

## What Head Start Gave Me: Jazmin's Story

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### How a casual walk with her daughter changed the course of one mother's life.

As a teen parent, life for me was all about surviving day to day. I wasn't thinking about the future; I was just getting through each moment.

One afternoon, while walking with my daughter, I noticed a "Now Hiring" sign. A woman asked how old my daughter was, and when I told her she was two and a half, she handed me a flyer. It read: "Give your child a Head Start—ages 3–5." I asked about the job, too, and moments later, the woman

who was the director of the Head Start learning center we had wandered to brought me a part-time application to work with children.

That flyer changed our lives.

I was hired as a group worker, and my daughter started Head Start when she turned three years old. At the time, I had only a high school diploma and no plans for college. I was simply grateful for the opportunity.

One day, the director pulled me aside and said, “You’re a natural with the children. Where do you see yourself in the future?” I didn’t know. No one had ever asked me before. She encouraged me to pursue early childhood education, and she helped me see a future I had never imagined. Because of Head Start, I found a purpose. I became the first in my family to go to college, earning my associate’s, bachelor’s, and then master’s degree.

All of my children attended Head Start, and each received the support they needed—including my son, who benefited from early intervention services and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Head Start gave my family opportunities we otherwise would not have had.

Today, I am honored to serve as an Instructional Coordinator Lead and a member of our Early Learning Services team. I use my experiences to support teachers and ensure our classrooms provide the highest quality of care. I know firsthand what these children need, and I now help others meet those needs every day.

When I look back to that moment on the sidewalk—flyer in one hand, toddler in the other—I’m filled with gratitude. Head Start didn’t just change my life. It gave me a future. Thanks to Head Start, I’m not just surviving anymore. I’m thriving. And that’s why I wake up happy every single day.

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Photos: Jazmin (inset) and children: Cindy (left), Ethan (center), and Donna (right).