

Tallatoona Community Action Partnership

[Music]

Dr. Bernadine Futrell: Hello, Head Start. This is Dr. Bernadine Futrell, the director of the Office of Head Start. And I am happy to welcome you to video number three of our miniseries, Strategies for Staff Vaccination: Voices from the Field. This week, I am delighted to introduce you to Tallatoona Community Action Partnership of Northwest Georgia.

Donnis Pace: My name is Donnis Pace, and I am the Head Start and Early Head Start director for Tallatoona Community Action Partnership. Central office location is Cartersville, Georgia. For the Let's Get Vaccinated campaign, we started – it was actually in May of 2021, we partnered with the Polk County Health Department, and a representative came to our end of the year trainings and celebrations that we have for our employees and staff.

A representative was there our entire meeting for our employees and staff to have the opportunity to ask questions and receive information and flyers about the vaccination at that time. Our education manager actually received her first vaccination in front of everybody while we were there, just to kind of show our employees what that would be like. As far as incentive at that time for our employees, we offered a \$50 gift card and their choice of Tallatoona vaccinated t-shirts that we had made.

Also, in September, we partnered with Bartelle Health Department and Polk County Health Department again, and we allowed staff to leave early on a Thursday, with pay, to go receive their vaccination, and as well as that Friday off, with pay, in case there were symptoms upon receiving the vaccination.

Once all of those employees are fully vaccinated with both their first and second shot, they will receive a \$500 incentive for that. Those are the things that Tallatoona put in place to really encourage our employees to become vaccinated. Some of the ones who were reluctant, they're just saying, "You know, I'm just totally against vaccinations. I've never really ... I don't even do the flu vaccination, but I love Head Start and what we do in the community, so I'm going to go ahead and get the vaccination."

Myself and my Head Start central office team we're actually going out to all of the Head Start centers. As part of the staff wellness initiative, we're going out and allowing them to have a 15, 20 minute break to come out of the classrooms, out of the office, enjoy a donut and a soda, and as well as receive a flyer with some great information on self-care for educators.

We're definitely working in some challenging times. We have to deal with COVID exposures from the community, from your job, your kids, your older kids to go to school, and everything. Just the extra support and just telling somebody, "I really appreciate you guys, and thank you for what you do, " it really, really means a lot right now.

I am a Head Start baby. I actually attended Head Start myself. And I actually came on – I've been with Head Start since 2001, September 2001 – I actually came in, first, as a parent of my own two – my younger two children as well. From a parent to a teacher assistant, to a teacher, to a center manager, and now, a Head Start and Early Head Start director.

I call it the Head Start bug. Once you get bit by the Head Start bug, you're there. And I will say that pretty much, my central office management team, they've been around for probably 10 plus years as well, so we're vested. We're not only invested in Head Start, but we're vested in our communities as well. And we're vested in the families and the children that we serve as well. We are definitely going to just advocate for whatever is best for our children, our families that we serve. And the thing that's best right now is the COVID-19 vaccination.

[Music]