

The Pennsylvania State University
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**EXPERIENCING VARIETY AND CHANGE IN HEAD START PARENT
INVOLVEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES: PERSONAL AND
PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

A Thesis in
Curriculum and Instruction

By

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Abstract

Head Start is a 41-year-old program, serving children and families living in poverty. Since 1975, Head Start services were planned and implemented in accordance with Head Start Performance Standards, which are federal requirements for ensuring that all Head Start families receive comprehensive services in health, nutrition, education, and social services. Parent involvement is at the heart of Head Start. Head Start believes that parents are a child's most influential teacher, and therefore parents are to be engaged in program activities and decision-making processes that cultivate positive outcomes for families in the program..

This study examines the generalizability of my involvement as a Head Start parent to the overall Head Stat experience. A multiple methods research approach was used to generate data with which to compare with my remembered experiences and current experiences with Head Start. First, a literature review detailed the history of Head Start's parent involvement polices. Research data included critiques on Head Start's parent involvement efforts, longitudinal studies on Head Start impact on families, and two qualitative studies on Head Start parental experiences. Second, a case study was done of the history and development of parent involvement policies and practices of Blair County Head Start. This was done because it was the program in which I began my experiences with Head Start, and where I continue to serve as a member of the Child Advocates Governing Board. Staff interviews and document review of the program's parent involvement policies and practices comprise the case study and help enable me to evaluate my personal recollections of experiences with Blair County Head Start, and to

glean from all data what I consider Head Start strategies for cultivating positive outcomes in families. Interviews with current Policy Council Parents provided important insight into current policies and practices of Blair County Head Start. My personal and professional data included reflections as a Head Start parent, teacher, manager, consultant and federal reviewer. All these data were used in a comparative way.

The methodology in this study, I followed the feminist notion that the personal is social; therefore, the study developed from the data markers of four elements; these showed how parental involvement is achieved and supported and they were: (a) recognition, (b) training, (c) resiliency, (d) decision making.

The Head Start Program provides recognition for the importance of parents in the child's development. Hence, the outreach that Head Start did with me. I was trapped in an abusive relationship and had little self-esteem and little hope that my future would hold anything more for me than this violence. That knock on the door was literally my escape from an environment that had crushed me and which would certainly have crushed my children as well. My central testimony is that the Head Start program recognizes the importance of parents, I was able to start being a part of my child's education, and from that stepping stone I was able to start being a part of my own life because of Head Start.

Head Start also offers parent training. I learned how to organize parents so that we could help each other and our local Head Start. At the center, I was trained into being a good leader. I was afforded the opportunity to do the kind of leading that eventually helped me lead myself out of my abusive marriage. The training I received also helped me find the strength to go back to school and become a teacher at Head Start. This training is an essential element of the Head Start program. The training element for

parents can be viewed as the “heart” of the program. This study backs the notion that it is parent training that makes the biggest difference in the lives of families who would otherwise remain marginalized.

The third element of the Head Start Program is the offering of support that enables parents and children to build on their resiliency. This resiliency comes from the social support and information that allows a person to reach out for other opportunities. When I first came to Head Start I just wanted to be there to watch what was going on. When I was offered the job of leading the parents in a specific task, I was not sure I could be successful, but I did it anyway because the staff was there to encourage me, and to assure me that I could do it. I then found myself sitting on boards as a Head Start representative, taking on leadership roles and responsibilities with confidence and enthusiasm. Through the encouragement at the center I was able to hope and achieve a better future for my children and myself. The struggle was not an easy one—but it was a supported struggle. In every step I took away from the dismal and hopeless life I had been living, I was opening a world of possibilities to my children and myself.

Head Start has also offered parents the opportunity to become decision makers. Decision making comes in the form of the parent councils where you became a member of a project bigger than yourself and family, one in which parents are able to participate in setting the agenda rather than just picking among the alternatives that distant experts set for the parents. Local control in the Head Start program means that the program gets parents involved and thereby makes the voice of the parents heard. It was my appointment to represent our local Head Start program that gave me the power to say “no” to my husband’s abuse. I remember distinctly that I was able to survive what turned

out to be my last violent abuse by my husband because I knew there was hope for me to make a better life for myself and my children. I endured that night—and the nights since have been infinitely better because I have the recognition, the training, the resiliency, and the decision-making skills to have a good life. I owe this all to my experience with Head Start. Head Start uses these four elements to help marginalized families achieve a better and stronger future.

The data from the data sources, autobiography, literature and document review, and interviews with Head Start staff and parents led me to conclude that my Head Start parent involvement experience is generalizable to the Head Start experience. Based upon my experience and its connections to policies, research, and program operations of Head Start, I challenged the current version of the Head Start Reauthorization Bill and make four recommendations for the improvement of Head Start:

1) Strengthen commitment to parents;

The current administration has proposed a Head Start Reauthorization Bill that poses a threat to Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices. The Bill proposes to reduce the role of parents in program governance, a vital component of parent involvement that engages parents in training, decision-making and nurtures resilience. "Under the Senate bill (S.1107), the board of directors would have complete authority on all decisions and would be required only to "consult" with the policy council. The policy council would lose its authority to jointly make decisions with the board of directors and instead make recommendations to the board, which could be accepted or rejected. The result: the existing system of shared governance and the high

level of parental involvement in administering Head Start programs would be eliminated” (NHSA, 2006). I propose that the Bill keeps Policy Council in tact as it stand today, with parent representatives having responsibilities in program oversight and administration. Rather than to diminish the role of parents on Policy Council, I propose that funding be increased to ensure parents are well trained and supported.

2) Acknowledge the four elements explicitly;

A study of my experiences with Head Start, both as a parent and professional, a review of Head Start parent involvement history and research, and a case study of one Head Start program has enable me to identify four primary elements of Head Start’s approach to parent involvement. These elements are recognition of parents as capable, important and with potential, the provision of training opportunities, resiliency building strategies and opportunities for meaningful decision-making.

Although the Head Start Performance Standards include a plan for ensuring that the four elements of recognition, training, resiliency and decision-making are implemented in Head Start programs across the nation, they have not been clearly identified as such. I recommend that these elements be clearly defined and outlined in documents expediently so that they can serve to formally direct practice.

3) Assure adequate funding for parental involvement and teacher education

In Head Start Reauthorization Bill, there are several proposals that require adequate funding to ensure they are effectively implemented. This includes the regulations regarding school readiness, collaborations with community agencies, and

teacher credentials. There is no mention of improving parent involvement efforts, but rather to diminish this important component of the Head Start program.

The Head Start Reauthorization bill includes the 2005 School Readiness Act which proposes to improve Head Start by focusing on school readiness, improving grantee oversight and program management, and increasing competitiveness in the program. The Bill supports provisions to increase competition in the program, in particular by requiring all grantees to meet certain school readiness outcomes in order to be designated as priority grantees (“Statement of Administration Policy,” 2005).

The Act proposes that Head Start strengthen State and local partnerships such as with other early childhood programs, especially local school districts, and by enhancing State collaboration on early childhood programs (“Statement of Administration Policy,” 2005). The Bill also required that half of all Head Start teachers to have a B.A or a B.S. degree by 2011.

All of these proposals require funding to ensure they can be effectively implemented, yet, the Bill includes no funds to accomplish these requirements (“Update on Head Start Reauthorization in the 109th Congress,” 2006). Although I do not support many of the items proposed in the Head Start Reauthorization Bill, if they are to be fully and successfully implemented, funds must be ensured so that parent involvement are not further reallocated to other line items. I recommend that funding for teacher training be increased and targeted with specificity, so that funds for other line items need not be reallocate to ensure teacher education regulations are accomplished.

4) *Engage in research concerning parental involvement around the elements.*

I recommend that further research be directed toward examining Head Start's policies and practices for fostering positive outcomes in families, and specifically those that foster social emotional resiliency. I suggest the research examines Head Start's policies, practices and barriers to that preclude successful parent involvement. I suggest that more attention be given to Head Start as a family program, and not simply an educational institution. Research that investigates Head Start's approach to parent involvement will likely demonstrate its importance to children and to the success of the Head Start program. I recommend that parental involvement in Head Start research is conducted with the diverse cultures and communities of the families we serve in mind. I suggest we examine parent involvement in the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs that have been successful in ensuring that parents are meaningfully engaged, amidst the laborious work schedules of these families. I propose that study of how successful Head Start has been in fostering resiliency in the families they serve. The study might first look at Head Starts parent involvement policies and practices and how they compare to strategies for cultivating resiliency as identified in resiliency theory. Once such policies and procedures are established, barriers to successful parent involvement should be identified. Finally, impact studies of individual programs in various cultures and communities may determine Head Start's effectiveness in fostering resiliency.

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It seems like only yesterday that I enrolled my first child at Blair County Head Start, and yet, as I reflect upon those days, I do not recognize the woman I was when Blair County Head Start entered our lives. Even today, Blair County Head Start personnel have eagerly given of their time and talents to share in the development of this research project. It is my pleasure to extend my appreciation for their support in this undertaking. I am grateful to my committee for the guidance and encouragement they have provided throughout the years at Penn State University.

My travels throughout the nation as a Head Start Federal Reviewer, has given me the privilege of meeting many interesting and caring people, without whom, I would not have learned so much about the families Head Start serves, and the dedicated personnel who give of themselves to change lives.

Words could not express my gratitude for my family and friends who have made this work possible. Special thanks go to my husband, Joe, for his encouragement, and for taking on extra family responsibilities, while I toiled long hours over books and documents, free of family chores and errands. I am grateful for all of my family, who supported me with love, consideration and patience.

I want to honor the memory of my mother, whom I know is smiling from heaven with pride, saying "I am proud of you, but then again, I always have been!" Thanks mom. Lastly, yet most important, I am thankful for a loving Heavenly Father, without whom none of this would be possible. It was He who led me to the people of Blair County Head

Start, and guided me through the subsequent life changes that followed. He has upheld me as He promised and has given me hope; Psalms 119: 116 (*paraphrased*).

CHAPTER ONE

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HEAD START

Portrait of a Head Start Parent

Mrs. M was the mother of three children between the ages of 1 and 3. She spent most of her days at home, tending her children and looking forward to the afternoon soaps. Mrs. M was also the wife of an abusive alcoholic. She often prayed that her husband would come home and pass out on the couch, but most of the time she would get a beating instead.

One afternoon, a Head Start representative came to visit. Mrs. M was embarrassed not only by her bruised and battered appearance, but also by the condition of her house. Dust and clutter were not the major problems; her house was literally falling apart. Mrs. M thought about the hole in her bathroom floor from which the basement below was clearly visible. Mrs. M pictured in her mind's eye several places in the walls that her husband had punched through and hoped that the visitor from Head Start would not ask to come in. Thankfully, she didn't. They talked at the door instead. The woman introduced herself as Ruth Anne and mentioned that she knew there were young children in the home who might be eligible for Head Start. Mrs. M's eldest child would be 3 in November, so she was old enough to begin Head Start. If the child was enrolled, she would be picked up by bus 3 days a week and spend 3 hours a day in a preschool classroom. Mrs. M was delighted. This program promised to make her life a bit easier. After all, caring for two children would be easier than managing three. Mrs. M accepted Ruth Anne's invitation and consented to have her child begin the program.

As the months went by, her eldest girl seemed really to enjoy going to school. One afternoon, the phone rang, and the woman on the other end of line identified herself as Romaine, the parent involvement coordinator from Head Start. Romaine invited Mrs. M to come to the center the following Tuesday to meet with a group of parents who were planning a Christmas party for the children. Mrs. M. declined, saying she was far too busy that day. Then, after hanging up the telephone, the young mother returned to the sofa. A month later, Romaine called again. She mentioned that the parent group still needed help with the Christmas party and offered to provide childcare for the babies if Mrs. M would agree to participate. The meeting was to be held the following Tuesday in a local church basement. Reluctantly, Mrs. M. attended. She observed briefly, and what seemed as if little was being accomplished, Mrs. M offered some suggestions that sparked a productive conversation. Everyone appeared to relax with one another, and a successful party was planned. Mrs. M felt pretty proud of herself. Not only had she spoken up, but the other parents had listened, and her opinion had been valued. She was glad she had come. Before the meeting ended, Romaine requested that this group of parents meet on a monthly basis to plan other activities for the children and to provide mutual support for the participants. Romaine also suggested that the group elect a committee chairperson, and Mrs. M was elected. Mrs. M was elated, yet worried about what her husband would say. Would he let her participate? Despite her concerns, Mrs. M accepted the responsibility and resolved to do well. After the meeting, the new committee chairperson was elected the role of something called Policy Council representative. This was the decision making board of the program, consisting of parents, Head Start director, and community representatives. The thought was a bit overwhelming, but

Romaine assured Mrs. M that she could simply observe the first few times. Romaine also expressed confidence that the young mother could handle the responsibility and excel in her new role.

As she considered all of this, Mrs. M decided simply to tell her husband about her plans. After all, he wasn't home during the day. That evening, when she nervously brought up the subject and broke her big news, her husband was too drunk to take much notice.

On the day of the Policy Council meeting, Mrs. M observed as planned, but not for long. Someone noticed that she had been busy writing notes all through the meeting, and with that, Mrs. M was selected as secretary for the group.

Although Mrs. M had always been a very quiet introverted person, and her self-esteem had reached an all time low of late, her personality began to change with her involvement in Head Start. Throughout the year, Mrs. M continued to serve as Policy Council representative and to work on several additional committees. The following year, with her second child enrolled at Head Start, Mrs. M became even more involved. That year, the Policy Council elected Mrs. M state representative and Policy Council chairperson. This meant she would attend the state-level meetings and be responsible for sharing and obtaining information for Blair County Head Start. As Mrs. M met those new challenges, her confidence in herself continued to grow.

Another year passed by, and Mrs. M's youngest child was enrolled in Head Start. Mrs. M was elected Policy Council chairperson continued as the state representative and became a national representative for Head Start. This meant a trip to a national conference in Colorado, an experience that proved to be an awakening for

her. While she was away from all of the stress if home for a week, with the children cared for by Grandma, Mrs. M realized she did not have to live in an abusive environment. She saw that she was worthwhile and valued. At the conference, she promised herself to make major changes for her children's sake as well as for her own.

On her return home, Mrs. M secretly planned to file for divorce but wanted to wait for the "right time." That time came all too soon, when one of her husband's episodes of violence lasted for hours. All the while, she held on, determined that this would be the last time she would ever endure this treatment. She turned to Head Start for help, and Romaine arrived and guided Mrs. M and her children through every step, from hospital to lawyer to shelter. Her life as the wife of an abusive alcoholic had ended, but her life as a Head Start teacher had just begun.

In the fall, she enrolled at the Pennsylvania State University, where she received her undergraduate degree in early childhood education. She returned to Head Start as a teacher, hoping to repay a debt of gratitude by giving families the care and support her family had experienced from the moment that Ruth Ann, the Head Start representative, had first knocked at the door. As a result of her firsthand experiences in Head Start, Mrs. M knew that the parent involvement practices of Head Start had much more to offer families. She had learned an important lesson; every successful parent involvement effort is built on sincerity, friendship, and a nonjudgmental attitude. Even when the parents of children in her class did not choose to be involved in Head Start in ways that she had hoped, Mrs. M did not assume lack of interest or laziness. Instead, she thought about how different her own life might have been if Head Start staff hadn't taken the time to draw her out and seek a variety of ways to include her. What a waste of human potential it

would have been if the Head Start professionals hadn't searched for Mrs. M's subtle strengths, gradually nurtured her self-confidence and helped to educate all three of her children! In her interactions with parents, Mrs. M sought to keep in touch with the feelings she had experienced when first approached by Head Start personnel; embarrassment about her living conditions, fear of failure, a low self-concept, and anguish about her family's situation.

Over the years, Mrs. M grew to understand Head Start from both sides, first as a parent and later as a teacher. In the spring, she began working toward her master's degree in early childhood education so that she could continue to learn and develop as a professional. Every detail of Mrs. M's life described in this Head Start's story is true. I know, because I am the former Mrs. M. (Zeak & Reneck-Jalongo, 1996)

In writing and reflecting on my story I found four approaches to parent involvement that saved my life and set my family on a healthier path, including (a) recognition, (b) training, (c) resiliency, and (d) decision making. The Head Start Program provides recognition to parents as important to the child's development and as individual's with ability and promise. Hence, the outreach that Head Start did with me. I was trapped in an abusive relationship and had little self-esteem and little hope that my future would hold anything more for me than this violence. That knock on the door was literally my escape from an environment that had crushed me and which would certainly have destroyed my children as well. Head Start first recognized me as a person worthy of respect and ability. They demonstrated that respect as they listened to my concerns about sending my young children on a bus to school at least ten miles away, separated for at least four hours a day, and appreciated my need for a reprieve from the responsibilities of

caring for three young children in such an unstable environment. They answered my questions, and expressed interest in developing a relationship with me as an individual and as a parent. Within weeks of enrollment in Head Start, they expressed appreciation for my abilities as a parent as they engaged me in opportunities to plan and make decisions for myself and my family, and gradually into involvement that would broaden my social resources through responsibilities in program oversight and development. Because the Head Start program recognizes the importance of parents, I became active in my child's education and from that stepping stone I was able to begin my own life as a resilient adult. The most significant thing that Head Start does is help parents get actively involved with their children's education by giving those parents a sense of empowerment, hope and desire for a better life.

Head Start also offers parents training. Beginning with my first parent meeting, where a holiday party was planned, I learned how to organize parents so that we could help Head Start teachers and provide special activities that our children may not otherwise enjoy. As a Policy Council representative, I was supported with training and guidance as I acquired leadership skills such as in listening, questioning, reflecting, analyzing and creative thinking. With such experiences, I was afforded the opportunity to do the kind of leading that eventually helped me lead myself out of my abusive marriage. With training came experience which builds confidence and self-esteem. For me, these experiences helped me find the strength and courage to go back to school and then to become a teacher at Head Start. Training is an essential element of the Head Start program. The present administration would reduce funding to Head Start so that those types of training programs would be reduced. The significant contributions that Head

Start plays in the lives of poorer Americans cannot continue if funding is reduced forcing Head Start programs to eliminate the “parent” part of this important program.

The Head Start Program offers support that enables parents and children to build on their resiliency. This resiliency comes from the social support and information that allows a person to reach out for other opportunities. When I first came to the Head Start building I occasionally wanted to be in the classroom, just to watch what was going on. When I was offered the job of leading the parents in a specific task, I hesitated, lacking confidence, but I accepted anyway because Head Start staff were there to encourage me, and to assure me that I could do it. With every charge came encouragement and guidance, to ensure that I achieved a level of success, resulting in a thirst to learn and accomplish more. Experiencing success in responsibilities, such as in planning a party or in organizing a fund-raising activity, I soon found myself sitting on boards as a Head Start representative and later participating in college classrooms, a dream I once never dared to consider. Through encouragement from personnel and friends at Head Start, I was able to hope and achieve a better future for my children and myself. The struggle was not an easy one—but it was supported struggle through every step I took away from the dismal and hopeless life I had been living.

Head Start has also offered parents the opportunity to become decision makers. As a parent, I believe I was always a decision maker, but generally the choices I made were in circumstances where options were limited and determined on the basis of immediate need and survival. As a Head Start parent, I learned to make decisions that held life long benefits for my children and me. My resources were plentiful, and the Head Start support for accessing services was abundant. For me, growth in the ability to make

informed and intelligent decisions came with my involvement in developing educational goals for my children and in serving on Head Start's Policy Council and its committees. With guidance from my Head Start teachers, I learned to better observe my children, to share information and to plan educational goals for each child according to their individual abilities and interests. With Head Start parent committees, my decision making skills were honed with participation on interview committees, recruitment and selection processes, finance reviews, etc. As a Policy Council representative, I became a member of a project bigger than myself and family, one in which I was able to participate in setting the agenda rather than just pick among the alternatives set by management. As Policy Council chairperson, I lead the council in discussion and decision making regarding program governance items including budgets, personnel issues, and Head Start policies and procedures. Local control in the Head Start program enables the program to get parents involved and make the voice of the parents heard. It was my appointment to represent our local Head Start Program that gave me the power to say "no" to my husband's abuse. I remember distinctly that I was able to survive what turned out to be my last violent abuse by my husband because I knew there was hope for me to make a better life for myself and my children. I endured that night—and the nights since have been infinitely better because I have the recognition, the training, the resiliency and the decision making skills to have a good, safe life. I owe this all to my experience with Head Start.

Statement of the Problem

My concern for Head Start families within the current political climate led me to ask: Are my initial experiences in Head Start generalizable to larger contexts? Do recognition, training, resiliency, and decision making figure prominently in local and policies and practices? In order to address these questions, I explore my personal experience across 30 years of association with Head Start, review the Head Start policies on parental involvement from the program's inception to its current reauthorization, analyze the research on parental involvement in Head Start, and conduct a case study of the Blair County Head Start Program. In this way, I seek to determine if recognition, training, resiliency, and decision making are identifiable in national policy, scientific investigations of that policy, and the daily practices of an existing program. If those elements are found in these data sources, then my personal experiences can speak loudly to the national concern for Head Start and poor families.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

A central premise of Head Start's rationale is that poor children live in homes which may not provide sufficient developmental stimulation to nurture physical and cognitive skills ascribed to children ages birth to 5 years old. Therefore, children who have a "head start" in order to compete with their middle-class peers are better equipped to succeed in early educational endeavors, from having more opportunities for exploration and learning than many children living in poverty. Lareau's research on successful parent involvement discusses her view that when parents are recognized as important to early child development, and as individuals with abilities and interests, they

are more likely to be engaged in the education of their children, are better prepared to succeed as the child's most influential teacher and more confidently able to contribute and advocate for their children and family (Lareau, 2000). Head Start readies its parents as they recognize the potential of these individuals, supports them with training and guidance, engages them in meaningful decision making and fosters resiliency with encouragement, resources and opportunities. My dissertation is based upon the conceptual framework of Lareau's perspective on successful parent involvement, Epstein's model of parental involvement, Maslow's Hierarchy of needs and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory.

Head Start parent involvement policies and practice reflect the theoretical view of Joyce Epstein who proposed six types of parent involvement effective in connecting families, schools, and communities. These include opportunities for parents to be involved in education and training related to child development and early education. They strive to communicate with families about educational activities and their child's progress in school and at home. She describes a comprehensive parent involvement program as one which provides opportunities for volunteering in classrooms, on boards and on committees. Such programs plan opportunities for families to be involved with their children at home in learning activities and other educational experiences. They afford opportunities for parents to be involved in decision making, such as in program governance and advocacy, and they support parents with resources and services by coordinating with partners in the community (Epstein, 1992).

Maslow's research discusses the importance of addressing the basic needs of food, clothing shelter and security as essential to preparing parents for involvement in

experiences that nurture a sense of belonging and acceptance, and onto self-esteem and self actualization (Maslow, 1999). Families living in poverty struggle daily to meet the need for food, clothing and shelter, and are often lacking the necessary resources. Many times these families are so caught up in a mode of survival that the need for love, belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization receive little attention. This results in greater frustration and hardship. My research explains how Head Start utilizes the framework of recognition, training, resiliency and involving parents in meaningful decision making to nurture families beyond their level of basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and safety, into relationships where their social needs of love and friendship are cultivated, in an environment where self-esteem and self-confidence can blossom, and on to lives with purpose and hope.

Historically, social service programs were developed based largely on the deficit model theory that parents are deficient in multiple ways, and need to be educated in order to become better parents and able to actively contribute to society. However, more contemporary developments have led to social service programs which design parent involvement based on the assumption that parents are not deficient, but need opportunities and resources to evoke change in their lives and in the community. In such programs, parents are recognized as having the potential to learn and develop hidden skills and abilities, and play a significant role in program governance and planning for service delivery. Still other family programs assume both the historical and contemporary positions. On one hand they argue that families need to be reformed, to have their deficiencies corrected in order to conform to the ways of middle class society. On the other hand, they also hold that parents need to be empowered to make those changes

(Zigler & Styfco, 2004). My research explains the Head Start model of parent involvement of both empowerment and education, as prescribed within the Head Start philosophy for cultivating social competency in children and families.

Bronfenbrenner, co-founder of Head Start, made a huge contribution to the Head Start philosophy as he described a model of human development which acknowledges that humans do not develop in isolation, but in relation to their family and home, school, community and society. Therefore, programs seeking to educate children must not ignore the contexts from within he grows and learns which all operate together to influence what a person becomes as he or she develops, and most assuredly, the family context (1990). Since the publication of Bronfenbrenner's theory, he has influenced how many social and behavioral scientists have approached the study of human beings and their environments. His ecological systems theory was renamed bioecological systems theory to give emphasis on the child's own biology and agency as primary to development, as well as biological maturing, and the family and community context in which the child lives. His theory led to new directions in basic research and to applications in the design of programs and policies, affecting the well-being of children and families both in the United States and abroad. Head Start's family support and parent involvement framework of recognition, training, resiliency and meaningful decision making was built upon his ecological construct.

Lareau (2000) also agreed that individuals respond to others from the context of those who influence their daily living. In *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parent Intervention in Elementary Education*, she examined models of parent involvement that were effective and other forms of parent involvement that seemed to be unsuccessful.

Lareau sums up the differences in class-based models of parent involvement by stating that middle-class parents view their children as projects, while the poor and working class families put their energy into getting through each day and keeping their children safe. She also concluded that low income families have been less likely to be involved in schools and programs that support the education of children, not for lack of interest in education, but in the kinds and levels of involvement offered to them. Many low income parents lacked confidence and self-esteem and felt they were not capable of taking on leadership roles on school boards, parent meetings and in programs such as Head Start. Programs that invited parents into token roles and responsibilities that seemed insignificant were not as likely to engage parents as those that demonstrated their belief that parents have value and importance. Parents tended to engage in opportunities most similar to the work they did at home and where significance was placed on their participation. They wanted to feel certain that could be successful in responsibilities given to them and to be certain that they were needed and appreciated (Lareau, 2000).

Lareau's approach reflects the strength-based approach to serving children and families that is common in most Head Start programs across the nation, where parents are recognized as individuals having interests and abilities, and are offered opportunities to engage in experiences of interest to them, where they are challenged and supported in areas where they feel strong and capable, and in an environment that demonstrates respect and appreciation for the contributions that parents can make to their child's development and to program governance and oversight.

This study demonstrates the contributions of Maslow, Lareau, and Bronfenbrenner, and Epstein as they developed an approach to parent involvement that

supports parents with and opportunities that enable them to provide their family needs, to build relationships with others and broaden the scope of contexts from which they receive support and offer their interests and abilities to others, and become resilient adults, empowered with hope and confidence.

Significance of Study

Over the last two decades, there has been great emphasis on Head Start's ability to prepare children for kindergarten. The Head Start Reauthorization bill includes the 2005 School Readiness Act which supports efforts towards reconstructing Head Start as the comprehensive family program as we now know it, to become an educational service in the business of readying children for kindergarten. Within the School Readiness Act the current administration proposes to improve Head Start by focusing on school readiness, improving grantee oversight and program management, and increasing competitiveness in the program. In particular, the School Readiness Act would address what they describe as a critical need to align Head Start programs with K-12 evidence-based academic standards and programs to improve school readiness ("Statement of Administration Policy," 2005).

The Act proposes that Head Start strengthen State and local partnerships such as with other early childhood programs, especially local school districts, and by enhancing State collaboration on early childhood programs ("Statement of Administration Policy," 2005). Collaborations are welcomed in Head Start as they provide parents with opportunities for training, and in many cases, meaningful decision making as they are invited to participate on various community advisory boards. With such opportunities,

parents are respected and recognized as having valuable contributions to offer to the communities where they reside.

The Bill supports provisions to increase competition in the program, in particular by requiring all grantees to meet certain school readiness outcomes in order to be designated as priority grantees (“Statement of Administration Policy,” 2005). Requiring grantees that are deficient in one or more of these standards to re compete for funding ensures that Head Start funding is used to support effective comprehensive services that prepare children for kindergarten, ignoring the varying abilities and interests of children and diverse rates of development. Such a requirement would result in classrooms directing attention to preparing children to achieve expected testing scores, such as already occurs in the public school system. Parents will likely be involved merely ensuring children are well rested and ready for testing.

The House bill also required that half of all Head Start teachers to have a B.A. degree by 2011; the Senate bill requires half of the teachers in every center-based program to have at least a B.A. degree and Head Start teachers must meet the higher degrees of their state pre-k requirements. Yet, the Senate bill includes no funds to accomplish these requirements (“Update on Head Start Reauthorization in the 109th Congress,” 2006). Consequently, many Head Start program will look to line items that are not considered as vital as preparing teachers to meet these requirements and to train them in strategies to ensure child outcomes meet federal expectations. Since increased parent involvement is not on the forefront of congressional oversight, funds once used for parent training will be transferred where it appears it is most needed. Staff training will

likely focus upon areas such as developing curricula to ensure growth in outcomes in areas of math, science, language and literacy, and less emphasis on building relationships with families as the child's most influential teacher. Consequently, with increased focus on the teacher as a professional rather than a partner with parents, the schism in those relationships will widen.

The Reauthorization Bill also proposed to diminish the Head Start Policy Council to the level of an advisory committee, relinquishing oversight and governance responsibilities to a governing board of directors (“Update on Head Start Reauthorization in the 109th Congress,” 2006). The role of parents as decision-maker is essential to the growth and development of parents as it engages them in training and provides ongoing opportunity for recognition as important to the family, to the Head Start program and to the community, cultivating positive outcomes leading to resiliency. Currently, parents are involved in the development of program policies, annual budgets, interview and recruitment and selection processes, as well as ongoing review of programmatic reports, strategic planning and self-assessment activities. This Bill will diminish parent involvement to a mere advisory role where plans are made by management, rubber stamped by parents and governed by a board of directors. Training opportunities for parents may continue as funding permits, but the empowerment and sense of confidence that comes with recognition of parents as vital to program success, and engagement in meaningful decision making that fosters resiliency will be gone with the demise of parent involvement as proposed.

