



Early Head Start and Head Start

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF WHAT THESE LOCAL PROGRAMS OFFER

by // JENNIFER THOMPSON

Early Head Start and Head Start (EHS/HS) programs are federally funded comprehensive school readiness programs that offer valuable and often life-changing resources for families in need. Not sure if these programs are for your child? Read on to learn what Head Start can do for your family.

What are these programs about?

"The programs are designed to provide group care experiences for children from low income families or special populations," says Council on Rural Services Early Childhood Director, Liz Phенning. "Children learn by engaging in hands on, individualized activities planned from evidence-based curriculum. Each child's progress is assessed throughout the year to ensure all children transition to kindergarten with the skills needed for success."

Head Start programs:

- Screen and serve children with special needs
- Complete health and developmental screenings so that early intervention services can begin prior to entering public schools
- Provide healthy meals as well as nutrition education
- Provide transportation for part-day preschool in some areas
- Collaborate with local medical and mental health organizations to remove health barriers for children and families
- Create community partnerships with local schools, health organizations, social service agencies and others in the community in order to create new opportunities for success

Who do they serve?

Council on Rural Services is the grantee for EHS/HS programs. EHS and HS are differentiated because not all grantees have both programs. EHS serves pregnant women and children up to age three and HS serves children ages three to five. Council on Rural Services' Kids Learning Place (KLP) Head Start and Child Care Center offers EHS/HS for eight counties of Ohio. These programs are available in other counties as well, but through different grantees.

According to Phенning, "To be eligible, families either have a household income under 100% of poverty, are homeless, are on public assistance or a child is in foster care. EHS/HS also reserves 10% of its enrollment for children with disabilities and 10% for children with income over 100% of poverty."

All HS options are free and eligible to families and include:

- Part day, part year center-based education (3.5 hours/day, 128 days/year)
- Full day, full year center-based education (6 hours/day, 1,020 hours/year)
- Full year home-visiting education (46 home visits and 26 socializations/year)
- A childcare option that is a full day, full year center-based education (10 hours/day). According to Phенning, "Most parents pay private fees and/or use Ohio Department of Job and Families Child Care Assistance."

Council on Rural Services' KLP childcare program in the Fairborn area is slightly different in that it serves children six weeks to age 12, whereas not all KLPs offer school-age childcare. If a family would like to be involved with the HS program, they would need to meet HS eligibility requirements.

Why should parents access Early Head Start or Head Start?

"Parents should take advantage of

the EHS/HS program because it is free, high-quality education for their children," says Phенning. "The teaching staff are degreed and experienced and the learning environments are safe and friendly. Parents work with teachers to ensure their child is ready for school, and with the support of staff, address any developmental, health or mental health needs of their children before they start kindergarten. Parents set personal family goals to improve their lives. They are also engaged in leadership opportunities to build their own confidence and skills as contributors to their communities."

Jodi Helmandollar, mother of three, has utilized the home-based program and EHS/HS, as well as the preschool and school-aged classrooms. She says, "Each classroom makes you feel like family. They care not only about the child, but also about the family. Family partnership goals are created quarterly. These goals are set to help work on milestones. They offer comprehensive services and will make sure your child has well-visits and dental check-ups on time. They want to be sure your child is as healthy as they can be overall."

Helmandollar has seen the benefits these programs can provide firsthand. One of her children had great success with speech therapy and another had behavioral issues that were resolved within months of entering the HS classroom. Helmandollar has been encouraged to set the personal goal of going back to school to finish her BA degree. She also served as an officer on the Policy Council for three years, became a Board Member in 2015 and is now a Parent Ambassador attending bi-monthly Ohio HS Meetings. She will be going to Congress in January to advocate for HS in Washington, DC.

How can I learn more about Early Head Start and Head Start?

To find out more about these programs, call 1-866-627-4557 or visit www.kidslearningplace.org to speak to an Early Childhood Service Coordinator about enrollment and to schedule a tour.