

MARWIC

T · I · M · E · S

MID-ATLANTIC REGION SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN

MARYLAND'S WIC AT CCI SUPPORTS COVID-19 MASS VACCINATION EVENT

On April 11, in Takoma Park, MD, CCI Health & Wellness Services held a second-dose mass vaccination event and the WIC at CCI team was there to support them. Since January, CCI has vaccinated more than 4,200 individuals, of which over 90 percent are minorities. The WIC at CCI team connected with over 800 patients and families that live in Montgomery County and Prince George's County by handing out WIC materials, sharing information on remote services, and registering participants on-site.

COVID-19 restrictions in Montgomery County and Prince George's County are typically stricter compared to other counties in Maryland and around the country. The mass vaccination event provided a great and safe way for the WIC at CCI team to distribute materials to many families who qualify for WIC services while adhering to COVID-19 guidelines. ■



WIC at CCI staff helping get Maryland residents vaccinated.

WEST VIRGINIA'S MID-OHIO VALLEY WIC PARTICIPATES IN CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

By Tina Smith, Outreach Coordinator

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Many agencies raised awareness through a variety of activities. Local Family Resource Network agencies created blue pinwheel gardens, planned a celebration of life ceremony, or staff dressed in blue colors for a day to memorialize those affected.

After attending an FRN meeting, Outreach Coordinator Tina Smith was inspired to have West Virginia's Mid-Ohio Valley (MOV) WIC staff participate in the Dress in Blue Day. According to Tina, "We serve such a diverse population, we need to honor and educate those affected by child abuse."

On April 15, staff members in all offices were invited to wear their favorite shades of blue in recognition of those children that we serve. ■



Just a few of the MOV WIC staff participating in National Child Abuse Prevention Month were Breastfeeding Coordinator Tammy Moyers, Outreach Coordinator Tina Smith, and OAIL Leasa Hart.

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NEWS FROM THE USDA: MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL OFFICE WELCOMES ELIZABETH BARRETT AND JOANNA HAZARD TO WIC

By Joseph Dybas, Program Specialist

The USDA Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the Food and Nutrition Service is excited to announce that Elizabeth (Liz) Barrett and JoAnna Hazard have both officially joined the MARO WIC team!

Joining the team as a program specialist, Liz will be primarily focusing her efforts within certification and eligibility, WIC's Farmers Market Nutrition Program, as well as the Senior Farmers Market

Nutrition Program. Liz originally joined FNS in 2016 as a program analyst with the Supplemental Food Programs Division's Program Integrity and Monitoring Branch in FNS' National Office in Alexandria, VA. Liz holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Scranton. Prior to joining the federal government, Liz worked at the International Rescue Committee resettling newly arrived refugees in Maryland – and helping them sign up for WIC!

JoAnna joins MARO WIC as a nutritionist where she will be leveraging her extensive background and experience as a registered dietitian. JoAnna will be working closely with nutrition and breastfeeding services as well as WIC food packages. JoAnna joins the team after most recently working for the Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) in Philadelphia as the director of nutrition and site affiliations. Prior to her work at CTCA, JoAnna worked at the VA in Western Massachusetts as the Healthy Teaching Kitchen Dietitian. Here she provided cooking demonstrations and group classes on healthy cooking and physical activity to our veterans. JoAnna holds a Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics from the State University of New York College at Oneonta and holds a board certification in Oncology Nutrition. In her free time, JoAnna enjoys yoga and volunteering at the local animal shelter. ■



JoAnna Hazard



Elizabeth Barrett

NEW JERSEY STATE WIC WELCOMES NEW PEER COUNSELOR COORDINATOR

By Cindy Weiss-Fisher, MS, RDN Program Manager
Nutrition & Breastfeeding Services, NJ WIC

The New Jersey State WIC office had been without a Breastfeeding Coordinator and Peer Counselor Coordinator since October 2019. Thankfully, New Jersey had support and guidance from FNS and the other MARO region breastfeeding coordinators. However, there had been a huge void, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

March 1, 2021, the NJ State WIC office welcomed our new Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator, Wamaitha Mirie, MPH, IBCLC! Wamaitha brings more than 16 years of local agency experience as a nutritionist and local breastfeeding coordinator. Her timing is perfect since we finally received the new WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum; Wamaitha attended the original training in June 2019.

Wamaitha is enthusiastic and ready for the challenges to implement the new WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum.

Despite the current environment (working mostly remotely), she is optimistic about the possibilities and the future of breastfeeding in New Jersey. ■



NJ WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator Wamaitha Mirie in a rare visit to the new NJ State WIC office.

MARO IN CONVERSATION WITH DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY STACY DEAN

By Mid-Atlantic Regional Office Staff

In early May, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO) had the opportunity to sit down with Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean to discuss the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Throughout our conversation, Deputy Under Secretary Dean provided a unique perspective of the WIC Program and offered an insight into how senior leadership at the Department and the White House plan to combat the hunger crisis in America, increase food security, and ensure all Americans have access to a healthy and nutritious diet.

Stacy Dean was appointed by President Biden to serve as the Deputy Under Secretary for USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services where she will work to advance the President's agenda on increasing nutrition assistance for struggling families and individuals as well as tackling systemic racism and barriers to opportunity that have denied so many the chance to get ahead.

Prior to joining President Biden's team at USDA, Dean served as the Vice President for Food Assistance Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). She directed CBPP's food assistance team, which published frequent reports on how federal nutrition programs affect families and communities and developed policies to improve them.

In addition to her work on federal nutrition programs, Dean directed CBPP efforts to integrate the delivery of health and human services programs at the state and local levels. Before joining CBPP, she worked as a budget analyst at the Office of Management and Budget.

