

Riverbend Head Start's programs enrich the lives of families during summer

by Kristen Gosling
July 15 2015 9:15 PM



Jessica Lewey sits on the living room floor with her two children. Her two-year-old son, Braden, is cuddled on her lap and as she reads to them, “I Love You Through and Through.” Her daughter, Aubree, sits by her side gazing at the photos.

This family bonding time and educational opportunity is just one of the things parents enrolled in Riverbend Head Start & Family Services’ home visiting program experience. Every week, a home visitor from the agency comes to the family’s home and spends 90 minutes with the child to teach the parents to be their child’s first teacher.





“I like that they come once a week, especially during summer time when most schools are not in session,” said Lewey.

Braden, is in Riverbend Head Start’s Early Head Start 12-month program, so the home visits continue even in the summer. It has been especially beneficial to Braden because he had a speech delay and receives physical therapy.

“I realized when he was one-and-a-half-years-old that he wasn’t saying anything. Now you can ask him where his arms are, and he will point to them and try to say the body part name. He can do it and I don’t know if we would see this progress if it wasn’t for Riverbend Head Start.”

Braden is the third child of Lewey’s to be in Riverbend Head Start’s programs. She found out about the program four years ago when her oldest, Ariel, was just three years old. She saw a poster at the Women Infant and Children’s Office (WIC) and decided to enroll her child.

The program is for families in Madison County who are living in poverty. For a family of four, they must earn less than \$24,250 a year and less than \$20,090 for a family of three. They have to be pregnant or have a child between the ages of birth through five years old.

Riverbend Head Start staff also taught Lewey about activities to do with her children while living on a limited income. She now takes them to the park and library and uses art as a way to connect with her children. She has seen the benefits of the program in all three of her children.

“It’s really an excellent program. It teaches your kids to be independent and gets them ready for kindergarten. They learn how to write their names, know their shapes and colors. I would encourage every parent to enroll their children in the program.”

She knows it works because her oldest made the transition to kindergarten several years ago.

“Ariel was comfortable when she went to kindergarten. She liked to read books with her teacher’s help. She also was comfortable on the bus because she had already rode a school bus for Riverbend Head Start activities,” said Lewey.

Her children are not the only members of the family making progress. In the program, Riverbend Head Start parents are encouraged to set and achieve their own goals and get involved in their children's educations. Lewey was just recognized for the support she is providing for her children's educations. She received two awards at the non-profit's annual Volunteer and Appreciation Banquet.

"I've got the certificates hung up on my wall. I was shocked and surprised. I am very proud of them."

The high school graduate knows their experience in Riverbend Head Start is just the beginning for her and her children.

"I've always thought about going back to school. It's my dream to become a pediatrician. I want to make a difference," said Lewey.

To find out more about Riverbend Head Start & Family Services, visit www.riverbendfamilies.org or call 618-463-5950.

Kristen Gosling is public relations director for Riverbend Head Start & Family Services