

Erinn Miller: [00:00:01] Parent educators are the beating heart of our organization. And as people who work with families and children as closely as we do, we know that sharing stories and experiences offers some of the strongest ways to connect, reflect, and enrich our growing community. Today, our guest is Mayelin Escobar. She's a parent educator at Show Me Strong Families here in St Louis. She's going to tell us, in her own words, in Spanish, her experience as a parent educator. For those of you who may not speak Spanish. The transcript in English will be in the description.

Mayelin Escobar: [00:00:35] My name is Mayelin Escobar. I am a family educator for Show Me Strong Families at Parents as Teachers in St. Louis. I have worked at this program for four years. I am very happy to work at Parents as Teachers. I started working at Parents as Teachers by destiny. I went out with a friend and she asked me why I wasn't looking for a job. I didn't want to keep working where I was working, I was working at Early Head Start for eleven years. I wanted to go to the next step in my life and wanted there to be a change to my life and I decided to start looking for something else. So, I was with a friend, an old friend, she told me "Why don't you apply at Parents as Teachers?" and I told her they never really have positions available. She told me to go get my computer, you will see something. So, I searched for my computer and open my computer on the Parents as Teachers website and by chance there was a position of home visitor in St Louis and immediately put in my application and my resume and well, here I am today. I was always, when I worked at Early Head Start, working on my certificates to take to Parents as Teachers because we had the Parents as Teachers curriculum. One day I was at the Parents as Teachers office and I thought the people here are so professional, I would love to work here. And well, here I am, the dream came true! One of the advantages when I started working as a Parent Educator at Show Me Strong [Families] was that I could bring the families I knew from Early Head Start because I when applied for it, Early Head Start was zero to three, and with Parents as Teachers it's from zero to five.

Mayelin Escobar: [00:03:19] So they, the families, were also very happy when I proposed it, "Look, I'm no longer working for Early Head Start, I am now working at Parents as Teachers", they were very happy. I came with all of my families so I did not go out and recruit. When I started, I started with my complete caseload and it was a great advantage to both me and the families. I love working with children because it has a significant impact on the lives of not only the family, but on the children as well. To support the parents as the first teachers of their children is very, very important. It's incredible and rewarding, the example that you give to them. I enjoy guiding the families in early development by providing the tools and resources that they need to form growth and learning and the strong relationships they have. For me, to see the children achieve those successes, goals, and all that is very rewarding to me. I can share about a family that deeply impacted me was a young mother that I worked with. She had many difficulties acknowledging her abilities as a mother. It was her first child and had very little help at first and often doubted if she was raising her baby the right way.

Mayelin Escobar: [00:05:06] So, over time during our visits through the activities and orientations I offered she was becoming more confident, more capable and she began to get more involved with her son and ask questions to apply the strategies that we had discussed. One of the most memorable moments was when one day she was really excited and she told me, “My baby is already talking! He is already saying words!”. I felt very proud to know I had been a fundamental part of that achievement. This experience reaffirmed a lot for me. How you can help parents recognize their own strength and support them in building positive relationships with their children for me is also very important. I have some challenges that I have faced. For example, the differences in culture and parenting practices. For example, we speak the same Spanish language but we have differences in the family and their methods of raising children. So I implement the methods that we use, the [family’s] perspective and promote an evidence-based approach to suggest positive discipline strategies without imposing my point of view on their methods, I did the work without giving my own [side]. Another challenge is supporting children with developmental delays and special needs when the parents don’t want to admit that their children have these problems. And they don’t want to get diagnosed, they don’t want to go to the doctor, they don’t want to recognize it. So, I propose the information about infant development specifically in the area of development (...)

Mayelin Escobar: [00:07:36] that the child was having difficulty with and support with specific activities to guide them to available resources for a more in-depth evaluation. There are also changes in the role, this has happened to me a lot when I come to the houses, and the mothers leave me with the child or the baby and starts talking on the phone and I tell them “I didn’t come to play with the child, to work with the child, the child is not the one who has to do the work.” I explained to the mother many times, “Apart from what I already explained to you at the beginning when you enrolled in the program, look, I come to observe, to observe the activity, see how they interact with Mom and Dad, and I evaluate the child in its development. But I am not the teacher like how it is in school.” So, those are other challenges that I face with different families. I have a family that I have known and worked with for eleven years. When I met them, their second daughter was two and a half years old. The little girl had a small delay in language, which I started to work with her, and they were very worried because she wasn’t speaking the same as the other children at that age. The first thing I did was I said “Don’t worry!”

Mayelin Escobar: [00:09:20] All children develop differently. She can’t compare her child to the other children. The level of growth of each child is different. So, we worked hard with her and the child started talking and everything was fine. But I continued working with this mom because every time we finished with one baby, she had another baby. I am working with her last baby, I think it’s the last baby, that is now 27 months old. I was lucky enough to be her doula. I got my doula certificate to work with her as her doula as well. I have worked with her over the years not only as an educator, but also as her counselor, and I have encouraged her and taught her to take care of herself and take time for her[self], I taught her how to create a routine with the children. She said the same thing one day, “You were right, all the children have different levels of growth because they are all the same, they are from the same father, and look: they are all speaking differently, they all left diapers at a different time, they are all different, some are more independent than others. It’s

true, I recognize that they all have different levels of growth.” There was another Mom that I visited, and she had wrapped her baby in a blanket and put it in a car seat.