Dean earned her B.A. and master's degree in public policy from the University of Michigan.

The conversation between MARO WIC and Deputy Under Secretary can be found below. Please note that some of the content has been edited for brevity and clarity.

— Q&A —

MARO: According to data released by USDA, as many as 30 million adults and 12 million children may not always have access to nutritious food as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this sobering reality, President Biden has signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) into law, effectively bolstering USDA's resources to combat the hunger crisis and increase food security. In particular, the ARPA includes \$390 million for modernizing the WIC Program. With this additional funding, where do you envision WIC to be in the next five years?

DUS Dean: Our top priority and overarching goal for the funds is to work with states and WIC clinics to implement strategies that will increase WIC Program participation, retention, and the use of WIC services and benefits – especially for underserved eligible populations. These funds are going to allow us to enroll more people, improve the participation experience, streamline benefit delivery and services, and reduce disparities where they exist in program delivery. Five years out, I hope we will see a WIC Program that continues to deliver the high impact services that it currently does while also reaching more eligible individuals and communities.

MARO: COVID-19 has drastically impacted the operations of the WIC Program, especially as WIC clinics at the local level have had to rethink operations and implement new procedures. However, as the nation begins to get vaccinated, many are beginning to wonder what life will look like after COVID-19. From your perspective, what are the biggest opportunities for the WIC Program as we enter a new “normal” post-COVID-19?

DUS Dean: While we know that WIC works, we have learned that through more flexibility, WIC can be more responsive to participants and reach eligible non-participants. I hope the things we explore, in collaboration with states and clinics, will be greater use of telehealth services, providing clients with more control over scheduling appointments, and possibly sharing medical records to reduce redundant visits. One way of thinking about what has happened over the past year in WIC is that we have fast-forwarded modernization. What we want to do is figure out which approaches to service that were supported through waivers we should bring forward to provide better service and strengthen the program. However, I don't want to do it just because we can – I want to do it because we believe it will improve program access.

MARO: Each year USDA-FNS reaches millions of mothers and babies through the WIC Program. What steps can we take to ensure FNS continues to administer a program that is equitable, inclusive and serves those who have historically been socially disadvantaged?

DUS Dean: I have two answers to this question. First, I think we should not assume that FNS has been administering a program that is equitable and inclusive. Instead, let's ask our participants. They should decide. When we shift power and make ourselves vulnerable to others' views on what is working and not working – then we are open to the conversation about how to improve operations. Second, we need to listen to people who are not participating in the program and talk with providers who can tell us about their patients and why they are not enrolling in the WIC Program.

MARO: What steps can we take to build stronger and more effective partnerships with stakeholders to advance the overall mission of the WIC Program?

DUS Dean: First, building upon the tremendous stakeholder relationships that we already have. However, I would encourage us all to approach this with some humility and assess whether we at USDA are a good partner. The federal government has a lot of power and responsibility in overseeing WIC. I think it is really important that we make sure our authority is not preventing us from talking to groups and individuals who are more marginalized and for those who might find it difficult or intimidating to engage with USDA. The federal government tends to work a lot with groups who have expertise on how to connect with the federal government and I appreciate that – but it will take some real capacity building to make sure we are talking with folks who are not accustomed to talking with the federal government to ensure we are engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders.

MARO: If you could send one message to someone who is on the frontlines and works in a WIC clinic, what would it be?

DUS Dean: Please keep doing what you are doing – you are doing amazing work in making sure our country's children have a healthy and strong start! This is critical work for the future of our communities and country! ■

