

MARWIC

T · I · M · E · S

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

WEST VIRGINIA VOAD DONATES PPE TO THE CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA WIC PROGRAM

By Hannah James, Central WV WIC Outreach Coordinator

The West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) consists of organizations that are active in disaster response throughout West Virginia. They strive to educate the community on the importance of working together during times of disaster preparedness, response, relief and recovery. The West Virginia VOAD, with guidance from the National VOAD, focus on these four principles as the foundation of their organization: cooperation, communication, coordination and collaboration, which they achieve while working with local, regional and national partners.

The Central WV WIC Program contacted the West Virginia VOAD to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) due to vendor supply shortages as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staci Boggs, a Recovery Coordinator with the West Virginia VOAD, quickly responded to the request and coordinated a day and time to distribute supplies to our Braxton WIC Office.

The office was provided with various PPE materials such as masks, gloves, gowns, and hand sanitizer to use when needed. We are very humbled by the West Virginia VOAD's donation of these essential items that will help protect our WIC staff.

Staci's favorite thing about working for the West Virginia VOAD "is making a difference in the lives of others." This pandemic has surely been trying, but we are so thankful to have community partners who are willing and ready to assist in times of need!

For more information on the West Virginia VOAD and the services they provide, visit www.wvvoad.org or email info@wvvoad.org. ■



Central WV WIC Outreach Coordinator Hannah James with PPE supplies donated by the West Virginia VOAD.

CHILDREN'S NATIONAL HEALTH SYSTEM WIC IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA READY AND SET TO GO TO SERVE CLIENTS DURING COVID-19

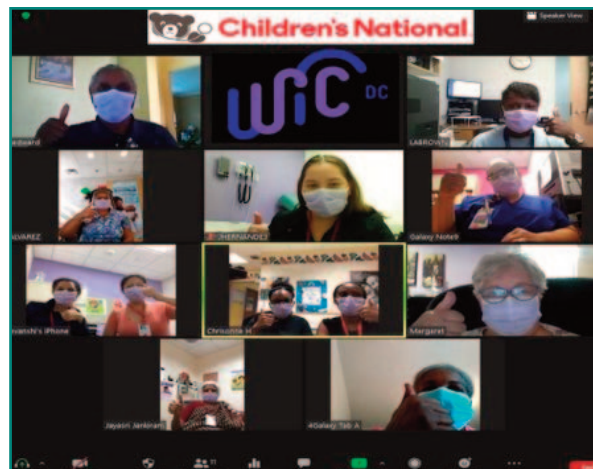
By Jaya Janakiram, Children's WIC Director, reflecting on COVID-19's impact on their WIC team

COVID-19 has been a humbling experience of a lifetime. The experience has truly brought our team together to assist the underserved target population. Some of our participants have experienced food insecurity due to sudden on-set of unemployment during COVID-19.

Telehealth has become even more meaningful during this public emergency as we were able to reach out to even more families to keep them safe and mail the WIC benefits. Both staff and caretakers appreciated the remote contact sessions with quality nutrition and breastfeeding messages without having to leave the comfort of their home.

The pandemic has helped us to devise strategies to maintain the continuity of care while maintaining the social distancing to mitigate the exposure to COVID-19.

I commend USDA, NWA and state agencies for acting swiftly to address the needs of the WIC-eligible families. ■



The Children's WIC team meets virtually due to COVID-19.

WINTER 2021

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Cindy Weiss-Fisher, MS, RDProject Manager
NJ WIC Services

Christina BalasCreative Director

Lisa ArnoldEditor

Please submit articles or story ideas for
MARWIC TIMES to your State Editor
at the State WIC Office Address.

Delaware.....Joanne White

District of Columbia.....Emily Woody
Jessie Lupo

Maryland.....Debbie Morgan
Ernest Le

New JerseyCindy Weiss-Fisher, MS, RD

PennsylvaniaCandance Sanderson, M.Ed.

Puerto RicoLcda. Gloribel Rabelo

Virginia.....Renee Johnson

West VirginiaDenise Ferris

MARO, USDAJennifer Nagy, MPH, RD

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(3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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NEWS FROM THE USDA: MOVING FAMILIES FORWARD DURING COVID-19

By Joseph Dybas, Pathways Intern, USDA

Throughout the country, millions of Americans have sought assistance due to the difficulties brought about by the coronavirus (COVID-19). However, despite the significant influx of those in need, staffs in our state and local offices have never wavered in providing the highest quality of guidance and compassion.

