

Getting Off to a Healthy Start

Dear Healthy Start Project Directors, Partners and Friends:

The National Healthy Start Association is implementing a new newsletter format. Instead of long e-newsletters, we're changing to a shorter and more frequent format.

Kicking off this endeavor is the Letter from the President below. Upcoming issues will feature more articles about the original Healthy Start projects - Then and Now. Consumer success stories might be a feature in one issue, research news in another and Healthy Start in the News in yet another.

To contribute to upcoming newsletters, such as photos of your holiday activities, please contact Bea Haskins, Newsletter Editor, at bhaskins@nationalhealthystart.org. Please also let Bea know if you need changes made to your listing in our email group.

We hope you enjoy reading this new format.

Deborah Frazier
CEO

Message from Kenn Harris, NHSA's President

Fathers Lost

Even in the midst of the sounds of darkness echoing in our nation from recent events in Charlottesville, Boston.... I find myself blanketed in somberness, trying to recuperate from the blow dealt by the recent passing of my father, August 5th 2017, just a few months ago! I cannot believe that my four siblings and I pulled together to execute his funeral services so quickly and I headed back to work for the first time after two weeks away; it seemed like I'd been away forever.



Although I was away from work, my work was not away from me. Hearing the phrase, "I'm sorry, I heard that you lost your father" weighed on my mind so much that the heaviness could not be ignored. I found myself having trouble with the term. You see, to me my father wasn't "lost." I know exactly where he is. I know he transitioned from this life to another in order to be with God in heaven. The idea of a father being "lost" wouldn't let me go because in order for something to be lost, it must first have to be possessed. And here's where my work is not far from me. I cannot help but think about Healthy Start's work around fatherhood and men's health because its meaning and value deepened the day my father died. I realize that what my father gave me, I now possess and that I do not lose it or him in his passing.

Our Healthy Start fathers are not lost either, are they? We know exactly

where they are. They need our support. They need our care. They need their families and their families need them. Under our current funding, the new mandate in our federal benchmarks asks Healthy Start projects to count them, but the integrity of our work with men and fathers demands that we **make them count**. Many of you have focused your efforts on *engagement* – you’ve begun to consider how to engage fathers; *inclusion* – some of you have integrated fathers into your core services that include outreach, case management and care coordination; and *connection* – through your work with fathers you have established partnerships with agencies and organizations that support and serve fathers. Engagement, inclusion and connection are all things that I had with my father and today I realize that it is those things from a physical perspective that are actually lost. And if we don't continue to push the envelope, these are the things that will be lost to the children of the fathers we serve. And in this sense, fathers are lost.

But I find that in my time of grieving over the passing of my father, heralding “fatherhood” becomes more important than ever. Healthy Start is in its fourth year of a five-year funding cycle. We cannot afford to let any opportunity pass to talk about the importance of men and fathers, to our women and children, to our families and to our communities. Here are a couple of things about my dad that I’d like to pass along to you. Things that were not lost to me:

A Father’s Strength

I have never liked wearing jewelry. In fact, the only piece of jewelry I wear is my wedding ring. But since my Dad’s passing, I’m feeling a need to be connected with him, so I’ve taken to wearing his jewelry; two pieces in particular. His favorite ring was a blue star sapphire ring, and is now my favorite ring. The other piece of jewelry is his gold tennis bracelet. When you’d see Dad’s hand, this bracelet was always attached to his wrist. In fact, if you only saw Dad’s hand with this bracelet, you’d know it was Dad’s right hand. He’d always remind us that any time we read about God’s right hand in the Bible, it represented God’s strength. I feel Dad’s strength when I wear this bracelet. Fathers can instill strength that is not lost even in death. Thank you for your strength, Dad.

Time with My Father

Being on time was important to my father. I’m sure that had something to do with his fascination and collection of watches. Dad told Mom to give each of his four sons and two grandsons one of his watches upon his passing, which she honored. This particular piece of jewelry is one I’ve chosen not to wear but rather hold on to as a keepsake as I will cherish the time that I had with my father. The times that I shared with my father are not lost; they will always reside in my memories about him.

So, thank you for *strength* and *time*, Dad. In the end, what is it that I want? I want more. More connection. More time. I just want more of my dad. It is our endeavor within the **NHSA Dads Matter Initiative** to ensure that Healthy Start women, children and families have more; more of dads’ strength and time in their lives. I appreciate what I had with my time with my dad and I realize that it’s not lost in his passing. I still possess those things in my heart.

For this, I am thankful.

And I thank you, Healthy Start family, for being there for our families over 26 years and thank you for being here for me, your NHSA president. Your outreach of support is most appreciated. I know that we are living in times of great uncertainty but one thing is certain and that is that we will only achieve success as a collective and connected community. Let's stay together!

Be well,

Kenn L. Harris

Mark Your Calendars!

March 24-25, 2018 - Fourth Annual Summit on Fatherhood and the Health and Wellness of Men and Boys

March 26-28, 2018 - 19th Annual National Healthy Start Spring Conference - celebrating NHSA's 20th Anniversary!

Living the Legacy: Celebrating Advocacy for Families and Communities, Then & Now!

Location: Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill; \$269/night. Registration information and hotel reservation information coming soon!

Contact NHSA:
1325 G Street, NW, Suite 500 Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-296-2195
info@nationalhealthystart.org
<http://www.nationalhealthystart.org/>
