

## Voices from the Field: Navajo Nation

[Music]

Dr. Bernadine Futrell: Hello, Head Start. This is Dr. Bernadine Futrell, the proud director of the Office of Head Start. And I am excited to welcome you to our fourth video in the series, Strategies for Staff Vaccination: Voices from the Field. This week, I have the great honor of introducing you to the Navajo Nation Head Start program.

Rolanda Billy: Navajo Nation Head Start has always been a community, family-type approach [Inaudible] program. A lot of it was coordinating services with local resource providers and a big support from our government, stemming from our Office of the President and Vice President.

Tama Nez: Our president did a lot of community visits. They did weekly meetings. What they shared were information about how many COVID cases there were.

Jonathan Hale: As far as Navajo, they are visual learners. A lot of the information that they had was through pamphlets and such and posters so that they could adjust to what was going on.

Rolanda: Providing pamphlets, bringing in health professionals, doing presentations. And ultimately, giving the resources to the employees so that they can make the best choice for themselves, for the students, and for the families they work with.

Tama: We have like 295 employees, and majority of them are vaccinated.

Rolanda: And again, it was a community effort. That's what Head Start is built on. Working and collaborating with resources, looking at data.

Jonathan: What really moved people was your colleagues getting sick. There's instances where in other programs I'm well aware of, that colleagues have passed on due to not receiving the inoculation and also acquiring COVID-19. Having to go through those situations and trauma, I think it made people really consider – think about their own wellbeing, as well as their families. And with Navajo being multi-generational homes, you have children and you have elderly in certain homes, so you'd also have to think of them.

Even in my personal life today, remembering people that have passed on that were dear to me that were not in my household, but yet have passed on from COVID-19. You see how precious life is. Also being a participant of Head Start back in my early years as a toddler and also having my children go through Navajo Head Start, it reminds me of that. It reminds me of being a parent. I have a family to protect. I have grandchildren. I have a responsibility.

Rolanda: One of our pillars – our four pillars is “Sihasin,” which is hope. Hope for the legacy – the continued legacy of our people. The heritage in our culture, we hold children and elderly dear and close to our hearts. And it was in an effort to protect them, to protect the language, to protect who we are as Diné people. I think that was what pushed a lot of our educators into

being vaccinated, was to give that hope and to give that opportunity back to our children in our Head Start program and Early Head Start programs here on the Navajo Nation.