2018-2019
Illinois Parent Ambassadors


Illinois Head Start Association
LaChar Crayton — Head Start has helped me more than I could even imagine. In 2013, I was hit with one of the heaviest blows of my life; I lost my first daughter.

This was the start of what seemed to be the longest fall to the deepest pit. I began my battle with depression and anxiety. While still grieving the loss of my daughter, I became pregnant with twins, and the progress I made with overcoming depression came to a halt. Post-partum hit me like a ton of bricks and it seemed to be a bottomless pit. I didn’t begin to see the light, until I was pregnant with my third child, when I received the news that there was a Head Start program opening in my town. It was then that my set of (now two-year old) twins were introduced to the Home-Based program. The following school year, all three children were placed into Center-Based programs.

While Center-Based, my children were able to build stronger bonds with children their own age, and I was able to begin to work on myself and engage with people who could understand my struggles and help me find myself again. In that, I’ve become the Chairperson at the site level for Illinois Action for Children and the Chair of the Policy Council as well; and in 2018, I was selected to become a Parent Ambassador for Illinois Head Start Association (IHSA).

With sharing my experiences, it has also helped me to help others to open up and be able to receive help and to keep the helping chain continue to grow strong.

Parent Ambassador Head Start Stories
The thought of having strangers come into our home did not sit well with us. Conversations with the social worker addressed our fears and we made the decision to enroll our son into the Head Start program.

There are many advantages for participating in Head Start. From the very beginning our social worker was awesome in exercising effective communication. She was encouraging and optimistic and spoke openly about the Head Start program. In the early stages she encouraged me to take a more proactive role in Head Start. Shortly after, I was elected to lead our Policy Council. Doing this allowed me to take a more proactive role in our Head Start program. Taking a leadership role gave me a holistic overview to how Head Start operates in our area and how they are striving to meet the needs of our children!

Head Start allowed us to develop action steps for our son, set goals and more. I began volunteering in our son's classroom. Participating in my son's classroom was priceless! I was amazed to watch his growth. Head Start help our son meet goals which are not directly addressed in a traditional curriculum. I watch my son develop into a Head Start classroom leader. He became very active and took initiative in helping others and his classroom. I watched as Head Start continued to develop our son in areas of kindness, gentleness and compassion. He blossomed and became ready to take the next steps in his academic career! Without a shadow of a doubt, Head Start played an instrumental role in our son's development and in preparing him to become a kindergarten leader!

Hello my name is Eddie Williams

My wife Nashira and I have three beautiful children — Jalani, Aneisha, and Brice. A couple of years ago I had to take a break from full-time work and schooling. During this period we were contacted by Head Start to enroll our youngest into the program. There was some initial hesitation about enrolling our son into the program.
David Lyke

Hi my name is David Lyke. I have raised ten children and put six through college. I am a dedicated Father and hard working parent, and will help and make sure that my children get everything that they need. I instilled in them the value of hard work, and that if you want it, you have to go and work for it.

Head Start has impacted my son’s and I lives in a great positive way. *Without Head Start where would I be?* My son is actually my great nephew, his mother had some problems and couldn’t take care of him so I got him at two days old – no other family member wanted to step up -- so I did. It was very challenging at first. I noticed my son at one and a half wasn’t developing his motor skills, so I enrolled him in Harvey Head Start and worked with him from day one.

Without Head Start, my son had emotional problems and speech problems. Head Start has really made a difference in my and my son’s lives. My son is four – now he can read, write and recognize his name. His communication is great! Head Start has been a wonderful journey – for my family.

I am currently the president of Head Start program at Illinois Action for Children in Harvey, Illinois. I have been nominated *Parent of the Year.* Also, I work with young men at risk. I believe that every child needs a loving home and good role models to follow.
For more on IHSA's Parent Ambassador Program visit the webpage today!

http://ilheadstart.org/parents/
My Story. My name is **Destiney Hearn** and I am a Head Start Parent. Here is my story. Imagine being eighteen years old, graduate early from Rock Island High School, a Golden Apple recipient, Thoms Family Scholarship recipient, Honors classes, on Honor Roll, enrolled in a community college before heading off to enter University of Illinois, Augustana, Memphis University, etc. Life all planned out, internship starting in the summer.

April 10, 2014 all of that was gone in a blink of an eye, and what seemed like the end. I was laying in the hospital bed when the doctor came in and told me that I was 29 weeks pregnant. My first ultrasound -- was a “big whole baby” my mom exclaimed at my bedside. My baby had all body parts and was completely healthy. I cried and cried wishing it was a dream. I felt very depressed and didn’t want life to go on, I felt everything I worked so hard for in school was ruined.

I guess you’re wondering -- *how did I go so far without knowing?* I was on the depo shot birth control and I was the .1% to get pregnant. I had no symptoms. Making it all seem worse, my due date was June 25th, the day I was supposed to leave for my internship. My family surprisingly was by my side the whole time. Thinking my family would be disappointed in me, but they were positive *and knew* it was a blessing.

Although I graduated early, I walked with my 2014 class on May 31st. A few hours after that, my water broke. I had my daughter naturally June 1st, 2014. *(Yes, I had a baby in a month).* She was healthy and beautiful as can be.

The next thing to overcome... So many people said I wouldn’t be able to achieve my goals and do what normal people do my age. I never imagined myself being a single mom, nor did I ever plan that. But it is God’s plan for me. I am now 22 years old and my daughter Zion is four years old. I gave up my full ride scholarship, but I did not quit. I knew I had to keep going not only for me, but for my daughter Zion —- *(whose name means “the world to come”)*.