Additionally, the Senate bill does not include a provision to halt the NRS – the SAT-like test being given to Head Start children. This test engages four and five year old

children in multiple testing, where the child sits across from the teacher for 15-20 minutes and is questioned on math and literacy. This test is conducted without the involvement of parents, as has been done for the several decades. Head Start has viewed parents as essential to the assessment process. NAEYC argues that assessment of young children poses greater challenges than people generally realize since first five years of life are a time of incredible growth and learning, but the course of development is uneven and sporadic. Consequently, assessment results—in particular, standardized test scores that reflect a given point in time—can easily misrepresent children’s learning (2005).

There seems to be little community, state and national attention to the roles of Head Start as a positive influence on the parents of these young children whose role as the young child’s most influential teachers have been loudly acclaimed in the field of early education. Head Start critics, such as J. Ellsworth and L. Ames even agree that there is ample research on Head Start as it relates to academic outcomes for children. But since it is a program for children and families, much more research must be done to determine the effectiveness of the program for families they serve, as they strive to foster positive outcomes (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

As I reflect on my own experiences with Head Start, I shudder to think what my life may be today if parent involvement were not considered essential to the success of this program in achieving its goals for achieving positive outcomes in children and families. Had they not recognized that I needed someone to see me as person worthy of respect, appreciation and with potential, my children and I would likely continue to live in despair and abuse, if we continued to survive at all. If it were not for Head Start’s determination to involve me in ways that developed my abilities, strengthened my

confidence and gave me hope, I would have continued to make decisions that led to nothing more than daily survival. I am thankful that Head Start recognized the power of engaging parents in decision making such as those responsibilities assumed by Policy Council representatives. Inherent in the charges of a Policy Council parent are opportunities for training, experiences that fosters skill development and a sense of empowerment that motivates one to strive for more, such as it did in my life. The proposed Reauthorization Bill as it is written will not only revolutionize this program, but is likely to lead to its total demise, as the building blocks of parent involvement are taken away, and the losers will be children and families.

Glossary of Terms

Family: For Head Start purposes, family means all persons living in the same household who are supported by the income of the parent or guardian of the enrolled or participating child; related by blood, marriage or adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Head Start Act: The intent of this legislation is to “promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children from low-income families through the provision of health, education, nutrition and social services based on family needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Head Start Performance Standards: Regulations which define the objectives and features of a quality Head Start program in concrete terms; they articulate a vision of service delivery to young children and families, and provide a regulatory structure for monitoring and enforcing of quality standards (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Maximum feasible participation: the term suggests the role of parents as a full partner with paid professionals in the program (Zigler et al, 1992).

Positive outcomes: Head Start ascribes to the following positive outcomes for children and families: to enhance self-confidence; to increase the child and family’s ability to positively interact with one another and with friends; to develop positive attitudes in the family toward the community and to foster interest in contributing to the community. Head Start seeks to develop problem-solving skills in children and families and to increase an individual sense of self worth and dignity within the child and family.

Resiliency: a process of struggling with hardships that progresses by accumulating small successes side by side with failures, setbacks and disappointments and resulting in a cluster of strengths (Siebert, 1996)

Social competence: the child's or adults' everyday effectiveness in dealing with both the present environment and later responsibilities in school and life (ACF, 1995).

Acronyms

ACF: Administration for Children, Youth and Families

BCHS: Blair County Head Start

CDA: Child Development Associate

ESL: English as a Second Language

FACES: Family and Child Experiences Survey

NRS: National Reporting System

OCD: Office of Child Development

OSPRI: On Site Program Review Instrument

PRISM: Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring

SAVI: Self Assessment Validation Instrument

CHAPTER TWO

MY REFLECTIONS AS A HEAD START PARENT AND PROFESSIONAL

The study begins with autobiographical reflections on my experience as a Head Start parent and professional and established upon my view that autobiography adds voice to individuals whose voices have not been heard, specifically, the voices of Head Start parents across the nation. According to Connelly and Clandinin, autobiography is also a practical form of research that can yield unique insights into the wisdom of experienced practitioners (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Telling ones story helps the individuals, (both the reader and the writer), to understand topics they may want to process and address and often results in the discussion of potential or existing problems that need to be further considered and explored. Reflection is a natural part of life, giving meaning and purpose to everyday experiences, which, when shared with others, can influence individual lives as well as society (Creswell, 2000). I believe my story can influence both policy and practice in Head Start.

My reflective data begins with Head Start involvement as a parent n the 1970's and through the 1980's, then onto the 1990's and into the current century, as a Head Start professional.

The 1970s

When my first child was enrolled in Head Start in 1977, I used my time at home to tend to the needs of my two younger children, hoping for a few brief moments of relaxation and escape from the realities of living with an alcoholic spouse. My life had no apparent significance, other than to survive each day, with hope and faith that someday

my life would be different. Since resiliency experts describe a resilient person as one who has faith and hope, I suspect that the seeds for cultivating resiliency were planted early in my upbringing, in a home where my mother ensured we were taught Biblical truths such as faith in God and the hope that a relationship with Him can bring. Head Start would prove to be the nourishment that fostered my growth to the resilient adult I have become today.

At first I wasn't interested in Head Start for anything more than a reliable, trustworthy, babysitting service for my eldest daughter. Despite the trauma our family endured, the safety and care of my children were my greatest concerns. Romaine, the parent involvement coordinator, recognized that quality in me and used it to nurture my interest in what the program had to offer me as a parent. After months of encouragement from her, Romaine sparked my interest when she said I was needed in order to plan a holiday celebration for the children at Head Start and assured me that my younger children would benefit from the activities as well. I heard two very important messages during that phone call. I was needed and "something special for my children", and eagerly responded that I would help. I recall attending that first parent committee. I was a bit apprehensive when I arrived, as many of the parents seemed to know one another. After quietly listening to their conversations, I offered suggestions for planning the Christmas party for the children, which were appreciated and accepted, leaving me to feel significant and capable. After plans were made, Romaine shared information about the role and responsibilities of Policy Council and requested that we elect a representative from this center. The parents voted, and I was elected, responsible for sharing information with the Policy Council about our centers issues, concerns and activities and

to provide information to the parent committee from Policy Council via written minutes and oral report. A month later, I attended Policy Council and began frantically taking notes, wanting to succeed in my new role. When I consider what led me, at that point in my life, to determine to succeed at this task, I recall feeling a sense of responsibility, and purpose, both attributes of a resilient person. The parents of this committee, and Romaine showed confidence in my ability, and I wanted to earn that respect by doing my very best.

At this meeting, one item on the agenda was election of Policy Council officers. Someone noticed that I was taking ample notes, and I was nominated, and then elected as Policy Council secretary. When I expressed fear that I wouldn't do the job adequately, Romaine assured me that I would have her support and would do well. Encouragement and support, the seeds for growing confidence had been planted and was beginning to blossom.

Policy Council meetings provided opportunities for significant advisory and decision making. During my experience with Policy Council we reviewed and approved program plans, budget reports, grant applications, personnel policies, and by laws. Several staff was hired by Policy Council during my experience with BCHS including the hire of a disabilities coordinator, teachers and an administrative assistant. Policy Council was well prepared to approve or disapprove hires through Policy Council representation on the personnel committee. I recall several instances when questions were raised to be further explored before finally making a decision on new hires. Parents are significantly involved in decision making at BCHS. Other decisions made by Policy Council included cost of living increases, the decision to provide GED classes, and donations to a home nursing agency. Policy Council was very involved in the decision to move BCHS out of

the oversight of the Community Action Agency and to incorporate as Child Advocates of Blair County, as it is now known. Committees were also formed through Policy Council, and I found myself on committees such as those responsible for personnel, budget, and recruitment policies.

On the Personnel Committee, at least two parent representatives served with program staff and the relevant coordinator. I recall participating in interviews to hire several teachers, and had opportunity to question the interviewee in the same manner as did the program staff. Once the interview process was completed, the committee discussed the interviews and voted to recommend one or more hires to Policy Council where parent representatives shared their recommendation and ample information about the qualifications the candidates possessed.

The Budget Committee reviewed the programs budget at least annually. A budget draft was presented to the committee, where the director clearly explained each item and its significance to Head Start. Many times, budget drafts were reviewed, discussed and if questions arose that couldn't be answered at the time, the committee reconvened until a committee approved budget was prepared for Policy Council approval.

The recruitment and selection committee was most active during late spring and early summer, when a large scale recruitment process was complete and applications for enrollment were submitted. I recall reviewing selection criteria for ensuring that families with the greatest need were met. On the list of approved criteria were single parent families, parents living in adverse circumstances, children in foster care, and children with disabilities. Once reviewed, the committee made a recommendation to Policy Council for approval. Then, the committee confidentially scored and prioritized

applications, using the selection criteria. Those with the lowest scores were selected for enrollment; others were moved to a waiting list.

Head Start parents at BCHS were significantly involved in program governance and were equipped with the tools for successfully assuming the responsibilities as assigned. I recall training events where we were introduced to processes for understanding and analyzing budgets, developing and establishing policy and in ensuring that Head Start policies resulted in effective practices for children and families. Head Start nurtured parents in the same way that good early childhood teachers grow confidence and esteem in children. That is, they take the time to know the person's strengths and interest, create opportunities to utilize those assets, and provide just enough challenge to further cultivate skills, with ample doses of support and encouragement to ensure success. This strategy is just as effective for adults as it has always been for children, and is evident in my own experience, while growing with Head Start.

The following year, 1978, when my second child was enrolled in Head Start, I did not have to be encouraged to become involved and take on new challenges in the program. The encouragement and support that I received through this program resulted in a renewed sense of confidence, purpose and value. I was eager try new experiences, assured that Head Start staff would support me in my endeavors to serve them. That year, I was elected Policy Council Chairperson, and eagerly accepted this leadership role, determined to earn the respect of my peers. As I became more acquainted with staff and other parents, I soon learned that the abusive life I had grown to believe was normal was grossly abnormal and risky for both me and my children, and dared to dream of a better life for my family.

In 1979, I was reelected as Policy Council Chairperson and asked to represent BCHS at a National Conference in Denver, Colorado. It was at this conference that I made life changing decisions, when once more I had a glimpse of life without abuse and experienced being treated with respect and appreciation. Upon my return home, when violent abuse finally brought me to the point of resolve, once more Romaine came to my side with support, guidance and encouragement. It was here that the many seeds of resiliency were in full bloom; the garden of hope was weeded of all that hindered my hopes and dreams, and a new life began.

BCHS's Director, James Matlack was very passionate about creating opportunities for Head Start parents to take the lead in planning discussions and activities relevant to its families across the central region of the state. He also felt that it was important for parents and Head Start staff to have opportunities to share ideas and information. With his support and guidance as well as encouragement from Blair County Head Start staff, parents of the Policy Council planned and implemented the first Central Pennsylvania Parent and Staff Association meeting. During Association meetings, Head Start parents met to discuss the rationale and purpose for this group as well as plans for future meetings. In the afternoon, parents and staff groups joined one another to share decisions made, offer recommendations, and to answer and address questions posed by each group.

In the fall of 1980 my youngest of the three daughters was enrolled in Head Start. I enrolled in Penn State University with confidence that I could succeed in whatever I choose to study. The desire to help, protect, nurture and encourage others was always a part of my nature, so I began to plan and prepare to enter a profession where I could play

a role in cultivating the strength of others in the way that Head Start had done for me. I planned to teach children and to help parents to see how important they were to early childhood development. As issues of funding, childcare, basic survival, as well as attending to the additional responsibilities of a student arose, my newly developed skills of resourcefulness and persistence enabled me to resolve each of the problems and to successfully graduate as an early childhood educator in 1987, receiving a B.S. in Early Childhood Education.

As I reflect on this decade with BCHS, and consider how I have grown and changed, I realize that it was and still is a life-long process. Those three years led me through a time in my life where my thoughts, plans and activities were centered on me, that is, the person I saw myself becoming. It wasn't that I neglected my children, but I felt confident that they were cared for, both by their teachers at Head Start, and my beloved grandmother, who tended to my children when I was busy at Head Start and its activities. I think I also believed that if I became better, I would eventually be a better mother to my children. So, I took every opportunity Head Start offered me, so that I could become someone I would like and that my children could love and respect.

The 1980s

Upon my graduation, I returned to Blair County Head Start to teach for the program that had taught me so much. During those five years, I learned even more from the children in my classroom and their families and had the privilege to watch parents grow to become resilient parents and responsible adults. Nancy was one of those parents from whom I learned much about the time, respect and trust it takes in building

relationships with families. Gina taught me lessons on diplomacy and patience. Brandon was a child in my classroom from whom I learned so much, both from him and his parents. His story depicts lessons learned in supporting parents of children with special needs.

Nancy. I remember the first time I met Nancy. She and her six children lived in an old refurbished farm house. As I approached her home for our first visit, I planned to become acquainted with the children and encourage her to volunteer in the classroom. Nancy, greeted me at the door, surrounded by her children, all under the age of five years. One look into her home told me that Nancy spent most of her time tending to the needs of her children and providing her home environment that was organized, clean and decorated with care. Artistic sketches of the children, pets, and the farmhouse were hanging on the walls, and as I admired them, I soon learned that Nancy was the artist behind the creations. As we began to converse, Nancy informed me that she would not be visiting the classroom, proclaiming that she was surrounded by children in her own home and did not need to be encircled by 18 more children. But she wanted to offer her talents in some way and asked if she could prepare some materials for the classroom, such as pictures, patterns, and borders for the bulletin boards. Recalling how Head Start recognized and utilized my strengths as a parent, I gladly accepted her offer and agreed to provide the materials and to send them home with the children. Nancy responded that she would come to the center to pick up the materials so that she could begin to work on the projects while the girls were in school and the babies were napping. According to plan, Nancy arrived and stood just outside the door of the classroom to collect the box of materials and assured me that she would return with the finished products, and she did,

one week later. Only this time, Nancy stepped inside the door and observed as I gathered additional materials for a second project she planned to begin. Once again, within days, Nancy returned, but this time I encouraged her to visit the parent room up the hall while I prepared for a third project she had planned. I knew there were other parents in the room that day and hoped she would have opportunity to make new friends and develop an interest in some of the parent activities that were being planned. Just as I hoped, Nancy visited with the others, and returned 30 minutes later to collect her goods. She began coming to the center almost daily, sometimes visiting the classroom and at other times, attending parent meetings and events. On one of Nancy's visits to the classroom, she happened to pop in while we were in the midst of mealtime activities, and immediately began helping children to ready for lunch. We were so grateful for her help and made certain that she realized how important she was to our classroom. After that visit, Nancy came to our class regularly to help with meals, and eventually to assist with art activities and games. Her younger children were always welcome in the classroom, making it easier for Nancy to participate, and creating an opportunity for the children to learn from each other. Over time, Nancy became one of our most frequent classroom volunteers. By mid-year, Nancy decided to enroll in Head Start's GED class, wanting to earn her high school diploma. Without a doubt, Nancy was achieving positive outcomes and developing confidence, self-esteem, and was on the path to resiliency. I met several "Nancy's" in my experience as a Head Start teacher.

Gina. Her son, Mikey, was a typical four year old in my Head Start classroom. Just like most boys, he was curious, active and loved to be engaged in very physical activities such as running, jumping, climbing, and building. He quickly learned the

behavioral expectations of our classroom, unless his mother came to visit and volunteer. Gina was a single mom, giving her best to be both mother and father to him. However, she was often frustrated at the behavior he displayed in her presence. I noticed that while Gina was very busy helping in the classroom, she paid close attention to Mikey's activities. You would constantly hear her shouting his name in rebuke from across the room for behaviors that displeased her. Seldom did I hear her provide encouragement and praise. I also noticed that some of her expectations of him were the cause of some of his misbehavior. For example, if materials were provided for an activity she found interesting, she would insist that he participate, and he would angrily respond with a temper tantrum. Gina also enjoyed craft activities, therefore, when she asked if she could bring materials for the children to make paper jack-o-lanterns, I eagerly agreed. She arrived the next day with precut orange circles, and black triangles and a few green rectangles. In preparation for exploratory play, Gina set up her materials in the art area where children were invited to make their jack-o-lanterns. Gina insisted Mikey make his right away. I stood from afar and observed as Gina made a sample jack-o-lantern, and began telling Mikey exactly how to place his precut pieces of paper in to the jack-o-lantern. Mikey didn't want to make one in the first place, and he certainly didn't want to make one just like hers. To quickly complete the task, he placed the pieces randomly on the paper and said "There, I am done, can I go play now?" Gina was in tears. She had hoped to help children make something to take home, and the children seemed no longer interested. As Gina left the room to calm herself, I rearranged the precut materials into one pile, mixing the triangles and rectangles and the orange circles. Then I invited an observing child to make something with the materials. There was no premade picture to

recreate, only the opportunity to be creative. As Gina returned to the room, two children were sitting at the table making their own versions of jack-o-lanterns, while one child found joy in randomly planning shapes on a larger piece of paper. I pulled Gina aside and suggested that she observe the activities, planning to explain later. I later asked Gina to think about her goals when she planned the activity. She reminded me that she wanted them to have something to take home to put up for the fall holiday. I pointed out that the children who made something, indeed had a piece of creative art to take home and enjoy, because it was made solely by them and with their own ideas in mind. She nodded in agreement. We talked about Mikey's reaction to the activity, and agreed that he simply wasn't interested in the project, but enjoyed other kinds of activities that were equally as valuable as the one she had planned. Gina admitted that she wanted something to put on her refrigerator, something made by her son. I was able to give her a photograph of Mikey building in the block area, which seemed to make her happy. This discussion led to the opportunity to explore how inappropriate expectations can lead to frustration and resulting misbehavior. With the help of the family service worker, these ideas were further explored and discussed on home visits and during parenting classes. As the year progresses, Gina continued to volunteer, and Mikey's behavior improved. Gina learned lessons through this experience, but as a teacher, I benefited as well. I learned to address sensitive issues with parents, but in ways that nurture them, rather than diminish their confidence as parents. It was this and many similar experiences that nurtured me both as a teacher and a parent.

Brandon. Brandon's parents were frustrated because they could not find employment to provide adequate care for their families without welfare support. His

mother worked at night in a local bar, while dad cared for two boys; and, when dad could pick up odd jobs in the community, he had to schedule it so that one parent was at home. They couldn't afford childcare and raising two boys was challenging. Brandon's father volunteered in the classroom frequently, and attended parents meetings on a regular basis. He shared his concerns for Brandon's behavior and had him examined by a medical doctor. Brandon was diagnosed with ADHD, and the physicians encouraged the parents to have him placed on Ritalin. He was instructed to give him medication in the morning and then again in the evening. According to his parents, Brandon became more manageable at home, however, we began to notice Brandon's personality beginning to change; he became lethargic and disinterested in many classroom activities. BCHS Staff encouraged the parents to observe Brandon in the classroom to see if he can identify changes in the child's behavior. When his father observed, he was shocked at the child he now saw. He saw how active and enthused Brandon was in the classroom setting prior to medicating him, and became concerned. He wanted to know more about what he could do for his son and soon became his advocate. Teachers and family service workers began equipping him with information on alternatives to managing his behavior without the medication, describing strategies that have been effective in the classroom, and enrolled the family in the Parent and Child Nurturing program. Within days, Brandon's parents chose to take him off the medication, and the former child emerged once again. Over the next several months, the family reported they had developed family rules and consequences they were trying to enforce. The task was slow and challenging, but they began to see some improvements. Brandon had a successful year and transitioned out of Head Start into kindergarten. About six months ago, I saw Brandon's father, where he

eagerly shared that Brandon was doing well in school. He also received his GED and was employed in a state job, within the community. He said that he had become more confident as a father because of his own experiences with Head Start.

These experiences strengthened my commitment to develop relationships with parents based upon trust and mutual respect. By seeking first to understand their interests and needs, families are better served, supported and nurtured toward positive outcomes.

Even as an employee, Head Start continued to nurture my professional growth and development. In the spring of 1993, the education coordinator at Blair County Head Start learned of a position comparable to hers in a Head Start program from a neighboring county. Terry encouraged me to apply for the position, saying that I had the skills to support the parent involvement efforts of this home-based Head Start program and the expertise in child development to guide and support home visitors. I took on the challenge and was hired as education manager where I grew to love home-based Head Start services because of my passion for serving families.

The 1990s

Bedford-Fulton Head Start is a home-based Head Start program in a county bordering Blair County. The program served pregnant women and children from birth to three in an Early Head Start program. Families of three to five year old children were served in one of three program options including home-based, combination services or in partnership with child care centers in the community. I was responsible for providing guidance and support to home visitors in their role as parent educator. When first hired, I began to explore Head Start Performance Standards, especially those related to parent involvement in a home based program. I agreed with the Head Start philosophy that

parents are the child's most influential teacher and that the home is a learning environment. For home-based programs, this meant that on home visits, teachers assume the role of adult educator and the parents as teachers of their children. Teachers would encourage parent involvement in educational activities with their children, by observing parent interactions, identifying parental strengths, and offering guidance and support to further develop their abilities as teachers. With training, preparation and encouragement, the home visitors and parents currently enrolled in the program began to realize the potential of a program design of this nature.

During my five-year experience with this program, I enjoyed visiting with families in their homes. As an education coordinator, I would have the privilege of home visiting with family service workers to provide evaluation and support. Many of the parents I have met were teen parents; others were grandparents raising children, single moms and dads, and traditional two parent families.

I recall visiting a very young teen couple and their two children. The young mother, Susan, was a senior in high school, while the father, Jake, stayed at home to care for their two children, a toddler and a six-month-old infant. As the home visitor and I became acquainted with this newly enrolled Head Start family, they explained that they planned for both of them to graduate from high school, with Jake completing his last year, after Susan graduated and could stay at home with the girls.

They lived in a very small room, in the basement of Susan's parent's home. They had access to the other living areas of the home, but they described this room as their own private space. The room was small, just enough for a mattress and a crib for their six month old infant, one dresser, and a laundry basket of toys and books. The two-year-old

girl sleeps on the mattress with her parents. As the home visitor talked with the mother of the children, I observed Jake and the children as they interacted with one another. The two-year-old girl brought books to her dad, which he read to her as he held the baby in his arms. The little girl seemed quite secure as she leaned over her daddy's back; with her arms around his neck, as he asked her to name the pictures in the book. I watched as he tickled her, sang her a song, and encouraged the little girl to talk to the baby. The interactions were obviously genuine and nurturing. As the conversation with the Susan ended, I encouraged Jake by telling him that he was a wonderful teacher and by elaborating on the details of the interactions I observed. He responded saying; "Everybody plays with their kids," I assured him that all parents did not teach quite as naturally as he had done. Weeks later, the home visitor told me that this family is so eager to share experiences they have had with their children and willing to try new ideas. These young parents, like many other began to see themselves with greater influence on the education of their children. They began to realize the impact of their words and actions as a role model to their children. The level of parent involvement at Bedford Fulton Head Start increased over the years, with several parents enrolling in educational programs such as General Education Degree (GED), Child Development Associate (CDA), and in community college based associate degree programs.

My Head Start-cultivated love for learning eventually led me to re-enroll in college in the mid-1990s, this time pursuing a master's degree in early childhood. I left the home-based program to complete my degree in August of 2000. I began teaching CDA (Child Development Associate) classes to parents, Head Start staff, and childcare providers interested in entering the early childhood profession or enhancing their current

professional status. Additionally, my passion for teaching led me to Penn State University as an adjunct instructor for child development and family studies courses.

My commitment to Head Start led me to explore ways to stay connected and to serve the program that had changed my life, including the opportunity to serve Head Start as a federal reviewer, with the responsibility of ensuring that programs across the nation were providing quality services to children and families as prescribed in Head Start Performances Standards.

The 21st Century

My experience as a Head Start Federal Reviewer provided ongoing opportunities for learning. My teachers were parents I met on American Indian Reservations, in Migrant Programs and in rural and urban Head Start programs across the nation. I learned from listening to the stories of veteran reviewers and those who began as Head Start parents themselves. The following recollections were shared by those people who continue to teach me about life with Head Start.

Rosa. Rosa and her family lived as migrant workers. They traveled throughout the states harvesting berries, corn, apples and assorted produce. They had three children, one in elementary school and a three-year old and an infant enrolled in Migrant Head Start. She feels safe in leaving these children with Head Start while she works in the fields. She and her spouse work from very early in the morning till early afternoon, in the heat of the day, and then return in the evening to work until darkness falls. At midday, she looks forward to visiting with their children at the center and feels very welcome and appreciated. Parent meetings are held during afternoon and early evening hours; dinner is

provided, resulting in significant attendance. Then, as they return to the field, evening care is also provided by the Head Start program.

As they travel from region to region, and season to season, Head Start ensures that comprehensive services follow them, through migrant networking systems. Rosa finds comfort in knowing that there will be consistency within Head Start for her children as they must travel so frequently.

Lucas. Lucas was a Head Start education coordinator in a program that lies in the hills of West Virginia. He proudly shared his story of how Head Start changed his life. Lucas was a single, unemployed parent of two little girls. The mother of these children had died of leukemia in recent years. He said he had no idea of how to care for growing girls, and when he heard about Head Start from friends at church, he eagerly enrolled them, hoping they could give him the help he needed. He was hesitant to visit the classrooms, feeling that he would be more of a hindrance than a help to teachers. He did accept invitations to activities and meetings, where he could meet other parents, hear their experiences with children, and ask questions about his little girl's behavior and development, and found himself looking forward to these opportunities. As time went on, and he attended trainings offered by the Head Start on topics of child development, nutrition, and healthcare and behavior guidance. He found these workshops interesting and informative, and planned to enroll in community college after the girls were in elementary school.

Lucas wanted to study early childhood education. Head Start encouraged him to begin taking a few classes immediately, perhaps during the day, while the girls were in preschool. They supported him as he sought funding and planned coursework, and were

available to help him with his studies as often as he found it necessary. Lucas said it was a long and difficult path, but after five years of formal education, Head Start invited him to do his student teaching with them. The experience was successful as he expected it would be. Upon graduation, he was hired at Head Start, first as a substitute teacher, and then as a lead teacher, when a position became available. Then, after a few years of teaching experience, he was promoted as education coordinator, and plans to continue his education while serving Head Start, because it was his lifeline at a time when he felt so alone.

Janis. Janis's mom was a family service worker for Head Start at its very beginnings, in the late 1960s. Her mom often shared her Head Start experiences with her as they sat around the table for meals, or during bedtime routines. She recalls the job of a family service worker as being very unpredictable and challenging. In those days, family service workers provided all aspects of comprehensive services, including health, nutrition, education and services. On any one visit to the homes of Head Start family, they may be greeted by scantily dressed parents who were just waking up, or come in the midst of domestic violence, or be welcomed by a parent who was high on drugs or alcohol. These family service workers were often young inexperienced parents with no idea of how to address or support the families they served. As Head Start programs began to realize that the safety of its staff, as well as the quality of services was hindered by this approach, they began to send two family service workers to homes to provide services. She was so grateful when Head Start broadened its scope of services to ensure quality services, but believes that safety often remains an issue in highly populated urban area (Head Start staff interview, 2006).

Ellen. Ellen was a director in a large urban area. We discussed her view on the differences in Head Start programs in urban areas compared to rural areas. She believed that although the Performance Standards unite us, the nature of the people served result in differences in services and outcomes. Ellen describes Head Start families in rural programs as more trusting and less demanding than those served in urban areas who have been scarred because of previous experiences with bureaucracy. There is more homelessness in the larger cities, resulting in more creative and challenging approaches to parent involvement. Services are generally provided within the shelters and children receive early care and education in a center-based setting in order to temporarily remove children from the shelter environment. Drugs and alcohol are prevalent in both rural and urban programs, however, due to the larger population; violent crimes seem to be more frequent than in rural areas. Ellen recalled a recent crisis when gunfire was heard just outside the center, and one of her staff was murdered. However, the urban areas seem to have more services to families in the communities, including mental health and those serving families experiencing violence and substance abuse.

Ellen described Head Start as a model program who showed the community what could be done to strengthen families and form strong collaborations, and has become more formalized now than one or two decades ago. She adds that Head Start programs attend more to addressing and appreciating diversity in the families they serve, than was done in earlier years. The need for mental health services has increased as substance abuse, violence and terrorism has escalated. She recalls that family partnership agreements with families have always been essential. She believes that the family

partnership agreements and community assessments ensure that programs are addressing the needs of children and families in their individual communities.

Ellen also named some barriers to parent involvement in many communities as a lack of resources and funding. She explained that when Head Start programs were first funded, they were funded at the requested amount, which varied by the area they lived in. If minimal funds were requested in the beginning, the increases over decades remain low. Even though increased funding brings more money to programs, the amounts are based on a percentage of their original funding request. Consequently, some programs are poorer than others, and do not have adequate resources to serve families effectively.

The Four Elements in My Reflections

An analysis of my personal and professional reflections of Head Start parental involvement demonstrates how Head Start utilized recognition, training, decision making and resiliency strategies in their approach to parent involvement.

Recognition

My Head Start story began when BCHS Head Start saw my potential buried within the scars of abuse and embarrassment. They recognized me as a person of worth and accompanied me on my journey to the resilient adult I am today. Romaine, the parent involvement coordinator, took the time to know that the safety and care of my children were my greatest concerns, and in appreciation for that quality and used it to nurture my interest in what the program had to offer me as a parent. BCHS staff recognized my need to be respected and valued, and sought meaningful ways to explore

my interests and cultivate skills and strengths, resulting in confidence and an eagerness to learn and experience a richer, fuller life.

