

ABCs, 123s, and so Much More

Program: Starting Strong in the Sioux Empire

Providers: Excel Discovery Center, Kidz Club Preschool, Sioux Falls School District, Volunteers of America, Dakotas and Youth Enrichment Services.

Service: Starting Strong in the Sioux Empire will provide over 200 three and four year olds the opportunity to attend a quality preschool over the next three years.

Need: In Sioux Falls there are approximately 1,200 economically disadvantaged three and four-year-olds, but there are only around 650 openings in free pre-kindergarten programs. There are 160 children on the waiting list for Head Start programs, and many of them will never receive any kind of preschool services without Starting Strong.

Impact: For every \$1 invested in early childhood education, the community receives a \$7 return. This is because children with quality pre-kindergarten programs are less likely to:

- Need special education
- Drop out of school
- Be unemployed
- Commit juvenile and adult crime
- Depend on public assistance

And more likely to:

- Enroll in a 4-year college degree program
- Have higher earnings

Life as a single parent can be tough. There is always a struggle to make enough to make ends meet, while balancing the needs of your children. It's a balance that many parents have to make, and one that Michael is still mastering.

"We've learned to have a schedule," says Michael. "Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays are bath days, during the week the kids know we wake up at 6:00am, so everyone is to school on time. We eat dinner together every night at the same time. It helps to have a routine."

Michael's also learned to be creative with his own time. Cleaning and the laundry are done during the day so that he can work at night. All the while making sure he has time to spend with his children. Because of their situation money can be tight, but Michael wanted to be sure that his youngest daughter would be prepared for school. While signing up for the waiting list for Head Start, he learned of the Starting Strong in the Sioux Empire program.

"We wouldn't have been able to get into Head Start until she was 4," says Michael. "The Starting Strong program fit into our schedule and has just been great for her."

Michelle has preschool three times a week for a few hours. Michael was able to enroll her in a location that is only a few short blocks from home, so he can drop her off and pick her up. In a few short weeks, not only have her alphabet and counting skills improved, but her behavior is improving too.

"Miss Nancy has been like a second mom to Michelle," continues Michael. "She's really worked with her manners. Michelle's much better at saying please and thank you now."

Because preschool is much more than learning your A-B-C's and 1-2-3's. It's about socializing and learning to listen, so that Michelle and other children can enter kindergarten ready to learn. And thanks to support from Sioux Empire United Way, over 200 additional three and four year olds will be able to attend a quality preschool program over the next three years.

Parents of Starting Strong participants know their child is getting a good start, "This program gives kids a chance, a chance to learn and grow, a chance to get a strong start on their education."

