a parent has ... I mean, when a child has a parent who is thriving and successful, they see that as an example for themselves, and parents are better capable of supporting their children when they have a foundation upon which they can grow. We know that family context is just so important. And of course, Early Head Start, 25 years old this year. Pretty impressive, serving pregnant women and our infants.

And we know that that brain development between birth and age 3 is so important. We know so much more about this now than even when—when Early Head Start was developed, and we know how important the services we're providing those infants is in their development, and that's really an investment in our future.

And 25 years: It's hard to believe. It seems like it's flown by for Early Head Start, but we have become a real incubator for early education and continue to grow. Early Head Start gets support across the board; it's very exciting.

And of course, we couldn't do a celebration like this without a hashtag. You knew I was going to talk about a hashtag, didn't you? So, we have #MyHeadStartStory, and I'm so excited. I launched this in early May. We're sharing all kinds of Head Start stories with that hashtag.

So, here's what I want you to do. Within your program, I know you've got staff, you've got parents who want to tell their story. They want to talk about how Head Start influenced them and their children, and we want to hear it. So, if you can get short video clips or short written stories that can be tweeted out with the #MyHeadStartStory. Let's see how many of these we can collect between now and the end of the 2020 calendar year. I've got a secret goal of 5,500 for 55 years.

Do you think we can do it? I think that's easy. We've got millions of these stories lying around; we just need to collect them.

So, that's your job. Get out there, get your parents to send you a quick video clip with permission to post it, and you can post it with #MyHeadStartStory, or if your parents are on Twitter, they can certainly post it themselves. That's always terrific. We can get that community going.

So again, Happy birthday, Head Start! Happy birthday, Early Head Start! I hope you're celebrating special today and encourage you to share those celebrations online.

And remember, Head Start is access to the American dream. Go make dreams happen!