As a Head Start teacher, I continued the program's legacy in recognition of parents as important and capable, and encouraged parents to participate in training and decision making opportunities while providing support and guidance. Nancy's story demonstrates how her concerns were respected and appreciated. As her strengths in creative art were recognized and appreciated she grew in confidence, and self-esteem. For Gina, recognition of her creative skills was essential. She also wanted to be identified as a caring mother, and deeply involved in the education of her son. Her experience in my classroom provided an avenue to demonstrate my appreciation for her abilities and contributions to the classroom.

As an education coordinator I saw how recognition of one teen father's strengths becomes a vehicle for encouragement, resulting in an eagerness to become even more involved as their child's principal influence.

My experiences as a Head Start parent, as a teacher, an education coordinator, and most recently a federal reviewer for Head Start, has shown me that parents are recognized as important and capable, provided training and support, have ample opportunities for meaningful decision making, and are supported and encouraged in various ways which foster resiliency. The critical needs of children and families from high crime areas of urban America are clearly unique, just as they are for American Indians, Migrant families and families living in rural communities. Recognition of the strengths and needs of each of these cultures is evident in the planning and implementation of services.

Training

BCHS provided many opportunities for trainings which sparked my interest and love for learning, very early in my Head Start experience. The training opportunities provided by Head Start not only taught me how to better manage my family and to nurture my children, but fostered personal skills I never knew existed. I attended trainings on child development, selecting toys for children, providing healthy meals, money management, and various parenting sources. In preparation for Policy Council and its committees, I attended training such as parliamentary procedure, understanding the Head Start budget, and Head Start Performance Standards. My involvement in program governance, such as my role as Policy Council chairperson, helped me develop skills in listening, questioning, reflecting and decision making.

Brandon's father's experience as a Head Start parent, also demonstrated Head Start's approach to recognizing parents as important and capable learner. Their training approach to parent involvement resulting in improved parenting and teaching skills. He learned through observation and participation as he volunteered in the classroom. He was also equipped with information for family decision making through observation and discussions in preparation for planning to address concerns over his son's Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Because of Head Start's education support, Brandon's father made informed decisions for his son's educational plan that improved his child's ability to interact and explore successfully.

Families from Migrant programs, American Indian Reservations, and in rural and urban communities, parents describe an effective training approach to parent involvement. For one parent, Head Start training led to a college education and

employment as a Head Start teacher and education coordinator. For others, training opportunities meant improved parenting skills, a GED, and employment. Training opportunities for parents has been consistent throughout decades of Head Start's history, and continues to be one of its strongest approaches to empowering parents for success.

Resiliency

Head Start's strategies for fostering resiliency included encouragement, education, resources, guidance, and support. They provide opportunities to apply skills learned through meaningful discussion and decision making experiences. For me, the encouragement and support that I received through this program resulted in a renewed sense of confidence and empowerment. Head Start's encouragement, guidance and support gave me the confidence to take on increasingly complex challenges, which fostered self-confidence and the desire to learn more, giving rise to a college education and profession.

As a Head Start teacher and education coordinator, evidence of characteristics attributed to resiliency was evident in many of the parents I encountered. Nancy's GED accomplishment demonstrated confidence, independence, and a desire to learn, all indicative of resilient person. Jake, the teen parent, completing his high school education one year after his children were enrolled in Head Start reveals purpose, and determination. Parents in diverse Head Start communities who have moved from dependence on family and community for survival to employment and education, render traits attributed to resiliency. Resiliency has been more than an approach to parent involvement for decades, but is also a product of empowerment and respect.

Decision making

BCHS provided me with many experiences in which I engaged in meaningful decision making. It began with the planning of the Christmas party, onto program governance responsibilities, and spilling over into my personal and professional life. Because of Head Start opportunities for significant decision making, I became more confident in my ability to plan for my family, and for myself as an individual, hence, the decision to leave an abusive environment and to earn a college education.

As a Head Start professional, I recall parents were involved as decision makers in the development of their child's educational plan, as well as on committees and in Policy Council. Parents share stories of developing skills in making informed decisions rather than those based on whims and impulses. Head Start's history of engaging parents in meaningful decision making begins at its best in the early 1970's, with the birth of the 70.2 and Head Start Performance Standards. It continues to be strong in many Head Start programs, yet in many others, the opportunities are less significant and empowering. This approach to parent involvement, engaging parents in meaningful decision making, is essential to Head Start's success in fostering positive outcomes in families and is the area where the current administration plans to do the most damage, as it seeks to return Policy Council to its 1960;s advisory status.

Head Start's fourfold approach to parent involvement is clearly evident in my personal and professional reflections of parent involvement in Head Start. Recognition of parents has been the key that opens the door, where training, resiliency and participating in meaningful decision making are extended. In duration, training has been most

consistent through Head Starts' history, yet, recognition, resiliency and decision making are all essential to successful parent involvement experiences. Without recognition of parents as capable of learning and contributing, training would be meaningless. And, since effective training is followed by opportunities for application of skills acquired and concepts learned, experiences in which parents are engaged in significant decision making are necessary. Resiliency approaches, such as encouragement, support, and the provision of resources are also necessary as they serve to nurture parents participating in training and decision making. All four approaches are necessary to foster positive outcomes in parents.

An analysis of these four approaches reveals that Head Start's strongest approach continues to be in its training efforts. In all of my experiences, I have seen varied types of educational opportunities for families with diverse interests, strengths and needs, which have been accommodated through the careful planning and provision of training opportunities. Recognition of parents, resiliency and decision making are evident, but ebbs and flows in programs, and are influenced by personalities, skills and dispositions of staff who serve them. Additionally, since its birth, Head Start advocates and critics have all agreed that education is essential to empowering parents, and has been consistently supported for over four decades.

My Head Start testimony, from its beginning to the present time, has revealed evidence of Head Start's parent involvement approach that includes recognition, training, meaningful decision making and resiliency, and is generalizable to the Head Start experience.

CHAPTER THREE

HEAD START POLICY AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to review the history of parent policy in Head Start, reporting its successes and critique. This chapter begins with a literature review of Head Start's history and the evolution of its parent involvement component for over four decades and ends with an analysis of the data to determine if Head Start has a history of approaches to parent involvement, utilizing recognition, training, meaningful decision making and resiliency.

A Changing Nation

Reflections on my experiences over the last four decades have led me to appreciate the extent to which our national and local culture has evolved and to consider the ways in which Head Start has responded to address the diverse and ever-changing needs of children and families. The Immigration Act of 1965 led to a rise in the number of immigrants, resulting in a more racially and ethnically diverse population, reshaping the way in which schools, workplace and legislature respond to the needs of families. Head Start families of the 1970s faced post Vietnam War issues resulting increased drug and alcohol abuse, and violence. The first home computer was introduced, opening windows to the world for children and families. The "traditional" family began to disintegrate with later marriages, lower fertility rates and increasing rates of divorce. In the 1980s, premarital sex, single parent families and rebellion among teens became more prevalent. Families headed by gay and lesbian couples and single parent families publicly emerged. The evolution of technology revolutionized the 80s and continued with advances in science and technology into the 21st century. Welfare reform was introduced in the 1990s

and transformed the way in which families living in poverty were supported and sustained. Families previously supported by welfare funds, were forced into low-paying jobs, training or educational programs. Many families were unable to meet the costs of housing and lost their homes. Some were forced into shelters or into the streets, while others moved into housing with extended family and friends. Still others became homeless. Grandparents began providing care to children while parents sought work, education or abandoned their families in desperation (Washington & Oyemade, 1987).

The emergence of the 21st century brought with it wars and terrorism. Poverty remained an issue and educational accountability continues to be the focus of political debate. The Iraqi War separated more families as mothers and fathers serving in the military were sent into service, and most recently, homelessness intensified as a result of natural disasters such as hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Head Start families faced many of these adversities and advances. As family context was culturally redefined, the ability of many households to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency became difficult and discouraging. Poverty became increasingly feminized, adolescent parenting was on the rise, and unemployment rates continue to haunt the families served by this program (Washington & Oyemade, 1987). Violence is prevalent in the homes of many Head Start families in the form of child abuse and battered spouses. Welfare reform has sent many mothers and fathers to work in low paying jobs that do not offer health and other benefits. Having an advanced education has become more important over the last 30 years, as earnings gaps between workers with and without a college education have grown wide, leaving Head Start parents unprepared and untrained to meet the stressors of today's culture (Children's Defense Fund, 2005). The demands placed upon our nation's families

have dramatically changed and have made a significant impact on the manner in which programs must serve and support families. Head Start literature indicates that the program has responded to the adversity in our culture with immediacy, purpose and with a plan to address the long-term effects of each adversity.

The Birth and Development of Head Start

As poverty levels continued to rise in the early 1960s, an increase in juvenile delinquency emerged. In response to concern for the quality of the communities in which disadvantaged Americans lived, President Kennedy's administration began investigate the nature of American poverty and planned a major antipoverty initiative. Upon President Kennedy's death, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson took on this project and announced a massive War on Poverty and pledged to win it. On January 8, 1965, President Johnson declared an "unconditional war on poverty" (p.2). One month later he appointed Sergeant Shriver as the director of the War on Poverty.

Scholars such as Jerome Bruner and Martin Deutsch argued for starting with a small number of well-funded Head Start projects staffed by well-trained preschool educators. It was the House Republicans who initially continued to pursue early childhood education. They criticized the White House and congressional Democrats for ignoring the needs of young children and recommended support for preschools (Zigler & Muenchlow, 1992)

By mid-1965, interest in early childhood education emerged, when Shriver began to explore the idea of early childhood programs. Sergeant Shriver asked Dr. Robert Cooke, a physician to assemble a group of experts to begin exploring early childhood

programming, including Dr. Edward Zeigler, Dr. Jule Sugarman, Dr. Julius Richmond were among the committee members. The Office of Education and the Cooke Head Start Planning Committee began to propose the education components of what would soon be the first summer eight-week Head Start program for one hundred thousand children. The Cooke Head Start Planning Committee issued a widely distributed report, "Improving the Opportunities and Achievements of the Children of the Poor," which recommended that Head Start programs provide comprehensive health, social, and educational services. In this report, the panel listed several major objectives. The intent was to improve the child's physical health, social and emotional well being, and improve intellectual abilities. Additionally, they proposed that programs provide experiences and environments that nurture self-confidence, dignity, self-worth and to promote positive relationships among family members. The report also notes the importance of supporting parents and children in developing constructive attitudes toward society and to foster opportunities where Head Start families can work and solve problems within a community context.

In response to political pressure, Shriver rejected the advice of most experts and endorsed an ambitious plan to begin summer Head Start programs. President Johnson applauded the idea, and few weeks later, on January 4, 1965, in his message to Congress, he announced the birth of Head Start (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). The hastening to serve over a half a million children in the summer of 1965 resulted in several issues. Plans progressed much too readily since the federal government lacked the funds and expertise to accomplish its goals (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998). The decision to create an inexpensive summer Head Start programs meant hiring inadequately trained teachers, since there was

a shortage of experienced teachers. Consequently, non-trained and inexperienced adults were hired as substitute teachers. Shriver thought the creation of job opportunities created for local citizens was a credit to the program, but he overlooked the possible negative effects on disadvantaged children who would be taught by inadequately prepared teachers. There was a serious lack of funds to provide the quality services considered essential to develop and sustain healthy child development. The cost per child for services was calculated to be at least \$1,000, yet the argument fell on deaf ears since acknowledging the lack of funds would have meant reducing the total number of children served. Additionally, the need to process quickly the thousands of project applications meant that weaker programs, who may not been funded under other circumstances, were approved and funding provided (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

By 1967, President Johnson and many members of his administration wanted Head Start placed in the Office of Health Education and Welfare. They believed that since it was an education program, services would be administered with greater expertise by the Department of Education. Shriver and many Democrats requested that Head Start continued to be administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity, stating that Head Start was a poverty program and not merely an educational program. They feared that comprehensive nature of this program would be diminished or eliminated if moved to the Office of Health Education and Welfare. Efforts to move Head Start failed in 1966 and 1967, as Congress agreed that Head Start should be administered by local communities and not by a group of experts who know very little about the children and families of individual neighborhoods. Critics argue that Head Start lost an opportunity to encourage public schools to provide broader and more comprehensive services for children in grades

k-3, and that decisions were made based upon political expediency rather than taking the council of experts (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). The issue of Head Start oversight continued to surface throughout the subsequent decades. Had the program moved under the oversight of the Department of Education, Head Start would likely have become a program solely for the purpose of educating children, and parents would not have benefited from the parent involvement approach it practices today.

From the beginning, Head Start was designed to provide comprehensive services to children and families, including education, health, social services and parent involvement. Education services for children included early learning and literacy programs to foster child development through various learning experiences. Health services were planned to ensure that children had a comprehensive health program, including good food, regular screening and check-ups, immunizations. They also learned to practice good hygiene. Social services included a system for helping parents to identify needs, access resources and to obtain the supports necessary to accomplish family goals (Zigler & Muenchlow, 1992).

An essential part of the Head Start program was the involvement of parents in program governance and education. Initially, opportunities for parents in meaningful decision making were not consistently provided among Head Start programs. Plans were developed and decisions made, then taken to parent boards for a stamp of approval. Head Start administrative staff did not fully understand or ascribe to the notion of maximum feasible participation of parents. Parents were not recognized as significant and capable adults worthy of respect and having abilities and interests. Training was provided but opportunity for meaningful decision making was non-existent, and the likelihood of

fostering resiliency in adults was less likely to occur as they were viewed as person with deficits in need of repair.

Although the original Planning Committee coined the term “maximum feasible participation,” they assumed that parents would learn from parent participation. One determined advocate, Bessie Draper, argued that parent must be actively engaged in the program in order to benefit most from it. Her support resulted in Head Start guidelines for parent’s right and responsibilities, which outlined the ways in which parents should be engaged and involved. In 1969, a parent involvement handbook was published entitled *Parent Involvement: a Workbook of Training Tips for Head Start*, (Office of Child Development, 1969) which encouraged programs to engage parents in program governance in order to better prepare them for community advocacy efforts, such as taking a role on school boards and welfare advisory boards. Support for this level of parent involvement was weak, as little attention and funding was given to parent involvement since the national leadership was interested only in parent training opportunities and not parents as decision makers. Early childhood experts disagreed with this level of parent involvement, arguing that parents first need education and training, and should not be engaged in programmatic decision making. The advice of these experts was ignored and by 1970, parent involvement was codified into Performance Standards under section 70.2. The new ruling gave parents more authority within a limited scope. The standards mandated the policy board be comprised primarily of parents, and detailed the roles and responsibilities of the board, including hiring and firing of staff, curriculum selection, finance and policy. The 70.2 (ACF, 1970), provided the framework for parent involvement practices which recognized parents as capable adults, and significantly

engaged them creative and reflective discussions and learning experiences where they participated in problem solving, conflict resolution, and meaningful decision making, often resulting in a sense of pride and accomplishment as they saw the results of their efforts.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s parent involvement training and technical assistance supports were dismantled, and funds for parent activities were cut and continue to be minimally supported throughout Head Start history (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). Head Start programs continue to explore and create innovative ways to engage its parents in early education and the support of family development.

Also, during this decade, Head Start recognized the cultural issues of families and strived to be respectful and appreciative of the diversity among those they serve. Subsequently, in response to the unique needs of American Indian and later, Migrant families, Head Start proposed an approach to addressing needs specific to their cultures.

American Indian Head Start

Head Start programs can be found throughout various parts of our country, from inner city neighborhoods, where violence and substance abuse are a daily part of life to remote Alaskan villages where there are poor facilities, few jobs, and limited access to education and training opportunities. Head Start programs are embedded in some of the most economically disadvantaged and geographically isolated areas of the country, including American Indian reservations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

In 1965, Head Start began serving 43 American Indians and Alaska Native Head Start programs in 14 states. Head Start now serves over 18,550 American Indian children in center and home-based programs in the following tribes, villages and towns, from 25 states across the country: 112 federally recognized Tribes who directly operate Head Start programs, 3 Inter-Tribal groups representing 25 reservations, 12 colonies and 14 ranches, and 18 Native Alaskan Regional Corporations serving 35 villages and cities. There are 84 languages represented among these distinct cultures. In addition to providing Head Start services to families, the American Indian Division of Head Start administers funds through 4 Tribal Councils to operate Parent Child Centers and to 7 Tribal Governments to operate Early Childhood Centers that serve expectant families, infants, and toddlers (ACF, 1999)

The United States Constitution recognized that Indian tribes were independent governmental entities and had the inherent power to govern their people and their lands. Tribes contracted with the government for many services such as medical care, police, fire departments, etc. Services provided to American Indian Head Start families are identical to those in all Head Start program, providing health, education, family and social services to children and families. But, as with every community in which Head Start provides services, delivery is unique to the needs of those they serve (ACF, 1999).

On many American Indian reservations, health, nutrition and dental care, as well as social services are amply provided through clinics administered by the Tribal Council. Educational services, including Head Start programs are also supported and governed by the Council. However, many of the poorer tribes lack resources to adequately provide health and dental care families, as do many rural programs across the nation.

American Indian Head Start supports a rich, diverse and unique Indian language, heritage and legacy. Parents are involved in meaningful decision making as they are participate in curriculum development which integrates language and culture into everyday learning experiences. For example, American Indian parents expressed concern that their children may not learn and appreciate the historical language and traditions of the tribe, and relied on Head Start to support them by providing a curriculum that respects and values the unique qualities of the culture. Without parental support, this would be a challenge, as 84 different languages are spoken among the tribes (ACF, 1999).

Parent involvement efforts are similar to those in many Head Start programs where parents are afforded opportunities for educational experiences, participation program governance, and social events and are encouraged to volunteer in classrooms. They participate in training events including first aid and safety, parenting skills, child development, job interviewing, and health and wellness management. Social events where parents can get acquainted with one another are provided to parents such as in potluck meals, family nights, health fairs, ice cream socials and mother's/father's day out. Educational Activities for parents may include GED classes, craft-making classes, and storytelling lessons. Parents are involved in fundraising activities, volunteer in clerical tasks, housekeeping chores, in teaching or sharing skills with children and parents, and by assisting in classroom material preparation. American Indian parents also participate in program governance through parent committees, advisory committees, and Policy Council (Watson, 2005).

During interviews with American Indians families, parents expressed appreciation for what Head Start has done for their children, but find it challenging to participate

regularly because of distance between centers, and work schedules. Center Committee meetings have better attendance than Policy Council meetings, since they are more localized in the communities they serve. Policy Council meetings are rotated among communities, to enable parents who lived greater distances to be more likely to attend. However, in many reservations, travel remains a barrier. A few male parents stated that are not able to be involved in program activities because many of them work out of town through the week and are home only on weekends, since there are only a few low paying jobs locally. Head Start provides child care during meetings, and younger siblings are welcome in the classroom when parents wish to volunteer, so this has not been a barrier for most American Indians parents (Parent Interviews 2005-2006).

When asked how their life circumstances has changed because of parent involvement in Head Start, most said that they know more about what their children learn, and how to help them at home. Others said they decided to go to college or into training because of Head Start's family goal planning with them. One parent said she always wanted to go to college to do but didn't think it possible, and Head Start helped her to take the steps necessary to accomplish her dream (Parent Interviews 2005-2006).

American Indian parents agree that Head Start has made positive changes in their lives, yet, today, only 19% of eligible American Indian children are served by Head due to insufficient funding (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003)

The recognition of the unique culture of American Indian families is evident in Head Start's efforts to ensure that the laws and traditions of each tribe are respected and the languages preserved. Educational opportunities for parents are numerous, and are developed with care and with respect for family values. Parents have opportunities for

meaningful decision making as they participate in family goal planning, parent meetings and Policy Council, while tribal governance is preserved. Testimonies of parents interviewed speak to Head Start's encouragement and support and the goals they have achieved through their Head Start experience.

Innovation in the 1970s

The 1970s were named the Head Start period of "innovation" because of the many new initiatives that evolved, beginning with the passage of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975* (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Responsively, Head Start required that programs include children with disabilities in at least 10% of its enrollment and parents were to be involved in screening, assessment and referral processes for their children. Head Start staff was required to prepare parents for multi-disciplinary team meetings, by sharing information and supporting them through the development of individual goal plans. Head Start also ensured that goals determined by parents and professionals were implemented in the classroom, and provided parents with activities and support for practicing identified skills in their home environment.

Also in 1972, the Child Development Associate (CDA) training and credentialing program was developed to train parents and staff to serve as teachers and classroom aides (Zigler & Muenchlow, 1992). CDA programs gave teaching staff the opportunity to enhance their personal and professional development. It also opened doors to parents who wished to improve their parenting skills, or to those who planned to enter the teaching profession.

The earliest Head Start Performance Standards were issued in the early 1970s to ensure that programs operate in accordance with the Head Start mission and principles. At the same time, the Office of Child Development formally adopted an over-arching goal for Head Start; to develop social competence in the children and adults they serve (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). By social competence is meant the child's or adults' everyday effectiveness in dealing with both the present environment and later responsibilities in school and life. This over-arching goal became the framework for Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

The earliest Head Start Performance Standards, issued in 1975, outlined the programs approach including the engagement of the entire family and community. The standards required that Head Start staff should maximize the strengths and unique experiences of each child by involving the family in planning and development of education goals and experiences. Additionally, Head Start contends that parents are the principal influence on early child development and therefore must be a direct participant in the program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Home-based Head Start began as a demonstration project in 1972, where Head Start services to children and families were provided in their own home. Home visits are provided on a weekly basis, with parents assuming the role of teacher and the home visitor serving as an adult educator. Home Visitors support parents in planning and facilitating learning experiences while utilizing the home as a learning environment, including its daily routines, materials and family interactions. Children and parents also have opportunities to interact with other families during socialization experiences, held in a Head Start classroom, or during community outings planned by parents. The Home-

based project proved to be successful, and soon became a permanent program option (Zigler & Styfco, 2004)

As early as the 1970's Head Start's framework for parent involvement was practiced and strengthened. Parents with children having disabilities were recognized as persons with unique needs, abilities and interests, and began providing educational experiences to prepare them as they make decisions for service provision and support to their children. CDA classes revolutionized parent opportunities for training and further professional development. During this era, Head Start spoke to its recognition of parents as the child's principal influence and created Head Start Performance Standards outlining regulations for developing strength-based parent involvement plans and procedures and with an over-arching goal of fostering social-competency in families, as characteristic of resilient persons.

Additionally, during this decade of innovation, Head Start continued to attend to the unique needs of diverse cultures in the nation and in 1977, began serving Bilingual and bi-cultural Head Start Migrant 6000 children and families in 21 states (Zigler & Styfco, 2004)

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start

In 1977, Bilingual and bi-cultural Head Start Migrant Programs began serving 6,000 children in 21 states. Services are provided to Migrant Head Start children and families identical to those of regular Head Start, but service delivery was uniquely designed to address the specific needs of these families. Migrant and Seasonal Head Starts programs serve infants, toddlers and preschool aged children so that they would not

have to be cared for in the fields or left in the care of siblings while parents work the fields from dusk to dawn (ACF, 1999.)

These families were served in home-based settings as well as center based. Home based services were provided to families as they moved in search of work during the spring, summer and agricultural work. Migrant centers provide extended day services, usually up to 12 hours a day and up to 7 days a week during the harvest season. Some grantees operate centers for only 6 weeks in the period of time when it is needed (ACF, 1999).

Migrant parents have opportunities for involvement much like parents in the “traditional” Head Start program. They serve on Policy Council, share decision making responsibilities, volunteer in centers, attended literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), GED, parenting, and safety and health classes. Parents in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs have opportunity to develop and implement family partnership agreements, wherein they receive Head Start support as they identify goals, develop strategies, and locate and access resources determined to accomplish their family plans. Parents in these programs also have opportunity to observe their children in classrooms and to participate with them in group activities. Involving families who work in the fields are difficult. Their working hours extend from dawn to dusk, with an extended break at midday for a reprieve from the heat and respite. These families often utilized this time to visit with their children in the centers and to participate in a variety of Head Start activities. Health, disability and transition services were uniquely delivered to this population. Since Migrant families are very mobile, Head Start ensured that children receive immunizations, screenings, and other necessary services through networking with

numerous Migrant Programs and Services across the country. Through this system, when families moved on to migrant farms in diverse regions of the country, their records of needs and services were recorded and forwarded to the agencies that would be supporting them for the next harvest season, ensuring continuity of care for children and families. Family Service workers in Migrant and Seasonal programs were generally bilingual and have schedules that accommodate the needs of the families they serve. There are currently 25 Migrant and Seasonal grantees and 41 delegate agencies providing Head Start services in 33 states to over 30,000 migrant children (ACF; January, 1999).

Head Starts recognition and appreciation for families in Migrant populations is evident in its unique approach to serving these families as they travel from region to region as farm workers. The transition approach to ensuring that services to children and families are continuous and consistent speaks to Head Start's respect for this culture. Program scheduling is planned with the dawn to dusk work schedules of working parents in mind, and enable them to participate in educational opportunities and parent meetings of interest and relevancy to this group. Resiliency is fostered as home visitors support families in developing relevant goals and guide them through the process of accessing the resources necessary to accomplish what they have planned.

Survival in the 1980s

The 1980s were a decade of Head Start survival. In 1982, Reagan proposed to block grant Head Start and reduced funding. Many social programs were mandated to reduce spending and to consolidate programs into block grants where states would determine how funds were to be allocated. Several concepts of Head Start were of

particular concern in this decade including community control, parent involvement, and the comprehensive nature of Head Start. Head Start encouraged coordination of community social services, and until this decade, there was no question that the community would be in control since funding went directly from the federal government to the local communities. When the threat of Head Start demise was pronounced, Head Start parents responded. They were equipped for advocacy through training opportunities and in experiences where their voices were heard and respected, thereby reacting to this threat by sending thousands of letters to state representatives in protest of these changes. The voices of empowered parents were heard and Head Start maintained community control (Washington & Oyemade, 1987).

Head Starts training approach to parent involvement continued to be a focus of Head Start, the Bureau responded by developing and disseminating a variety of program resources including several parent education curricula, a guide and video for involving parents in Head Start, a Self-Sufficiency series, Adult Literacy demonstrations, and a Family Needs Assessment model instrument.

Parent volunteers of this decade sited limitations to volunteering as transportation and childcare. Also, lack of knowledge of parliamentary procedure necessary for Policy Council Committees, and frequent rotation of parents serving on Policy Council, were noted as barriers. Parents who did not understand the parliamentary procedure processes often felt insecure and were less likely to engage in committee matters. Policy Council membership seemed to change frequently, and parents who were not familiar with those serving on former committees often felt uninformed and not able to confidently contribute to discussions and decisions. Funding reductions in training and technical

Assistance limit parent involvement because it prevented programs from supporting parents with childcare and transportation costs, and therefore also reduced the level of parent involvement (Washington & Oyemade, 1987). Head Start's model of comprehensive services became challenging when funding cuts eroded the families abilities to meet their basic needs. Funding cuts in social service programs such as food stamps, WIC and welfare support resulted in critical needs for families as they strive to provide for their families. These families turned to Head Start when striving to cope and thrive in the midst of crisis (Washington & Oyemade, 1987). Head Start responded by supporting families with referrals to food pantries, heating resources and in locating shelter for those who have lost their homes. Head Start provided training opportunities to make parents more employable. Family Service Workers continued to address the individual- critical needs of families, by looking to the community for supports and services. Although Head Start has always encouraged community involvement in the program, this decade required renewed and strengthen partnerships with social service agencies also in the business of serving families.

As Head Start strived to strengthen relationships with community partners, their ability to engage parents in training and in meaningful decision making expanded. Community social service agencies has come to respect and appreciate the Head Start philosophy for educating and empowering families, and began to develop a similar approach as they offered resources and support to the program and its parents.

Program Improvement in the 1990s

With funding decreases and little expansion, questions of quality surfaced in the ninety's. The Silver Ribbon Panel was formed to examine the key ingredients for program success and to make recommendations for Head Start quality improvement and expansion. The final report noted several issues. Funding was not sufficient to ensure that quality is maintained and strengthened. Cost cutting measures often were necessary in local programs such as in staff salaries and reduced services to children and families and training funds were minimal. The task force also recommended staff qualifications in all areas must be improved and more staff family service workers were needed to respond to the rapidly changing needs of Head Start families (Zigler and Muenchlow, 1992). Families dependent on drug and alcohol needed unique sources of support. As violence erupted in many more homes, both the victim and the abuser required special services. Increases in families with critical needs often became overwhelming for one family service worker serving many such families.

The 1990s brought with it an increased emphasis on Head Start as a family support program, rather than solely child development and education, and led to the development of Family Resource Centers. Since its founding in 1998, Family Resource Centers provide services to families, tailored to each of the communities they serve. Many such services include early childhood education, parenting classes, literacy, ESL and GED classes, job readiness training, transportation assistance, after school

programming, summer camps and distribution of food, clothing, furniture and infant care supplies. Many of these services are accomplished in association with Head Start and its community partners (Zigler & Muenchlow, 1992).

In 1992 mandates for increased monitoring of Head Start programs were put into place, requiring that a full on-site review be conducted at each Head Start agency at least once during each three year period to ensure compliance with Head Start Performance Standards (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). Head Start programs were required to conduct annual self assessments, and to develop a plan of action for program improvement. Every three years, they were reviewed by a federal team of experts in health, nutrition, education program design and management and social services. In the 1990s, the federal review process became more intense, looking closely at the systems and services of Head Start to ensure compliance to Head Start Performance Standards.