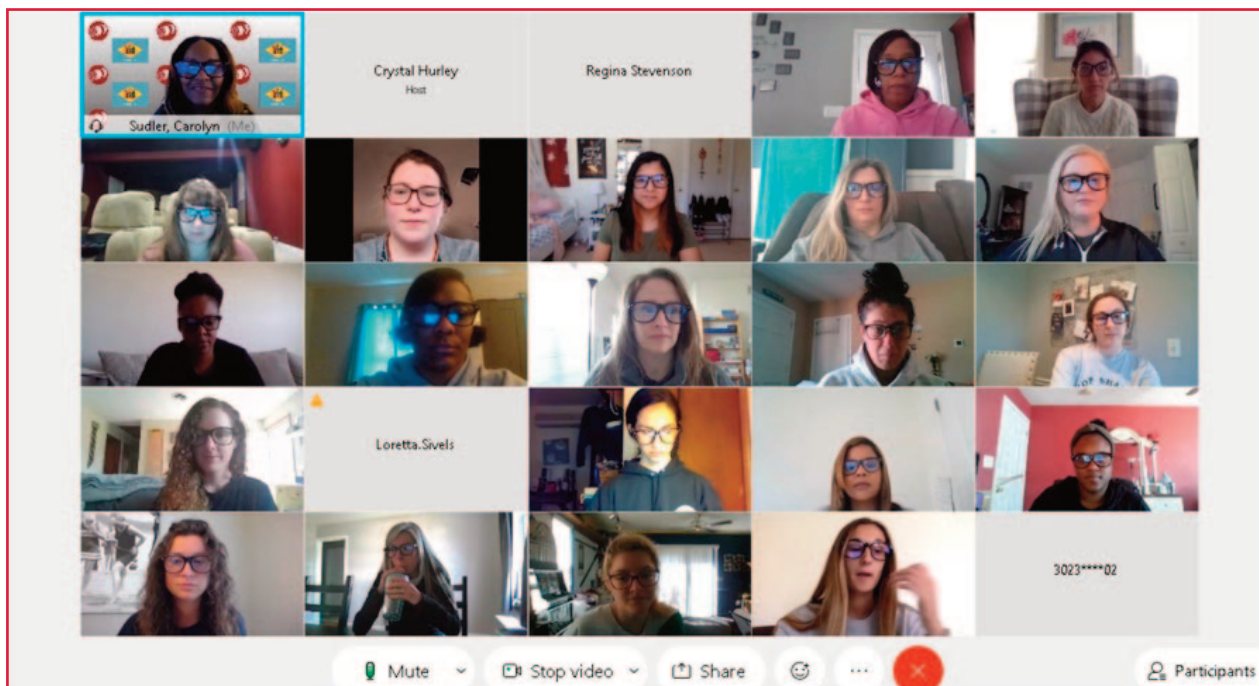
DELAWARE WIC PROVIDES BLUE LIGHT GLASSES TO STAFF

By Maria Shroyer, MS, RD, LDN

Delaware WIC held its annual in-service virtually in October 2020 featuring a favorite speaker, Jeffrey Harris, DPH, RD, professor at West Chester University. He spoke on FODMAP diets and Intermittent Fasting. During this talk, he mentioned that he had been using and benefitting from Blue Light glasses due to so much computer use during the pandemic.

Delaware WIC staff has been doing remote operations since March 2020, and all visits are conducted over the phone. Even when in person, staff spends a considerable amount of time with the WIC On the Web (WOW) computer software system.

As a holiday surprise, all staff was mailed Blue Light glasses to their homes. ■



Delaware staff show off their Blue Light glasses during the March virtual in-service.

VIRGINIA WIC WELCOMES NEW BREASTFEEDING PEER COUNSELOR LIAISON

The Virginia WIC Program is pleased to welcome Donesha Scott, DrPH, MSPH, BSW, as its Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Liaison. Donesha brings to the Program more than eight years of experience in public health and six years as a Navy Ombudsman. Donesha is a Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC) and is delighted to support the public health mission to improve maternal and infant health. She has worked as a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor and community volunteer to assist breastfeeding mothers in need of encouragement. Donesha's areas of expertise include abstinence education, childcare health curriculum training, and elementary and community college level health education.

Dr. Scott holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, a Master's degree in Public Health, and is a graduate of the Doctor of Public Health program at Capella University, focusing on Health Advocacy and Leadership. She has a passion for education, empowering breastfeeding mothers, serving her church and community, traveling, and spending time with family. Donesha has been married to her loving husband for 17 years. Together they have four children, all of whom are home-schooled, ambitious, and outgoing.

Virginia WIC is excited to welcome Dr. Donesha Scott to its Nutrition Services team. ■



Dr. Donesha Scott

FFCRA AND ARPA FUNDING IN PENNSYLVANIA

By Joseph McLaughlin, Director, Finance, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

In December 2020, Pennsylvania WIC received notification from USDA that FNS' Budget Office completed their allowance of the \$500 million in WIC Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) funds to the Regional Offices. The Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, in turn, made the FFCRA funds available to State agencies. PA WIC's portion of FFCRA included \$4.6 million for NSA and \$11.0 million in food dollars. To date, PA WIC has expended the allocated food dollars and is in the process of expending the allocated NSA funding.

On March 11, President Biden signed Public Law 117-2, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, into law. This provided authority for the USDA to temporarily increase the Cash-Value Voucher/Benefit for Fruit and Vegetable Purchases (CVV/B) for certain food packages to an amount that is less than or equal to \$35 per month.

PA WIC chose to implement this option and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service authorized a total of \$14.3 million dollars for the CVV/B increase in Pennsylvania. The ARPA funds may only be provided to participants as Fiscal Year 2021 food benefits for a four-month period and may not extend past September 30, 2021. ■

WEST VIRGINIA BREASTFEEDING PEER COUNSELOR COMPLETES CLC CERTIFICATION; FEATURED IN HEALTHY CHILDREN'S PROJECT BLOG

By Jodi Giancola MS, CLC, WVWIC State Office Breastfeeding Coordinator

Crystal Lovett, ADN, RN, CLS, CLC, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor for West Virginia's Valley Health, has completed the Healthy Children Project, Inc, Center for Breastfeeding Online Training Course and passed the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice certification exam in February 2021.

Crystal was a recipient of the Accessing the Milky Way Scholarship from Healthy Children's Project for the CLC course and was featured in the Healthy Children's Project Blog, The Milky Way, this past February. In the blog, Crystal discussed her own breastfeeding journey and how it has shaped her career. While she knew from a young age she wanted a career in Maternal & Child Health, she credits the lactation support she received with her own children, leading to her desire to support families navigating new parenthood. Crystal loves talking with WIC participants, listening to their stories, providing prenatal breastfeeding education, and counseling for concerns and questions.

"Crystal is an inspiration to everyone with her enthusiasm and dedication to families, to breastfeeding mothers, and for her advocacy for equitable care for all, no matter of race or ethnicity," said Mary Caldwell, Director at Valley Health WIC. "I am so glad she is working as a BFPC here at Valley Health WIC."

Crystal is currently studying to be a doula and plans to sit for the IBCLC exam in September. Her future goal is to become either a Physician's Assistant or Family Nurse Practitioner. ■



Crystal Lovett

FROM INTERNSHIP TO DIRECTOR: VIRGINIA WIC WELCOMES KAILYN STANLEY

The Virginia State WIC Office welcomes Kailyn Stanley as the newest member of its Nutrition Services team. She is joining the Virginia WIC Program as a Nutrition Liaison to fill the position of the VA/MD WIC Dietetic Internship Program Director.

