

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Head Start program celebrates 40<sup>th</sup> birthday**

BISMARCK, N.D. – Head Start programs are celebrating a special birthday today. Forty years ago on this date President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the creation of the comprehensive child development and school-readiness program. It was one of his administration’s top priorities in the “War on Poverty.” Since its inception, Head Start programs have served over 22 million disadvantaged preschool children across the nation.

What began in the mid-1960s as an eight-week summer preschool enrichment program in the German-speaking south central parts of North Dakota has evolved into a full-year program offered at sites across the state. Currently, 14 Head Start and seven Early Head Start programs serve about 3,400 North Dakota children ages birth to 5 years and their families.

“This is an opportunity to recognize some very dedicated early childhood professionals and to celebrate Head Start’s positive impact on so many children and families,” said Department of Human Services Executive Director Carol K. Olson.

Linda Rorman, who administers the Head Start State Collaboration Office for the department, said that research has verified that disadvantaged children who participate in Head Start do better in school and in life. She said the program addresses educational, social, nutritional, health, and behavioral needs and promotes positive parenting skills. To qualify for Head Start, she said, a child’s family must meet federal poverty guidelines or must live in medically underserved areas.

Rorman said, “Head Start works because it embraces the family of each child in a mentoring way and provides the services and supports to address unique family needs. Parents are their children’s first teachers, and parent involvement is a program cornerstone.”

According to Rorman, Head Start and Early Head Start teachers are required to have at least an associate’s degree in early childhood education. Almost half of the Head Start professionals in North Dakota hold bachelor’s or master’s degrees in their field, she said.

Information about Head Start programs and services is available on the department’s Web site at <http://www.state.nd.us/humanservices/services/childfamily/headstart/> or on the North Dakota Head Start Association’s Web site at <http://www.ndheadstart.com/>.

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