Mayelin Escobar: [00:11:31] I told her when I got there, I said “Look, the baby needs to leave the car seat, the wrap is only used for the first few weeks”, and to let it be, put the baby on the floor on a hard surface to see her move and let the baby start to move. Then she told me, she answered that she put her [the baby] there to be able to do things around the house. I told her: but it's better that you put her in a place where the baby is free, where it has freedom [to move] her arms, her little legs, she can play. So, it happened that the baby had its two-month consultation, its first consultation. I realized when they took the baby out of the wrap (blanket) and we put her on the floor because I wanted to see the baby’s movements, when they took the baby out, I noticed the hands were trembling and I told them, “Look, she has a tremble in her hands that is a product of you having the baby wrapped like that.” This was reflected in the hands and the reflexes. Then, they told me...then they went to her consult and the doctor and the pediatrician noticed the shaking in the hands and they wanted to have more results to have more peace [of mind]. So, they did a head scan, (...)

Mayelin Escobar: [00:13:11] and the results showed that there was an effect that changed the cognitive part of the brain. The baby started doing physical therapy for cognitive development and reflexes. In our next visit after, she told me “You were right, teacher, I didn’t listen to you and now my baby has problems and I am very stressed and worried.” This time I told her “Look, don’t worry about this, this is not such a serious problem. This was detected in time, there is time for a solution. The baby will have physical therapy and now we will work together, the three of us, and we will help the baby.” And that is what happened. We started doing the activities that affected it and that solved the problem. We are going to now talk about the Hispanic community and how the Hispanic community accepts the home visiting program. I believe that offering home visiting programs is a really great benefit to them. They feel really supported, not only in the education and growth of their children. If they don't feel very supported, they should have someone who is guiding them in all of the areas, someone to ask any questions they have, someone to talk to when they are distressed. As bilingual educators, we help them with translating documents, making medical appointments when they can’t, we do lot of things. We are multifaceted and help them through the same problems [I had] with the language barrier (...)

Mayelin Escobar: [00:15:20] if they can’t do it. Sometimes I push them to study English because starting English classes motivates them to do things younger, the young mothers. But in my experience as an educator, I have learned it can make them more patient and tolerant even though we share different languages. This is also a part of being an educator - all families are different. Sometimes you find some mothers are a bit more withdrawn, they don’t like... they are more reserved. But by the end they become more open, they start to become more communicative. I am faced with idioms that they say, they have more words, they have their idioms and phrases that don’t match with [mine], and sometimes I say things that aren’t correct, so I feel bad to say a phrase

or idiom. We teach the importance of taking time for self-care to the mothers. It's also something that is really invaluable. Throughout my career, I have learned that empathy and adaptability are fundamental to meet the needs of the family. To recognize and respect the personal cultural differences has allowed me to make deeper and more effective connections. Additionally, encouraging open communication and offering constant support has been key to empowering parents in their role and strengthens the development and well-being of their children. I think they are happy with the home visiting program. I would say to become a parent educator, if someone were to apply for the position... it's a job that is very enriching.

Mayelin Escobar: [00:17:52] There are challenges, it has difficulties. It is fundamental to recognize each family is unique. Everyone is different with their own dynamics and parenting methods even when they share the same language, they are all different. It is important to have empathy for them and can address issues with them and show up for them in a respectful way. Sometimes it feels self-conscious, but by the end, they adapt to you and they believe in what you are giving them and they begin to feel more comfortable. It is important to highlight that at the beginning they have more reservation but by the end they are always happy with you for everything that you provide. Finally, maintaining an attitude of continuously learning is important for a Parent Educator to adapt to the changing needs of the families and maintaining the most professional practices. Embracing the principles of preparation builds success and satisfaction as a Parent Educator. I would say to a family that wanted Parent Educator services that this program not only offers guidance in education and child development, but also provides a variety of additional resources to strengthen family well-being. With a Parent Educator, it guarantees that there is always a professional trained to support the growth and development of their children by performing periodic evaluations they can tell their child needs what we work a little more in this area or the other area.

Mayelin Escobar: [00:20:09] That's invaluable to have someone helping. This program not only offers guidance in the area of education and child development, but also provides a variety of additional resources to strengthen the well-being of the family. Like I said before, translating documents, making medical appointments and we help with many things. With a parent educator, they feel like they have a guarantee that there is always a professional by their side that has the ability to support the growth and development of their children. By performing regular evaluations, they are saying to them "Look, your child is doing good. You are doing a good job." They feel secure that they are doing a good job as a parent. We always say "Parents don't have a manual." Because I had a Parent Educator I felt like I was protected and I felt like I was doing a good job. I didn't have a manual that could guide me and tell me how to raise my son. Nobody taught me. However, having a Parent Educator, a family educator, guides you and tells you what you have to do. This program Parents as Teachers offers that to parents... it provides opportunity. The program is invaluable.