On the behalf of all of us at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO), we send our deepest thanks to the state and local staff who continually rise to meet this challenge and play a crucial role in implementing new efforts and moving families forward.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has worked tirelessly to ensure all Americans have access to nutritious foods and the resources necessary to live a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle. For the past few months, we have seen a Department-wide effort to implement innovative policies and programs that allow us to reach the most vulnerable and those who have been subject to the hardships brought by COVID-19. For instance, with authority given under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, USDA has established the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, a nationwide initiative spearheaded by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Through the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, USDA supplies food boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat products and a combination box of fresh produce, dairy or meat products.¹ As of September 29, USDA has distributed more than 100 million food boxes to families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.²

Moreover, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), which administers 15 nutrition assistance programs, has also sought new ways to better serve participants and those impacted by the pandemic. Most notably, FNS has launched programs such as Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) to ensure all children have access to a healthy meal during remote learning, while also addressing supply challenges and allowing substitutions when WIC foods are unavailable. It is imperative to note that since the outset of COVID-19, FNS has provided billions of dollars in food through local food banks and disaster household distributions, and has approved more than 4,000 flexibilities and program adjustments to ease operations and protect the health of all those we serve.³ Interestingly, of those 4,000 adjustments, MARO WIC has approved nearly 140 waivers, effectively ensuring our state partners operate in the most efficient manner possible. Unequivocally, through our continued efforts and the hard work done by all our partners, we will continue to meet this unprecedented challenge and move families forward. ■

[1] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service. USDA Farmers To Families Food Box. 2020.

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/farmers-to-families-food-box> [2] U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2020.

Farmers To Families Food Box Program Surpasses 100 Million Boxes Delivered. <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/09/29/farmers-families-food-box-program-surpasses-100-million-boxes> [3] U.S. Department of Agriculture:

Food and Nutrition Service. FNS Responds To COVID-19. 2020. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/coronavirus>

DELAWARE WIC USES SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER FOR DEAF PARTICIPANT IN VIRTUAL BREASTFEEDING CLASS

By Ida Lewis, IBCLC, RLC and Charmaine Sampson, IBCLC, RLC

The Delaware WIC Program launched virtual breastfeeding classes in February. The Program hosts these online breastfeeding classes the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Each participant receives a monthly text message to join online.

A deaf participant contacted the Program wanting information on how to join with her hearing impairment. She was excitedly expecting the delivery of her first baby and wanting to breastfeed. The Program was able to connect with American Sign Language, Inc. (ASLI) for assistance. WIC sent the presentation to ASLI so they could have time to review the material before the day of the class. ASLI connected with the participant to introduce themselves and to get any questions she had in advance. One day prior to the class, WIC connected with the participant and her mother to test for possible technical issues.

ASLI joined the online breastfeeding class and signed the entire presentation. It was awesome to witness the excitement of the participant. At the end the virtual class, lines were opened for questions and the participants had an abundance of them. The sign interpreter asked all questions and interpreted WIC's responses. What a success this turned out to be! A week later, the Delaware WIC Program received an amazing thank you email for providing the service. The participant shared that the service was priceless, and she was stunned that we were able to help.

The Delaware WIC Program will continue this collaboration with ASLI and looks forward to offering this service in the future. ■



While this is not the actual class, note how the signer can interact with the participant.

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AT PENNSYLVANIA WIC

Participation

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

Since the onset of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, WIC Program overall participation numbers have been slowly declining from March through August. Some possible reasons for the decline include: participants do not have the capability to do the on-line verification process, COVID-19 has given participants other competing concerns to deal with and participants might not be aware that they can still receive benefits remotely.

On a brighter note, participation levels have increased from August to September. This could be due to the continued WIC advertising, including the commercials featuring Charlie Batch (see related story on page 7), as well as the ongoing dedication of the Local Agencies and clinics to help improve the nutrition and health of pregnant women, mothers, and caregivers of infants and young children in Pennsylvania.

Statewide Declaration

By Heather LaTour, WIC Public Health Program Manager, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC, Division of Finance and Technology

The Pennsylvania WIC Program met the congressional mandate that all WIC State Agencies must be EBT implemented statewide by October 1, 2020. PA was declared statewide on September 24, 2020.

