Head Start Happenings Newsletter

SPRING 2026

NEW CASTLE COUNTY Head Start, Inc.

Welcome

We're delighted to welcome you to the latest edition of the Head Start Happenings newsletter! With the arrival of Spring and warmer weather, our centers are filled with the buzz of learning, curiosity, and excitement. Classrooms are coming alive with hands-on activities, outdoor exploration, and opportunities for children to discover, create, and grow.



Wendy Marsilii
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In this issue, we're highlighting stories from former students, parents, and community partners that reflect the lasting impact of New Castle County Head Start, Inc. (NCCHS). We're also featuring our staff and their achievements that they continue to make.

Stay connected with us beyond the newsletter by visiting our Facebook page: @newcastlecountyheadstartinc. You'll learn what is happening across our classrooms and centers—from hands-on learning activities and special visitors to events, celebrations and more. There's always something happening at NCCHS and we'd love you to follow along.

ARTICLES

Head Start stories

The lasting impact of a Head Start teacher

Sometimes the smallest moments in a classroom can shape a child's entire life.



More than two decades ago, Noah Humphrey attended Bear Head Start. Noah faced challenges early in life, including disabilities and a stutter that made speaking a challenge. But one teacher never gave up on him.

Her name was Ms. Melva and Noah and his family have never forgotten the impact she made. Noah was her student for three years, and because of her efforts, he was allowed to stay an additional year in the program. Those years became life changing for Noah.

> *"Head Start makes a difference," Noah's mother, Meryl Humphrey shared. "Thank you Bear Head Start for all you do and have done for little people."*

Ms. Melva constantly encouraged Noah to speak confidently and never give up, reminding him that he could accomplish anything. She told him he was "the smartest boy she ever knew," words that stayed with him long after he left her classroom.

Today, Noah Humphrey's accomplishments are remarkable. He earned his master's degree from Yale University and is expected to complete his doctorate in less than six months. He also helped bring attention to the story of Rev. Mr. James W.C. Pennington, contributing to efforts that honored a Black student whose rightful degree recognition came 180 years later.

Noah now speaks and preaches before large audiences—an incredible achievement for someone once described as a "stuttering, low-achieving" child. He has written three books and served as chaplain for both Whittier College and Yale University football teams.

His story is a reminder that early childhood educators do far more than teach letters and numbers. They build confidence, inspire resilience, and help children see possibilities within themselves that they may not yet recognize.

Enriching classrooms through storytelling and music

For the past four years, NCCHS has had the pleasure of partnering with storyteller and musician, Clem Bowen. Clem brings his expertise of storytelling to the classroom by using musical instruments and engaging movement activities for the children to do.

Clem performs for each classroom individually so every class has the opportunity to engage in hands-on activities. Throughout the school year, Clem typically performs twice, and sometimes performs during our summer program as well. Clem introduces the children to different genres of music and styles of stories.

We are grateful for our partnership with Clem, whose work has enriched learning experiences for both our students and staff at NCCHS.

About Clem Bowen

My mother was one of the first five teachers when Head Start opened its first centers in West Virginia. That year, I performed my first part in the local children's theater.

Seeing my sadness when the play ended my mother invited me to create plays for her class. Soon I was performing in all the local centers. I knew at nine years old what I wanted to do for my whole life. I studied theater, dance and music therapy. I learned to make and play musical instruments. When we moved back to Delaware in 1976 my mother and I both began working for NCCHS.



I moved on to instrument making with the PA guild of craftsmen, solo performances and therapeutic music story sessions for special needs populations. NCC Head Start and Read Aloud Delaware enabled me to continue performing in the centers often in those years. This partnership with NCCHS gives me an opportunity to have an ongoing interaction with the children. Bringing them joy, music, a love of language and stories of the world around us. The highly professional staff (most of whom I have worked with for years) and I create a dynamic learning team. The children are thoroughly prepared and excited for my visits. The teachers actively support the children and the performance with enthusiastic participation. Concepts in my stories support ongoing lessons plans. My songs encourage self-esteem and non–violent ways to solve problems.