In October, 1993, the Head Start Bureau funded sixteen Head Start grantees to implement demonstration projects for homeless children and their families. The objectives were to enhance access of homeless families to Head Start Services, provide services responsive to the special needs of homeless children and families, identify effective methods of addressing the needs of homeless children and families and implement and document replicable strategies for collaboration between Head Start programs and community agencies on behalf of homeless families. Most homeless families were provided Head Start services in transitional shelters. Head Start collaborated with community agencies to provide housing and self-sufficiency related services, as well as traditional Head Start services. Some cities provided Head Start centers specifically for homeless children because they felt that traditional classrooms did

not meet the developmental and social-emotional needs of homeless children. Others felt it was more important to integrate children into existing Head Start classrooms because it provided homeless families with opportunities to interact with families who were not homeless. Collaboration with community agencies continued to be essential for addressing the critical needs of families (ACF Information Memorandum, 1992).

By 1994, the Head Start Act broadened the CDA requirement and requested that each classroom have a teacher with an age appropriate CDA credential or a state certificate for preschool teachers, or an associate, bachelors or advanced degree in early childhood or related field. Many Head Start professionals argued that this policy would hinder parents who were striving to become Head Start teachers and teacher assistant. Others believed that programs would encourage parents to enroll in CDA classes, supported by Head Start parent funds. CDA coursework and its portfolio requirements would prepare parents with the confidence and skills to embark on the professional journey to becoming a teacher with the required degree (ACF, 2004).

In the same year, Congress authorized the development of Early Head Start, a program to provide comprehensive services to low income families with infants, including early child development, early intervention, child care, parent education and training, and assistance in accessing resources for housing, health care, and income (Zigler & Styfco, 2004).

The purpose of Early Head Start was to enhance the overall development of very young children, enable parents to be better as caregivers and teachers of their children, and to help parents meet family goals. Services are provided through parent education activities, peer support, and by providing comprehensive health services to women before

and after pregnancy. As with Head Start, Early Head Start offers children and families comprehensive services three primary options including home-based, center-based and combination models.

Home-based services bring Early Head Start staff into family homes every week to support child development and the parent-child relationship. As with Head Start, Early Head Start offers children and families comprehensive services. The Home-based approach of Early Head Start focused on the strengths of families. It allowed families to take the lead in identifying issues that affect their child and family, and built on the premise that families who identify their own problems and solutions are more likely to resolve them. The role of the home visitor in the home-based option was one of a parent educator (supporting parents in their role as their child's teacher), rather than a preschool teacher, as is the case in center-based options. Twice a month, all parents and children in program have an opportunity to come together as a group for learning, discussion and social activity.

Center-based services offered children part- or full-time enrollment in an early care and education setting. In addition, staff members visited family homes at least twice a year for conferences, where child progress is shared and goal development occurs. Combination services, as the term suggests, combine home visits and center-based services. In the center based and combination models of service, the child may be in a licensed family child care home, a child development center run by the EHS program, or a community based child development program (ACF, 1999).

The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) focused on helping welfare recipients become employed and move toward self-sufficiency, in

anticipation of welfare reform. Over half of Head Start families of the time were receiving welfare benefits and were likely recipients of JOBS. In 1995, Administration for Children and Families encouraged local programs to collaborate with (JOBS) in order to maximize services to families. With these efforts, Head Start programs would work with JOBS agencies to expand child care services for children of participants, making it possible for parents to engage in work experience, training and other services. Head Starts role in this partnership would be to provide wraparound child care following half day Head Start services. Additionally, they would partner to provide education, training, work experience and supportive services (ACF Information Memorandum, 1995).

In 1995, Head Start Performance Standards were revised. The revisions brought on changes in Policy composition as it limited the term of any Policy Council representative to a total of three one year terms. Standards for programs serving infants and toddlers were added. Organization of Head Start was placed into three major categories-Early Child Development and Health Services, Family and Community Partnerships and Program Design and Management. Revisions to the child health services emphasized that programs link families to a “medical home” to ensure continuous care for health needs. The Family and Community Partnerships focused on strengthening linkages with Head Start families and other community agencies. Program Design and Management revisions were meant to improve overall management and accountability. Standards for transition services were added to ensure a seamless transition processes to move children from previous childcare programs into Early Head Start or Head Start and from Head Start into elementary school, or into other preschools and childcare settings. Standards for addressing family literacy were added to ensure the provision of child

development and literacy skill training for parents. Monitoring requirements were strengthened to ensure corrective actions were taken as needed or terminations to be undertaken when failing to meet the standards (ACF, 1975/1995)

Child custody continued to be an issue among Head Start families, and in October, 1998 the Head Start Act directed Head Start staff to “inform custodial parents in single parent families” about the availability of child support services for the purposes of establishing paternity and acquiring child support and refer eligible parents to state and local child support offices. Head Start staff was expected to be knowledgeable of the special benefits these services offered to Head Start single-parent families and be committed to helping them understand and use child support services. Child support services can be a significant resource for Head Start single parent families on their journey to economic self-sufficiency (ACF Information Memorandum, 1999).

Social competency continued to be the overarching goal of Head Start and in 1998, the National Education Goals Panel, further defined social competence with five objectives: to enhance healthy growth and development; strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children; provide children with educational, health and nutritional services; to link children and families to needed community services and to involve parents in programmatic decision making opportunities (Zigler and Styfco, 2004).

Family literacy services were planned into Head Start and Early Head Start programs at this time. Toward the goal of preparing children for school with an emphasis on literacy, Head Start played four basic roles in promoting child and family literacy. For children, the role was to provide language-rich and print rich environments as well as

effective teaching strategies and assessments. For parents, the role was to support parents in their role as child's first teacher; to help parents address their own literacy needs by providing access to Adult Basic Education, General Education Degree (GED) and other literacy opportunities, and to assist families in accessing materials and services essential to family literacy development (ACF Information Memorandum, 2002).

Although Head Start began as a program serving children and families, this decade brought the national recognition of Head Start as a family program. Head Start continued to identify and address the escalating issues of drug and alcohol abuse and violence in families, and of those living in shelters. The birth of family resource centers provided another supportive agency that enabled Head Start to further provide education and training for jobs to the parents they serve.

21st Century Head Start

On May 18, 2000, Head Start celebrated its 35th anniversary and marked a five year period of significant expansion in services to children and families. Over the last several years many Head Start program have seen significant changes in the needs of their children and families, particularly the need for quality care for those Head Start parents who are working or in job training. While many Head Start families' needs for child care were best be met by a center based program option, other families benefited from other program options such as family child care.

In response to family needs for child care, the Head Start Bureau proposed that programs begin to explore and initiate partnerships with high-quality comprehensive child care services in providing full-day, full-year settings for children of low income

families. Four approaches to the provision of child care were discussed, including full day Head Start services, purchasing services from existing providers, wrap a around child care services(before and after Head Start), and a combination of all of the above. In full day Head Start child care services, children received traditional Head Start classroom services all day, on a schedule which addressed the needs of Head Start eligible working families. In other approaches to child care for Head Start families, children were transported to partnering child care centers, after a traditional morning or afternoon in a Head Start classroom. Those child care centers were required to meet Head Start performance standards, and often received support in the way of training, and materials to aid them in meeting and maintaining Head Start compliance. In others, Head Start eligible children received early care and education in a child care setting, with Head Start support staff providing support to the Head Start child and family, as well as to center and staff serving those families (ACF Information Memorandum, 2000) The initiative was successfully piloted in many Head Start programs. However, regulations to support this initiative remain in draft form and are not supported with adequate funding.

In the 21st Century, families have become more and more diverse culture and ethnicity and resulted in having unique needs for services. Head Start issued a new policy guidance to all programs ensuring that communications with parents are carried out in the parents primary or preferred language or thorough an interpreter, to the extent feasible. Many families, especially those who recently arrived in the US, as of 2000, lack proficiency in the English language and needed assistance in understanding the program and how to participate in them. Additionally, staff was to be familiar with the ethnic

background of families and to be able to serve children and families with little or no English proficiency (Zigler & Styfco, 2004).

In November, 2001 the Head Start Bureau proposed to enhance ongoing effectiveness of Head Start family service workers with training and technical assistance opportunities. Originally, the Bureau considered requiring family service worker's to obtain a social worker's credential; however, extensive research proved that those with the credential were no more qualified than Head Start staff who received ongoing training and support (Washington & Oyemade, 1987). Family service workers played a critical role in developing and supporting the implementation of Head Start's family partnership process. Through this process, the family of each enrolled child has opportunities to develop and implement an individualized plan of services based on their interests and needs. Although many parents seemed readily able to articulate goals for their children, it was more difficult to consider plans for themselves. When asked to determine personnel goals, many parents would state that they had no goals, when in fact, a skilled family service worker was able to engage them in conversation that led to the realization of family goals. Still other families listed goals such as a new house, a new car, a job, or increased income. The experienced family service worker would engage parents in identifying strategies to accomplish those long-term goals, but in realistic and achievable steps, and families would become more hopeful and motivated to strive for goal attainment (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). This critical of family service worker credentialing initiative remains under discussion and has not been considered under the Head Start Reauthorization Bill (2006).

In February 2004, the Head Start Bureau invited leaders from every Head Start and Early Head Start program to come together to focus on enhancing father involvement through Head Start. It was founded on the President's Fatherhood Initiative, which is founded on the belief that responsible fathers can be important contributors to the well being of children. Through the institute, the Head Start Bureau ensures that local Head Start program leadership, staff and parents have the knowledge and skills needed to strengthen families and support the ongoing involvement of fathers in Head Start and in the lives of their children. Fatherhood activities were planned in Head Start programs across the national in unique and creative ways. Fathers planned activities with their children including classroom visitations for reading, and sharing hobbies and skills. Father and child field trips were planned, such as fishing outings, ball games and hiking. Fathers had opportunities to interact with other fathers in social events and in training experiences planned with the interests of fathers in mind (ACF Information Memorandum, 2004). This initiative took parent involvement to a whole new level of moving families toward self-sufficiency and resiliency.

Literacy initiatives continued in this century. May 2004, the Head Start Bureau announced the launching of a Parent Mentor Training program aimed at increasing the ability of parents to enhance their children's language and literacy skills as well as learning how to mentor other parents to do the same with their children. Mentoring activities would include participation in family literacy activities, supporting families who are English language learners and in enhancing family computer skills. They would also provide services in Head Start classrooms such as reading to children and providing positive role modeling (ACF Information Memorandum, 2002). This initiative is no

longer funded, but has continued to some extent, as parents share lessons learned as a participant in this initiative.

Hurricane Katrina caused damage to more than 200 Head Start facilities. Nearly 100 of these facilities were so significantly damaged; they required replacement or extensive repair. Hurricane Rita only added to the devastation. Head Start immediately responded. In October 2005 Head Start provided support and guidance to Head Start and Early Head Start grantees and delegate agencies damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Programs in neighboring areas were encouraged to accept families displaced by these disasters. Programs were urged to provide Head Start services to any eligible families which have temporarily relocated to neighboring communities, ensuring that costs for the first 30 days of service to these children and families would be reimbursed. Administration for Children and Families provided support to programs in developing strategies that would allow grantees to start serving children again. ACF also agreed to work with each grantee to explore appropriate options for finding replacement facilities as soon as possible (ACF Information Memorandum, 2005).

In this decade, a revised and more comprehensive PRISM (Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring) was introduced to Head Start. This instrument would be used to assess Head Start and Early Head Start programs every three years on a comprehensive on-site program review constructed by ACF, to ensure the provision of high quality services to children and families. This new approach to program assessment was planned to utilize an integrated, comprehensive and outcome focused method that ensures compliance to performance standards. The PRISM would involve federal reviewers to engage in week-long activities including document review, observations and

interviews with program staff, parents, and community partners to determine program compliance as defined by performance standards.

Most recently, the federal monitoring process has become even more scrutinizing, as proposed in the Head Start Reauthorization bill for 2006. The bill proposes that Head Start reviews are conducted during unannounced visits, as has been done by state child care licensing agencies for decades. Additionally, to ensure that the review process itself is valid, programs may be re-reviewed. That is, within 2 weeks of participating in a week-long comprehensive program review, another team may come in to repeat the process. Within ninety days of all reviews, programs found to be noncompliant must provide the Head Start Bureau with its correction plan of action. Then, when corrections are made, another report is made to the Bureau. Follow-up reviews continue to occur for programs who have claimed to correct areas cited as noncompliant. The visiting review team examines those particular areas and report whether or not the correction was made. This process was established to ensure that all Head Start programs provide services to children and families in accordance with the Head Start performance standards.

For over forty years Head Start has continuously strived to identify the changing needs of families. Their recognition and appreciation for the needs of working families is depicted in the birth of Head Start's child care services offered in full-day full year programs. The appreciation for increased diversity in the nation's communities is evident in Head Start's provision of ESL classes and interpreters to non-English speaking families, and in its determination to develop relationships families to better understand their needs, interests, abilities, traditions and plans for the future. Increased efforts to involve fathers in their child's education and in the Head Start experience, reveals its

appreciation for the role of the father in the healthy development of the child and family. The Head Start approach begins with recognition of parents as vital to becoming a resilient family and has continued that effort for decades.

The Four Elements in Head Start Policy

The history and development of Head Start speaks of a developing model of parent involvement that includes recognition, opportunities in training, participation in meaningful decision making and supports that foster resiliency. Since the founding of Head Start as a project in 1965, parent involvement has been inscribed into policy as important to early child development and education. Even those that believed that parents were deficit and in need of repair, agreed that parents must be involved in the Head Start program as they are their child's principal influence. Policies on parent involvement began in recognition of parent and family needs, and instituted training process to educate families. Parents were said to be involved in decision making in Head Start's beginning, however, their role took the form of advisory rather than program governance. As Head Start's history evolved, parent policy was strengthened to include parental involvement as decision makers, parents were recognized as have strengths to be cultivated and nurtured, and resiliency was fostered through encouragement, guidance, access to resources and a sense of empowerment. Head Start Performance standards describing parent involvement policy has been strengthened over the years, until recent legislation proposes to diminish it once more.

Recognition

Head Starts recognition of parents as persons with individuality, and worthy of respect and appreciation is evident throughout its history in planning for successful parent involvement. As early as the Cooke's Planning Committee, parents were recognized as important to the social emotional health of the family as well as having a significant influence in the community. However, as Head Start programs were implemented, parents were not always recognized as significant and capable adults worthy of respect and having abilities and interests. By the time the 1970's arrived, Head Start's plan for successful parent involvement was in place, and parents were not only to recognized as important to their child's education and to the success of the Head Start program, but were to be significantly engaged accordingly.

Head Start's revised Performance Standards demonstrate its commitment to recognition of parents. The standards outlined regulations for developing strength-based parent involvement plans and procedures and with an over-arching goal of fostering social-competency in families, further evidence that Head Start recognizes parents as having strengths and capable of social competency.

The recognition and respect for parents as individuals became evident with the development of American Indian Head Start programs and unique services for families in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start options. Head Start recognized that American Indian families needed an approach that ensured appreciation for their culture, its traditions and values. The Migrant community required services that would follow them as they travel from region to region, and Head Start responded in recognition of their unique needs.

Head Start recognizes the unique strengths and needs of families with children who have disabilities, and provides an approach to parent involvement that is relevant and appropriate for each family. Home-based as a program option for families was birthed upon recognition that some families prefer to have their young child in the home at their side, but want their children to have the educational opportunities of children who participate in center-based programs. Subsequently, center-based Head Start programs are offered in recognition of parents with diverse scheduling needs and interests.

The growth of the early Family Needs Assessment into a Family Partnership reveals Head Start's recognition that families have goals which can be accomplished given resources and opportunities for training and significant involvement in relevant experiences. Training opportunities that vary according to parent schedules and are planned with the diverse interests of parents in mind are evidences of recognition of parents as capable learners.

The creation of Early Head Start as a program option for families with children prenatal through three years old demonstrates Head Start's recognition of the unique interests, strengths and issues of parents in this population. Often, these parents are teen parents, and require specialized services, while recognizing the abilities and interest they have to offer to children and to the program.

In the last decade, Head Start has proven that it has recognized family as all persons involved in the life of the child and related by blood, marriage, adoption or guardianship, and including parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents and foster parents. Most recently, Head Start has demonstrated its recognition of fathers as important to the well being of the child and family by encouraging programs to be

intentional about engaging fathers in programmatic and social activities with children and with other fathers. Head Start has a plan for parent involvement that recognizes parents as important, capable and worthy of respect and appreciation.

Training

From its very beginnings, parent training opportunities have been integral to Head Start. Even the earliest critics, who viewed parents as deficit and in need of Head Start services to be fixed, agreed that parents needed to be educated. Parents of the 1960's were offered training in topics such as "Ages and Stages of Children"; Planning and Preparing Health Foods" and various workshops where parents could participate in making learning games and activities for children. In the 1970's, parents were trained on program governance using the 70.2, the guide for parent involvement on Policy Council. Trainings were planned utilized a parent interest survey, resulting in a high interest in parenting classes, and acquiring job readiness skills. Many parent enrolled in GED classes provided by Head Start through its community partners. CDA (Child Development Associate) classes were held for parents and staff, and often supported with Head Start parent funds, or by helping parents to access funds through rehabilitation agencies or other social service programs. In Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, parents were invited to participate in ESL classes, and many of these families were interested in the health and safety training events offered by Head Start. Parents of children with disabilities were supported with trainings such as in parent rights and responsibilities, as they prepared to advocate for their children. In Home based Head Start programs, training was inherent in this program option and individualized for every family, according to their expressed interests, strengths and goals. In this same period of

time, training funds were decreased, and program sought creative ways to continue these educational opportunities.

The 1980's brought with it a threat of diminishing parent involvement as the Regan administration proposed to block grant Head Start funds. The initiative was unsuccessful and remained in tact. Head Start increased their focus on training opportunities for parents. In this decade, the Head Start Bureau provided programs with many training resources including, a Self-Sufficiency Series, and Adult Literacy programs.

The 1990's continued efforts to provide training to Head Start parents. With renewed and strengthened partnerships with social service agencies in the community, families had increased opportunities for developing job readiness skills through specialized training and internship opportunities. Family Literacy services became a focus of this decade, as Head Start in partnership with adult education programs sought to improve adult and child literacy skills.

With increased diversity in the 21st century, Head Start and its partnerships ensured the provision of ESL classes for Spanish speaking families as well as Asian, and other non-English speaking cultures served by Head Start. Fathers were offered numerous training opportunities as Head Start focused upon fathers as essential to a child's healthy development. Literacy initiatives also continued into this century.

Head Start's strongest approach to parent involvement is in the training and educational supports it provides to families and has been consistently provided for over four decades.

Resiliency

Head Starts approach to fostering resiliency in parents became evident with the creation and implementation of Head Start Performance Standards in 1970's, and remains in tact through the 21st century. Although the Performance Standards do not specifically speak to resiliency, plans to foster characteristics commonly attributed to resiliency are clear. Dr. Albert Siebert (1996) in *The Survivor Personality*, states that “resiliency is a process of struggling with hardship that progresses by accumulating small success that occur side by side with failures, setbacks and disappointments and resulting in a cluster of strengths he calls resiliency's” (Siebert, 1996).

Many resiliency theories such as those defined by Masten and Coatsworth (1998), Henderson and Milestein (1996), Grotberg (2003) and Bell (2001), described several characteristics common to children and adults who have succeeded in accumulating these resiliencies. These factors have been termed “protective factors.” According to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), the individuals who exemplify resiliency generally have an easygoing disposition; exhibit self-confidence, high self-esteem and self-efficacy, faith, and good intellectual functioning. Additionally, a resilient children, youth and adults are friendly and have an affectionate demeanor, sense of humor, tenacity, and tolerance. Emotionally, these persons are self-reliant, independent, self-controlled, self-motivated, and hopeful and have a sense of purpose. Social traits include a sense of responsibility, social competence and learned helpfulness. Intellectually, they have high, realistic goals and standards, peer support, and educational opportunities in a positive learning climate. Masten and Coatsworth describe factors that exist within the family and community of the resilient person. These include close relationships with

caring family and friends, a warm, nurturing environment, socioeconomic advantages, and connections with extended family and friends (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). In her work with the international Resilience Research Project, Grotberg states that resilient people are likable, lovable, have empathy for others, like to help others, demonstrate responsibility and have a positive and hopeful outlook on life and situations. They can talk to others about their feelings and concerns, are resourceful in finding ways to solve problems and finding help as its needed (Grotberg, 2003). Cultivating resiliency requires services built upon a strength-based approach which focuses upon what people do well. They help adults to celebrate how far they have come through adversity and to clarify the strategies they have used to cope and persevere, while holding them accountable to those things that must change. Programs utilizing strength based approach help adults to develop a vision for who they are and who they can become, and how to accomplish their dreams (Higgins, 1994). Head Start mirrors these strategies for fostering positive outcomes, including social emotional resiliency in the families they serve in the form of Head Start Performance Standards, which regulate the way in which families in this program are supported and served

Although the term “resiliency” does not exist in Head Start Performance Standards, it is significantly implied throughout the regulations, as it describes expectations related to children and families. For example, Head Start strives to establish patterns of success in families in order to create a climate of self-confidence; to increase the child and family’s ability to positively interact with one another and with and friends; to develop positive attitudes in the family toward the community and to foster interest in contributing to the community. Head Start seeks to develop problem-solving skills in

children and families and to increase an individual sense of self worth and dignity within the child and family. A close examination of the Head Start performance standards reveals that the broadly stated goals and objectives are to be implemented in ways that foster resiliency as previously defined (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995). Table 1 provides an overview of strategies identified in the previously discussed literature as significant to cultivating resiliency and Head Start Performance Standards.

Table 3.1

Comparison of Strategies for Cultivating Resiliency and Relevant Head Start Performance Standards

| <i>Strategies for Cultivating Resiliency</i> | <i>Selected Head Start Performance Standards</i> |
|--|---|
| <p>Pay attention to family attributes, such as their beliefs, values, and emotional warmth (Bell, 2001, Higgins, 1994).</p> <p>Support parents in developing the ability to plan and achieve goals (Bell, 2001)</p> <p>Help families to know the support systems within their community, and how accesses services</p> | <p>1304.40 Grantees must engage in a process of collaborative partnership building with parents to establish mutual trust and to identify goals, strengths and necessary services and other supports.</p> <p>1304.40 Grantees must offer parents opportunities to develop and implement family partnership agreements that describe family goals, responsibilities, timetables and strategies for achieving these goals as well as progress in achieving them.</p> <p>1304.40 Grantees must work collaboratively with all parents to identify and</p> |

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| | <p>(Bell, 2001) continually access, either directly or through referrals, services, and resources that are responsive to each families interests and goals. Grantees must support and encourage parents to influence the character and goals of community services in order to make them more responsive to their needs.</p> |
| <p>Provide parents with access to family health care and in developing preventative health habits (Bell, 2001)</p> | <hr/> <p>1304.20 Assist parents to enroll and participate in a system of ongoing family health care and encourage parents to be active partners in their children's health care process</p> |
| <p>Provide opportunities for relationship building with other adults and families in the program and in the community, thereby improving self-esteem in adults by facilitating a sense of feeling satisfaction from being connected to people they deem as important and who treat them as valued persons (Bell, 2001)</p> | <p>1304.40 Grantees must ensure that parents have opportunity to work together and with other community members, on activities they have helped develop and in which they have expressed interest.</p> |
| <p>Provide educational opportunities of interest to family members, which are facilitated in a positive learning climate and where experiences nurture intellect, are appropriately challenging and evoke problem solving skills (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Grotberg, 2003)</p> | <p>1304.40 Grantees must assist parents in becoming their child's advocate by providing education and training to parents to prepare them to exercise their rights and responsibilities concerning the education of their children, and assist parents in developing the skills to effectively communicate with teachers and other school personnel in order to</p> |
| <p>Engage families in experiences which nurture effective communication skills, decision making, responsibility, independence, and social competence (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).</p> | <p>participate in decisions related to their children's education. Grantees must provide opportunities to include parents in the curriculum develop and</p> |

approach to child development and education.

Grantees must provide parents with opportunities to participate in the program as volunteers or paid employees.

1304.50 Grantee must establish and maintain a formal structure of shared governance through which parents can participate in policy making or in other decisions about the program

Provide opportunities for parents develop social skills on how to be effective in their application of discipline, by avoiding harsh discipline and using positive parenting skills (Bell, 2001)

1304.40 Grantees must provide opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, knowledge, and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of their children and to share concerns about their children with program staff.

Minimize the effects of trauma and adversity; identify family stressors and support the transformation of feelings of helplessness into learned helpfulness (Bell, 2001).

1304.24 Grantee must work collaboratively with parents for issues related to mental health education by:

Discussing and identifying with parents appropriate responses to their child's behaviors; discussing how to strengthen nurturing, supportive environments and relationships in the home and at the program; helping parents to better understand mental health issues; and supporting parents' participation in any needed mental health interventions.

1304.40 Provide education and other appropriate interventions, including opportunities for parents to participate in counseling programs or

to receive information on mental health issues that place families at risk, such as substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, and domestic violence.

Dr. Carl Bell (2001), in *Cultivating Resiliency in Youth*, sites several major strategies for cultivating resiliency in adolescents and adults, all familiar to Head Start. One such strategy is to help families develop and expand their awareness of and access to community resources. Helping families to know the support systems within their community, and how to prepare and access those services is key to cultivating independence, responsibility, self-competence and ultimately resilience (Bell, 2001). Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) require that families receive information on the resources in their communities. These resources are generally compiled in a handbook and given to parents early in the enrollment process. Subsequently, this handbook is utilized as a point of reference when discussing family goals and needs. Many parents also receive support in accessing these resources such as guidance in collecting necessary documents as required by the provider of services or in effectively communicating the need for services to relevant agencies. In addition to developing family awareness of community resources, Head Start takes an active role in community planning to ensure strong communication, cooperation, and sharing of information among agencies and community partners to improve the delivery of services to children and families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Another essential feature of resiliency is good physical health; therefore providing access to health care is an important strategy for building resiliency, (Bell, 2001). Head Start Performance Standards begin with expectations for ensuring the

healthy development in young children. They require that the program collaborate with parents to ensure that their child has a source of ongoing health care (such as immunizations, health and dental check-ups, and mental health care). Where families do not have Medicaid or insurance to cover the costs of medical care, Head Start is responsible for insuring that screenings are completed and medical care is provided. Performance Standards mandate that parents are encouraged to be active partners in the child's medical and dental processes and to accompany their children to medical and dentals exams. Additionally, when child health or developmental problems are suspected or identified, parents must be consulted and receive guidance, training and support on the provision of preventative medical and dental health care, first aid, occupational and safety hazards and safety practices in the home in the form of group training events, home visits, written information, and consultation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Head Start requires that staff and families work together to identify the child's nutritional needs, utilizing parent-led nutritional surveys in which information is shared regarding family eating patterns, cultural preferences, and special dietary requirements. Parents must also be involved in planning and evaluating the programs nutritional services. The program must also provide educational opportunities for parents to enhance food preparation and nutritional skills (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) also dictate the way in which programs collaborate with parents to ensure that each child receives appropriate screenings to identify any concerns regarding a child's developmental, sensory,

behavioral, physical, social-emotional and intellectual skills. Parents are encouraged to participate in the screening process by supporting the child and sharing additional pertinent information. If the screening indicates a need for further evaluation, parents receive information on the concerns and resources available to them, in order to make an informed decision regarding the needs of the child. For parents with children suspected of having disabilities, Head Start programs ensure that parents involved in the assessment process and in the development of individual education plans. Head Start staff support parents in these processes by equipping them with information to effectively advocate for their child, and by accompanying them when meeting with special education specialists when requested by parents. Providing parents with information and providing support are some of the key strategies used by Head Start to develop responsible parents, and resilient adults. The Head Start standards on health have a twofold purpose; to ensure that health needs of the child are addressed and to support parents in developing responsible habits in the provision of health care for their children, both contributing to the development of resiliency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Attachment is another key component for strengthening resiliency. Parental warmth, acceptance, and affection are important to the emotional well being of children and adults. Developing closeness, increasing positive family statements, facilitating communication clarity, and encouraging emotional cohesion helps to develop supportive family relationship processes. By paying attention to family attributes, such as their beliefs, values, emotional warmth, support, organization, and communication strategies, family strengths can be nurtured and expanded (Bell, 2001).

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) for Family Partnerships begin with an introduction stating that Head Start offers parents opportunities and support for growth, so they can identify their own strengths, needs and interests. The objective of these standards is to support parents as they identify and meet their own goals, nurture the development of their children in the context of their family and culture, and advocate for communities that are supportive of children and families in all cultures. The building of trusting, collaborative relationships between parents and staff allows them to share with and to learn from one another. As a part of this ongoing partnership, the program must offer parent's opportunities to develop and implement individualized family partnership agreements that describe family goals, responsibilities, timetables and strategies for achieving these goals as well as progress in achieving them. Head Start must provide parents with opportunities to participate in the program as employees and as volunteers. Programs must provide parents with opportunities to work together, and with other community members in activities they helped to develop and in which they have expressed an interest. These strategies, forming trusting relationships, opportunities for learning and experience, goal setting and development, are all strategies attributed to resiliency in adults (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Bell advocates improving self-esteem in adults by facilitating a sense of feeling satisfaction from being connected to people they deem as important and who treat them as valued persons. They need models they can use to make sense of the world, a sense of their own uniqueness, and a feeling of competence to do what they is required of them in everyday living (Bell, 2001). Head Start requires that programs nurture self-confidence and self-esteem in parents by providing opportunities for meaningful responsibility with

the context of program service and administration. Parents are invited and encouraged to participate in classroom experiences. Through such opportunities parents are able to observe children engaged in stimulating play that leads to overall healthy development. The teacher serves as role models in their interactions with children, enhancing parent ability and confidence in their role of the child's most influential teacher (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) on Program Governance states that its objective is to ensure that there is an established policy group, and a well-functioning governing body comprised of parents and community members, responsible for overseeing the delivery of high-quality services to children and families, in accordance with Head Start legislation. These decision making bodies receive training in Parliamentary procedure, Head Start Performance Standards, program policies and procedures, and other topics of information as relevant to the responsibilities of the governing body including review and approval of program grant applications, recruitment and selection and enrollment processes, program self assessment hiring and terminating staff, and personnel policies and procedures. Parent Committees advise program staff in developing program activities and services. These parents are provided guidance, training and support to ensure success in carrying out these responsibilities. Through such program governance charges, parents are involved in data collection and analysis and discussion in order to problem solve, resolve conflict and make informed decisions, all characteristic attributes of a resilient adult (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Resiliency can be reinforced by providing opportunities to increase individual social skills (e.g., communication, leadership skills, problem solving, resource management, the ability to remove barriers to success, and the ability to plan). Furthermore, family interventions that promote resiliency combine behavioral parent training techniques with other intervention components that are designed to improve family relations as an important social skill. In addition, parenting practices designed to control and socialize the child have an influence on resiliency. Providing parents' social skills on how to be effective in their application of discipline, by avoiding harsh discipline and using positive parenting skills, has been shown to reduce violence in families. Further, teaching parents the social skills on how to provide supervision and monitoring of the child, extend their involvement with their children, and increase their knowledge of their child's activities and whereabouts, has been shown to decrease the possibility of engaging in risky behavior. These skills support the development of the characteristics of resiliency, such as the ability to attract and use support, the need and ability to help others, having altruism toward others (Bell, 2001).