I had to prove to myself and those who doubted me that I can still live life...
and achieve my goals with a child. I work full time and I have taken full time classes online and at night on campus. My family helped out tremendously; but my family was not the only support. I am a Head Start Kid, I went when I was younger. So, I knew I had to enroll my daughter into the program. When I went to do my intake, the family social worker who interviewed me, had been my mom’s social worker. It was amazing! A great feeling to have someone actually remember my family. My daughter started Head Start when she was three, not only did she blossom physically, but mentally as well.

Head Start is all for the children, but they are for the families as well. Head Start worked with creating goals for myself and assisted in whatever needs I needed. There were tons of family events to attend, classes to help parents have more information on parenting, and I also served as vice chairperson for our district Policy Council. There, I had a voice, I felt important, and I felt what I said—and my opinions—mattered.

With my family and Head Start, I have a great support system. I have gone back to school and I am one semester away from my associates in Early Childhood. I even bought a house—yes, at 22 years old—and, I am now the Program Assistant working for Head Start in my school district in Rock Island, Illinois.

With Head Start, I was able to set goals for me and my daughter, and not just educationally. I was able to meet those goals with the provided resources and opportunities to go further in life. And the best part is being able to meet so many wonderful individuals who care about making a difference in children’s and families’ lives.
Parent Ambassadors visited the offices of U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin. Seven parents were chosen from throughout the state to speak on the core values of Head Start and to share their personal Head Start stories.

To get more information about Parent Ambassadors or any other services Head Start provides, do visit us www.ilheadstart.org or www.nhs.org
I had always known I wanted to be a mom. When I married my husband in June 2014, he had two children from a previous marriage that I was excited to begin co-parenting. Gavyn was four at the time and Elijah was six months. From the moment I met them I just felt it, I was their mother.

In October 2014, four months after Sam and I were married, our world was permanently altered. DCFS removed our kids from their biological mom’s home after she and her husband were found for willful neglect and sexual abuse. This finding came at the same time my husband lost his job and I had our first of three miscarriages. We felt completely isolated and that the odds would be forever stacked against us. DCFS had recommended that we should enroll our kids into Head Start. Sam and I couldn’t understand how education could help our family, but once we had met with the organization and our home-based teachers, we were quick to realize that Head Start was more than education. It was an opportunity to give my kids a second chance.

Head Start helped us obtain the mental care that my kids so desperately needed. They taught us ways to calm Gavyn when he felt triggered by his PTSD and continues to help us foster a positive and supportive environment while Elijah navigated through his traumas.

Head Start changed our lives for the better. It has become a sanctuary where my kids feel safe to reclaim their space and learn. Our local facility has become like our family, and why I feel so passionate about Head Start. My hope is to share our story and how Head Start’s core values of focusing on a family’s well-being on top of preparing the children for their future is a necessity. When passionate people care about you it changes you for the good.
My name is **Samantha Williams**. I’m a thirty year old wife and mother to a punky little four year old girl, Ariyanah. I am a stay-at-home mom who doesn’t really get the chance to get out. As crazy as it sounds, I looked at my child starting Head Start as a chance for me to get out and get involved. Something to keep me busy. I soon learned of the Policy Council and felt that its duties perfectly aligned with what I was craving to do. I soon became fascinated with the behind-the-scenes work of Head Start and knew I wanted to become even more involved. So when the opportunity to become a Parent Ambassador arose --and knowing that not only could I be a part of the behind the scenes, but also be a part of awareness-- I jumped for it.

Since entering Head Start, my child has grown leaps and bounds. Things that I never even thought to start to work with my daughter on, she has come home and excelled in. She is treated as an individual child and her personal needs are catered to.

Outside of that, the relationships that I have built with the facility are amazing. The staff have never made me feel like I’m just another parent, but actually a friend. My Family Advocate is a true Godsend. She always goes the extra length to not only help me, but also my whole family – in any area. Whether it be an issue that may have arisen in the classroom, to helping me clothe my family, Head Start has changed my family in the most positive ways. And I can’t wait to embark on this journey to discover and learn more to instill my knowledge of Head Start to others.
Sarah Hornback — I am a single mom of three amazing young gentlemen Dale (9), Johnathon (4), Patrick (9 months). I signed Johnathon up for Early Childhood Head Start when he was just six months old. I had just moved home to get away from a very abusive relationship. I was not in a good place during this time. I was not the mom that I wanted to be or desired to be. Head Start became more to us than just a way to teach my child. It became a life line of support. Kathy, my son’s teacher helped us set goals and work toward those goals. She helped me become a better mom. She provided ways for us to grow, not only as individuals, but also as a family. The year before Johnathon turned three, Kathy talked to me about policy council and how I could help shape our program and have a voice. That year (‘16–’17), I served as our policy counsel chairperson. The staff at my agency became more like family to me during this time. My Director is more like a second mom to me. Her love of the children is amazing and has rubbed off on her staff. She has believed in my family. I found out I was pregnant with my third child right after coming home from an Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies conference. The staff helped sign me up as a pregnant mom. I was wait-listed till there was an opening with Kathy. Once a spot opened up, I started to meet with Kathy. She helped me make sure that I was not only being a great mom to my other two boys, but that I still took care of myself and my unborn baby. During all this Johnathon turned three. We got him into the center and we all began to grow even more. He has grown so much and continues to grow. His teachers and family advocate have worked with him and me to set goals to help him grow for kindergarten. We are still working toward those goals. Patrick was born in Nov 2017 and just six weeks after he was there, he began to see Kathy our Home based teacher. I feel like he grows every time he sees her. We are working both in the classroom and at home with all the teachers. They continue to help us grow as a family and reach our goals together. Head Start came into our lives when we needed it most and has been a huge blessing to us. I have become a better mom and a leader in the program and our community. Head Start has provided several opportunities for my family to grow. I strive to help educate people about Head Start and the amazing work that it does. Head Start is helping set my boys and me up for a successful future.