The teachers follow up with art projects and books related to subjects introduced in the performance. I am honored to work with your children. You are truly giving them a Head Start.

Thank you —*Clem Bowen*

Delaware Wolf Trap

Bringing learning to life through music and movement

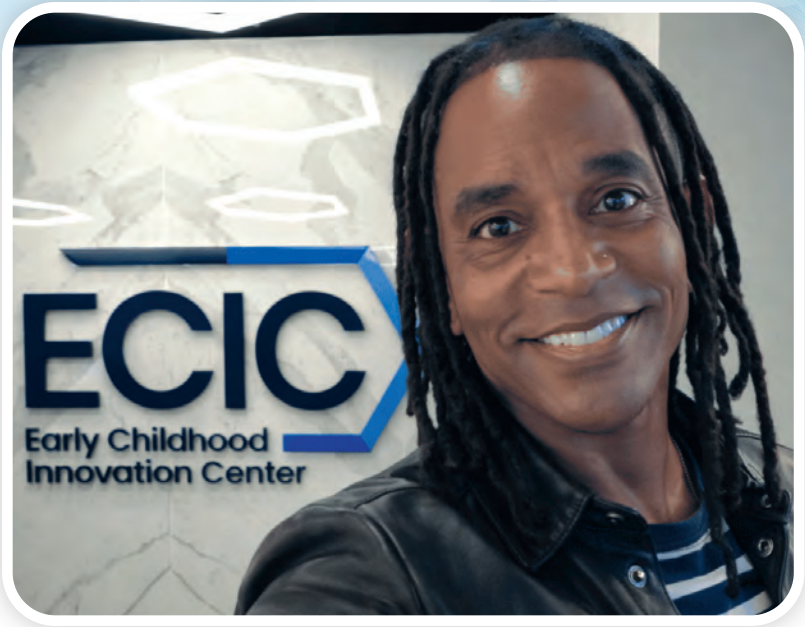
For the past two years, NCCHS has had the pleasure of partnering with Delaware Wolf Trap. Through the Delaware Institute for Arts in Education, Delaware Wolf Trap provides our teachers with 16 hands-on learning sessions that bring music, movement, math and literacy into everyday lessons.

Delaware Wolf Trap shows our teachers how to be confident in their teaching styles using music and movement. Many teachers, especially those that are new, are reluctant to display and teach using their musical abilities. Delaware Wolf Trap taps into that potential giving teachers the confidence to become stronger leaders in their classrooms. The program also shows that literacy and math don't always have to happen through traditional group lessons. Adding music and movement creates fun, engaging ways for children to learn while giving teachers new tools and ideas they can use every day.

NCCHS loves collaborating with Delaware Wolf Trap to empower our teachers. We have a great partnership with Delaware Wolf Trap and love bringing music and movement into each one of our Head Start Classrooms.



Building the blueprint forward: Men in ECE across Delaware



Emery's journey and why men matter in early childhood education

Long before Emery ever stepped into a professional classroom, he was the person children naturally followed. Growing up in a large and close knit family in Brooklyn, Emery was a constant, steady presence. He was the one who helped with homework, calmed big emotions, and found ways to turn learning into something fun. For him, early childhood education was never a career pivot. It was a natural extension of who he had always been.

That instinct led him to pursue a bachelor's degree in the field. He worked steadily toward that goal and completed 103 credits, building a strong academic foundation. Then the pandemic happened. Like many students across the country, Emery's education was disrupted. His coursework paused, and the path he had carefully planned suddenly felt uncertain.

Finding his place in Delaware

After the pandemic, a visit to a friend in Delaware opened a new chapter. Emery connected immediately with the community and the opportunities within the local early childhood field. Even before he officially moved, programs were offering him jobs. It was a clear sign that his passion and his presence were needed.

