

Maryland Monday Message

April 9, 2012

Head Start a Foothold to Future

Broad Benefits Flow from Preschool Program



Hylah Frances and Franora Gray

Single mother Franora Gray and her 4-year-old daughter Hylah Frances, a first year Ellicott City Head Start student, are reaching for the stars despite down to earth concerns. That's just what the comprehensive school-readiness program aims to foster. "From the time I pick her up at the bus stop until she goes to bed, she sings songs and talks a mile a minute about daily school trips. They 'travel' all over the world through reading – they even took a trip to the moon when they studied space exploration." Adds Ms. Gray, "She is learning far more in Head Start than what I'm able to teach her at home." And the benefits don't end there: Head Start promotes school readiness by offering educational, health, nutritional, and social and other services to enrolled children and families. Ms. Gray struggles to care for her family because of unemployment and chronic health problems.

The Head Start program, managed by Howard County Community Action Council (CAC), works on multiple issues. More than 100 Head Start families have received food assistance from CAC. CAC also has a new federal initiative, "DreamSavers, to help 30 Head Start families increase their net worth by matching their savings. Ms. Gray enthuses, "I can't think of any other entity willing to match a two to one savings." And she credits CAC with making her more confident in her job search. "Thanks to CAC's support, my family is on its way to breaking the cycle of poverty. If the sky is the limit, then Hylah will travel to the moon, as an astronaut."

CAC Head Start has served almost 10,000 low income families in Howard County since 1965. It remains committed to interrupting the cycle of poverty and helping families achieve self-sufficiency, but it is seeing increased demand without increased funds.

This Maryland Monday Message is a production of the Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute in cooperation with the Howard County Community Action Council.

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