Kailyn comes to Virginia WIC with six years of experience in a WIC local agency office. She previously worked at Richmond City WIC as a Nutritionist and Breastfeeding Coordinator. Kailyn has a Master's degree in Public Health, and holds credentials as a Certified Breastfeeding Specialist (CBS) and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). Kailyn completed her dietetic internship through this very program she now will be overseeing. She is excited to bring her experience to this position and work with future interns.

The Virginia and Maryland WIC Programs share the Dietetic Internship (DI) program. The program provides opportunities for eligible WIC staff to complete the DI while maintaining their employment. The 11-month program provides supervised practice in community nutrition, food service, and clinical nutrition with a focus on public health. Upon completion of the internship, graduates are eligible to register for the RDN credentialing exam.

Virginia WIC is excited to welcome Kailyn and look forward to the knowledge and experience she brings to our state office. ■



Kailyn Stanley

PUERTO RICO WIC DEVELOPS NEW AND FUN INITIATIVE

By Gloribel Rabelo-Figueroa, LND, Outreach, Social Media, Mobile Units and Satellites Region Supervisor;
Osvaldo Fraticelli, Graphic Artist; María J. Medina-Guarch, Consultant & Translator

As part of our efforts to expand and strengthen nutrition education across the island, Puerto Rico WIC has developed a new and entertaining initiative known as “Nutrition Superheroes Want to Meet You.”

Even when superheroes are characterized by their abilities and powers to protect the public and fight crime, they also help the world become a better place to live. Our nutrition superheroes will work to support good nutrition as a key element to sound mental and physical health for WIC participants. Therefore, we are happy to introduce you to the following superheroes:

Super Veggie: characterized by a broccoli representing the vegetable food group

Super Frutalina: characterized by an orange representing the fruit food group

Super Amino: characterized by a peanut representing the protein food group

Super Paneto: characterized by a slice of whole wheat bread representing the grain food group

Super Lactus: characterized by a glass of milk representing the dairy food group

All the superheroes will be transported in a mobile unit known as Super Llanda in order to carry out their adventure missions related to nutrition education. Their motto has been established as “eating healthy is also fun.”

On the other hand, it is important to point out that the previous initiative aims to involve all our service regions through the creation of short and entertaining stories encompassing the aforementioned characters. Said stories will involve topics such as: eating a variety of foods from the five main food groups to help obtain the various nutrients required by the body; importance of physical activity and exercise; importance of good nutrition for children; and tips for eating right, among others.

As you may imagine, Puerto Rico WIC is very excited about these new characters turned into nutrition superheroes that will soon be part of our family. They will come to meet our participants and share exciting adventures in the WIC clinics. So, let us wait for them!! ■



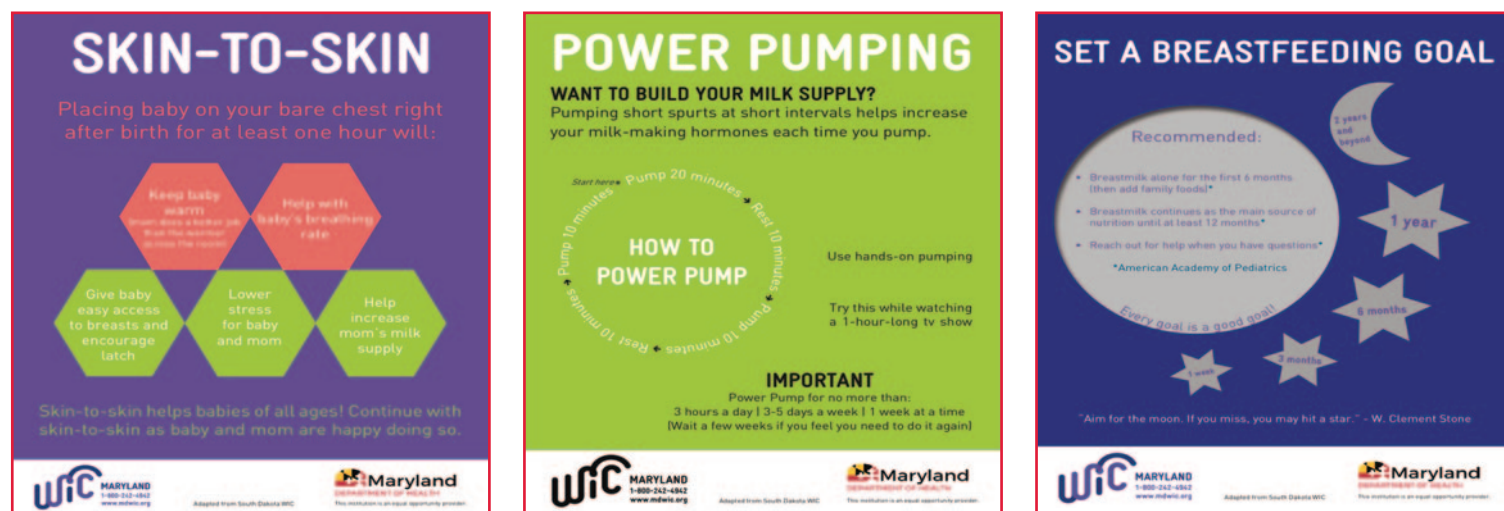
MARYLAND WIC INFOGRAPHICS: A NEW ADDITION TO PEER COUNSELOR BREASTFEEDING EDUCATION

By Amy Kovar Resnik, MS, RD, LSN, IBCLC

Very few Maryland WIC staff had authorization to text participants prior to COVID-19. Yet when our lives abruptly changed, and remote working became the norm, the Maryland WIC Breastfeeding team quickly pivoted, focusing on new strategies to provide ongoing breastfeeding guidance and education, as well as establishing rapport at a time when face-to-face meetings were not allowed. The requirement for distance counseling and the fact that no Maryland WIC local agencies were allowing in-person appointments meant we had to find creative ways to communicate with participants and convey information.

