



2019 Minnesota Head Start Heroes

Head Start Heroes is an annual event that honors members of the Minnesota Head Start community who overcame tremendous challenges and achieved personal and family success. These children, families, alumni and staff members have been selected by the Minnesota Head Start Association Scholarships and Awards Committee based on compelling, personal testimonies about their Head Start experience and how they were able to transform their lives. The Head Start Heroes epitomize how determination, fortitude and access to early learning and whole-family approaches can pave the way to lifelong success.

Minnesota Head Start Heroes Award Ceremony

*Hosted by the Minnesota Head Start
Association, Inc. at the
Minnesota History Museum,
March 12, 2019*



The Minnesota Head Start Association (MHSA) mission is to advocate for low-income families and inspire high standards of service for young children by providing innovative leadership and programs to help children, families, and communities reach their full potential.



CATEGORY 2 WINNER

Head Start family who has made significant life changes within the past 12 months and is currently enrolled in a Head Start or Early Head Start program or is serving on a Policy Council.

Brian and Mandy Miller have been together for 18 years. Between the two, they have 6 children, 3 of which have attended Head Start. They had been friends for years, but at first their relationship did not go further & they separated. They were re-united in recovery in 2000. They started a long distance relationship over the phone. Their relationship grew and soon they were expecting a child.

Brian started school, got a job as a gas station manager while Mandy worked seasonal jobs. They bought their first home together. Brian was involved with speaking engagements about his meth use. Because times seemed to be good, they both quit NA/AA and going to church.

However, Mandy lost her job and followed up with the birth of Isaiah. Unfortunately, he was stillborn and had to be revived. This resulted in many health issues. This traumatic beginning was enough to trigger Brian's addiction relapse. Mandy quickly followed suite. When Isaiah started Head Start they were using on and off, but trying to stay clean. Isaiah's attendance was inconsistent and many of the goals they set with their staff were just made up in order to "be done." In complete denial about their drug problem, they lost their house.

As their drug use spiraled, they had another child, Kael, and their older children began taking care of the younger ones. Their oldest daughter went to live with Mandy's ex-partner to escape the chaos. Having their lives spiral out of control from drug and alcohol use, eventually the police arrive to arrest them, spending some time in jail, and temporarily losing custody of their children.

Following their jail stay, they were invited to a church. From there they worked to meet all the conditions to get their kids back, worked to find a home, and get their lives back in order. Brian went to Teen Challenge, eventually becoming an employee.

As they worked to find a home, they struggled due to their eviction and drug history. Finally finding a small home. They welcomed their 5th child. Mandy began to work seasonal jobs again to make ends meet. This time when Kael was enrolled in Head Start, they worked with staff to set and attain goals, seriously, to move ahead and fulfill their dreams. They applied for and were awarded a Habitat for Humanity home. Mandy found full time work as a professional Peer Support specialist. With help from God and support from area resources including Head Start, the family has been able to move forward and use the road they have traveled to inspire others.