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995), state that programs must support the social-emotional development of children by developing trusting relationships with them, fostering independence, and encouraging self-control by setting clear, consistent limits and having realistic expectations. Independence, trust, and self-control are all factors identified in research that contribute to the development of resiliency. Cognitive, language and physical development standards define various ways that Head Start programs must support the intellectual development of the child. These strategies include experimentation, inquiry, observation, play, exploration, opportunities for self-

expression, and interaction among children and adults (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995). Head Start encourages parents to provide experiences at home where those skills are developed.

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) require that parents are involved in curriculum development and approach to child development and education. This may occur as they share their child's interests or provide activities in the classroom relative to their own traditions, hobbies and talents. They may also participate in evaluation and selection of program curricula. Parents are encouraged to support child development by participating in child observation and assessment and providing educational experiences for their children in daily routines, conversations, and planned activities. These strategies support the development of self-confidence, resourcefulness and problem solving abilities in young children and their parents, also noted as factors that contribute to resiliency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Finally, Bell reports that minimizing the effects of trauma and adversity can encourage resiliency. Essentially, the strategy involved here is to support the transformation of feelings of helpless into learned helpfulness. This tends to facilitate the need and ability to help others, altruism toward others, and the development of compassion. If families' stressors can be readily identified and they are helped to cope with stressors, they will be less prone to engage in self-destructive behaviors such as drug abuse, school failure, unsafe sex, and violence (Bell, 2001). Head Start is mandated to provide mental health services to adults and children, in order to minimize the stressors that lead to trauma and crisis. A mental health professional must observe children in the classroom on a regular basis. When observations lead to identification of concerns over a

child's mental health, parents must be involved in sharing of information regarding child behavior and development, including issues such as separation and attachment. Parents must have opportunity for guidance and educational experiences that enable them to provide a nurturing supportive environment in the home. These Head Start mental health practices have been planned to nurture independence, problem solving, learned helpfulness and ultimately resiliency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Masten and Coatsworth maintain that to cultivate resiliency, opportunities must be provided that nurture intellect, that is, by providing experiences that are appropriately challenging and evoke problem solving skills. There must be educational opportunities of interest to family members which are facilitated in a positive learning climate.

Additionally, to support the development of independence, responsibility, and social competence, programs serving adults and children must afford opportunities where such qualities are nurtured (Masten & Coatsworth 1998). Head Start Program Performance Standards (1975/1995), for Education and Early Childhood Development begin by defining ways in which programs must help children to gain social competence; that is, the skills and the confidence necessary to succeed in their present environment and with later responsibilities in school and life. It takes into account the interrelatedness of cognitive, emotional, and social development; physical and mental health; and nutritional needs. They state that programs must provide educational curriculum that is developmentally and linguistically appropriate. Head Start must provide opportunities for parents to become involved in the development of the program's curriculum and approach to child development and education. Head Start is required to support and

encourage parents in the observation and assessment processes of their child. Head Start teachers create opportunities for parents to talk about the activities of their child and the skills observed. Teachers share their own observation information, resulting in a jointly developed education plan for the child. Parents are also encouraged to participate in the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for children with special needs. Head Start is required to provide the parent with relevant information, resources, and to attend the IEP conference with them if they want the additional support. Parents are educated on their rights as decision makers and play a vital role in the development of educational goals for their child. Social competence and skill development are factors, which contribute to resiliency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Resiliency development is most likely to occur where adults and children are supported in a climate that is respectful, and where they feel physically and emotionally safe and secure (Grotberg, 2003). Head Start Performance Standards 1975/1995) also articulate the ways in which programs must ensure the safety of children. Programs must insure that the physical space where the child explores is safe and risk free, in order that children may feel confident in exploring their environment and trying new and interesting experiences. Head Start must ensure that appropriate staff store and administered medication correctly. Parents must be informed of any changes in the child's health or incidences where they child may have been injured. Head Start programs must foster safety and health by demonstrating practices such as hand washing at various essential times (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995). Family Service Workers help parents to provide safe homes, by participating with them in conducting a

safety assessment in the home, and providing information and encouragement as they strive to provide a home environment where children feel safe and secure.

Head Start provides a safe environment for adults who participate in program events and experiences. Head Start staff is required to communicate with parents respectfully, and by providing encouragement and guidance to ensure that they feel accepted and appreciated. Head Start staff are also expected to serve as a positive role model to parents in conflict resolution, problem solving and in appropriate language used in informal conversations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Mental Health needs must be identified and address collaboratively between Head Start professionals and parents. Head Start must provide educational opportunities where parents learn to anticipate their child's behavior and resolve age related concerns such as temper tantrums, separation anxiety and attachment issues. Professionals must support parents in discussing and identifying ways to respond to their child's behaviors and ways to strengthen and provide a nurturing and supportive home environment. Research indicates that children need people they can trust to care for them unconditionally, in a positive and nurturing environment. These factors are indicative of resiliency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995). As referenced in Table 1, Head Start has a plan for fostering positive outcomes in families, and particularly those attributed to resiliency.

Although the Head Start Performance Standards have been revised in the 1990's the essence of its plan for fostering resiliency in families remains the same. However, with the threat of diminishing parent involvement in meaningful decision

making, and with increased attention to academics with lessened attention to parent involvement, empowerment that leads to resiliency is less likely to occur.

Decision making

The quest for parent involvement in meaningful decision making has been challenging. The early Head Start programs did believe that parents were capable of holding responsibilities such as in program planning and governance. However, as advocates such as Betsy Draper spoke out, a plan was made to ensure that parents were meaningfully engaged in decision making. The 70.2 outlined a plan for engaging parents in decision making processes such as in classroom and center committees and on Policy Council and its subsequent boards.

In the 1970's with the development of American Indian Head Start programs, parents were uniquely involved in decision making as they critiques and discussed curricula to ensure that the language, values and traditions of the culture was preserved. Parents of this decade were involved in meaningful decision making at various levels. Some preferred to be involved on parent committees where they planned activities and fundraising events. Others served on center committees and Policy Councils where they were involved in program governance and oversight. All parents were invited and encouraged to participate in goal planning for their child as well as for the family. In these goal planning processes, parent s participated in discussions and decision making to determine educational goals as well as personal goals that foster resiliency.

With the birth of Head Start performance Standards in this decade, plans for engaging families in training and decision making were defined to ensure all Head Start parents had such opportunities.

In the 1980's, as Head Start strengthened its relationships with community partners, parents had even more opportunities to participate in meaningful decision making. Modeling after Head Start, some of its partners invited parents to serve on advisory boards, where they could benefit from hearing parent concerns and experiences, and where parents could advocate for change in the agency as well as in the community.

As Head Start moves through the 21st century, Head Start continues its efforts to engage parents in meaningful decision making through its committees, Policy Council, advisory boards and through participation with community partners. However, with this century came another threat to parent involvement in Head Start as it has been known to be for over four decades. With proposed Reauthorization legislation, parents will regress to the advisory position of the mid sixties, and will not benefit from the sense empowerment and confidence experienced as parent representative on Policy Council. Additionally, with increased focus on academics, and less attention to parent involvement, it is likely the role of parent as child's principal teacher will be ignored and given over to those acclaimed as the experts.

An analysis of these Head Start Performance Standards reveals a parent involvement approach similar to my own experiences with Head Start and includes recognition, training, opportunities for meaningful decision making and fosters resiliency and has been consistent for nearly four decades. For over four decades, parents have been recognized as essential to the success of the Head Start program, and as vital to the health development and early education of young children. Educational opportunities have been Head Start's strongest approach to involving and engaging families. Since the mid sixties, Head Start has continuously planned and facilitated engaging training events that are

meaningful and interesting to parents. Over the years, Head Start has broadened its training resources as it has formed and strengthened partnerships within the community. Parental involvement in decision making has been essential to empowering parents in their diverse roles as parents, as individuals and as members of the community. Head Starts plan for parent involvement in meaningful decision making is strong, and is effectively facilitated in most Head Start programs. However, the proposed Head Start Reauthorization Bill threatens to diminish this opportunity for parents to grow in confidence and competency, and onto resiliency.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HEAD START

The purpose of this chapter is to review Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices through an examination of longitudinal studies conducted by Head Start, a critique on Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices, the NHSA (National Head Start Association) Web site for Head Start parent success stories, and two books describing research conducted on Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices. An examination of this nature enabled me to determine if the four parent involvement approaches identified in my Head Start testimony are present in the research and therefore generalizable to the Head Start experience.

Longitudinal Studies on Head Start Parent Outcomes

Over the years, Head Start has been recognized as a successful early childhood program, but little recognition has been attributed to its success as a parent development program. Many studies have been conducted, examined, and critiqued with only slight attention to the effectiveness of Head Start parent involvement efforts. A few studies have examined parent involvement policies and practices in Head Start, such as the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES; ACF, 2000, 2005), The Head Start Parent Involvement Project (Parker, 1995), the Welfare to Work Single Mothers Perspective (Bruckman et al, 2003). I examined these studies for the four approaches to parent involvement as well as a Review of Head Start Research.

The FACES is a central part of Head Start's Program Performance Measures Initiative to provide outcome-based information about the Head Start program to the Head Start Bureau and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, local Head Start grantees, Congress and the public. FACES had five primary performance measures under study including:

1. To enhance child growth and development
2. To strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children
3. To Provide children with educational, health and nutritional services
4. To link children and families to needed community services and
5. To ensure well managed programs that involves parents in decision making.

Under the objectives for strengthening families as the child's primary nurturers of their children, they planned to measure how Head Start parents demonstrate parenting skills; improve their self concept and emotional well-being; and make progress toward their educational, literacy, and employment goals. For objective four, linking children and families to needed community services, FACES proposed to measure how Head Start links families with social service agencies to obtain needed services; to education and health agencies for needed services; and help parents to secure child care in order to work, go to school, or gain employment training. FACES also measure how Head Start ensured a well-managed program that involves parents in decision making by assessing how programs are well managed; how parents are involved actively in decisions about program operation; and to determine if the program employs qualified staff (FACES: The Head Start Family, 1995).

FACES was conducted with a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs, centers, classrooms, children and families. FACES had five phases of data collection. The first phase was a spring 1997 field test in which approximately 2,400 parents and children were studied in a random sample of 40 Head Start programs to assess the feasibility of interviewing and assessing parents and children on a large scale using the selected instruments. Although it was a field test, it provided valuable information on the status of Head Start programs, children and families. The second and third phases of FACES occurred in fall 1997 and spring 1998, when data were collected on a sample of 3,200 children and families in the same 40 programs. Spring 1998 data collection included assessments of both Head Start children completing the program and former Head Start children completing kindergarten, as well as interviews with their parents and ratings by their kindergarten teachers. In the spring of 1999 data collection continued in the 40 Head Start programs, plus a kindergarten follow-up for former Head Start children. The fifth phase in spring 2000 completed the kindergarten follow-up for the children completing Head Start in spring 1999. These phases allowed for pre-post comparisons, assessing the effects of Head Start by examining children and parents before their exposure to Head Start and determining their status at the end of the program (FACES: The Head Start Family, 1995).

The study found that families improved in activities for parents and children to experience together. 95 % of parent studies said they ran errands with children, 94 % played with indoor toys, 92 % did chores together, 88 % taught numbers and letters, 76 % read stories and 75 % played counting games. FACES examined the ways in which parents are involved in Head Start activities and found that over 40 % volunteered in the

classroom, 53 % attended parent education events, and 80 % participated in parent-teacher conferences. Parents were asked if Head Start was a source of support to families. 27 % said that Head Start was very helpful, and 66 % stated that Head Start was helpful. They were also asked to rate their satisfaction with Head Start services and reported that they were highly satisfied with the various services offered to families (ACF, 2003).

The National Head Start Impact Study is a longitudinal study that involves approximately 5,000– 6,000 3 and 4-year-old preschool children across an estimated 75 nationally representative sample in communities where there are more eligible children and families than can be served by the program. The children participating have been randomly assigned to either a treatment group (which receives Head Start services) or a comparison group (which does not receive Head Start services).

The National Head Start Impact Study has two primary goals. The first is to determine on a national basis how Head Start affects the school readiness of children participating in the program as compared to children not enrolled in Head Start. In addition, it is to determine how Head Start affects the lives of the families of children enrolled in the program. The second goal of the study is to determine under which conditions Head Start works best and for which children.

The study examines various factors that could affect the results of the Head Start program. These factors include differences among children attending Head Start, differences in children's home environments, the different types of Head Start programs available, and the availability and quality of other child care and preschool programs in a particular area.

Data collection began in the fall of 2002 and is scheduled to continue through 2006, following children through the spring of their first grade year. It includes twice yearly in-person interviews with parents, in-person child assessments, and annual surveys with care providers and teachers, direct observations of the quality of different care settings, and teacher ratings of children (ACF, 2000/2005).

The impact of Head Start on parenting practices was examined in three main areas in the first round of findings: (1) educational activities that parents do with their children, including parent-child interactions that involve talking, reading, teaching, and exposure to new experiences for promoting language development and early literacy; (2) parental discipline that emphasizes establishing firm but fair expectations for child behavior and promotes the development of social understanding and skills necessary for positive relationships with peers and adults; and (3) safety practices--parents' preventive efforts to safeguard the child's environment crucial to children's physical health and overall well-being. The study found that Head Start had a small positive impact on the extent to which parents reported reading to their child. For parents of children in the 3-year-old group, there is a lower use of physical discipline with children in the Head Start group compared to children in the non-Head Start group. A similar impact was not found on physical discipline for parents of children in the 4-year-old group. No statistically significant impacts were found on parents' child safety practices at home (ACF, 2000/2005). Recommendations will be discussed upon completion of the 2000-2006 Head Start Impact Study.

Assorted additional studies on Head Start's impact on children and communities found that actively participating parents had an enhanced sense of well-being, and were

more likely to improve their families' economic and social status. (McKey et al., 1985)

Upon reviewing Head Start's Head Start impact studies, an advisory committee was formed to make recommendations for Head Start improvements in Creating a 21st Century Head Start. One recommendation reported was to enhance family services and increase parent involvement. With this in mind, the advisory committee encourages programs to review and expand current resources used for the provision of family services, parent education and family support. Programs were encouraged to increase efforts to involve parents in all aspects of the Head Start program, by revisiting strategies currently used and revising them with consideration for working parents, parents with special needs, and parents of children with disabilities. Head Start should also continue to respond to the diversity in families they serve. Increased male involvement in Head Start programs was to be further encouraged, with renewed attention given to exploring creative ways of involving men in overall program activities.

A second recommendation reported was the need to expand services to reach unserved children and families, by targeting high concentration areas of poverty and those where resources are scarce. Additional support was to be provided to the unique needs of American Indian and Migrant programs, with particular attention to increased funding, adoption of a more flexible enrollment policy for seasonal farm-workers, improved collaboration between migrant programs and federally funded health, education and disability services, revised eligibility criteria for American Indian children and addition support to American Indians in the construction of facilities on reservations.

Consideration for full day and full year services were also recommended. Strategies encouraged included the use of Head Start funds for the provision of full day-

full year services. Training and technical assistance were offered for helping programs to transition to full day services, with particular attention to involving parents and programming for children throughout a longer day. Grantees were able to provide summer full day services where needed to allow parent to work and provide the continuity of services for children. Head Start programs were advised to continue efforts to maximize resources to meet the needs of full Head Start, and to work more closely with the broader child care community. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) planned to improve federal child care policies serving low income children. They recommend that recognition should be given to child care as a two-generation program that should meet the needs of working families as well as the developmental needs of children.

The recommendation to serve families with younger children resulted in the development of Early Head Start. The advisory committee overwhelmingly recommended that Early Head Start should be built upon the accepted principles which has made Head Start a success, including comprehensive services, and with special attention given to the parent-child relationship (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services; December, 1993).

The Head Start Parent Involvement Project examined the ways in which parent involvement improved the lives of families. Two Head Start delegate agencies in New York City participated in the project. While agency one's two centers are within walking distance in the same community, Agency two has one center that buses families from three widely dispersed geographic areas to a middle-class neighborhood. Agency one serves Latino families of Dominican origin (99.6%), while Agency two's families are

predominantly African American. Virtually all of the families from both agencies have incomes below the poverty line. Two Head Start delegate agencies in New York City participated in the project.

Each Head Start mother at the two agencies was classified by staff as a low, moderate, or high participator. Research staff randomly selected 72 mothers, 24 from each of the three involvement categories (low, moderate, high). Sixty-eight of the 72 (94%) invited mothers participated in the survey.

The design for the longitudinal study had pretest and posttest data collections. In the fall of 1991, the mothers completed a series of measures and Head Start staff assessed the children. Data were collected on parent and child outcomes at the end of the Head Start year. One year later a telephone interview was conducted with the mothers. At the same time, data were collected from the children's teachers on their school on the mothers' involvement in the elementary schools.

A survey was developed to generate information about the types of life events experienced by Head Start mothers and the extent to which they perceived these life events as barriers to their involvement in Head Start. The number and types of life events experienced were also related to Head Start staff's ratings of the mothers' level of involvement compared to other mothers in the program. The *Barriers to Head Start Parent Participation Survey* was conducted through personal interviews in June 1991.

The most frequent of these events was sadness, depression, lack of energy, low interest. Parental factors included having a toddler at home, or a child with a disability, children with behavioral problems, and lack of child care. Factors related to maintaining a house were prevalent, including homes lacking heat, electricity, or telephone. Several

life events were identified as related to self-sufficiency, such as the need for job training, education, and employment. These were ranked as barriers to Head Start involvement, as schedules conflicted with many of the programs activities. Most mothers believed that conflicting schedules were the greatest barrier to parent involvement. Although many mothers expressed feelings of sadness and depression, most did not believe that these feelings hindered their participation (Parker, 1995).

When asked how parent involvement in Head Start could be improved, many suggested self-sufficiency activities such as English as Second Language, GED, and other skill-building training experiences. Recommendations made as a result of this study include a reexamination of the needs and skills of parents and how Head Start can address these through the types of involvement activities offered, tailor programs to meet parent's specific goals, and redefine parent involvement to include activities initiated by Head Start to be carried out by the parent at home. Additionally, Head Start programs should reduce the case loads of social service staff to maximize their ability to support parents in goal attainment, add services to decrease barriers to fuller participation in Head Start and examine the feasibility of coordination of services between welfare to work programs and Head Start, using Head Start as a site for job training and education, leading to paid employment (Parker, 1995).

The research determined that Head Start parent involvement improves the lives of families they serve in several ways. Parent-child relationships were improved, homes became more of a learning environment where children learned school readiness skills, and greater parent involvement in elementary school and increased parental self sufficiency were the most frequently noted positive outcomes resulting from parent

involvement in Head Start (Parker, 1995). Results showing a differential impact of different types of involvement on outcomes provide new avenues for thinking about the relationship between specific parent involvement activities and specific outcomes.

Head Start parents have distinct perspectives on how they are often involved in Head Start and how they prefer to be engaged by Head Start teachers. In a study of Welfare-to-Work Single Mothers Perspectives on Parent Involvement in Head Start (2003), five single mothers of Head Start children at one center were interviewed to capture their perspectives on parent involvement in Head Start. The intent of the study was to inform Head Start teachers of the important tasks of involving low-income single mothers in their children's education. Mothers interviewed were involved in their children's education by helping to extend classroom learning experiences in the home, acting as a classroom volunteers, going on field trips, taking leadership roles in Policy Council, and attending monthly parent meetings. These mothers believed that parent involvement enabled them to become more sensitive to the needs of their children while interacting with other adults for their own personal development (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003).

The study resulted in several conclusions. For example, the study determined that when teachers seek to build partnerships with low income families, the relationship should be built upon parents' interests and personal goals for their child. Teachers who were leaders in parent involvement practices enabled parents, regardless of their parent's educational levels, to be involved. Teachers who did not involve parents had attitudes that negatively stereotyped less educated parents and low economic parents. Additionally, parents who were more involved in their child's education were in programs where they

began to feel they could have a positive impact on their child's education and that their participation was valued (Bruckman &Blanton, 2003).

Recommendations for program improvement in parent involvement practices including a plan to offer several options for parent involvement to parents with responsiveness to differing patterns in parent participation; efforts to become stronger allies to parents in caring for children, awareness of personality factors that play a role in parent involvement and appreciation for the unique circumstances of each family. By providing several types of parent involvement opportunities, parents are more inclined to participate in those most meaningful and relevant to their family. Young parents struggling with early child care issues, look to adults who can understand and appreciate their parenting efforts, and who will provide support and guidance. When teachers strive to become that ally, parents are more likely to respond and participate in classroom activities. Many parents are hesitant to become involved for various reasons. They may lack self-confidence, fear new experiences, or simply need to be encouraged in order to feel appreciated and needed. Others may have family issues that affect their ability to become involved in expected ways. Teachers who have been successful in involving and engaging these families take the time to build relationships with parents, to understand and appreciate the families' circumstances, and to identify family strengths and interest. These teachers seek ways to involve families in nontraditional ways. By offering parents a variety of ways to be involved may help to ensure that parents have opportunities to participate and further develop strengths and acquire new interest (Bruckman &Blanton, 2003).

A Review of Head Start Research (Mann et al, 1977) determined parent involvement results in an increase in parent interactions with children and parent participation in later programs. In 1978, a review of What Head Start Means to Families (O'Keefe, 1978) revealed that Head Start parents were better prepared to support their child's education in the primary grades.

Forty-one Longitudinal Studies on Head Start children and families were conducted over the last 35 years. Among those studies, 21 parent outcomes were examined. These studies involved more than 2,500 families and resulted in a persistent pattern of parent progress in the skills needed to support their children in successful education experiences in public school systems. Specifically, these studies showed that parents demonstrated improvement in their ability to promote early learning skills and demonstrated greater participation in their child's schooling beyond Head Start, leading us to conclude from these 35 years of longitudinal study, that a strong persistent pattern of parent progress emerges with Head Start parent involvement policies and practices (Zigler & Styfco, 2004).

A Critique on Head Start Parent Involvement Policies and Practices

Head Start views the practice of engaging and involving parents as a means of empowering parents. Rather than leaving them to exist in despair and helplessness, Head Start strives to provide support, nurturance and education, in order for parents to become more effective in the family context, and as contributing community members. However, critics Mickelson and Klenz (1998) argue that parent involvement in Head Start programs is more form than substance. That is, parents serve on the Policy Council and attend

meetings, but program staff largely controls the meetings, agenda, dialogue, expenditures, hiring and program content. This assumption is based upon a study of one rural Head Start program in the South, where they sought to examine Head Start claims that parent involvement was a vehicle for empowering poor parents to transform their own lives. In the program studied, data was collected over a nine month period through observation, interview and document review. The researchers attended parent meetings and events which involved parents. They also volunteered in classrooms at three of the programs centers. As data was analyzed, a central theme emerged. Parent involvement met the program requirements, but had little substance. In meetings observed, staff framed issues and questions with narrow choices and solutions, reports given by parents were brief and generally about fundraising, in-depth discussions of program operations were not deliberated and parental attempts at innovation and participation were undermined. When parents were provided opportunities for discussion, they generally acquiesced to staff or sought guidance and direction. Interactions at board meetings were almost entirely controlled by staff. Consequently, their views were not heard as they were not empowered to speak out (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

Head Start Performance Standards state that the parents' Policy Council should be involved in the hiring and firing of staff, and given equal qualifications, when interviewing for a Head Start position, parents should have priority over non Head Start interviewees. In the program understudy, personnel issues were not generally brought to the attention of Policy Council until the interview process was complete and a candidate was selected. Parents were not offered information about training and employment opportunities. Reasons for staff terminations were not clear, if discussed at Policy

Council. The role of Policy Council in these matters seems to be simply to rubber stamp decisions that have been made by program administration (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

Center meetings were designed for opportunities to discuss topics of interest to parents relevant to early care and education, and to raise questions and issues on program oversight. Unfortunately, in many Head Start programs, topics of discussion were determined by administrative staff and usually fell into themes of fundraising activities or discussions of hygiene and nutrition. The author of the described study concludes that if parent involvement in Head Start were truly substantive, and parents were educated and trained and empowered by their participation, the lives of children, families and communities would be transformed (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

NHSA Success Stories

The NHSA Web site, www.igotaheadstart.org, is a forum where Head Start parents can post testimonials of their Head Start experiences on a Web site. The Web site is available to anyone, including media and legislative decision makers, interested in Head Start and how it has changed the lives of the families it serves. I examined 10% percent of the 166 stories posted. Every testimony describe encouraging details of changes in family live, extending credit to Head Start and its services to children and families. For example, eight parents stated that they volunteered in the Head Start classroom and felt it provided them with encouragement and confidence to get a job. They did not provide details on how their improved confidence was nurtured nor any challenges faced as they volunteered. A former Head Start child, now a Congresswoman, stated that her mother learned skills in parenting, but the testimony does not provide

sufficient information to understand the kinds of supports provide and the parenting skills acquired. Five Head Start teachers who were former Head Start parents credit Head Start with their interest in professional development and in teaching for Head Start, but do not describe how Head Start has cultivated their enthusiasm for teaching. Two parents attributed their escape from abuse to Head Start and with accomplishing goals such as in writing and earning a professional degree. Both parents stated that they volunteered in Head Start, but did not discuss strategies used to engage them in ways that fostered those positive outcomes. None of the testimonies reviewed provided evidence of training. In three of the stories, opportunities for decision making were implied as they made mention of their role on Policy Council and in all of the testimonies, recognition and resiliency could be assumed, but none were clearly supported. Additionally, there were no specific strategies or barriers identified that would help to strength parent involvement and evoke change for program improvement. If the website forum is one more venue for parents to offer thanks to Head Start, then its purpose is accomplished as it stands. However, if it is to share Head Start's success in its service to families, the information would be more valuable if the stories were further developed to include details such as Head Start's approach to parent involvement in each individual experience.

An examination of the NHSA Web site testimonials led me to conclude that it would not be a comprehensive source of data, as the stories revealed do not provide sufficient detail to determine of the four parent involvement approaches of recognition, training, meaningful decision making and resiliency were a part of their Head Start experience. There were implication that parents were recognized as persons and abilities, but there was inadequate data to determine how that was fostered. Training opportunities

provided to parents were not discussed sufficiently to assess Head Start planned these events in accordance with parent interests and goals. Parents indicated participation on committees and on Policy Council, but did not provide enough information to determine if they were engaged in meaningful decision making. Resiliency was more evident on the website, as parents talked about the positive changes in their lives, extending credit to Head Start. However, these stories were so brief and one-sided that I discounted them as a valuable source of information to this study.

The Head Start Mother (Peters, 1998)

In *The Head Start Mother*, Peters describes how her experiences as a Head Start mother have changed her life. She describes how she became involved in community affairs, stopped using corporal punishment on her children and decided to return to college. Peters credits Head Start with her change in view of self and her ability to plan and accomplish personal and family goals. She recalls Head Start bred confidence as she advocated for governmental relocation assistance for families evicted from apartments that were scheduled for demolition and of how she began to positively consider all that she can accomplish for herself, her children and her community. *The Head Start Mother* further details Peter's study of parent involvement in one Head Start program (Peters, 1998).

Her study began as an ethnographic study to give voice to Head Start mothers regarding their involvement in Head Start. Peters stated that she wanted to know why Head Start made a difference in her life and the lives of Head Start mothers. She determined to understand the involvement of parents in Head Start as a process that may

affect the lives of families in a positive direction. One of three of her research questions specifically addressed parent involvement in Head Start; “Was Head Start an arena for self change and empowerment?” (p. 173). Peters indicates that she is not attempting to generalize her findings to the entire population of Head Start mothers or to all Head Start programs, but is using her study to give mothers a voice in describing their experiences with Head Start and their perceptions of any changes they may have experienced.

Initially, she Peters planned to use both a qualitative and quantitative approach to her study utilizing observation, interviews and two sets of questionnaires, but encounter many problems with the quantitative segment of the research. Consequently she decided to use data from interviews with participants. The setting was in the community where her child was enrolled in Head Start, 21 years prior to the study. Her study involved 33 interviews of mothers involved in Head Start from 1968-1993 as well as a few mothers who also became Head Start staff. Peters utilized three sources in selecting women for the study including a list of Head Start staff, twenty-one mothers the director thought might be interested in participating, and inclusion of mothers who showed a willingness to be interviewed by indicating so on a consent form. As the study began with in-depth questionnaires, the pool of participants diminished, resulting in the 33 mothers who were interviewed.

When asked how Head Start changed their lives they resoundingly agreed that Head Start recognized them as individuals with importance, and supported them toward resiliency as they encouraged them to do more with their lives. They encouraged parents to explore opportunities leading them to consider other options for themselves and their

families (Peters, 1998). They all agreed that they became better parents because of what they learned in Head Start (Peters, 1998).