He began working in a YMCA after school program and later joined New Castle Early Head Start. There, administrators recognized his commitment and encouraged his growth as an educator. The work reaffirmed what he already knew. This was the field where he belonged.

The credit barrier and the choice to persist

When Emery decided it was time to return to school and finish his degree, he faced an unexpected and frustrating obstacle. Many colleges would not accept the 103 credits he had already earned. It felt like he was being asked to erase years of hard work and start over from the beginning.

It was a discouraging moment, but walking away was never an option. His commitment to the children he served was stronger than the bureaucracy standing in his way.

The ECIC stepped in

That is where the Early Childhood Innovation Center came in.

Instead of giving up, Emery enrolled in the ECIC CDA® Comprehensive Program. Through the ECIC, he found structure, guidance, and a pathway that respected both his experience and his future. At a moment when quitting might have felt easier, the ECIC provided clarity and direction.

His coach, Ms. Simmons, ECIC, CDA Coach, is a NCCHS employee and a steady source of encouragement. Through consistent check ins and a firm belief in his potential, she helped Emery stay focused and moving forward. Combined with the support of his administrators at New Castle Head Start, the ECIC helped Emery regain momentum with confidence and purpose.

Through the ECIC, Emery also discovered CDA® credit for prior learning. This pathway allowed him to honor his past academic work and continue toward completing his degree without losing the progress he worked so hard to achieve.

Why men belong in early learning

For Emery, being a man in this field is about representation and responsibility. He believes both boys and girls benefit from seeing men as caregivers, educators, and leaders during their most formative years.

Children need to see men who are patient, consistent, and invested in their growth. They need to see men who listen and show up every day. This presence helps children understand that care and guidance are not limited by gender.

Emery's journey reflects what becomes possible when men are supported to stay in early childhood education. Through the ECIC, his pathway did not end. It expanded.

Early learning spaces benefit when men bring their presence, perspective, and commitment into the classroom. For those who have ever felt called to mentor, teach, or guide young children, there is room to grow here and the ECIC is ready to help you take that next step.

Empowering families and communities: Dorcas Johnson's journey with Head Start

When Dorcas Johnson and her husband began the journey to find a daycare program for their two children, Dinah and Israel, they were overwhelmed by the cost of two. Dorcas continued to homeschool, but she worried about her kids missing out on social interaction with other children. Fortunately, a colleague mentioned the Head Start program. It didn't take long for the couple to find NCCHS.



Dinah and Israel started the NCCHS program virtually in 2020. Dorcas says the virtual learning experience was excellent, and her children quickly made friends with their classmates. She commented that Dinah was well-prepared for kindergarten and was ahead of her peers after one year at NCCHS. Israel continued in the program until 2023 when he transitioned to kindergarten.

"The benefits and support of Head Start for children and families extend well beyond the classroom. Everyone learns and grows through the program," comments Dorcas, a fervent advocate for NCCHS who spreads information about the program to her friends and colleagues.

Dorcas was quick to get involved from the beginning, wanting a better understanding of the program. She shares that the NCCHS has not only educated her children but has also taught her to be a better parent. Dorcas Johnson has been a member of the Policy Council since 2021, where she served on the finance committee. A critical issue at the time was the minimum wage increase in Delaware. She took her committee knowledge to her workplace and successfully secured a raise.

Dorcas benefited from free parent training. She took her learnings from the Stand by Me financial literacy program and increased her credit score by over 200 points. Additionally, she has completed the TECE I & II program and is currently working on her Child Development Advocate (CDA) credential. Dorcas sees the value of early education and wants to start a program like Head Start in her home country of Ghana.

