



My name is Shakira Gonzalez, I am currently serving the USA Army at 205<sup>th</sup> Ambulatory Support Medical Company. I was born in Puerto Rico. In 1997 my family immigrated to the United States, Jefferson City, Missouri, I was 2 years old then.

In 1998 my parents enrolled me into the Head Start Program in Jefferson City. I remember making new friends, playing and participating in games and many activities with them. I also remember that at that time I was not able to verbally communicate with my Head Start friends as my first language was Spanish and I had just recently moved from living with my family in Puerto Rico which only spoke Spanish. Communicating with the kids around me was definitely a challenge for me, though with the help of my Head Start teacher Ms. Linda who was very understanding of our family's situation and the rest of my classmates I was able to conquer the shyness I had developed due to the language barrier. As I felt that at one point I couldn't openly communicate with them, Ms. Linda's patience and cheerfulness helped me through that time.

I feel that the Head Start Program was a great beginning as at such young age it sparked my interest and got me excited to attend school as well as it enhanced my academic development which are things that have benefited me to this day.

As I am in the process of accomplishing many great things in my future, as I am currently a freshman in college studying in a pre-dental program and I am excited to continue and finish the many classes I need yet to complete.

Head Start was also a great beginning for my siblings Derick, currently attending Kansas University to major in Medicine and Drasen who is currently an outstanding High School Student and soon to attend the Science and Technology College in Rolla and plans to major in Engineering.

I thank the Head Start Program as it really helped my young parents to steer me and my siblings in the right direction. I feel that this program can make a huge impact in our society, because children need a little encouragement to succeed in life and the partnership that the parents and the Head Start Program form at the kid's early age seems to be a big part of a successful future.

My parents feel blessed to have found this unique program as it was a great resource when they needed it most!

Shakira Gonzalez