

**Angela Krehbiel Vancil**  
**A Parent's Perspective on Head Start**  
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First, I'd like to thank the Maine Children's Alliance and the Maine Head Start Directors Association for releasing this annual report. It provides solid data that highlights the importance of Head Start to Maine's low income children and families.

The report shows the devastating impact the economy has had on low income families and describes the broad range of services that Head Start provides and the impact the program has. It also raises concerns about future funding for the program and shows how important Head Start's state funding is. The Governor's proposed budget -- under consideration today, down the hall -- would eliminate this state funding. The result would be the loss of approximately 303 Head Start slots.

I'm here today to put those "slots" in a context. Each of the slots at risk represents a real child. And one of them is my daughter, Jenni.

There is no "typical" Head Start family, but let me tell you a little about mine. I spent my childhood in poverty. My parents separated when I was 8 and my mother was often unavailable, leaving me responsible for raising my brother and sister, both under age 3. I did the best that I could, often missing school. I learned patience and parenting skills at far too young an age.

For years as an adult, I faced many challenges: divorce; my home being condemned and destroyed health issues ... and I had no way to pursue my dream of a college degree. But more recently my life, and the lives of my children, has truly turned around. Head Start has played a major role.

My children have all been enrolled in Head Start. My daughter, Amber, who is now 11, had serious developmental issues as an infant. She began in Head Start when she was 6 months old. The staff made sure she received the assessments and services she needed. With these early interventions, my beautiful child who didn't talk until after she turned three, is now flourishing.

And I am flourishing too. Until recently I would never have even considered speaking in public as I am today. I have gained confidence and leadership skills through serving on the Head Start Parent Council. I am now the President of the Council, and have served on the community Head Start Board for the past two years, representing the Parent Council. I'm the Vice President of the Board.

I am enrolled in a four-year degree program at the University of Maine at Augusta, where I'll soon begin my junior year. I am working toward a BA in Mental Health and Human Services, and I'm planning for a career advocating for young children.

My youngest child Jenni is currently enrolled in Head Start where she is building a foundation for a healthy future. She has wonderful teachers who have constructed an individualized program for her; they nurture her and encourage her. I know she is safe and that she learning important interpersonal and educational skills that will serve her well as she enters kindergarten next year. Knowing she is in a safe and positive environment all day makes it possible for me to fulfill my educational dream.

All of our lives have been and continue to be improved by Head Start. My children and I have all gained skills, confidence – and hope for the future -- through the program. My hope is that funding is maintained so that others will have the same opportunity as my family. I know first hand that funds invested in Head Start bring life transformational returns.

Thank you.