THANK YOU

Awards and recognition

Program awards

Ethel Cooper award recipient

- Debbie Drueding

Employee of the year recipients

- Christine Potter – Absalom Jones
- Veronica Patterson – Jeffrey E. Benatti
- Es'Shenelle Robinson – Claymont
- Tammy Hammond – Lambson
- Mercedes Reyes – Manor Park
- Fatima Balderas Ramirez – Early Head Start
- Andrea Reynolds - Administrative Office

Policy council members

- Thais Alvarado
- Irma Alvarez
- Lisbeth Arriaga
- Magdalena Aviles
- Alyssa Beard
- Sierra Cabrera
- Markeya Jackson
- Dorcas Johnson
- Masani Marks
- Beartriz Medina
- Dee'Lisia Medley
- Eboni Morales
- Yesenia Morales
- Shalicia Price
- Dorenda Richardson
- Guadalupe Solano
- Zaybeth Vazquez
- Nakea Wright

New hires

- Joanne Lambert
- Corinna Miranda-Mendez
- Bella Tabor
- Elaina West
- Sara Wright

Team recognitions: service awards

15 Years

- Jennifer Saavedra
- Carmen Reyes
- Jose Vazquez

10 Years

- Karen MacNab
- Kimberly Hylenski
- Whitney Buck
- Brittney Banks

5 Years

- Davida Alladin
- Danielle Drummond
- Ana Lowe



IN THEIR WORDS

What parents say

We're deeply grateful to the families who make our program a community. We asked parents across our centers to share their experience—here's what they had to say.

1 Why did you choose to enroll in our Head Start program?

I chose to enroll in Head Start so my child could learn important skills as well as be around other children her age to learn and grow from.

— TONIERA G.

To ensure that my kids are meeting milestones. Have interactions with other kids their age.

— IMANI G.

Social development, access to resource and location.

— RAMATOULAYE D.

I chose to enroll because I wanted to give my child the best possible start in life. I've heard the program provides a strong foundation in early education, social skills, and health development. I'm also drawn to how Head Start supports families as a whole.

— SHAMARI F.

My son came to Head Start back in 2008 and wanted my daughter to have the same experience. The program helps the children to prepare for kindergarten.

— YURI S.



2 How did Head Start help you or your child this year?

It helps us to know more about my child and helps my child to communicate with other children and learn more things.

— DASARI S.

It is an excellent program that hep my children to their milestones and help me in every single parenting thing.

— ANAM A.

They helped by giving me a peace of mind and not worry that she was not going to be ready for kindergarten.

— MASANI M.

It helped us to get Iyana the positive value in learning all things like the alphabet, numbers, colors, shapes and social activities with others and preparation for kindergarten

— JACQUELINE K.

Early Head Start is a wonderful program. My daughter has learned to identify colors, shapes, etc. Personally, it helped me socialize with other moms.

— PATRICIA A.



3 What is the biggest change you have seen in your child this year?

Many cognitive and emotional changes in behavior.

— GUADALUPE T.

Communication. We have all learned to talk to each other and work on things together as a family.

— ASHLEY W.

Can sound out every letter and spell/write her whole name.

— KASHMERE J.

His behavior and academics are excelled to prepare him for kindergarten. Thank you to all the staff and Admin.

— TAYNAZIA C.

The biggest change I feel we have seen is our eating habits, we have learned different recipes with the classes that were proved from the school.

— KIMBERLY M.

DID YOU KNOW?

Free training for parents — TECE I & II

NCCHS offers free Training for Early Care and Education classes to enrolled parents, providing fundamental knowledge for working with young children and a path into the Early Childhood Education field. In 2024 - 2025, ten parents graduated.



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Wilmington, DE 19804
(302) 999-8480

Jeffrey E. Benatti
931 Corbitt Road
Bear, DE 19701
(302) 832-2212

Claymont
3301 Green Street
Claymont, DE 19703
(302) 792-9065

Early Head Start
19 Lambson Lane
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 777-5104

Lambson
19 Lambson Lane
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 655-5070

Manor Park
1 Bassett Avenue
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 328-9454



Volunteer or donate today!

NCCHS depends on community support by way of monetary or in-kind donations and volunteers. Call the Administrative Office at (302) 452-1500 for more information on donation needs and volunteer opportunities.