Parents interviewed also cited experiences in decision making processes such as family goal planning, selecting goals for their child's educational plan, participating in discussion and planning for social activities for families, and in issues relevant to program governance.

Mothers interviewed said that Head Start encouraged them to make positive changes in several ways. Staff sought out and provided trainings and made them available to parents. These parents attended training experiences as they were relevant and of interest to them as individuals. Trainings noted included positive parenting, family finance, ages and stages of early child development, as assorted topics planned to inform parents serving on parent committee meetings and Policy Council. They had opportunities for support in obtaining a general education diploma, to participate in literacy classes, and CDA programs.

Peters attributed changes in families to several factors embedded in Head Start's policies and practices. She states that the mandate for "maximum feasible participation of the poor" is still making the difference both nationally and in local programs.

Peters described barriers to parent involvement noted by Head Start parents. Most reported that there is less time to volunteer in classrooms, due to welfare reform. Parents felt that classroom volunteer time was valuable as it made them felt good to be able to contribute; it helped them to learn to parent better and provided opportunities for changes in other areas of their lives. Some parents she interviewed identified inhibitors as barriers to parent involvement, such as lack of interest, substance abuse, fear and insecurity, but

added that Head Start provides opportunities to address these factors. For example, parents reported that Head Start staff treat parents as individuals, and build relationships that are comfortable and meaningful to each person. One parent described how she was not interested in classroom volunteering, but was shown as much appreciation for her determination that her child would attend Head Start regularly and well rested, as those parents who participated in the classroom, meetings and program events. Other parents are provided support services to address substance abuse and family abuse issues. Disinterest in Head Start parent involvement activities is addressed by striving to inform and engage families in ways that are appropriate and relevant to individual families. Parent interviewed stated that families who seem to lack interest, either don't fully understand the opportunities availed to them through Head Start, or those experiences provided have not been particularly relevant to them as they face more critical family issues that need attention. They suggest that once Head Start staff understands these issues and family needs, they continually strive to inform, involve and engage all families, but realize that not everyone will respond to Head Start invitations and benefit from the way in which Head Start empowers parents to move from clients to volunteers to contributing citizens

Regarding the question of Head Start as an arena for change and empowerment, Peter concluded that most Head Start mothers interviewed recognized they had changed their parenting practices through their involvement with Head Start. Peter's also noted that Head Start provides opportunities for changes to occur through education, career opportunities, and relationships. She concludes that Head Start has been instrumental in affecting change in the lives of families, through involvement as employees, decision

makers and as volunteers. Peters argues that current trends towards “professionalizing” Head Start may destroy the very ingredients which have made these changes in parents occur. She recommends that research needs to continue and that policy makers should make use of research information when decisions that effect families are made (Peters, 1998).

Peters’ study of *The Head Start Mother* demonstrates the four approaches to parent involvement as identified in my experiences as a Head Start mother. The participating mothers in this study described how they were recognized as individuals of importance to their child, family and to the Head Start program, demonstrated through numerous ways the program strived to involve and engage parents. Ample trainings were provided based upon the stated interests of parents, and including CDA classes, GED courses and literacy training events. These mothers described how they were involved in meaningful decision making as they participated in developing educational goals for their children, and in planning family goals and strategies, as well as involvement in classroom committees, center committees and in program governance and oversight responsibilities. Resiliency approaches were apparent, though not clearly identified as such. Mothers interviewed described how Head Start encouraged them to explore opportunities for themselves and their family and provided the resources and support that accompany resiliency development. Peters study demonstrates how Head Start provides an approach to parent involvement including recognition, training, decision making and resiliency.

Something Better for My Children (Mills, 1998)

In *Something Better for My Children*, Mills tells the stories of several parents who report that their lives have been changed through their experiences with Head Start. Josephine Garner praised Head Start for inspiring her to take on challenges she once feared. She recalled the time she came to Head Start as a parent on welfare support and recalled eventually being hired as assistant teacher. Josephine was interested in becoming a teacher but felt she “wouldn’t measure up.” She applied for a low-level job in the public school system, and needed a reference from the Head Start Director. The Director refused to sign the reference form, saying she could do better and wanted her to work for Head Start, and challenged her to prepare herself to become a teacher. Head Start staff equipped her with the necessary resources and encouraged her to go on to community college, and then to apply for a teaching position at Head Start. She went to school at night and soon earned her associates degree. Garner further describes how proud she feels to be able to send her son off to college with the same confidence and support Head Start had given her (Mills, 1998).

Representative Maxine Waters, head of the Congressional Black Caucus, credits Head Start with focusing her talents. She moved to Los Angeles in 1961, was hired as teacher assistant for Head Start, enrolled in college and earned her Bachelors Degree in Sociology. She then became Head Start’s manager for volunteer services and parent involvement. In this position she began to advocate for increased Head Start funding, came into contact with politicians and realized her interests and talents in the field of politics and advocacy (Mills, 1998).

Carolyn Yellow Robe tells how Head Start gave her hope, and a sense of purpose. She graduated from high school on an Indian Reservation with expectations that she would simply return to the tribe and raise a family. She married and moved to California during a federal effort to find jobs for American Indians. She found work picking strawberries, often not getting paid for her work. Later she moved to Montana because she did not want her children to become involved in the gangs that were attracting young people. She and her alcoholic husband divorced, and she began providing for her family as a motel maid. In 1965, she enrolled one of her children in Head Start where staff encouraged her to volunteer at the center. At first she was not interested until they convinced her that she would learn how to be a better mother. She volunteered at the center in a variety of activities, including parenting classes, parent committee meetings, and soon became a classroom aid. She liked working with children, and discovered new interest and abilities in herself, and enrolled in college with plans to become a teacher. Years later she earned her bachelors degrees in Early Childhood, and then her master's degree. In 1979, Carolyn was named director at a Head Start center and became a voice for American Indians at the national level (Mills, 1998).

Bishop More was a teen parent of a Head Start child. She described herself as a lonely child and having low self-esteem. She attributes her success to Head Start for providing encouragement and support that led to self-confidence, and positive self-esteem. Head Start personnel challenged her with responsibilities that interested her, and provided guidance and support to ensure her success. Training opportunities were ample and interesting. Bishop More became increasingly involved in center committee activities and on Policy Council. Over the years, through her participation with Head Start, she

became an American Indian parent representative to the National Head Start Association. Bishop credits Head Start for successful parent involvement efforts, stating that parents have to see that there is a world bigger than the one we dare imagine, and that although parents think that no one pays attention to the things we say and do, Head Start does and we (parents), can make a difference (Mills, 1998).

Mills also sites ordinary stories of families doing ordinary jobs and paying taxes. One parent listed her Head Start volunteer experience on a job application and was hired at the post office. Another parent who was on welfare credits Head Start for a job that enabled her to pay off her pick up truck. One parent stated that one of the things Head Start does is recognize that parents have an interest in their children but do not know where to begin to how help them, nor how to provide educational support and guidance. This parent stated, Head Start gives you hope that you can change things for your family. Yet another parent attributes Head Start's success in parent involvement efforts to their attitude toward families. She says they don't overwhelm parents; they try to find the things you can do well and engage parents in those ways. One Migrant Head Start director noted that after 20 years of experience, she has learned that the most effective way to involve parents is to make them feel welcome, make them feel good about themselves, and to know that they have something to teach as well (Mills, 1998).

In all of these parent testimonials, parents recalled how Head Start personnel treated them respect and with appreciation for their involvement in classroom and center activities. They spoke of training opportunities where they learned how to support children in home and classroom play activities, parliamentary procedures for conducting an effective meeting, planning and preparing healthy meals and strategies for positive

behavior management. These parents described social events where they had opportunity to form friendships with other families, and to build relationships with Head Start staff. Others described opportunities for creative planning and organizing events for classroom and center-wide activities, as well as participation on parent committees and Policy Council where their voices were heard and opinions were validated. These Head Start stories revealed an effective approach to parent involvement including recognition, training, decision making and encouragement and guidance that leads to resiliency.

The Four Elements of Research on Parent Involvement in Head Start

Testimonials from Head Start parents reveal the Head Start philosophy for fostering positive outcomes in families in an approach similar to Lareau's theory for providing successful parent involvement experiences. Within each personal story, Head story is loudly acclaimed for engaging families in meaningful experiences, with few exceptions. Longitudinal studies designed to examine Head Start effectiveness in service to children and families did not specifically describe Head Start's approach to parent involvement; these studies measured the outcomes of Head Start as it relates to children and families. However, the parent involvement approaches of recognition, training, decision making and resiliency are implied in many of the conclusions and recommendations of each study.

Recognition

A few longitudinal studies identified goals and strategies for assessing how Head Start recognizes parents as important to children and to the Head Start program. The FACES Study sought to measure how Head Start strengthened families as primary

nurturers of their children. Inherent in this study was the recognition of parents as important to healthy early development. This aspect of the study revealed that families improved upon the quality and frequency of activities shared with their children including chores, in play, and in reading stories, and based upon Head Start's recognition of parents as vital to early education. The National Head Start impact study, in recognition of parents as the child's principal influence, stated as three of its goals to assess how Head Start impacted the quality and frequency of educational activities parents do with their children, how discipline practices were enhanced, and how safe and healthy issues were improved. This study found a small measure of positive impact on parent-child reading activities, discipline and safety practices.

In *The Head Start Mother* (Peters, 1998), Head Start parents tell how they were involved in programmatic activities planned around their specified interests, revealing evidence that parents were recognized as persons with abilities and diverse interests. Parents interviewed in *Something Better for My Children* (Mills, 1998), described Head Start as recognizing their potential in ways they had never dreamed. They credit Head Start for treating them with respect and appreciation for parental involvement. The element of recognition was evident throughout the research.

Training

As FACES examined how Head Start supported parents as primary educators of their children, they found that parents were volunteering more in the classroom, attending training events and participating in conferences, where teachers and parents grew in their understanding of individual child development and education. A Review of Head Start Research (Mann et al, 1977) examined a study of what Head Start Means to Families and

found that parent training opportunities better prepared them to support their child's education through the primary years.

In Peters (1998) parents stated they received ample training opportunities which were planned around their individual interests and goals. Mills (1998) credited Head Start for inspiring parents to be challenged and provided them with resources to further their education. These studies showed that parents interviewed were also supported with varied training opportunities designed to their specific interests.

Resiliency

Although studies specific to resiliency in Head Start have not been conducted, a few longitudinal studies have measured items described as characteristic of resilient persons. FACES, the longitudinal study of Head Start outcomes, also assessed Head Starts success in linking families to resources and services to effectively address the needs of their family, including health, education and employment, while fostering families toward competency as characteristic of resilient person. The study concluded that more parents were aware of resources and support available to them and developed the skills necessary to access and utilize services to achieve family goals.

Assorted national impact studies have examined parental sense of well-being and its impact on economic and social status, and found that actively participating Head Start parents had an enhanced self concept and sense of well being, resulting in improved family circumstances. The Head Start Parent Involvement Project looked into the ways parent involvement impacted family life and found that parent-child relationships were improved, homes became more of a learning environment, greater parent involvement in elementary schools and increased self sufficiency from parent involvement in Head Start.

In Peters (1998), Parents indicated that resources for learning and planning to address family issues were ample with Head Start's support and guidance. They credited Head Start with fostering a sense of empowerment and hope and have become increasingly involved in community affairs, and now are able to plan and accomplish personal and family goals. Parents interviewed by Mills, (1998) indicated that because of Head Start, they have cultivated many characteristics attributed to resilient adults. An analysis of Head Start research demonstrates that the element of resiliency is woven throughout its approach to parent involvement.

Decision making

As with the previous elements, longitudinal studies have not all specifically examined Head Starts approach to involving parents as decision makers, but have researched goals which address this approach. FACES examined how Head Start involved parents in decision making in program governance. Parents interviewed applauded Head Starts efforts in engaging them on committees and in program governance and oversight, as it equipped them with skills that enhanced family management and community advocacy. The Head Start Parent Involvement Project, while examining parent perspectives on Head Start, found that parents who were involved in decision making, such as in planning education goals for children, taking leadership roles on Policy Council and attending parent meetings were those who felt they had a positive impact their child's education. These parents attribute feelings of value and importance to the relationships developed between parents, teachers, and program management.

In Peters, (1998), parents interviewed described how they were involved in meaningful decision making through developing educational goals for their children as well as personal and family goals. Others described participation on parent committees, center committees and on Policy Council. In *Something Better for My Children*, (Mills, 1998) describes how parents were respected and appreciated for their decision making abilities and contributions to program governance.

Critiques on Head Start parent involvement revealed that in some programs, parents are not significantly involved in decision making. They serve as advisory boards where they are informed of programmatic decisions and encouraged to approve recommendations set forth. Although not consistently applied, the element of decision making is evident in Head Start's approach to parent involvement.

A review of the research data reveals that Head Start has demonstrated significant utilization of parental recognition, training, resiliency strategies and engaging parents in decision making. Parents interviewed have agreed that they are recognized as important and capable, are provided ample training opportunities relevant to their interest and goals, and are supported with resiliency building efforts such as encouragement, guidance, resources and education. With few exceptions, parents are also engaged in meaningful decision making.

An analysis of research on Head Start parent involvement reveals a parent involvement approach similar to my own experiences which includes recognition, training, resiliency and decision making, and is thereby generalizable to the overall Head Start population.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CASE STUDY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN BLAIR COUNTY HEAD START

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss data collected from a case study of Blair County Head Start and reflections on my history as a Head Start parent, teacher, manager and federal reviewer, as a practical test in determining whether my Head Start experience is generalizable to the Head Start experience. In a review and analysis of Blair County Head Start and its parent involvement policies and practices, and in revisiting my personal and professional Head Start experiences, I further identify how parent involvement approaches to parent involvement including recognition, training, meaningful-decision making and resiliency are present in the program and in my experiences with Head Start.

Demographic Make Up of Blair County

Blair County lies in the central mountains and valleys of Pennsylvania. It is considered an urban-rural mixed county by national standards, but is rural in nature and both geographically and culturally isolated from large Pennsylvania cities. The county area covers 525 square miles and is situated halfway between the cities of Harrisburg and Pittsburgh (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Blair County is on the verge of being classified as a distressed area. In recent years there was a loss of 3000 jobs from the area due to the closing of five major industries and massive lay-offs at another six manufacturers and service providers. The unemployment rate has fluctuated from 6.9 % to 7.7%, depicting a bleak economic

future. The job market has shifted from manufacturing to service industry positions in low paying jobs with little or no benefits. The area median wage remains at \$35,000 per year, however, 31% of Head Start families earn under \$6,000 per year and 79% earn less than \$15,000 per year (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

The population of Blair County has diminished over the last decade. The current population is 129,144, showing a loss of 1400 residents in the last ten years. Most of the population is concentrated in three townships surrounding the city of Altoona. Thirty-seven percent reside in Altoona. Of the county population, 13% live below the poverty level. Over 19% of Blair County children live under the poverty level, and 2,393 of those children live in poverty and are under the age of five. Twenty-one percent of the children in Blair County live in single parent homes (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Among the counties designated as a mixed rural and urban population, Blair County has the highest rate of teen pregnancy. The incidence of low birth weight babies have raised in the last decade and Blair County's infant mortality rate is higher than the state rate (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

The racial and ethnic composition of the total county is basically homogeneous; with 97.6% of the residents being Caucasian, 1.4% being African American, and 1% being other groups. The non-Caucasian population has increased in the last decade by a full percent (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

A community needs assessment conducted in Blair County identified risk factors which contribute to extreme economic and social deprivation, family management problems and early and persistent antisocial behavior. These factors included child abuse

and neglect, spousal abuse, and substance abuse. These factors greatly affect Head Start eligible children and families in the county (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Blair County records 380 child abuse and neglect reports which are 25% higher than the rate of abuse for the state. Many of these reports involved Head Start children and adults. Of the 388 families receiving Head Start services in the current decade, 50 families have expressed concern over domestic and child abuse (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Substance abuse has become an increasing problem within the county to catastrophic proportions. However, Blair County does not have enough long-term facilities to accommodate the need and short-term treatment is limited. Alcohol and marijuana were the most used among high school students on a regular basis. The use of smokeless tobacco, inhalants, hallucinogens and other prescription medications are also on the rise with this age group (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

In order to address the needs of children and families as they face these barriers, Child Advocates of Blair County held a series of round tables to which they invited CABC Board members, staff and parents. The findings of these groups are that Head Start parents have need for increased parenting effectiveness, personal effectiveness and economic self-sufficiency. Parents where there are two working adults need quality, affordable child care. Family literacy was also identified as a need, since 8% of all adults in Blair County have under an 8th grade education (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Families enrolled in Blair County Head Start identified their individual family service needs and most said they need access to adequate medical and dental care, parenting education, transportation, housing, access to mental health treatment, assistance with food and jobs that pay a living wage (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Blair County families experience numerous barriers to addressing these needs. Lack of adequate health care was due to a lack of providers who accept health coverage. Additionally, medical providers were not open for service in the evenings to accommodate low income working parents who cannot easily leave work or take off for medical appointments (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Dental care providers who accept Medicaid or Blue Chip were minimal. There were free dental clinics in the county, but the hours were inconsistent and had long waiting lists. The free dental clinic has helped many Head Start families but is open only 1 day a week and has often been cancelled for lack of a volunteer dentist (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Many Head Start families struggle to meet the nutritional needs of children and adults. There are eight food banks in Blair County and two soup kitchens. Due to increased demand, food bank supplies were dwindling, and families were not receiving the expected amounts of food they have been given in the past. The cost of food was higher in this area than in more populated urban areas and food stamp allocations have been cut over the past several years. Working families have experienced the challenge of juggling work schedules and taking care of the family and were eating many more meals

in restaurant and fast food services (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

There is a wealth of Senior Housing in Blair County, but family housing is at a premium. The majority of subsidized housing units were in or very near the City of Altoona. There were few opportunities for families to find subsidized housing in the rural areas of the county. Housing units that were available have a long waiting list, and once approved, finding an apartment or house that meets regulation is difficult. Many Head Start families were living in substandard housing that is often unsafe or unsanitary (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000). There was one homeless shelter in Blair County that houses homeless families. The families receive Social Service assistance and were limited to a 30-day stay per year. There were two shelters that house chronically and short-term homeless men. One Domestic Abuse shelter exists in Blair County as well as one shelter for Homeless and Runaway Teens (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

For adults who strive to further their education, there were numerous institutions which offer post secondary training in the county and surrounding area. Penn State University and community college are in the county. There was a vocational technical school, beauty schools, business schools, and computer learning institutions with the county. Adult Education services are provided through local school districts. Career Link and youth services offered assistance in resume writing, job search and training, and the counties community action agency provided special training for persons who were designated as hard to employ (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2000).

Early care and education programs were readily available in Blair County. However, Head Start was the only program in Blair County that continued to afford comprehensive services to children and families. Child care funding was available in the county, but eligibility guidelines had hindered access to these funds. (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 2004)

Many family services were accessed through BCHS or through referrals. Approximately 80 families per year, since 1999 received emergency food and shelter, 30 families received housing assistance, 15 received transportation assistance; 20 received mental health services; 55 received Adult Education or job training; and 20 received abuse services. Additionally, 360 per year received health education, 290 families received parenting education, 7 families received assistant to incarcerated families and 3 received marriage education services (Blair County Head Start Community Assessment, 1999, 2004; 2006).

Blair County Head Start: The Early Years

Blair County Head Start (BCHS) began serving income eligible 3-5 year old children and their families since 1967 under the auspices of the Blair County Community Action Program. The first Blair County Head Start center was opened for 60 children at Simpson Methodist Church in Altoona, Pa. At the Simpson Center, parents were involved in an advisory capacity, that is, recommendations were made and approved by parents. For example, when the decision was made to expand services to additional children and families in the county, Policy Council was presented with the plan with a recommendation for approval. Policy Council was not involved in the development of the

plan, as has occurred for the last three decades (Blair County Head Start Policy Council minutes, 1976).

Children were transported to Simpson Church on city buses, supervised and cared for by bus aides. Three-five year old children attended Head Start four days a week for 3 hours per day, receiving meals and snacks that meet 75% of a child's daily nutritional requirements. Parents were invited to volunteer in the classrooms or to attend workshops, meetings or to socialize with other parents. Parents who wished to participate in the center either rode the city bus, or were transported by program staff. The program continued to expand, and by 1976, Blair County expanded to 105 children in six sites throughout the county. Many of these sites were housed in churches, where classrooms and parent meeting rooms had to be set up and torn down weekly, in preparation for church services. Children in the rural areas were transported by van, leaving little space for parents to ride to the center as well. In such cases, Head Start staff provided transportation. Eventually, they consolidated into one large center in an old school building in the city of Lakemont, and serving 185 children (Document review, 1976).

The Lakemont center housed seven double session classrooms, serving children 3 hours per day and continued to expand the number of children and families served. Outlying areas of the county required a more individualized approach to serving families in those areas as they differed from families living in the city of Altoona. So, once again, they scattered the programs in facilities throughout the county, some in schools and modular buildings, and another in a library facility. BCHS also purchased an old elementary school in the Greenwood area of the county, which housed seven

additional classrooms. There was ample room for parent meetings and activities, as well as office space for administrative personnel (BCHS staff interview. 2006)

In 1982 Child Advocates of Blair County (CABC), incorporated and became a private, nonprofit, community based organization, to provide quality programming focused around the total needs of at risk children and families and became the grantee for the Blair County Head Start program. The CABC's vision was to assist families in providing nurturing environments for their children by providing an atmosphere of mutual respect, loyalty and trust. They ascribed to developing partnerships that would support nurturing parenting, personal competence and economic self-sufficiency for parents, while enhancing children's effectiveness in both their present and future environments. CABC sought opportunities to work with others in the community to assist families in their achievement of positive outcomes. Such outcomes included the parent's utilization of nonviolent means of conflict resolution, progression toward self-sufficiency, enhancement of parenting abilities, and supporting the development of their children's social competence (CABC program plans; 1999, 2005). In response to their vision, CABC added to their organizational structure, several programs designed to accomplish their goals, including Teen Link Connection, the Nurturing Program, Networking Program, and the Rose Bradley Child Care Center. All of these organizations provided comprehensive educational and social services to adults and children in Head Start and in the community. Teen Link provided case management services educational programs, home visits and referral services to pregnant and parenting teens. The Nurturing Program provided parents and children with an educational program from which to learn positive ways to relate to one another, and focus upon effective parenting.

The Networking Program provided intensive case management and parenting education in a home-based setting to children and families. The Rose Bradley Center provided child care services to infants, preschool and school aged children. All of these services were provided to Head Start eligible children and families as well as those in the larger community. The ultimate goal of Child Advocates was to support families living in poverty, and to achieve integration into the general society and to transition from unemployment to economic self-sufficiency (BCHS Program Plan, 1989/1995, BCHS Staff Interview, March 2006).

By 1998 Child Advocates of Blair County served 404 children in the service areas of Altoona, Tyrone, Hollidaysburg, Martinsburg, and Claysburg. The Altoona centers include the Greenwood Center, Juniata Center, Fairview Center, a classroom in the Wright Elementary School and the Stevens Center. The Tyrone Center serves children in Bellwood, Tipton and Tyrone. The Hollidaysburg Center serves families in the Hollidaysburg and Duncansville. Families living in Martinsburg, Roaring Springs and Williamsburg are served in the Martinsburg Center and the Claysburg Center provides services to children from Sproul, East Freedom and Claysburg. Blair County Head Start began to offer its families three service options including home based, center based, extended day and a full day/full year program, in response to family needs as identified in community assessment. Full day, full year and extended day programming provided childcare supports to parents working or in training. Center-based programs served children 3.5 hours per day, either in the morning or afternoon, determined by parent schedules and interests. Home based services, where families were visited on a weekly basis for 90 minutes, were provided for families wanting to keep their children at home,

yet sought the comprehensive educational support services of Head Start (BCHS Program plan, 1998, BCCHS Staff Interview, March 2006).

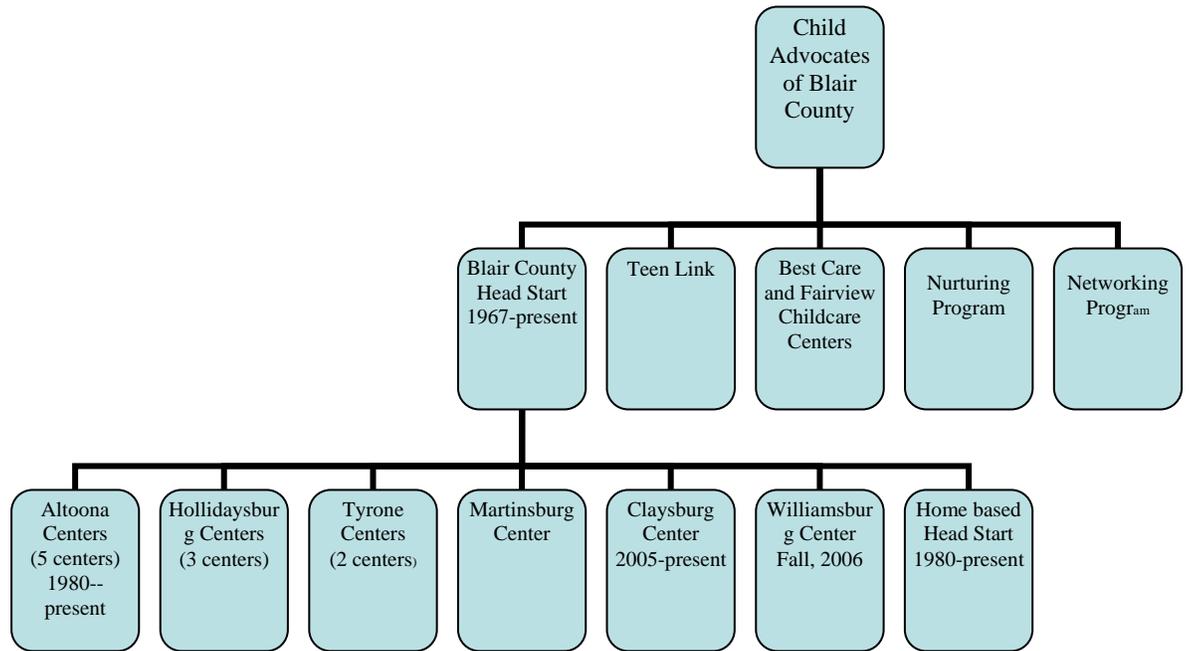


Figure 5.1 Child Advocates/Blair County Head Start organizational charts for 2006.

Blair County Head Start’s Parent Involvement Policy and Practice

Blair County Head Start, along with Head Start programs across the nation, began addressing federally mandated Head Start performance standards innovatively and relevant to the local culture. They sought to serve families having the greatest need, and involving parents in meaningful and relevant program oversight and planned activities

Serving Families with the Greatest Need

Social Service standards require that recruitment and selection process ensure that families with the greatest needs are enrolled into the program (Head Start Program Performance, 1975). Blair County Head Start strives to serve families with greatest need. Recruitment efforts are managed by family service workers who contact WIC (Women, Infants and Children), Housing Authorities, and Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) Reports for determining the number of children they serve who are age and income eligible. They also distribute fliers throughout the community and television ads are announced are aired by the local cable company. Current Head Start families help to refer potential children and families to the program and are contacted by the family service workers to begin the recruitment process with them. Door-to-door recruitment brings in many families as Head Start staff is constantly on the look out for evidence of young children living in the neighborhood. Letters are sent to all community agencies explaining the Head Start program, including information regarding age and income requirements, and are encouraged to pass the information along to potential clients. Head Start staff spoke to organizations and local groups to educate their members on services provided and benefits of becoming involved with the Head Start program. Local school districts are involved in the recruitment process by accepting flyers and distributing them to each child enrolled in kindergarten through 6th grade. Letters go out to Faith Based organizations to go into their bulletins. Family Service Workers post flyers in local business to promote Head Start and offer recruitment information, such as markets, Laundromats, gas stations, drug stores, etc. All Social Service agencies in the area, physicians and dentists who provide services to preschool children in Blair County

receive a recruitment letter, brochure and posters (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006). Additionally, Blair County Head Start has an interagency agreement with Intermediate Unit 08(which serves children with disabilities), the Altoona School District and Children and Youth Services, who serve as a referral source to Blair County Head Start. BCHS also participates in events sponsored by other agencies to provide support to the program, educate, generate interest, and recruit Head Start families (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

Once applications are received, the family service worker will visit the home to interview the family to assess family needs and collect documents to determine eligibility. When applications have been collected, the family service worker will score the application according to income, age and need. Once scored, the Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance Committee (ERSEA), comprised of parents and staff, review the applications and prioritize them according to need, utilizing predetermined criteria for selection and enrollment. The criterion is developed by the ERSEA committee as well, and approved by Policy Council.

Through this recruitment and selection proves, BCHS believes they have identified a greater number of children who are eligible, strengthen the awareness of Head Start in the community, and ensuring they are serving the most in need of Head Start services (BCHS program plan; 1999- 2006).

Supporting Families through Community Partnerships

Head Start programs must assists families to improve the condition of the home and quality of family life, making parents aware of community services and resources

and assisting them in accessing those needed (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975; 1995).

