

2023 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 Reception and Award Ceremony
 Hosted by Minnesota Head Start Association, Inc. at the
 American Swedish Institute: 11:00 a.m., March 7, 2023

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 1: STAFF MEMBER

Head Start alumni who has become involved in their local program as a staff member and demonstrates a passion for serving through advocacy, career growth, or being involved in Head Start, the community, or the state/national level that benefits Head Start families.

Alicia Rufus

Tri-County Community Action Program (TCCAP)



In one small backpack, I packed one outfit for my son and daughter and left an abusive relationship. We got on a bus and made our way too Little Falls, Minnesota, to stay with my sister. Unable to stay with her, I was forced to go to a shelter in Brainerd. I filled out my first application to enroll my children in Head Start at the Tri-County Community Action Partnership. We participated in the Early Head Start homebased, while being at the shelter. I was able to get a place to live in Little Falls and my children were able to transfer to Head Start there. My third child was born and enrolled in the Early Head Start program.

My children's father followed us to Minnesota. A short trip turned long led us to lose our home. Homeless again, we found a place to live as a family, but the abuse continued, and I was pregnant again.

I decided to go back to college, while working dialysis at our local hospital. I wanted to expand my knowledge from a tech to a nurse. Throughout my pregnancy, I was very sick. The father of my children was working, so a decision was made that I would stay home. Nobody was being taken care of, so I moved out with my children. After my fourth child was born, I filled out another Early Head Start application. TCCAP had my 3 children in the center based, full time. When Head Start had to shut down due to COVID-19, I lost my childcare and my job because of the lack of childcare in the rural parts of Minnesota. I continued online college, but keeping up with the needs of my children, chores and homework became hard. I fell into a dark place. I wanted to give up, but I pushed through. I made a discovery as I worked on myself, and it was time to acknowledge the pain that I had been through.

I have learned to accept myself for who I am, that I am strong and every obstacle in my life has been lessons that will help me out in the future.

I finished my Associates Degree while my children continued to attend TCC. I have now started my bachelor's degree at the St. Cloud state University to major in Psychology.

This is the beginning of an amazing journey. We need to learn to create our own story. Doing this, I learned to define my future self. I am Alicia Rufus, consciousness of spirit manifested as flesh master of self, great mother, clinical psychologist, wellness retreat owner, multi-millionaire, and philanthropist. I have started my new journey working for Tri-County Community Action Partnership, as a family advocate. I would like to give back to the community of Head Start, because Head Start has been there for me.