We had already been developing infographics for use by breastfeeding peer counselors as another way to meet the many expected contacts. Breastfeeding peer counselors are encouraged to use a variety of contact message types, such as phone conversations, texts, visual platform meetings and/or in-person meetings (when allowed). While most often used by peer counselors, some local agencies have designated situations when other trained WIC staff also provide infographics.

Infographics serve a variety of purposes. These pictorial images are packed with educational messaging, are attractive, and they stand out among standard, word-only texts. Participants, many of whom prefer to receive texts, seem to like them. Staff finds they improve efficiency, as they are quick to send, being ready to use, thus cutting down on time that otherwise would be spent typing texts and assuring spelling and grammar is correct. Staff that does not have ability to text participants can send infographics as email attachments, or print them and send via US mail. At a future time when Maryland WIC staff is able to meet participants in person, the printed infographics can also be used as additional handout material. ■



MASTER OF HUMAN-COMPUTER INTERACTION (MHCI) CAPSTONE SPONSORSHIP IN PENNSYLVANIA

By Jessica Smith, Public Health Program Administrator, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

What would it take to leave kids asking, 'Mommy, when do we get to go back to the WIC clinic'? Pennsylvania WIC was selected as a non-profit sponsor for the Carnegie Mellon University Master of Human-Computer Interaction (MHCI) Capstone Project. As a result, five graduate students are dedicating seven months to answer this question.

The MHCI students, otherwise known as Team WICKed Nutrition, are scattered from California to Pennsylvania. The students come from diverse backgrounds and each brings unique experiences to the table. Restrictions resulting from the current pandemic could not hold back this team. Nonetheless, it has created an interesting twist, forcing weekly meetings to be held via web conferencing.

The team is challenged to research every aspect of the PA WIC experience and create a solution for improvement. To kick off research, the team began collecting program history, data, and testimonials. Local team members visited a variety of WIC clinics to get a feel for commonalities and differences across agencies. Team WICKed has interviewed both state and local agency staff in varying positions to learn more about Program operations and technology from the ground up. Offering gift card incentives, students completed surveys and interviews with the WIC-eligible population including former participants, those eligible but not participating, and current participants.

Interviews are invaluable, but what better way to grasp the full experience than to personally participate? Three of the team members took on new identities: a pregnant mother who only spoke Korean, a new mother, and the mother of a 3-year-old. The students then acted as a WIC participant and completed a telehealth appointment from start to finish. The new identities brought to light a key piece of the participant experience that the team was lacking. So, they bought a baby! Baby Amanda Rin (A-mandarin), is a baby doll that will spend time with each student to simulate what it is like to be a caregiver. To further build empathy, each student will identify their own practices that relate to barriers participants face. These range from shopping and cooking with WIC foods to utilizing public transportation for grocery shopping and appointments. Whatever the new practice may be, top priority is making sure Baby Amanda Rin is cared for.

Team WICKed is nearing the halfway point in their project. They have reviewed endless amounts of data, from secondary research to co-design sessions, participant interviews, the prototype, the conceptual prototype, mock appointments, and staff interviews. This research has brought to light common trends which will drive the next steps in the project. The four main opportunity areas they've identified are: effort, access, action, and change. Team WICKed aims to decrease participant effort, increase access, and increase action. The team is using these opportunity areas to decide what to create that will have a lasting positive impact on the PA WIC experience. The second half of the project will consist of prototyping, user testing and the development of final deliverables. The state agency is looking forward to discovering what direction this project will take! ■

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WIC BREASTFEEDING PEER COUNSELOR'S 1,000 DAYS INTERVIEW

By Jaya Janakiram, MS, RD, LD and Chrisee Henderson BA, IBCLC

Chrisee Henderson, a Community Lactation Consultant and former Breastfeeding Peer Counselor with the WIC Program in Washington, DC was interviewed by First 1,000 Days organization about her experiences with the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program. The organization's mission is to ensure women and children have the healthiest first 1,000 days in the US and around the world.

Chrisee wanted to become a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor to help and support mothers so that they wouldn't have to struggle as she did during her breastfeeding journey. Chrisee believes mothers are more open to talk to Breastfeeding Peer Counselors because they have experienced some of the same struggles and concerns they have. A Breastfeeding Peer Counselor can also be a bridge between a mother and a WIC Nutritionist.

She addressed some of the breastfeeding issues mothers face when they return to work and how WIC supports them to make the transition easier. She explained how WIC provides resources such as stress management, a mother's right to pump at work, securing breast pumps from WIC or through a mother's insurance, helping to create pumping schedules and dealing with unsupportive co-workers.

Chrisee shared how gratifying the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor position has been for her and thanked DC WIC for giving her the opportunity to do what she loves. She expressed how honored she feels to know she has made a difference in the lives of breastfeeding mothers she has supported.

To see the full interview and blog post, please visit:
<https://thousanddays.org/updates/interview-wic-breastfeeding-peer-counselors-provide-critical-support/>. ■



Carol Dreibelbis, BA, MPH a US Policy & Research Analyst, 1000 Days (top photo), interviews Chrisee Henderson, BA, IBCLC - Community Lactation Consultant, Children's National Health System.

ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER AT NEW JERSEY'S VNA OF CENTRAL JERSEY (VNACJ) WIC

By Peggy Ferro, Nutrition Educator

Absence makes the heart grow fonder...even at WIC.

It has not been the easiest of times and yet, not the worst either. There are always silver linings and we at New Jersey's VNACJ WIC have found one worth sharing.

As we approach the winding down of the 2020-21 pandemic crisis and get closer to a "new normal" in the clinics, there is the most wonderful truth presenting in the ongoing telephone relationships we are experiencing with our participants; they trust us. Our families miss us and trust us at WIC.

It started to become evident when, little by little, moms began asking, "When will you open?" or sharing, "I really like checking her/his iron level with you, it helps," and the very ultimate evidence that we are trustworthy, "I can't wait to show you the baby."

Sure, not everyone is sharing this way; some may hope to never leave their home again for a WIC appointment or for any service for that matter (our moms are busy moms... parents, caregivers, teachers, students, employees, housekeepers, chefs, taxis, all-around Chief Household Officers, etc.).

Some simply like us and miss us. Many trust us enough to share some of the most memorable and intimate parts of their lives, specifically, bringing children into the world and then learning to feed them. That part of our work has not changed. However, the pandemic has broadened the scope of our reach, impacting trust, despite the "distancing."

Karen Borja, IBCLC and Lead Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, knows about this dynamic. "Coaching our moms in one of the most personal experiences they will ever have (feeding their babies) is an awesome opportunity to build trust. During these past 12-plus months we were making hundreds of diaper referrals, reaching out in email, conducting Zoom classes (both in Spanish and English), and sending a special bracelet gift to our breastfeeding moms to make sure each knew how much we cared about them. The feedback is so gratifying. They trust and like us. We trust and like them, too."

Our Agency's sponsor, the VNAHG Children Family and Health Institute (CFHI), is exploring ways to meet existing and now, post-Covid legal service needs of WIC families in our Freehold clinic. CFHI is first surveying these families for unmet needs. Surveying big life needs, for example, potentially losing public housing and needing advocacy, is another matter of trust. WIC families expressing legal service needs "in trust" to our sponsor is one more demonstration of our mutual trust. We hope to share more on this initiative this fall.

So, as the saying goes, absence does make the heart grow fonder, for both WIC families and WIC staff, resulting in more trust. It certainly motivates us to create touch points and share our sponsor's resources even when there are barriers like the pandemic. ■

WEST VIRGINIA'S VALLEY HEALTH WORKSITE WELLNESS PROGRAM AND THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE

By Rachel Miles Hoopes, MS, RDN, LD, CLC, ASCM – EP, Valley Health WIC, Huntington, WV

West Virginia's Valley Health WIC Program has had a health and wellness program for years and over time it has adjusted to meet the needs of our staff, the plans of our community and the realities of COVID-19. While we educate our participants on the importance of healthy foods, regular movement, and the beauty of healthy interactions with loved ones, we must also embrace these ideals and find ways to incorporate them in our lives. Support through a local health promotion program can help staff adjust to the realities of lives that are full of work, family, aging issues, and this year, worry over COVID-19 and the restrictions it has placed on our lives.

Over the years, some aspects of our wellness program have continued and thrived. A quarterly newsletter is released both in print and digital form due to the eight different WIC clinics spanning six counties in West Virginia. The Valley Health West clinic still enjoys educational information placed where staff spends time. Selected educational materials also include new materials available for WIC clients. This allows all staff from the front office to nutrition to see the breadth of information available for WIC clients. Along with education materials, questions that all can answer are posted each month. This allows staff to share information, solutions, and shared memories.

While we started the wellness program with healthy habits competitions, those ended as community walking competitions became more regular. We joined a city-wide walking program for which our parent organization, Valley Health Systems, created a team. Steps could be added on the website by hand, on an app, or staff could sync wireless devices to count steps for them. The walking competitions at the community level then continued to adapt with Valley Health starting walking competitions for staff that include prizes and change about every quarter. These competitions are run through an app that is easily used on phones and counts steps or miles. The progression to app-based movement competitions allows staff to decide if they want to join and/or what month's competition may work best for them.

Staff suggestions have also strengthened our program as it continues to change over time. Staff requested help with healthy snacking at work. For about a year, each Friday was a healthy snack potluck; some months we focused on veggies, fruit, or salads. Anyone could join in, but it was totally optional and a great way to use up veggies or fruits that we or our families had not gotten to yet. As COVID-19 developed, potluck-style food sharing was not appropriate, and change had to occur. Although staff enjoyed the snacks and time together, eating together and sharing food was now not safe. Activities then focused on self-care and reaching out when needed.

Our wellness program has been regularly included on the agenda at staff meetings. During these scheduled times, we have been able to do activities such as group stretching, guided meditation, and tai chi videos. Having a short break or two at staff meetings helped keep people aware and participating in what can be long days of information. COVID-19 has changed this too, as we are doing smaller or remote meetings now.

Having a wellness program that can adapt to change, along with leadership support, has allowed our program to thrive, even with something as disruptive as COVID-19. Wellness is something we teach at WIC and strive to live ourselves, but we acknowledge the struggle most of us face. ■



Pictured (left to right) are Sheri Carpenter, IBCLC; Rachel Miles Hoopes, MS, RDN, LD, CLC, ASCM – EP; and Michelle Hughes, CLC showing off worksite wellness initiatives.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WIC PARTNERS WITH OTHER FEDERALLY FUNDED NUTRITION PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE NUTRITION EDUCATION CLASSES TO WIC PARTICIPANTS

By Emily Woody, MPH, RDN, IBCLC and Banafsheh Dehdashtizadeh, MS, RDN, LDN

In February, the DC WIC Program partnered with the University of District of Columbia (UDC), Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to assist eligible families to enroll in online virtual EFNEP cooking courses. To assist with enrollment, DC WIC staff were provided information on how to enroll WIC clients in the EFNEP class series and text messages were sent out to WIC participants with links to the EFNEP registration page.