PA WIC was rolled out for use by participants across the state in October 2019 but faced many challenges getting all stores certified to take the eWIC cards. PA WIC has over 1300 vendor partners, so certifying all stores was a monumental task. PA WIC worked to visit all stores needing to be Level 3 certified to achieve the statewide implementation goal. The most difficult task was the number of stores located in the last region to rollout – Philadelphia. But with all the help in the field, PA WIC achieved the goal. By being EBT implemented statewide, PA WIC provides WIC participants the ability to shop for their groceries in an easier and more efficient shopping experience. Participants can shop as many times or as few times as they want during the month. It is no longer a “use or lose” of their benefits as it was when the Food Instruments were in circulation.

Telehealth

By Kathleen Hiltwine, WIC Public Health Nutrition Consultant, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

Pennsylvania WIC, in collaboration with the West Virginia WIC State Agency, submitted a Telehealth Intervention Strategies for WIC (THIS-WIC) grant proposal to Tufts University on September 8, 2020. The goal of the THIS-WIC grant is to eliminate some challenges participants face in receiving WIC services and keep clients safe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, while building an evidence-base for effective use of telehealth in the WIC Program. If awarded, at the end of the grant period, PA and WV will determine the piloted telehealth services effectively facilitated behavior change and offered the participants a positive WIC experience.

The grant project would allow the piloting of several telehealth interventions to eligible participants in both states, including virtual group education classes as the nutrition education contact at benefit pick-up appointments for children age two through their fifth birthday who are high risk due to obesity; online nutrition education lessons as the nutrition education contact at benefit pick-up appointments for non-high risk children age two through their fifth birthday; and virtual nutrition assessments at health evaluation appointments for non-high risk children age two through their fifth birthday.

Additionally, the grant project will assess effectiveness and participant satisfaction of two different online lesson designs: microlearning lessons which offer content that is brief and targeted, and umbrella lessons which offer content that is longer and more extensive.

PA and WV WIC received the commitment of ten WIC locations throughout both states to pilot the project, if awarded. The State Agencies are excited for the potential opportunity to work with Local Agencies to implement the project and contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting telehealth as a supplemental delivery method to in-clinic services.

Stakeholders' Collaborative Summit

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

PA WIC worked collaboratively with the Women's Health Activist Movement Global, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, and the PA Health Funders Collaborative to execute the PA WIC Stakeholders' Collaborative Summit Webinars on Oct. 14, 9-11am and 2-3pm, and Oct. 15, 9:30-10:30am and 2-3pm.

The purpose of the Summit was to bring together statewide leaders, advocates and stakeholders in the WIC Program to explore and learn together. The Summit highlighted innovative best practice models that have proven effective during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify strategies to advocate and apply these best practices in the different regions of PA. Participants and speakers examined key challenges and opportunities related to improving WIC services in the midst of a pandemic and EBT transition, discussed existing strategies and programming that addressed intersecting WIC issues, and identified opportunities to build regional partnerships to fill gaps in WIC services that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. ■



Pennsylvania WIC's ad campaign touts the virtual services offered during the pandemic.



The Summit featured eye-catching messaging.

PUERTO RICO WIC CONTINUES TO EXPAND DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

By Gloribel Rabelo-Figueroa, LND, CLE, Outreach & Satellite Region Supervisor, PR WIC Program and Maria J. Medina-Guarch, Consultant to the Executive Director, PR WIC Program

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped us. To some extent, we have reinvented ourselves in order to continue providing quality services to all of our participants. Although we are still working remotely, we have continued to increase our enrollment and today our staff is celebrating the new acquisition of two mobile units that will serve as clinics. This fills us with great joy because it allows us to increase the scope of Program services to current and new participants. Each mobile unit has all service areas found in a local clinic, including reception/waiting, anthropometric measurement, breastfeeding and restroom, in addition to being fitted with the necessary equipment and fixtures. Also, the units have received colorful vehicle signage with WIC contact information, logo and eye-catching pictures of real WIC participants, thus creating impressive, noticeable and striking mobile billboards with the intent to spread the WIC message 24/7.

