



All About Us

What Is Head Start?

Head Start is a national program administered by the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, Federal Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start's goal is promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social/emotional development. For over forty years, Head Start has prepared preschool children for success in later learning.

In 1995, the Early Head Start program was established to serve pregnant mothers and children from birth to three in recognition of the growing body of scientific evidence indicating the importance of healthy growth and development during a child's earliest years.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs must comply with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and meet vigorous health and safety regulations. These standards provide the framework for Head Start services and create a standardized definition of quality to ensure the highest level of accountability.



Long Island Head Start History

L.I. Child and Family Development Services Inc., is a private not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to provide a comprehensive learning environment to children respectful of their cultures and to assist families in reaching self-sufficiency through the combined efforts of parents, community, and staff. Training has always been an integral part of the Head Start initiative and many use the Head Start opportunity to develop their skills. Head Start works in collaboration with community agencies to provide needed services and makes extensive use of volunteers, including the Board of Directors, the Policy Council, retired senior citizens, high school and college students, and other community members. Parents are key volunteers in each of the centers and regularly assist in defining and carrying out policies and programs.

Long Island Head Start/Early Head Start operates on the premise that all children benefit from a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program and strong families, and that families carry the primary responsibility for the growth and development of their children. Therefore, in addition to its early child development program, Head Start reinforces parenting skills and assists parents to become self-sufficient.

The first Head Start program in Suffolk County began in 1966 to provide children from low-income families with a pre-school experience to give them an equal opportunity for success in the public school system. Head Start was designed to be a comprehensive child development program, which also involved parents in educational, training, and job skill programs, as well as in the decision-making process.

The first programs in Suffolk County were grass-roots summer programs, involving parents and other community volunteers in securing sites, designing programs, staffing the centers and constructing much of the equipment. These Head Start programs were considered pilot projects. They were so successful, both locally and nationally, that funding was appropriated for full-year programs. By 1968, full-year programs were located in twelve target areas throughout Suffolk County.

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's enrollment slowly increased, reaching about 900 by the mid 1980's. With increased funding, Long Island Head Start began expanding its enrollment and number of sites. Today, Long Island Head Start serves over 1,675 children and their families in 18 licensed Head Start centers, and three Early Head Start centers funded for 172 children throughout Suffolk County.

In the mid-1970's, the agency began receiving training funds and established a training program for staff. The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential for teaching staff became available nationally, and Long Island Head Start was among the first to establish a CDA training program in anticipation of future mandates.

In 1999 Long Island Head Start was awarded the first Early Head Start grant on Long Island to provide services to infants/toddlers and pregnant women. This program is now operating at three Early Head Start centers.

Long Island Head Start

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How Does Head Start Work?



Comprehensive Program Services

Head Start's comprehensive approach supports children's physical development including their oral and mental health, and healthy nutrition. All children are screened to ensure their basic health needs are met through preventative care. Our program services include: education, health, nutrition, and family supports.

Parent Involvement and Family Focus

Head Start is not just for children. It's a family-centered program that recognizes parents are a child's first teacher and principal influence

in their child's development. Parents are encouraged to become active partners in their child's learning. Parent education, family support and social services are designed to support and empower Head Start families, assisting them in becoming economically self-sufficient, and helping them to identify and achieve personal family goals.

Policy Council

Head Start relies heavily on families and community members to strengthen its programs. You can participate in program policy and decision-making by becoming a member of the Policy Council (PC). The PC is made up of parents who currently have children enrolled in the program and community representatives who are selected to serve on the Council. The Policy Council along with the Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer work together to plan the day-to-day operations for Long Island Head Start, including the establishment of program policies, the hiring of staff, budgeting, and fund-raising. Within that structure, the Policy Council provides policy direction to the agency's Head Start and Early Head Start programs currently serving over 1600 low-income children, birth to five years and their families. You can contact your local center to receive more information on joining the Policy Council.