EFNEP is a free nutrition education program for limited-resource families. Since 2008, the UDC EFNEP has worked in local communities to teach participants skills and strategies to stretch their food dollars, eat nutritious meals, and improve their overall health. Through a series of hands-on and fun lessons, EFNEP participants try new recipes, practice skills that help them save money at the grocery store and learn how to make quick meals at home.

EFNEP participants have access to the support of a well-trained program assistant to encourage them to reach their nutrition goals throughout the series of classes. Also, EFNEP provides special training to pregnant and nursing mothers using the *Eating Smart and Being Active During Pregnancy and Feeding Your New Baby* curriculum.

Through the collaboration, WIC clients participating in the EFNEP course received cutting boards, measuring cups, measuring scoops, thermometer, and a cookbook of healthy, easy and nourishing recipes. EFNEP graduated 13 WIC participants from first class series in June. WIC and EFNEP plan to continue their partnership to enroll WIC participants into the EFNEP classes.

DC WIC has a similar partnership with DC's YMCA SNAP-Ed Program to offer "Simple Cooking with Heart" virtual culinary education classes to WIC participants which began in May. WIC participants received two free bags of local produce to be delivered to their home during the weeks of the class. According to DC WIC Local Agency staff, WIC participants were excited about the opportunity to attend these virtual classes and registration of these classes filled up quickly! ■

By Sierra Yoder

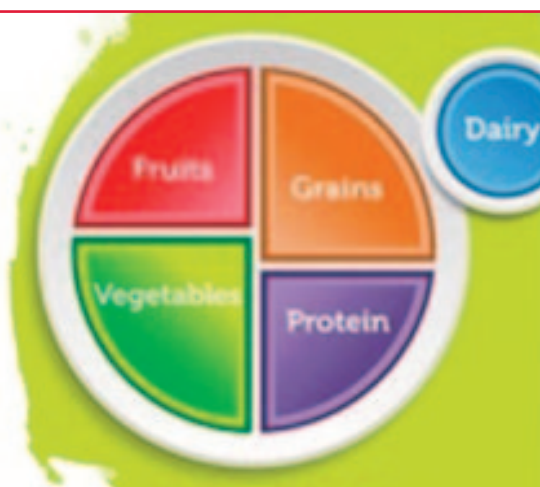
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many changes to how events are held and even how we interact with one another. It has caused us to find innovative ways to present information to individuals in our communities.

In March, West Virginia's Randolph-Elkins WIC's Petersburg office was asked by the local Head Start to speak with their parents about the topic of nutrition. The meeting was held over Zoom where the presentation of "Get a Head Start on Healthy Eating" was given by WIC Nutritionist Sierra Yoder. Sierra discussed areas of healthy eating such as, "My Plate" recommendations for pre-school-aged children, hydration needs, picky eating, and how to prepare safe foods at home.

The presentation also informed parents about the health and financial benefits of the WIC Program and how to apply if eligible. ■

Healthy Eating

- Choose healthy options for your child such as: fruits, veggies, grains, protein foods, and dairy or soy fortified products.
- Limit items that contain added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium.
- Use the MyPlate plan as a general daily guide.



MyPlate.gov



Get A "Head Start" On Healthy Eating

WIC AWARENESS MONTH AND WIC PUBLIC MEETINGS IN PENNSYLVANIA

By Candance Sanderson, M.Ed,
Outreach Coordinator,
PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

Pennsylvania WIC developed and disseminated outreach materials in celebration of May's WIC Awareness Month to promote the WIC Program and its services.

In accordance with 7 C.F.R. § 246.4(b), PA WIC held 10 virtual public meetings statewide open to the public to provide comments and recommendations for the development of the 2022 WIC State Plan of Program Operation and Administration for the WIC Program in Pennsylvania. Persons wishing to give testimony but unable to participate in a virtual meeting were also given the option to express their views in writing and submit written comments by May 31, via email or by mail. ■

PENNSYLVANIA WIC ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL DIETETIC INTERNSHIP

By Stephanie K. Bender, MS, RDN, LDN, Dietetic Internship Director,
PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

The Bureau of Women, Infants and Children (PA WIC) AEND Accredited Dietetic Internship (DI) recently concluded its DI application/selection process and is proud to announce that we have 12 Pennsylvania WIC local agency employees selected who will participate as part of the 2021-2022 PA WIC ACEND Accredited DI class.

Pennsylvania WIC is proud to be able to offer this unique opportunity to our PA WIC local agency employees across the state and considers it a great achievement. PA WIC's ACEND DI was created to both address retention of nutritionists and promote broad professional development among its ranks. In exchange for on-going paid employment, benefits and reduced tuition, interns are asked to complete a two-year payback period thus alleviating staff retention challenges and attract new talent to the PA WIC Program.

PA WIC would also like to thank all applicants and local agencies who supported the PA WIC DI Program and participated in the DI application process.

