

## **BRIEF HISTORY**

In January of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared The War on Poverty in his State of the Union speech. President Lyndon Johnson announced the birth of Project Head Start from the White House Rose Garden on May 18, 1965 and months later the Office of Economic Opportunity launched the eight-week demonstration program. Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, and community-based agencies across the country were the mechanisms for change. From the late 1960s-early 1970s, regional Head Start grantees were disconnected as a community but collectively experienced the need for advocacy and professional development in order to meet operational objectives and enhance performance outcomes. The need to fill the void drove innovation. After connecting at a National Directors Association meeting in 1974, a small group of regional directors began to convene regularly to discuss emerging issues and trends impacting grantees. As the group's numbers increased and the dialogue identified gaps in program support, this informal grassroots organization advocated for policy and funding reform, connected providers with peers across the region, and delivered services and resources to a segment of the early childhood community whose unique needs were otherwise unmet by an existing organization.

After years of grassroots work, the private, nonprofit membership organization was officially incorporated in on September 30, 1986 as the Region IV Head Start Association (RIVHSA) and under the leadership of William S. Fillmore, Jr. (Florida), who also served as the first President of the Association. From 1986-2001, the association filled its mission through the work of elected officers and standing committees. In May 2001, the Board of Directors hired its first Executive Director, John Lowery. In the same year, RIVHSA established an office in Buford, Georgia in space donated by a local member program, Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. Two years later, the organization expanded staff capacity with the creation of the Program Assistance Specialist position to support member services and increase organizational capacity through professional development. Myra Ingram took the helm in July 2006 as the Executive Director. During its 25th anniversary year, RIVHSA purchased its first corporate headquarters in June 2011 and permanently relocated to Snellville, Georgia in November 2011.