BCHS strives to do this by involving community partners in program planning, governance, advisory and referral. BCHS has involved community partners from its very beginning, as it was developed and administered through the Blair County Community Action Agency(CAP), where several agencies worked together to address the needs of families in the community. Later, as BCHS moved from CAP, and under the auspices of Child Advocates, the listing of partners with whom they collaborated grew year by year, as needs of families changed and accumulated (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

Community Partners served on round table discussions to determine strategies for supporting families in assorted crisis and adverse circumstances. Physicians, dentists, psychologists, etc, served on health advisory boards. School district and early intervention agencies participated on education advisory committees, and transition planning activities. Social service agencies, such as Children and Youth, Teen Link, etc. worked closely with BCHS to extend services to families experiencing domestic abuse, substance abuse, homelessness, and food and shelter crisis. Educational Institutions, such as Career Link, Penn State Altoona, Community College, and Computer Learning Network offered guidance and support to families wanting to prepare for employment, enroll in college or in technical training. Parents anticipating their child's enrollment in kindergarten were well prepared as BCHS partnered with School Districts in kindergarten registration and readiness fairs, sponsoring kindergarten visits and presentations to parents, and in sharing child information as requested, and with approval from the parent.

Community partners supported BCHS in program oversight, as they provided representatives to the Policy Council and Governing Board. The Policy Council Community Representative was able to share community information relevant to governance questions and issues, and parents serving on Policy Council became better acquainted with the people and resources in their community. The Governing Board is comprised mainly of community volunteers and a Policy Council parent representative. The BCHS Governing Board is currently comprised of a judge, a few lawyers, a commissioner, a parent representative, and a former Head Start parent, many of whom had served Head Start for over a decade. The Governing Board reviewed recommendations made by the Policy Council and further approved or disapproved the proposal. Governing Board meetings are open to all BCHS parents as nonvoting participants, which further strengthens the relationships of parents with the community. Parents were made aware of these community supports through a community resource handbook, which listed all partnering agencies and their services (BCHS program plan, 1999, 2004-2006), (Community Resource. Handbook (1974-2006)).

This strategy of supporting families through community partnerships has been noted as one of Bell's (2001) strategies for cultivating resiliency in adolescents and adults. Through increased awareness of community partners, and in working side by side with representatives from collaborating agencies, parents are better able to access and advocate for community supports, becoming increasingly independent, responsible, and competent, all characteristic of resilient persons.

Family Strengths and Goal Development

Head Start programs are also required to assist parents in identifying family needs and opportunities for continuing education which may lead toward self-enrichment and employment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975, 1995).

In the early years of Head Start, like all Head Start programs, BCHS Family Service Workers, supported parents in identifying family needs. From the needs based perspective, the program sought to address these needs and correct deficiencies that may hinder a family's growth toward self sufficiency and resiliency. Later, Head Start's approach to family development became more strength focused, and to address the needs of families through a competence, self-esteem building, and educational approach to resolving family problems. BCHS strived to identify family strengths and interests through informal conversations, goal setting activities, surveys and by building relationships with parents. Upon enrollment, the Family Service Worker sought to build a mutually respectful and trusting relationship with families, and to encourage sharing of information that would lead to the development of family goals. Parents were always eager to share the hope and dreams they have for their child, but were less inclined to dream for themselves. Head Start helped parents to dare to dream, and then to plan to accomplish those goals into realistic, manageable strategies. BCHS also supported families toward accomplishment of goals by providing resources, guidance, training, and with regular follow up and encouragement (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

Bell (2001) advocates building positive relationships, developing family strengths and engaging parents in goal setting activities. Through partnerships where

parents feel welcomed, accepted and appreciated, self-confidence and self-esteem are nurtured and attributes to the development of resilient adults

BCHS provided diverse opportunities for parents to serve Head Start in areas of interest and ability. Parents were invited and encouraged to participate on Policy Council and parent Committees to participate in program planning and governance, and where they cultivated and practiced skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, organization, and responsibility. BCHS parents were able to volunteer in the classroom, prepare classroom materials, assist with clerical work, and organize and participate in social events. These opportunities engaged parents in areas of strengths and interests, but provided opportunities for self-esteem and self-confidence building, and to observe and participate as role models to others (BCHS Staff interview, 2006). Bell (2002) advocates strategies for cultivating resiliency to include such opportunities for meaningful participation where adults experience a sense of satisfaction, purpose and value.

Communicating with Parents

Head Start must also ensure that ample communication occurs between parents and program staff by providing a system for the provision of information to parent and policy groups as well as individual families who may not be involved in committees work (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975; 1995).

Since the early seventies, BCHS parents received multiple of forms of information including the BCHS parent newsletter, handbooks, memos, Policy Council and assorted committee minutes, regular visits and telephone calls from teachers and family service workers, and informal conversations as they visit the centers (BCHS

Parent Newsletters, Parent Handbooks, Policy Council and Parent Committee Minutes, Memos and Contact Logs 1970-2006).

The BCHS parent newsletter grew in content and creativity as resources and program services developed. BCHS parents were involved in the titling of this newsletter through contribution of ideas and finally voting on the title *Children of Tomorrow/Blair County Head Start*. Every newsletter began with a letter of welcome and encouragement from the Head Start Director to parents. One newsletter each year noted the benefits of parent involvement to the program and family. The list indicated that parents have a better understanding of what the center is doing for the child and the kinds of home assistance parents may provide. The newsletter included monthly updates on classroom themes, activities and opportunities for volunteers. The program calendar detailed monthly training events, health and nutrition activities, meeting dates and times, ads for open Head Start positions, and a parent activity calendar. Each new newsletter had a page devoted to one classroom or center where teachers described the previous month's classroom experiences as well as encouragement for parents to participate in upcoming activities. Classroom volunteers were also listed in each newsletter. Updates to an incentive closet were noted including bed pillows, toasters, irons, towel sets and wall clocks. One newsletter contained an invitation from Policy Council to parents to attend a day trip to Washington D. C. Informational pages from community resources were frequently noted in the newsletter, such as New Choices and GED classes. (New Choices in an agency that provided seminars on career exploration and guidance, job seeking and job readiness, professional development, career and family management, single parent survival skills and occupational information. The services are provided to single parents

with custody of children, over 18 years old and are homemakers forced to become the wage earner because of death, divorce, separation, many of which describe BCHS female parents. General Education Degree (GED) programs are those provided for parents seeking to obtain their high school diploma.) Information articles were provided as well including topics in health, education, nutrition, and parenting. Additionally, at least three to five pages of the year-end newsletters were devoted to listing the accomplishment of Head Start parents, such as GED, CDA, VoTech and computer training graduates, parents who completed the CDL (Bus driver licensing program), and a listing of those who became employed or enrolled in college since their enrollment with Head Start (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006, BCHS Parent Newsletters, 1970-2006).

BCHS provided information to parents frequently through memos and minutes sent home to families and posted in parent rooms, classrooms and in the halls of program sites. Memos often referred to upcoming program and community events of interest, meeting announcements, Head Start in the news and Head Start legislative alerts, and reminders of policy and procedures (BCHS Memos, 1970-2006).

Teaching staff and parents often conversed through notes home, and though informal conversations on the phone and at the center. Conversations were generally centered on their child's experience in the home and in the classroom, and sharing information that would better support the child in both environments. Teachers also made home visits to become better acquainted with the family and the home environment. In their center-based classrooms, teachers visited with families at least twice per year and held parent teacher conferences two times per year as well. The primary purpose of the visits was to discuss the child's development and progress in the home and classroom

setting. Parent and teachers shared observations of the child, planned goals and discussed strategies for supporting goal development. Parents were also encouraged and invited to share their personal interest and abilities with Head Start children and through involvement in center and program activities (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCHS Contact Logs, 1970-2006).

In home-based settings, families were visited weekly, to support parents as the child's primary teacher. In this case, the home visitor role was not that of a preschool teacher visiting the home, but as an adult educator, supporting the parent as they plan and facilitate parent and child activities to develop goals identified by both the parents and the home visitor. On this 90 minute, weekly visit, the home visitor also shares resource information to support families in family goal attainment. Home Visitors are responsible to provide comprehensive services to these families, as they share information and support families' education, health, social service, nutrition, and mental health services (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

BCHS keeps families informed about program and community events through memos and announcements. When BCHS parents and staff have planned classroom, center-wide, or program-wide events, such as workshops, conferences, educational trips to Washington D.C., social events, etc., program staff ensure that all relevant parents are informed and encouraged to attend. Community announcements, such as Career Fairs, health screen drives, literacy programs, and career training opportunities, parents are informed of these opportunities through the monthly parent newsletter, flyers posted on site, and personal contacts made to families who have expressed interest in these opportunities (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCHS Memos 1970-2006).

BCHS informs parents of legislative alerts, such as when Head Start funding is threatened to be reduced and diminish services. In such cases, parents encourage other parents to engage in a letter writing campaign, guided by program staff, but led by parent committees (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; Parent Newsletters and Memos, 1970-2006).

BCHS parents also receive numerous education materials on topics such as parenting, child development, menu and budget planning, and time management. Community partners also provide brochures and flyers to be shared with parents, on topics that reflect services in the community. For example, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), a health and nutrition service agency, provides information on dietary requirements for young children, and related health topics (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCCHS Parent Newsletters and Memos, 1970-2006).

Family service workers visit families at least once a month. Each family is assigned to a family service worker, who provides program information, support parents in the development of family goal setting, planning and accomplishing identified objectives. Parents and family service workers are also in constant communication throughout the months, as desired and necessary, through telephone calls, onsite visits, and parent activities and meetings (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCCHS Contact Logs, 1970-2006).

Parents communicate with BCHS as well, through informal conversations with teachers, family service workers and administrative staff. They share information via bus drivers who transport children from home to school and home again. Parents often briefly talk with bus drivers and monitors about the child's evening and morning

experiences as it may be important to ensuring there needs are considered throughout the day (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCHS Contact Logs, 1970-2006).

BCHS believes that positive communication between parents and Head Start staff is essential to providing quality services to children and their families and to ensuring that their strengths are cultivated and needs are addressed.

Addressing Parent Involvement in Health, and Nutrition

Health and nutrition are two of the primary areas of comprehensive services to children and families, both in the classroom and on home visits. During the recruitment process, parents receive information concerning the comprehensive program goals for determining the child's health status. Each child history is completed by the parent in collaboration with the Family Service Worker. Immunization records are obtained from the parent at the time of recruitment and the importance of having up-to-date immunizations is stressed. During recruitment, the Family Service Worker will determine if the family has an ongoing source of health care and medical coverage. Once accepted, Family Service Workers will discuss and document barriers that may be facing the families in achieving medical and dental goals. For children who do not have up to date well child-care, the parent will be assisted in making the necessary arrangements to bring the child up-to-date (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975; 1995).

Head Start programs were required to provide the child's family with the necessary skills and resources to link the family to ongoing health care and were to be encouraged to participate in a Health Advisory Committee (HAC) to assist in planning and evaluating the programs health services. The HAC Committee was responsible for

identifying links to health services in the community and to be involved in the screening and assessment of child health and development. Parents were to receive information about all health resources and provided opportunities to learn the principles of preventative health, emergency first aid and safety measures (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975, 1995).

BCHS collaborated with parents to ensure their children have an ongoing source of health care. In rural areas, transportation to services is often challenging to families who have no personal vehicle and access to public transportation is limited. BCHS responded to the need, by providing parents with resource information on medical providers, and identifying those who accept Medicaid insurances. For many families, support meant continual follow up to ensure appointments were made and completed. For others, BCHS staff aided parents in making the telephone call to the doctor, and often providing transportation to services. BCHS often paid for dental and medical care when it became necessary, aided parents in organizing and maintaining health documents, and offered training and support to parents in conversing with professional staff to clarify concerns or to access the services desired (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

BCHS also provided Health Fairs at Head Start Centers where children received health screenings, including hearing, vision, speech and language, height and weight and developmental check-ups. Families were transported to centers by van, bus and or by available program staff. Health Fairs were typically held during the programs orientation week. As parents and children awaited their appointed time for screenings, they visited the child's classroom where they met classmates and teaching staff. Teachers prepared materials and activities which parents and children could enjoy with one another

as they formed relationships with other parents, children and program staff. Parents were also invited to attend information sessions where they received relevant health information, and a calendar of training events on health and other topics of interest. Families unable to attend the Health Fair were visited by Family Service Workers who assisted them in arranging to obtain required screenings and immunizations (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCHS Parent Newsletters and Memos, 1984-2006).

BCHS strives to form partnerships with health providers, several of whom serve the program in an advisory capacity, both informally and formally, through service to the Health Advisory Committee. BCHS health partners include pediatric physicians, dentists, nutrition consultants, WIC agency staff (Woman, Infants and Children), optometrists, speech and language therapists, psychologists, and public and state health services. The health advisory committee is comprised of several such partners as well as Head Start program staff and parents. The purpose of this committee is to develop, review and revise a plan for health services and education. BCHS believes that it is important to involve parents in health advisory to ensure that the health program is tailored to the needs of families in BCHS, and that it fully utilizes the resources available in the community (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

BCHS provided training to parents on health topics such as first aid, safety, and dental care. Family Service Workers also visited the home and assisted parents in conducting a safety checklist indoors and outdoors and provide resources to make necessary corrections and improvements. On home visits, program staff also model preventative health practices such as frequent hand-washing and encouraging tooth

brushing. BCHS also informs parents about potential health conditions in the community, such as signs and symptoms and prevention (Staff interview, 2006).

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) required that Head Start programs help families to understand the relationship of nutrition to health, factors that influence food practices, ways to address nutritional needs and to establish healthy eating habits in children. Programs must also provide opportunities for training in consumer education topics such as money management, menu planning, etc., so that parents can better fulfill their role and responsibility for meeting the nutritional needs of the family. Parents serving on Head Start Policy Council and Health Advisory Committees should also have opportunity to review and comment on the nutritional services of the program to ensure that the nutritional status of each child is shared with parents, menus and information are regularly provided to parents, and food assistance services are made available to families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975, 1995).

BCHS parents were engaged in nutritional education in a variety of ways. A variety of nutrition training opportunities were provided such as an Eating Right Series and Safe Food Storage. Parents were invited to participate in the Nutrition committee to review meals to be served to children in Head Start. As they volunteered in the classroom, teacher's modeled strategies for encouraging healthy eating habits, during meal times including hand washing and teeth brushing activities. Nutritional health histories were completed by parents to provide the program with information ensuring that meals address the nutrition needs each child. This information often alerts parents to potential concerns, resulting in support services to address the nutrition issue (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; Parent Newsletters and Memos, 1975-2006).

On home visits, BCHS provides nutritional food experiences, engaging both parent and child. As they prepare the snack, the home visitor describes the nutritional value of the food, as well as the educational skills being cultivated in the experience (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; Contact Logs 1970-2006).

Parent Involvement in Mental Health Services

Although mental health services have always been written into performance standards, it has only been in recent years, as brain research has further shown the relevance of mental health to overall development, that it has become more of a focus and emphasis. BCHS has always addressed mental health in children and adults. Through the 1980s they had a child psychologist on staff, which provided classroom support to teaching staff and parents, and individual play therapy for children identified as having social-emotional issues. Many times, these were children who exhibited extreme adverse behavior in the classroom and in the home. Teachers and parents, supported by the psychologist, planned strategies for supporting the child in their environments, and to teach children appropriate ways to express feelings and emotions. Most recently, community partners are utilized to conduct onsite classroom observations to identify children with varying degrees of mental health concerns. If concerns are identified, parents are notified and a discussion ensues on plans for further evaluation and referral. Parents also have access to mental health services. At BCHS, if parents have concerns regarding their own mental health, such as those experiencing domestic violence or substance abuse, BCHS family service workers provide supports and referrals services to the most relevant mental health agency. Family service workers often accompany

families to these services, upon request, and provide follow up care and encouragement throughout the service period (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; Contact Logs, 1970-2006).

At BCHS, health, nutrition and mental health services are developed and monitored by administrative staff, striving to partner with education, social services and parents, to ensure the overall healthy development of the child is developed and maintained (BCHS program plan, 1999, 2004-2006). Bell (2002) advocates strategies where parents are engaged in meaningful decision making, responsibility and advocacy; experiences which foster characteristics attributed to resiliency.

Addressing Parent Involvement in Education

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1996) outlined an approach to engaging parents in child and family development services. The standards required that Head Start staff should maximize the strengths and unique experiences of each child by involving the family in planning and development of education goals and experiences. Head Start contends that parents are the principal influence on early child development and therefore must be a direct participant in the program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975, 1995). A review of Blair County Head Start program plans and assorted documents reveals how these mandates were implemented.

The BCHS mission statement describes a strength based philosophy for supporting children and families and the belief that parents are the most important person and the greatest influence in a young child's life. They encourage parents to be actively

involved in all aspects of program services. (Welcome to Head Start; Parent Handbook, 1973)

BCHS ensured that parents were involved in educational opportunities that enhanced their role as the principal influence on early childhood education and development, by providing training opportunities where parents learned about activities and routines in the home that can reinforce learning and development, providing opportunities for parents to observe growth and development and identify the child's strengths, interest, goals and special needs, and planning parent conferences and periodic home visits by education staff. As required by standards, center-based programs such as BCCHS, are required to provide families with two educational home visits per year and two parent-teacher conferences. BCCHS begins the program year by visiting all enrolled families prior to the beginning of the program year. On this visit, teaching staff become acquainted with families, share program information, provide parent and child activities, briefly observe and converse with parents to learn more about the child's interest and strengths. A parent and teacher conference is planned after screening and assessment is completed, to review and confirm results, and plan subsequent goals in partnership with the family. Parents are encouraged to further inform the assessment process by observing their child and sharing information with Head Start staff (BCCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; Policy Council and Parent Committee Minutes, Contact Logs, and Parent Newsletters, 1970-2006).

BCCHS parents are involved in curriculum development. They are encouraged to provide input into the plan through the curriculum suggestion form, classroom committee meetings, education advisory committee meetings, through participation in

program self assessment and through Policy Council review. They are invited to plan and suggest educational experiences for children in the classroom, as well as those planned for the home environment. In BCHS classrooms, parents are supported as volunteers and further educated on developmentally appropriate expectations and activities for children. Each play area of the classroom is labeled with posters that identify the kinds of experiences a child might explore, skills they are acquiring, and ways that volunteers can support children at play. Parents are encouraged to visit the classroom at least once, based on the belief that parents need to know about the persons and the environment where their children are being educated and cared for several hours a day. They need to see their children playing, exploring and learning. Parents who visit their child's classroom are surprised at how much their child can do and the experiences they enjoy (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006, Policy Council and Parent Committee Minutes, Contact Logs, and Parent Newsletters, 1970-2006).

Parent-child activities are planned to complement classroom experiences and to develop specific goals relevant to each child. Families may receive children's books from the program, and are encouraged to read with their children. The teacher may make suggestions on providing other literacy and math experiences in the home, such as reading cereal boxes, counting toys and pictures, and playing matching games (BCHS Staff interview; 2006).

CABC strives to respect and appreciate the diversity in the families they serve. Although the program is primary homogenous as it relates to race and ethnicity, CABC recognizes the rich diversity in family contexts, traditions and family values. It is the belief of CABC that the program environment should be a place where every child and

every family feels welcomed and included. For this reason, they strive to make celebrations meaningful to all families in the program. Subsequently, activities are planned based upon individual interests of children and adults, developmental abilities, family culture, and family beliefs. They have three major classroom celebrations involving children and families including, Fallfest, a celebration of fall; Winterfest, a celebration of winter, and Springfest, a celebration of spring (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006; BCHS Staff Interview, 2006).

Parents are also involved in planning individualized education services to children. Parents are involved in the screening, observation and assessment process to determine the child's intellectual, social-emotion, and physical goals. Additionally, when issues of concern arise on the bus or in the classroom, a Kids In Discussion KID meeting is held. Participants of this meeting include parents, the teaching team, and all relevant staff as indicated. For example, if the behavior only occurs on the bus, the bus driver is invited. If it's a nutritional concern, the Health Coordinator attends. After a comprehensive discussion of the child's development and the issue in question, a plan of action is determined and follow up planned. Parents are involved in the plan of action as they share relevant behaviors that occur in the home, and provide additional support and intervention in the home, as planned by the committee (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

The education component of BCHS strives to provide comprehensive services to children and families by partnering with parents, community partners, and other program management staff (BCHS Program Plan, 1999, 2004-2006). In activities where parents are meaningfully engaged in curriculum development, advocacy and as their child's

teacher, parents become self confident, responsible, creative, resource, and have a sense of purpose, all characteristics attributed to resilient persons (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Addressing Parent Involvement in Program Governance

Parent involvement Standards require that Head Start programs provide experiences and activities which support and enhance parental decision making and problem-solving skills through direct involvement in program planning and administration. These roles and responsibilities were originally outlined in the form of 70.2 of Head Start Performance Standards. The 70.2 outlined the structure, composition, function and responsibility of Policy Groups including Center Committees, Policy Committees and Policy Council. This article of Head Start legislation mandates that parents of children in the program constitute a majority on the policy board and details the ways in which the policy boards must, by law, have input and decision making power in different areas of program operation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

BCHS utilized the 70.2 in preparing its parents for active participation in Head Start. The Welcome to Head Start Book is given to every parent upon enrollment, describing the opportunities and services provided to every child and family. The booklet details committees available for parent involvement. All parents are automatically a member of Parent Center Committees, which are held in a locale and time convenient for the greatest number of parents of the center. This committee works with teaching staff to provided quality child development programming. Parent's representatives are elected

from Parent Center Committees to Policy Council. Parents on the Center Committee advise the PC representatives on matters coming before the policy board and the reports back to the Center Committees. Each Head Start class and center had a parent committee (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006, Welcome To Head Start Handbook, 1974-2006, Policy Council Minutes, 1980-2006).

BCHS Policy Council was the policymaking board of the program, comprised of parent reps elected from Center Committee as well as other members representing community organizations and former Head Start parents. As mandated in performance standards, this PC was responsible for approving and disapproving all major decisions concerning this program based on information and recommendations from the Head Start Director and standing committees. These committees included a budget committee, personnel, recruitment, and by-laws. Parents receive training in order to effectively assume their responsibilities such as in parliamentary procedure, budget and finance, etc. (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

The BCHS finance committee is responsible for reviewing and approving the program budget and subsequent finance reports. Each month the Fiscal Director prepares financial reports to be distributed to the Policy Council. The report includes the amount budgeted or contracts, expenditures for the month, expenditures to date, balance unexpended and percent expended. Policy Council receives training to understand these reports in order to make informed decisions about the approval or disapproval of the proposed budget or report (BCHS Program Plan; 1999, 2004- 2006).

The personnel committee participates in the interviewing, hiring and terminating staff by making recommendations to Policy Council for approval or disapproval.

Generally, at BCHS, applications are screened by relevant Head Start staff, and then interviewed by the personnel committee. Parents serving on this committee also receive interview training, Head Start staff qualifications, etc. (BCHS Program Plan; 1999, 2004-2006).

The recruitment committee participates along with other families, informally, in neighborhood scouting for eligible families. The committee further contributes selection of families into the BCHS program. Family Service workers ensure that applications are anonymous, so that selection is based solely on criteria, also determined by the committee and approved by Policy Council. Once prepared, the committee scores applications against the criteria, which are prioritized for enrollment, to ensure those with greatest need are served (BCHS Program Plan; 1999, 2004- 2006).

The bylaws committee reviews, revises and proposes changes to by-laws, which govern the way in which Policy Council conducts business. By-laws detail items such as Policy Council composition, requirements for a quorum, impasse procedures, and attendance requirements. The by-laws are reviewed by this committee annually and recommendations made to the Policy Council (BCHS Program Plan; 1999, 2004-2006).

Center and Classroom Committees were responsible for assisting teachers in the classroom with curriculum planning and development, and in carrying out routine classroom activities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995). BCHS provides opportunities for these meetings during regular classroom hours so that parents are more likely able to attend. Notice of the meetings is sent to parents at least 1 week prior (although it is also place on the annual calendar), and parents are invited to submit agenda items to be discussed at these meetings. One parent is elected to record minutes of

the meetings, which are posted in the classroom for non –attending parents to read. BCHS parents plan monthly parent activities, fund raising events, elect Policy Council representative, and support the classroom in any way deemed necessary. They receive training in by-laws, rules and responsibilities of the committee and its officers and the roles and responsibilities of the Policy Council representative. They also are encouraged to participate in workshops planned around expressed interest of parents in each center (BCHS Program Plans, 1999, 2004-2006). These strategies for engaging parents in program governance, foster positive outcomes such as problem solving, conflict resolution, and responsibility, and all characteristics attributed to resiliency.

Parent Involvement in Program Monitoring

BCHS parents are encouraged to participate in annual program monitoring. A parent satisfaction survey is distributed to families to determine if interests and needs have been addressed through program services. Classroom committees and Policy Council also complete an annual survey to ensure that they have been effectively involved in program governance. Also, parents are invited to participate in annual self-assessment. Documents reviewed indicated parent involvement in the use of the SAVI, the OSPRI and most recently the PRISM, all of which are self-assessment instruments. Prior to the assessment activity, parents are provided training in the use of the instrument, and give guidance and support to complete the task successfully. They are assigned an area to review, generally based upon expressed interest. After the review has been completed the self-assessment committee meets to review areas for improvement, strengths and recommendations. Subsequently, the relevant committee (education, health

advisory, etc.) meets to develop a plan of action for making improvements and corrections (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

Parents who participated in the self-assessment process over decades have made recommendations such as the formation of a task force to discuss barriers that prohibit effective communication, discuss ways to involve staff and volunteer organizations in parent activities, a revision of the parent questionnaire, discuss ways to involve more parents on committees and in the classroom, review and revise parent needs assessment, train teaching teams how to better utilize parent volunteers, provide ample notice of parent meetings and noted parent training events in the program calendar. They also recommended a revision of the parent recruitment volunteer interest form, posting children's artwork in the parent room, and post training calendar just after training needs assessment is completed (OSPRI 1994,1996). Parent involvement in program monitoring activities requires commitment, organization, and responsibility, all traits attributed to resiliency.

Parent Education Opportunities

Head Start requires that programs provide a variety of opportunities must be created for parents to be involved in education and other appropriate interventions, including opportunities for them to participate in continuing in education and employment training and other employment services through formal and informal networks in the community. As parent involvement continued to be a focus of Head Start, the Bureau responded by developing and disseminating a variety of program resources including several parent education curricula, a guide and video for involving

parents in Head Start, a self-sufficiency series, adult literacy demonstrations, and a family needs assessment model instrument (Washington & Oyemade, 1987).

At BCHS parents participated in trainings notes as interests, including Exploring Parenting, First Aid and CPR, Adult Basic Education Program, Looking at Life Series, Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, the Nurturing Program, and Exploring Parenting Child Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practices. Parents receive education and training information through onsite workshops, newsletters, parent handbooks, classroom committee meetings, conferences and association meetings. They also receive practical experience as they volunteer in the classroom and in other aspects of the program. For example, they are to observe teachers modeling positive behavior guidance, facilitating engaging activities with children, encouraging independence in children and providing physical and verbal support to children (BCHS Program Plans, 1999-2004-2006; Parent Handbook, 1974-2006 and Parent Newsletters 1972-2006).

Parents at BCHS attend state and regional meetings where they are engaged in training and in making recommendations for program and training improvement across the state and region. BCHS parents have had opportunities to attend the Central Pennsylvania Parent and Staff Association meetings, Pennsylvania State meetings, Regional training events and National Conferences provided every three years in various regions across the nation. National conferences provide an assortment of workshop opportunities, and expose parents to persons and environments of other cultures. Regional and State meetings provide a forum for discussion on issues relevant to programs to the state and region, and to share how individual programs are addressing the issues. For example, in many programs, parent involvement in classroom and center

activities has been challenging. Programs who have had more success shared their strategies, providing encouragement and hope to the others. These meetings also created opportunities for parents attend presentations, led by experts from other programs and States, broadening their scope of understanding as it relates to parenting, educational opportunities and leadership in the community (Head Start State and Regional Announcements and handbooks; 1980-2004)

BCHS provides opportunities for training and experience in a variety of employment opportunities within the context of Head Start including the Up and Running Program. In this program, parents participate in meeting core training requirements including an individual assessment, a self sufficiency series (resume/interview skills, job search, completing forms and applications, study/writing skills), a personal effectiveness series including stress management, goal setting, parenting skills, conflict resolution, budgeting, family dynamics, effective communication, assertiveness training. They develop an individual training plan in partnership with a mentor, and participate in on site career planning opportunities as in intern at Head Start, or by taking GED refresher courses or CDL courses. Off site planning possibilities required that each participant enroll in at least one career prep course at a post secondary institution. Eighty percent of the participants enrolled in a class at a secondary education facility. Seventy percent attended college or other form of training and education (BCHS Program Plans, 1999-2004-2006, Contact Logs, BCCHS Parent Newsletter, 1970-2006). Bell (2001) advocates strategies which engage adults in relevant educational opportunities such as those provided by BCCHS, which foster positive outcomes, including those attributed to resiliency.

Parents as Volunteers

Head Start Performance Standards (1975/1995) require that programs provide opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, understanding of early child development and experiences where they will work with their own child, supported by Head Start staff (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1975/1995).

At BCHS, parent volunteers, those working in classrooms, on buses, performing clerical work, in food service and assistant management staff are provided with support and relevant training. Classroom and bus aide volunteers receive training in developmentally appropriate practices, behavior guidance practices and in ways to interact with and engage children in singing, reading and play activities. Parents assisting in food service learn to utilize sanitary practices. Those assisting clerical and management staff receive relevant guides as it is related to the task (BCHS Program Plans, 1999-2004-2006).

A volunteer conduct policy adopted by the BCHS Policy Council governs the way in which volunteers should conduct themselves in the center. The policy details unacceptable forms of behavior and communication and the consequences for such behavior, including suspension from volunteer services. They are also provided incentives to encourage active involvement by way of an appreciation closet where they may spend accumulated points to purchase household items they are not permitted to buy with food stamps. Child care was also provided for parent volunteers at BCHS at no charge to parents attending center committee, classroom committee, training sessions or involved in other activities (BCHS Program Plans 1999-2006).