The next application due date for the 2022-2023 DI program is October 1, 2021. Please feel free to contact the Director of the PA WIC DI Program, Stephanie K Bender, MS, RDN, LDN, with any questions at stepbender@pa.gov or 717-783-1289. ■

NEW JERSEY OFFERS VIRTUAL MONTHLY TRAINING

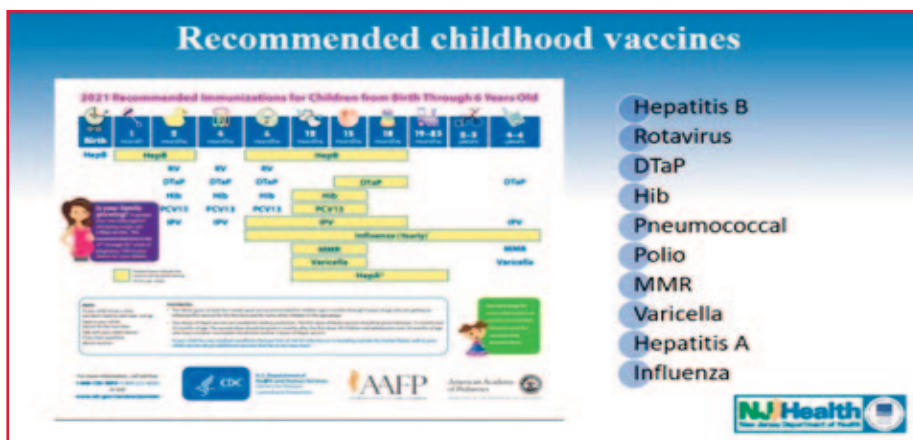
By Mary Higgins, MS, RDN Coordinator, Primary and Prevent Health Services, NJ WIC

New Jersey's State WIC Office has been unable to provide in-person trainings for Local Agency Nutrition and Breastfeeding staff since March 2020. We were able to regroup and provide virtual trainings beginning in July 2020. The platform we use is "Go to Training." These meetings are now held monthly and include training topics and important updates on policy changes, resources available to local agencies and relevant information requested by our local breastfeeding and nutrition staff.

For our most recent training in May, we had presenters from the New Jersey State Preventable Disease Vaccination Program. They provided up-to-date information on vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines for pregnant women, the positive impact vaccines given during pregnancy have on the baby, and tips on dealing with vaccine resistance. They also provided us with resources for staff. During past meetings we have had speakers on oral health and njparentlink.nj.gov, a state website for up-to-date resources for families.

The Go to Training format allows us to include and immediately access polls and tests during the session. The responses allow us to gauge understanding and gather opinions. Every session concludes with an evaluation, which is sent at the end of the meeting to all attendees. The results help us determine if the training was well received, along with suggestions for improvements and additional topics of interest. ■

Highlights from the May 2021 Immunization and Vaccine presentation.



MARYLAND'S JOHNS HOPKINS WIC CELEBRATES NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

By Chloe Dillaway, MSPH, RD, LDN, Nutritionist, Johns Hopkins WIC

March is National Nutrition Month, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' annual campaign to celebrate nutrition and encourage learning about healthy eating habits. This year's theme was "Personalize Your Plate – there is no one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition and health." Johns Hopkins WIC staff in Baltimore celebrated National Nutrition Month by honoring the varied backgrounds of its unique staff.

Each morning during the month, a photo of a different staff member's plate of food was shared by email, along with details about how it exemplified personal taste and recipe tips. Staff was encouraged to guess who had prepared the dish, and by the afternoon, the "chef" was revealed. From air-fryer-cooked salmon with steamed spinach and sweet potatoes to plantain soup with broccoli and carrots, the recipe sharing inspired new meal ideas and a sense of connection among staff that had been working remotely for over a year. The pictures were also shared with participants on the Johns Hopkins WIC Facebook page. Many participants engaged with the posts promoting the message that there are a variety of ways to "eat healthy," reflecting our cultural backgrounds, and health and wellness goals. ■



A sample of Johns Hopkins WIC staff dishes to celebrate National Nutrition Month.

WEST VIRGINIA BREASTFEEDING-FRIENDLY CHILDCARE TRAIN-THE-TRAINER WORKSHOP

By Jodi Giancola, MS, CLC, WV WIC State Office Breastfeeding Coordinator

On April 28, a three-hour West Virginia Breastfeeding Friendly Childcare Train-the-Trainer virtual workshop was provided by Dr. Jamie Jeffrey, MD, FAAP, Director of Keys 4 Healthy Kids; Molly McMillion, RN, BSN, IBCLC, LCCE, CPST, Director of West Virginia Breastfeeding Alliance and Special Projects Consultant for West Virginia Perinatal Partnership; Joyce M. Tucker, ITSN Coordinator, Division of Early Care and Education for WV DHHR; and Jodi Giancola MS, CLC, WV WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator.

The training was adapted from The Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute and is part of a statewide workgroup intervention to help normalize breastfeeding in early childcare centers to help increase initiation and duration of breastfeeding in West Virginia. The training served to educate on the benefits of breastfeeding for mother and infant, addressing personal feelings about breastfeeding, proper storage and handling of breastmilk, ways to normalize breastfeeding in the childcare setting, paced bottle feeding, the Ten Steps for Breastfeeding Friendly Childcare Centers and local community resources, including West Virginia WIC.

The training was a big success with 33 attendees, including Infant Toddler Specialists, Quality Improvement Specialists, nurses and health educators, and Traveling Resources and Information Services providers. West Virginia WIC is excited to be a part of this statewide initiative. ■



**MARWIC
TIMES
Calendar**

The deadline for the Fall issue of MARWIC Times is August 6, 2021.

Submit articles, photos and calendar events to your State editor.

No Polaroid pictures. 5" x 7" digital photos (saved as JPEGs)

preferred. All photographs must include a detailed caption.