

Selina Ellis Head Start Success Story



Each October we commemorate Head Start Awareness Month and reflect on the important impact this crucial program has had on children and families for generations. I was asked to share my Head Start story. Head Start has been a huge impact on my personal life! I can honestly say I would not be who/where I am in life without Head Start!
#HeadStartWorks

I went to Head Start as a child and remember my mom being there too working in the kitchen and being in class with me as a parent volunteer. I love that Head Start emphasis the importance of families being involved throughout the program in things such as Policy Council, volunteering and hiring of parents. I remember songs we learned and used those same songs when I was a Head Start Preschool Teacher. I remember the different learning areas with Block Area being my favorite. I remember doing family style eating and was able to go to school for many years with my Head Start peers. I am still very close with a lot of my Head Start peers I was in preschool with for two years! I was an honor student throughout my school career and truly believe that is because of the foundation Head Start instilled within my community and family.

I was a teen parent, my son was 6 months old at my high school graduation. I graduated top 10% from Bartlett High School here in Anchorage, AK. I was a UA Scholar and was offered a scholarship to attend University of Alaska Anchorage. Going to college was always my dream but that changed once I had my son. He became my whole world and I decided to stay home with him as my husband started his career in construction since he had amazing pay and benefits with the Labor's Union. Fast forward a couple years and my husband got badly hurt on the job, our world was turning upside down as we learned about Workmen's Comp and many other benefits we needed to apply for to maintain our household of 3. He needed to have multiple knee surgeries and needed time to recover and do physical therapy. There was no way he could be our sole provider so the financial stress was fast approaching.

My neighbor's son was attending a KCI Head Start Program and I would see the mini school bus come and get him. I got information from my neighbor and applied once my son was age eligible. There were so many children in our neighborhood and we all applied and got into 4 different KCI Head Start program options at



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different locations since there were options like bus service, Full-day fee based, Part-day ect. I went everyday with my son since I was not comfortable in leaving him because I had not been away from him since he was born. I was blessed to have an amazing Center Director and amazing Teacher with whom I am still friends with today! One of my son's Assistant Teacher's is still employed with us at KCI Head Start which is so great! They utilized my support and put me to work helping with day to day tasks at the center.

We made my family goal about me getting my Preschool Child Development Associate and within two months of volunteering they encouraged me to apply for a job opening within KCI Head Start and I was hired as a full-time Substitute. Two months after that I was hired as a full-time Assistant Teacher. I achieved my family goal of getting my Preschool CDA and then because of our amazing HR at KCI Head Start I started my college dream with my KCI Head Start peers. The

agency had educational funding at that time and on Friday's a private college instructor would come and teach us college courses and KCI Head Start paid for the class and I was paid on the clock to attend the class! We all would sign up for the same college classes and after work carpool to college for night classes. It was so great to graduate college with my KCI Peers and as I received my Associates Degree and then my Bachelor's Degree I advanced up the KCI Head Start hierarchy becoming a Teacher, then Teacher/Family Advocate, then Center Director/Family Advocate.



KCI Head Start expanded our services after applying and getting funding for our Early Head Start Home-Based and Center-Based Program for prenatal families, infants and toddlers. I joined their advisory and once a job opening occurred I switch over to work with them since their target audience was teen parents in High School which was something that was I knew I could excel at from my personal experience as a teen parent.

I am receiving my 15 years of service pin next month in November 2020 from KCI Head Start. I have many stories from over my years for staff and families, a lot of happy and a lot of sad stories. I have seen so many staff and families grow and reach amazing milestones

from graduating High school, graduating college, becoming home owners, working out custody arrangement and more! Best recent story is one of my current KCI Early Head Start families is a teen mom who was a preschool student of mine! She has a goal of becoming an educator too, wanting to work for KCI also once she completes high school! This is my second school year working with her and her daughter and it's been so rewarding that the teen mom

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remembered me and her time at KCI Head Start! I can't wait to see what the future holds for her and know KCI EHS and HS will probably get to work with her for the next few years helping then teen mom reach many milestones and know her daughter will be ready for continued educational growth because of the foundation of Head Start that was achieved.

KCI Head Start is so amazing, I am so thankful to be a part of this school family of ours, #KCI.OHANA. We are so close that even as staff and families leave the agency we keep in contact. We have many staff who are former parents of KCI Head Start and have such great opportunities for professional development that we see staff retention pretty often. I have many close friends because of us working together and have seen a lot of my preschool students graduate High School over the past couple years. My son recently graduated from Bartlett High School Class of 2020, everyone says he is my mini me because he is so resilient, an honor student, strives for attendance success, and is an advocate and leader in many ways just like me. I was able to take leave from work to take him to college this past August. I cannot thank the leadership at KCI Head Start enough for having such an amazing impact on my life and our community. #HeadStartWorks

Thank you for listening to my KCI Head Start story!!!

Selina Ellis, KCI Family & Staff

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