Every year, parents were recognized for volunteering and received plaques, certificates or other such tokens of appreciation (BCHS Program Plan, 1999, 2004-2006; Parent Newsletters, 1774-2006; BCHS Staff Interview, 2006). Henderson and Milestein (1998) advocate volunteer experiences where adults develop skills, as well as self-confidence, learned helpfulness, responsibility and purpose, all characteristics attributed to resiliency.

Parents as Paid Staff

BCHS ascribes to hiring parents into positions where they are most qualified to ensure the success of the parent, as well as maintain program quality. Open positions are posted through advertisement, through memos to parents and newsletters, so that all parents have opportunity to consider their qualifications as it relates to the position. Parents, who have met the qualifications, are invited to the interview process and are screened along with all other applicants. When all factors are equal, parents will receive preference for employment in the Head Start program for openings for which they are qualified (U.S. department of Health and Human Services, 1975; 1995).

Parents are also trained and hired as substitute staff, providing them opportunity for experience and skill development. Training opportunities are provided twice a year for the purpose of recruiting parents to provide back-up support in the classroom, and on buses when regular staff is off work due to sickness, personal day, etc.(BCHS Program Plan; 1999, 2004-2006). Masten and Coatsworth (1998) encourage opportunities where adults develop and utilize skills in ways that are meaningful and relevant to individual persons, as such experiences foster positive outcomes attributed to resiliency.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Parents cited limitations to parent involvement activities such as transportation, the need for childcare and conflicting school and work schedules. Funding reductions in training and technical assistance also limit parent involvement because it prevented programs from supporting parents with childcare and transportation costs, and therefore also reduced the level of parent involvement. However, BCHS sought funding creatively and responded to these barriers by continuing to provide transportation to parents who wished to volunteer or attend meetings. Child care initiatives at BCHS addressed the needs of working families (Staff interview, 2006).

Welfare reform had an adverse impact on parent involvement at BCHS. BCHS staff believed that parent activities created a way for parents to socialize as well as to learn, explore unfamiliar territories, and acquire new interests. Since welfare reform pushed parents into low-paying jobs, requiring many of them to work two and three jobs to make ends meet, their attendance at program meetings and activities has been sparse (Staff interview, 2006).

Of greatest impact on Head Start parent involvement is the current Head Start Reauthorization Bill in which the Bill before the House and Senate proposes to significantly diminish parent involvement in Head Start, leaving them with little or no power to make real decisions that affect children. Head Start parents across the nation have united to advocate for meaningful involvement in program oversight, the foundation for Head Start's success (NHSA, 2005).

The Four Elements in Practice at Blair County Head Start

An examination of Blair County's plan and practices for parent involvement reveals an approach that includes recognition, training, meaningful decision making and resiliency.

Recognition

In its earliest years, as with the federal approach to parent involvement in Head Start, the approach in Blair County Head reflected a view that parents were deficit, needing education, training and resources to correct deficiencies. However, by the 1970's Blair County's approach became one in which parents were recognized as having strengths, abilities and diverse interests. With its vision to assist families in providing nurturing environments for their children by providing an atmosphere of mutual respect, loyalty and trust, they recognized parents as important to and to be appreciated.

BCHS also recognized the unique needs of teen parents and partnered with Teen Link, to provide individualized training and case management services to young parents. As many of BCCHS's parents were employed and in education programs, they offered child care services through the Rose Bradley Center, and later Best Care and Fairview Centers, and in the 1990's provided extended and full day-full year Head Start services in response to expressed needs for child care. The home-based and center-based BCCHS options provided parents with additional choices of service that demonstrated respect for parent schedules and values.

BCCHS demonstrates respect for each family's traditions as they provide celebrations that appreciate seasons, rather than holidays which may offend others.

BCHS parents were encouraged to volunteer in classrooms, on committees and advisory boards, in recognition as capable learners and with experience and abilities to contribute to program development and improvement.

BCHS has a vision and mission that reflects the philosophy that parents are the child's principal influence, and demonstrate recognition of parents as such as they involve parents in screening, observation and ongoing assessment, and in goal and curriculum. BCHS clearly has a plan and practices for an approach to parent involvement that demonstrates recognition of parents as important, capable, and to be respected and appreciated.

Training

BCHS has an approach to parent involvement that includes ample training and education opportunities. They provide workshops where parents can make crafts and learning games to use at home with their children. BCHS provides training in numerous topics of expressed parental interest, such as conflict resolution, parenting classes, money management, first aid and CPR, opportunities to be trained as a paid class aid/substitute, bus aide and as a bus driver. They partner with social services agencies such as Teen Link, the Nurturing Program and the Networking Program to provide additional training and support for specialized populations.

Parent communication efforts were also a source for providing educational information. Through newsletters, home visits, parent conferences and articles of interest, parents were informed on topics such as selecting safe and appropriate toys for children, time management strategies, and planning healthy meals.

Parents at BCHS also have opportunities to attend state, regional and national Head Start conferences where they received training on selected topics such as parliamentary procedure, preparing for self assessment, the role and responsibilities of Policy Council, an overview of Head Start Performance Standards in specified areas, parent rights and responsibilities, and a host of other topics. A review of BCHS's policy and practices in parent involvement reveals a strong training approach.

Resiliency

Resiliency development is inherent in BCHS's approach to parent involvement. It begins with recognition of parents as essential partners in the education of young children, as important to the success of the program. It develops with ample training opportunities where parents acquire and renew skills and are introduced to new ideas and concepts, and involvement in meaningful decision making build confidence and a sense of empowerment, all fostering resiliency in families.

BCHS sought to strengthen their approach to fostering resiliency as they partnered with social service agencies in serving specialized populations such as teen parents, and those dealing with critical issues, such as drugs and alcohol abuse. They seek to support parents in improving their quality of life as defined by family goals, by partnering with agencies that serve the Head Start population including school districts, community colleges, Career Link centers, and health and nutrition agencies. Many of these partners served on BCHS's advisory boards, where parents could work side by side, helping to inform policy and change in the community and to develop stronger links to accessing resources.

BCHS also provide opportunities for parents to become paid staff. Some are trained and hired as substitute aids, often developing an interest in early care and education, and after formal education acquired, become teachers at BCHS or in its child care centers. Others may be trained and hired as bus aides or bus drivers, or for clerical support. BCHS also provided a forum for parents to receive on the job training, as they participated in welfare to work programs. The Up and Running program of BCHS provide parents with various types of internship opportunities as they were trained in areas of interest.

Decision making

Parents at BCHS are involved in meaningful decision making processes. Initially, in the mid to late sixties, parents assumed the role of an advisory board, where plans were made and submitted to Policy Council with a recommendation for approval. However, beginning with the development of the 70.2, BCHS's Policy Council parent took on the prescribed role. They are involved in planning, as well as in discussion and critique and ultimately in making decisions relevant to program governance and oversight. Policy Council parents also have opportunity to serve on subcommittees such as the finance, recruitment and selection, and the self assessment committees. They serve on advisory committees within BCHS including health advisory committees and education advisory boards, where community partners, parents and program staff discuss issues and make recommendations to Policy Council.

BCHS parents are involved in curriculum development as they share observations and information about their enrolled child, and partner with Head Start teachers to make decisions in planning appropriate and interesting goals for children. Throughout the year, parents continue to make decisions regarding their child's education as they update goals

that reflect child progress and development, and plan strategies for skill development. Additionally, parents are engaged in decision making as they plan family goals, develop an action plan, and with the support of Head Start personnel, access resources and services to accomplish their plans. BCHS parents are involved in various ways in meaningful decision making.

BCHS's approach to parent involvement is four-fold. It recognizes parents as important and capable, provides opportunities for training and education, engages parents in meaningful decision making and fosters resiliency in the families they serve. BCHS strengths have been in the recognition of parents as capable learners with potential and promise, in provision of training opportunities and in fostering resiliency in the families they serve. Parents at BCHS are involved in meaningful decision making through educational goal development, family goal planning, through committees and through Policy Council. However, participation in many center-based activities has been more challenging as parents are either enrolled in formal education programs or working one or more jobs to meet the needs of their families with schedules that are inflexible and demanding. The goals we have desired for families have been attained for many BCHS parents, yet challenge this program to seek innovative strategies for continuing this four-fold approach to parent involvement.

An analysis of BCHS parent involvement policies and practices reveals the four elements of recognition, training, resiliency and decision making similar to those that existed during my involvement with this program, demonstrating generalizability to the overall Head Start experience.

CHAPTER SIX

ACKNOWLEDGING THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HEAD START

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the conclusions, implications and recommendations of my research in response to the question: *Are my personal and professional Head Start experiences generalizable within the Head Start experience?* The chapter begins with an overview of the four elements as identified in my reflections on Head Start experience, a history of Head Start parent involvement policy, in research, and a case study of parent involvement in Blair County Head Start.

The Four Elements of Head Start Parent Involvement

A review of my personal and professional experiences with Head Start, a history of parent involvement policy, research literature, and a case study of Blair County Head Start reveals a parent involvement approach that includes recognition, training, resiliency and decision making. As a Head Start parent and recipient of Head Start's recognition, training, resiliency and decision making parent involvement efforts, I can fully appreciate the extent in which this program changes the lives of families. Head Start's recognition of me as a capable person with potential and promise led me to believe it of myself. Having confidence that I could learn, explore new experiences, and take on fresh challenges, I was eager and able to participate in training for preparation for life beyond Head Start. Their resiliency efforts equipped me with the supports and resources needed to make a critical decision that would change my life forever. This experience taught me lessons that led to my success as a Head Start teacher and later, education coordinator. Because

of the recognition, training, resiliency building efforts and opportunities for decision making in my personal life, I was able to ensure that Head Start parents in my BCHS classroom and in the Bedford Fulton Head Start community were treated with the same respect and given the same opportunities as had been granted me.

At the national level, where I serve as consultant and Federal Reviewer, I continue to see these four elements in action in most Head Start programs. Having experienced this approach to Head Start parent involvement myself, I am able to understand and appreciate each program's unique approach to parent involvement within the framework of maintaining recognition, training, resiliency and decision making. I can appreciate the success of parents that others may deem small or insignificant, and offer hope and promise to parents living in circumstances I once endured. I know first hand what Head Start can do for families, and when assessing programs for compliance to Performance Standards, my expectations are high, since our families deserve the same opportunities that have led me to my own resiliency.

An analysis of the history of Head Start's parent involvement policies reveals that it has a history of policy that is based upon four-fold approach to parent involvement that includes recognition, training, resiliency, and decision making. Although in its earliest history, the implementation of policy resulted in recognition of parents as important to program governance in form only, the Policy Council served as an advisory committee rather than in planning and approval processes. In the early 1970s, recognition and involvement in meaningful decision making became substantial and significant. Training was always a strong component of Head Start's history. Throughout the decades, funding for parent training has diminished, but programs have sought creative ways to ensure that

families receive trainings of interest as determined by parents. Additionally, recognition, training, and meaningful decision making were also a part of Head Start's unspoken plan for fostering resiliency, and became more apparent with the development of Head Start Performance Standards.

A study of research demonstrates how Head Start mothers were recognized as important and capable, participated in trainings that were interesting and relevant, had opportunities to be engaged in meaningful decision making, and were supported and encouraged, fostering resiliency. Parents credit Head Start for providing resources and supporting them in planning ways to achieve family goals fostering a sense of empowerment. They all attended various training events that reflected the diverse interests of families served and were respected and appreciated for their decision making abilities and contributions to program governance and have cultivated many characteristics attributed to resilient adults. Parent involvement approaches of recognition, training, decision making and resiliency are implied in many of the conclusions and recommendations of longitudinal studies examined and further demonstrate generalization of my Head Start reflections to the Head Start experience.

An examination of Blair County Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices, provided evidence that the program recognizes parents as important and capable, provides ample training based upon parent needs and interests and are engaged in meaningful decision making, and are supported and encouraged in ways that foster resiliency. BCHS program plans and policies detail how the program ensures parents are recognized as the child's principal influence, and as important to the Head Start program. They describe a process for planning training that is interesting and relevant to parents.

They also have policies and procedures for involving parents in meaningful decision making.

Beginning with my experiences in Head Start, in the history of parent involvement Head Start policy, research on parent involvement studies, and a case study of BCHS, the data reveal the existence of the elements of recognition, training, resiliency and decision making, yet some have been more consistently upheld than others.

Recognition

Recognition of parents means that Head Start views parents as capable and with potential. They have diverse interests and skills to be explored and appreciated. Recognition implies that parents are to be treated with respect and as important to child development and to the success of the Head Start program. Recognition of parents is vital to fostering positive outcomes in families, as it opens the door for building relationships, and where parents find comfort and security in exploring uncharted waters. I know that had I not felt recognized by Head Start, that is, respected, appreciated and needed, I would not have attended that first parent meeting, may have continued to live in despair and abuse, and may never have entered the doors of a college classroom. Recognition is the foundation upon which training, and resiliency and decision making is built.

Recognition of parents as the child's principal influenced has survived for over four decades. Parents have always been embraced as the child's principal influence. Although originally parents were recognized more for their needs and deficits, they have come to be appreciated and respected for their strengths and the contributions they can make to child development and program administration. That is until now, with proposed

Head Start Authorization, which diminishes the role of parents in the child assessment and in program governance.

Training

Training in Head Start takes many forms. It may occur in a small group setting where a speaker shares information and provides opportunities for discussion and reflection. It may be in a workshop setting where parents gather to make crafts, learning games or to organize family pictures and artifacts. Head Start training is planned around parent interest and goals. Topics may include family budgeting, cooking, or positive approaches to discipline. Others trainings are planned to prepare parents serving on committees such as the finance committee, personnel committee or the recruitment and selection committee. Other training opportunities are less formal, and occur in Head Start classrooms, where parents are invited to observe children or to engage in playful activities that strengthen their understanding of child development and learning. I recall participating in all forms of training events at Head Start, all of which prepared me for college and inspired my life long love for learning. Training is important to fostering positive outcomes in families, as it provides them with information and strategies for successfully accomplishing their goals.

Training opportunities have not waned over the last four decades. In my experience with Head Start, I participated in numerous training events and opportunities, including workshops, orientation events, and through volunteering on committees and in the classroom. A review of Head Start's history on parent involvement, research, and a the case study of BCHS, demonstrates that even as funding reductions occurred,

programs found innovative ways to ensure that training opportunities were provided and planned in accordance with the interest and goals of the families they serve.

Resiliency

Resiliency building efforts embrace parents with encouragement and support. They equip parents with resources and opportunities to plan and accomplish personal and family goals. Research has described resilient persons as those who thrive through adversity, that is, they learn through the experience and build upon it to improve their current situation. My experience with Head Start is one of resiliency and empowerment. Head Start's history of parent involvement reveals a pattern of resiliency building in Head Start. Its Performance Standards provide a plan for fostering resiliency, as they support parents in goal development and achievement, and provide resources and opportunities from which parents can successfully address family needs. Resiliency is often the product of active involvement in Head Start, as well as the strategies used to build characteristics such as confidence and competency.

Resiliency building efforts have remained strong in most programs. As a parent in Head Start, we were provided with ample resources and equipped to access those that best address their family needs and goals. Head Start's history of parent involvement did not specifically speak to resiliency; however, when comparing Head Start performance standards with strategies for cultivating resiliency, it is evident that Head Start has a plan for building resiliency and monitors to ensure compliance. Research indicates that with some exceptions, parents receive support and encouragement for their accomplishments and efforts toward their goals. In some programs studied, parents were not so readily embraced by personnel who did not ascribe to Head Start's philosophy on parent

involvement. Other studies revealed a positive impact on parent self concept and enhancing family circumstances, such as finances and developing nurturing relationships. BCHS continues efforts to build resiliency in the families they serve, through encouragement, support, and by strengthening relationships with social service agencies in the community that support Head Start families.

Decision Making

Opportunity for parents to participate in meaningful decision making takes many forms. Parents participate in programmatic decision making through committees and planning activities. Parents come to Head Start as decision makers in varying degrees and circumstances. Many of Head Start's parents make day to day decisions that have both a short and long term impact. Head Start seeks to strengthen decision making abilities to ensure positive outcomes.

As a Head Start parent I was intently involved in meaningful decision making. I served on classroom committees, center committees and in Policy Council. As I participated in the development of my children's educational plan, I made decisions about the goals we hoped to achieve in their Head Start experience. With Head Start's support and encouragement, I also made the ultimate decision to leave a life of abuse and despair and move on to a life filled with hope and promise for me and my children.

Head Start's history shows that decision making was not initially empowering and engaging, as parents served only in an advisory capacity. However, as history progressed, Head Start Performance Standards required that parents be meaningfully engaged in various ways. Research reveals a 30-plus year history of engaging families in meaningful decision making. However, some studies have revealed programs that continue in the

advisory mode of parent involvement, but when monitored, they are held accountable and required to change or be in jeopardy of losing their grant. BCHS is continuous its history of involving parents in decision making. Parents participate in developing educational plans and family goals plans, and they participate on various committees and on Policy Council.

It is clear that the elements of recognition, training, resiliency and decision making are vital components to the Head Start approach to parent involvement and results in fostering positive outcomes for children and families.

Additional Insights

In my experience with Blair County Head Start, it is evident that relationships were crucial in fostering my resiliency. Ruthann, the family service worker who knocked on my door, earned my trust as she talked about her appreciation in seeing my children play happily outdoors, and as she respected my wishes to talk outside my door rather than insisting on going inside. She spoke to me as a person of importance when considering matters regarding my children. Therein, a lasting relationship began and continues as she is the Head Start director and me as a governing board member. Romaine, the parent involvement coordinator showed the same respect and appreciation for what she considered to be my strengths. It was her support and encouragement that led me to confidently take on new challenges and to become a resilient adult. The late James Matlack, the former Head Start director, treated all parents as essential to the success of the program, from which lasting relationships were built. Yolanda and Terri, both education coordinators at BCHS, saw potential in me and encouraged me both as a

teacher and friend. Our relationship led me to become a good teacher and later an education coordinator at Bedford Fulton Head Start. My relationship with Barb, the Head Start director at that program, my mentor and friend, led me to become more confident in my advocacy for children and families. I have memories of many people in Head Start, whose relationships I treasure and to whom I ascribe my success on the journey to resiliency.

Relationships are significant to parent recognition, training, resiliency building and in comfortably engaging parents in decision making. A review of Head Start's parent involvement history demonstrates the importance of relationship development to successful parent involvement that fosters positive outcomes. Head Start performance standards speak to relationship building and detail numerous strategies and contexts in which it must occur. Relationships between Head Start parents and staff are evident in Head Start research. It took relationships between trusting adults to begin to recognize the potential of parents and for parents to accept the encouragement and support offered by Head Start staff. Parents, who comfortably participated in training events and in meaningful decision making, were those who felt respected, appreciated and secure. Relationships were also evident in adults who described life changes characteristic of resiliency. They were offered guidance, resources and encouragement to ensure they were able to accomplish individual and family goals. BCHS has a history of relationship development with families. Family service workers, teaching staff, and management personnel strive to know their families well, in order to build and sustain trusting relationships. Relationships begin with respect and recognition of parents as important, capable and with great potential.

The Future of the Four Elements in Parental Involvement in Head Start

Based upon my experience and its connections to policies, research, and program operations of Head Start, I challenge the current version of the Head Start Reauthorization Bill. I make four recommendations for the improvement of Head Start.:

- 1) Strengthen commitment to parents;
- 2) Acknowledge the four elements explicitly;
- 3) Assure adequate funding for parental involvement and teacher education; and
- 4) Engage in research concerning parental involvement around the four elements.

Strengthen Commitment to Parents

As a former Head Start parent, I appreciate the importance of parent involvement to programs and to individual families, and wish to see Head Start continue to flourish in service to children and families. The current administration has proposed a Head Start Reauthorization Bill that poses a threat to Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices. The bill proposes to reduce the role of parents in program governance, a vital component of parent involvement that engages parents in training, decision making and nurtures resilience. "Under the Senate bill (S.1107), the board of directors would have complete authority on all decisions and would be required only to "consult" with the Policy Council. The Policy Council would lose its authority to jointly make decisions with the board of directors and instead make recommendations to the board, which could be accepted or rejected. The result would be that the existing system of shared governance and the high level of parental involvement in administering Head Start programs would be eliminated" (NHSA, 2006).

The National Head Start Association (NHSA) is very concerned about the weakening of Policy Council as well as the unfunded regulation requiring improved teacher credential by 2011 and continues to work to see changes that address these concerns included in a “manager’s amendment” before the Bill goes to the floor. If that doesn’t happen, they will work to get key amendments offered and accepted on the floor (NHSA, 2006).

Since unfunded regulations often result in targeting resources from line items treated with less importance, such as the requirement for improved teacher credentials, I support NHSA in their request that funds be allocated for teacher education. Additionally, I propose that the bill keep Policy Council intact as it stand today, with parent representatives having responsibilities in program oversight and administration. Rather than diminish the role of parents on Policy Council, I propose that funding be increased to ensure parents are well trained and supported.

This study has shown had parent involvement in decision making is essential to fostering positive outcomes in families. Parental involvement in Policy Council is one avenue in which Head Start demonstrates its recognition of parents as capable and important, and provides a venue for training and resiliency building. Research has demonstrated that parental involvement in meaningful decision making has a positive impact on families. They are better equipped to advocate for family needs and in accomplishing goals. Parents experience a sense of empowerment which influences and enhances the family atmosphere. Head Start families and local communities that support them must loudly acclaim their disgust for a bill that weakens the core of this program. It

is parental oversight that has developed Head Start from a project to a service that builds strong families and strengthens communities.

Acknowledge the Four Elements Explicitly

Although no definition for Head Start parent involvement has been formally written, it has been interpreted to mean that parents will participate in all aspects of the program, from participation in children's activities to direct involvement in policy and program decisions. A study of my experiences with Head Start, both as a parent and profession, a review of Head Start parent involvement history and research, and a case study of one Head Start program has enabled me to identify four primary elements of Head Start's approach to parent involvement. These elements are recognition of parents as capable, important and with potential, the provision of training opportunities, resiliency building strategies and opportunities for meaningful decision making.

Although the Head Start Performance Standards include a plan for ensuring that the four elements of recognition, training, resiliency and decision making are implemented in Head Start programs across the nation, they have not been clearly identified as such. I recommend that these elements be clearly defined and outlined in documents expediently so that they can serve to formally direct practice. With precise attention to these four elements of parent involvement, Head Start personnel can be educated on ways to ensure parents are recognized and embraced throughout the program. There must be enhanced attention to the importance of parent training as being essential to fostering resiliency in families and for ensuring their success in programmatic responsibilities. Opportunities for meaningful decision making should be stressed. By

bringing this element of parent involvement to the forefront, programs can ensure that it is respected as vital to parents and programs, and not merely a stamp of approval. And most assuredly, since most of Head Start's Family Partnership Performance Standards are centered on strategies that foster resiliency, program staff must be educated and held accountable for their role and responsibility in resiliency building processes.

Assure Adequate Funding for Parental Involvement and Teacher Education

In Head Start Reauthorization Bill, there are several proposals that require adequate funding to ensure they are effectively implemented. This includes the regulations regarding school readiness, collaborations with community agencies, and teacher credentials. There is no mention of improving parent involvement efforts, but rather to diminish this important component of the Head Start program.

The Head Start Reauthorization bill includes the 2005 School Readiness Act that proposes to improve Head Start by focusing on school readiness, improving grantee oversight and program management, and increasing competitiveness in the program. The bill supports provisions to increase competition in the program, in particular by requiring all grantees to meet certain school readiness outcomes in order to be designated as priority grantees ("Statement of Administration Policy," 2005).

The Act proposes that Head Start strengthen State and local partnerships such as with other early childhood programs, especially local school districts, and by enhancing State collaboration on early childhood programs ("Statement of Administration Policy," 2005). The Bill also required that half of all Head Start teachers have a bachelor's degree by 2011.

All of these proposals require funding to ensure they can be effectively implemented, yet, the bill includes no funds to accomplish these requirements (“Update on Head Start Reauthorization in the 109th Congress,” 2006). Therefore, many Head Start program will look to line items that are not considered as vital as preparing teachers to meet these requirements and to train them in strategies to ensure child outcomes meet federal expectations. Since increased parent involvement is not on the forefront of congressional oversight, funds once used for parent training will be transferred where it appears it is most needed.

Although I do not support many of the items proposed in the Head Start Reauthorization Bill, if they are to be fully and successfully implemented, funds must be ensured so that parent involvement is not further reallocated to other line items. I recommend that funding for teacher training be increase targeted and with specificity, so that funds for other line items need not be reallocate to ensure teacher education regulations are accomplished.

This study has shown that Head Start has a comprehensive approach to parent involvement that includes recognition, training, resiliency and decision making. My experience has shown that these elements were critical ingredients as I have become a resilient adult. Head Start’s history of Head Start had indicated the importance of this component to cultivating families who are empowered and competent. The Head Start Performance Standards clearly demonstrate a plan that reflects these four elements to ensure that all families have such opportunities. Research has shown that where these elements are consistently utilized, parents and children experience positive outcomes. A study of BCHS, demonstrates how these elements are successfully put into practice.

Therefore, I heartily recommend that parent involvement be reconsidered as necessary and vital component of the Head Start and its families, and that funding be provided to ensure full implementation of the elements of recognition, training, resiliency and decision making.

Engage in Research Concerning Parental Involvement Around the Elements.

A review of studies on Head Start parent involvement revealed many forms of quantitative research. While such studies are important, I believe that there are people and places behind the statistics that can tell us so much more about Head Start's success in fostering resiliency in the families they serve. However, qualitative research on the impact of Head Start's approach to parent involvement is limited. Currently, only two such studies conducted solely for the purpose of collecting qualitative data on parental experiences with Head Start and its impact on families were found by this researcher, including *The Head Start Mother* (Peters, 1998) and *Something Better for My Children* (Mills, 1999). There are a few longitudinal studies that address parent involvement, however, much more needs to be studied.

I recommend that further research be directed toward examining Head Start's policies and practices for fostering positive outcomes in families, and specifically those that foster social emotional resiliency. I suggest the research examines Head Start's policies, practices and barriers to that preclude successful parent involvement.

I suggest that more attention be given to Head Start as a family program, and not simply an educational institution. Research that investigates Head Start's approach to

parent involvement will likely demonstrate its importance to children and to the success of the Head Start program.

I recommend that parental involvement in Head Start research be conducted with the diverse cultures and communities of the families who we serve in mind. I suggest that we examine parent involvement in the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs that have been successful in ensuring that parents are meaningfully engaged, amidst the laborious work schedules of these families.

Finally, I propose that study of how successful Head Start has been in fostering resiliency in the families they serve. The study might first look at Head Start's parent involvement policies and practices and how they compare to strategies for cultivating resiliency as identified in resiliency theory. Once such policies and procedures are established, barriers to successful parent involvement should be identified. Finally, impact studies of individual programs in various cultures and communities may determine Head Start's effectiveness in fostering resiliency.

Final Remarks

Head Start parent involvement includes training, program oversight, and the recognition of parents as a valuable asset to the success of each program, Parent involvement is foundational to the success of this program, and results in resilient adults and families. Every effort should be made to maintain the framework that has upheld Head Start for four decades. Family needs have critically changed and escalated, yet Head Start has a strong and comprehensive plan for supporting families, and a system for ensuring its programs make the grade for providing quality services to those we serve.

To Head Start:

As I began the project, I was certain I would find you to be flawless, and often, simply misunderstood. But my journey has taken me far beyond my expectations. I have learned a great deal about your history and evolution in becoming an effective comprehensive program for families.

I have learned that there are incredibly good Head Start programs, and there are those that evoke feelings of frustration, disappointment and shame. Fortunately, the number of quality programs continues to rise, and those which are a disgrace have been closed or given over to grantees that will rectify the wrongs done to children and families. I expect that of you Head Start, for you want only the best for your families.

I have loved you, Head Start, for over thirty years, first as a parent, a teacher, a manager, consultant and now a federal reviewer. I chose this research project as one way to say thanks to Head Start for all that you have given me. I am a product of Head Start's approach to fostering positive outcomes in families. I am a resilient adult. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Glenna Zeak

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions were used to interview Head Start personnel to guide document review and to verify personal recollections of my experiences with Head Start.

What are the ways that parents have been involved in the program over the last four decades? How has it changed? What has prompted the change?

What types of training that is provided to parents and how has it changed over the last four decades? What has prompted the changes?

What types of resources have been provided to parents and how has it changed over the last four decades? What has prompted the changes?

How has the level of parent involvement (committees, classroom volunteer, etc) changed over the last four decades? What has prompted the changes?

What is the programs mission and vision for parent involvement in Head Start? How has it changed over the last four decades? What has prompted the changes?

What have been the strengths of parent involvement in this program over the last four decades?

What have been the barriers to parent involvement over the last four decades? How have they been addressed?

What parent involvement strategies have been most successful? To what do you attribute the success of these strategies?

What parent involvement initiatives have occurred over the last four decades?

Do you believe that this program has kept up with the changes affecting families over the last four decades? If so, how? N

APPENDIX B: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

The following documents were reviewed to enhance and validate personal recollection of my experiences at Blair County Head Start:

Blair County Head Start; Children of Tomorrow Parent Newsletters 1970-2006

Blair County Head Start Community Assessment Reports 1980-2005

\Blair County Head Start Community Resource Booklets 1974-2006

Blair County Head Start Governing Board meeting minutes 2005-2006

Blair County Head Start Policy Council meeting minutes 1970-2006

Blair County Head Start Program Calendars 1975-2006

Blair County Head Start Program Plans 1999, 2004, 2005, 2006

Blair County Head Start Self Assessment Reports 1980-2006

Blair County Head Start Training Plan 1980-2006

Blair County Head Start : Welcome to Head Start Parent Handbook 1970-2006

Head Start Information Memorandums 1970-2006

Head Start Performance Standards 1975-2006

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