On the other hand, and despite the lockdown brought by the pandemic, we were able to digitalize our 2020 Annual Conference on Nutrition and Breastfeeding for the benefit and training of all staff. This will allow said staff to access, from the comfort and safety of their preferred location, all information on the various topics covered by the conference.

In addition, it is important to bring out the fact that although we also continue to face situations caused by the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and especially María, we have received disaster funds that have permitted us to carry out equipment purchases; as well as investments in repairs, relocations, signage and settings of clinics throughout the Island. Likewise, we have been able to establish satellite clinics that will offer extended hours and services on weekends.

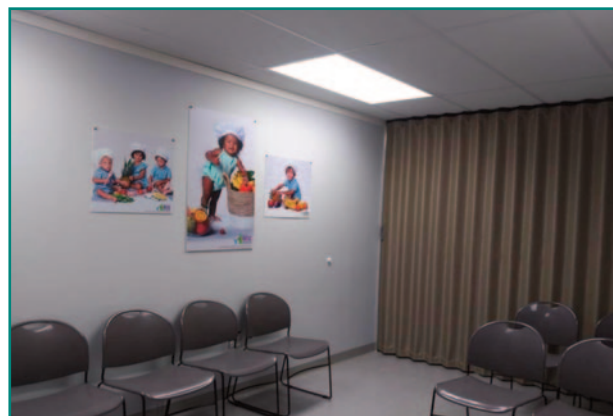
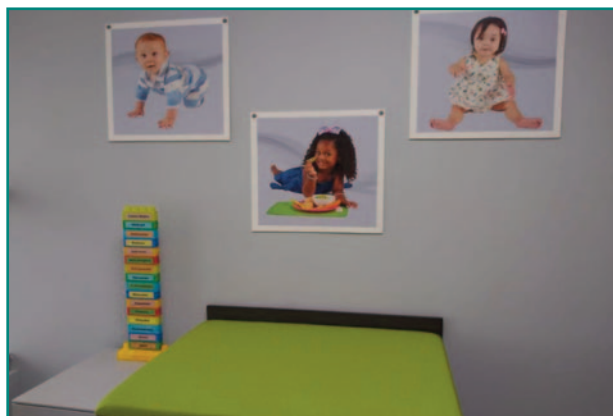
Ultimately, the difficult times have forced us to take multiple actions to face them and be able to continue uninterrupted, although differently, the provision of nutrition and health services to all participants. We faithfully keep our mission to grow and face challenges in order to continue achieving success. ■



Jeanette Canino-Santos, PR WIC Program Executive Director



Eileen Perez-Rodriguez, Executive Officer Human Resources and Labor Relations, PR WIC Program



Views of the mobile clinics.

MARYLAND WIC HOLDS VIRTUAL STATEWIDE CONFERENCE

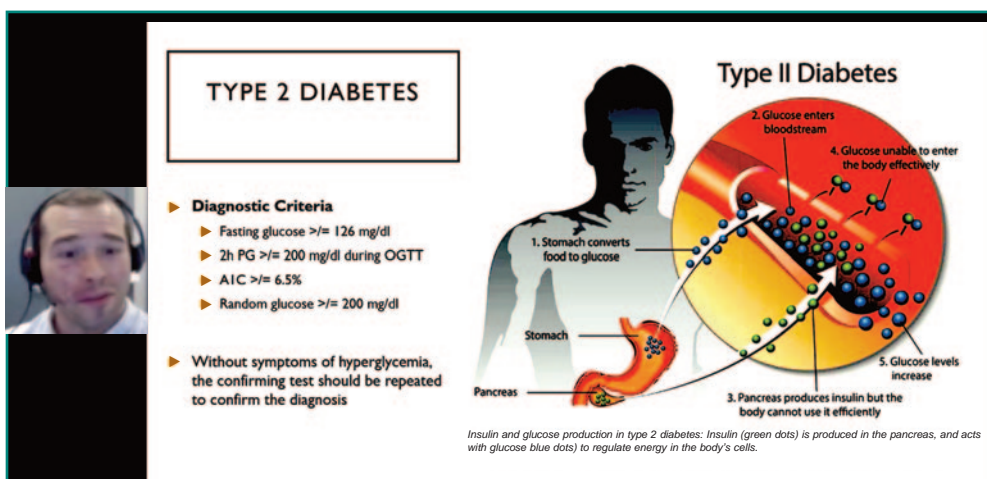
By Ernest Le and Cristina Luibil

Back in 2019, Maryland WIC staff began planning a conference for the over 300 workers throughout the state set to take place on October 28, 2020. By January of 2020, we had confirmed a location, tentatively lined up our speakers, and begun procuring goodie items. We had even designed a conference logo and came up with a slogan: "Focus on the Future." We expected 2020 to be a great year!

