

Head Start program preps area 4-year-olds for success in school

Courtesy of CPCD • Updated: July 14, 2015 at 4:46 pm • 

In her short four years of life, Olivia has been through more than most kids: she was removed from her birth home due to abuse and neglect; moved in and out of three foster homes; and finally arrived at the Martins' home, where she was officially adopted last winter.

Though she is now in a loving, permanent home, the trauma Olivia has experienced since birth still affects her daily. Seeking developmental and emotional help for Olivia and support for their whole family, the Martins found CPCD.

CPCD provides comprehensive early childhood services to children and their families in El Paso County, focusing on children living in poverty and children with special needs and severe behavioral struggles. Olivia is one of more than 2,000 children who were given a head start thanks to CPCD teachers, family advocates, speech and occupational therapists, behavioral health specialists, bus drivers and nurses.

But for every Olivia, there are four other children in El Paso County who don't receive services due to funding gaps. "I've seen a lot of children in overwhelming circumstances walk through our doors – situations that most of us can't imagine," said Noreen Landis-Tyson, CEO and president of CPCD. "Knowing that our program helps these children to become ready for school, prepared to grow and learn, is what drives us to do more so that we can help more, every day."

Fifty-five percent of the 4 year olds who started their final year of preschool at CPCD last fall were on course to have the skills needed to enter kindergarten. By the end of the 2014-15 school year, 90 percent of those same children had met or exceeded those expectations. Research shows vulnerable children who attend preschool are far more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to become dependent on public assistance. CPCD team members are proud to have provided opportunities for 800 4 year olds this year to be ready for success in school and in life.

Terril Glass, community volunteer with CPCD and a former Head Start student, remembered how important it was for him to get on the bus every day as a child. "I know what happened to the kids in my neighborhood who didn't get on that Head Start bus with me," he said. "I've had so many doors of opportunity open – I know most of my friends didn't have any doors, or even windows."

In addition to providing children with an early childhood education, CPCD also supports parents in setting and reaching goals in the areas of parenting, education and economic stability.

According to the Ascend at the Aspen Institute, there is strong support for a two-generation approach to early childhood education that cuts across party lines, race, class, age, and gender; 89 percent of all Americans support two-generation approaches as an investment in moving families from poverty to economic stability. CPCD offers programs for families that include parenting classes, health and wellness programs, volunteer opportunities, financial literacy classes, job-training workshops, assistance with continuing education, and the opportunity to serve on the Parent Policy Council which, along with the Board of Directors, governs CPCD.

To learn more about CPCD and the Head Start program in El Paso County visit www.cpcdheadstart.org.