Sadly, that didn't pan out. When it became clear that an in-person conference was not going to be possible, we quickly moved to creating a virtual conference. We had to contact the speakers to explain the new format to them. Logistics for registering with the conference had to be redone. And we had to test out different streaming platforms for hosting the conference.

One of the advantages of going virtual turned out to be that we could hold more breakout sessions. Since we no longer had to keep everyone in the same physical space, we could invite more speakers to address a wider variety of topics. Sessions included education about gestational diabetes, a cooking demonstration, and tips for connecting with mothers in the Millennial generation. Attendees also received continuing education credits.

Attendees gave very positive feedback and participated in great numbers. Although we would have liked to see everyone around the state in person, it was still a great opportunity for us all to learn together. ■



Gene Arnold, MS, RD, CDCES speaks to the virtual conference about gestational diabetes.

BREASTFEEDING CAMPAIGN PROJECT AN EARLY SUCCESS IN PENNSYLVANIA WIC

By Tiffany R. Myers, MS, RD, LDN, CLC, Public Health Nutrition Consultant and State Breastfeeding Coordinator

PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

The Pennsylvania WIC Program has successfully implemented the USDA's Breastfeeding Campaign Project in the first several months in PA. Local agencies piloting this project have enrolled over 75 participants in the Buddy Program, a program in which moms are paired together to facilitate peer-to-peer support on their breastfeeding journey.

Breastfeeding information from the USDA's WIC Breastfeeding Support website is being advertised using social media to bring awareness to breastfeeding. The BF Project is reaching both current followers as well as those in the area who are not currently following the local agency's WIC pages. To learn more about the PA WIC Breastfeeding Support Campaign, visit: <https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/>.

Plans for the BF Project include the development of new breastfeeding education booklets containing the new campaign branding and important information for moms journeying through the four stages of breastfeeding: Learn, Start, Overcome and Thrive. This content will also be made available electronically for use during remote appointments as well as in an online lesson format for participant self-study. Finally, virtual breastfeeding classes were implemented in November to better reach and prepare new and expecting moms for delivery and starting their breastfeeding journey.

Pennsylvania WIC Breastfeeding Coordination:

- Releasing the newly updated Breastfeeding Manual which has been upgraded for user friendliness in the clinic.
- An updated Policy & Procedure 5.02 Breastfeeding Education and Peer Counseling Program is being finalized and processed for USDA review. This will be released, and changes reviewed with local agency breastfeeding coordinators once approval is received.
- Results from the 2019 Breastfeeding Services Satisfaction Surveys will be available soon and shared with local agencies.

PA Breastfeeding Coalition (PABC):

Pennsylvania has an active state breastfeeding coalition. A membership in PABC will allow members the following benefits:

- Networking opportunities, including four quarterly meetings held in January, April, July, and October.
- Resources shared with the latest research and state updates.
- Announcements about career opportunities, events, and educational opportunities for CERPs/CEU's.
- All-access pass to our private Facebook page, only offered to PABC members.
- Since networking is one of the greatest benefits of joining PABC, this could allow meeting others who may be interested in starting/joining a local breastfeeding coalition if there isn't one already in regional areas.
- To register for PABC, visit the following link: <https://www.pabreastfeeding.org/membership>.

A Challenge from the PA State Breastfeeding Coordinator

- If there's not a local breastfeeding coalition in your geographical area, join forces to initiate a local coalition.
- Active participation in a breastfeeding coalition has many benefits. A coalition provides its members with the opportunity to network and high-light work to promote, support, and protect breastfeeding as a cultural norm.
- Networking with other professionals in our state and more importantly, in our local communities, helps close the circle of continuity of care.
- Many other professionals who are vested in breastfeeding may not be familiar with the WIC Program and the wonderful services provided to participants, so networking and creating relationships with these people through a coalition could be a great start to a lasting partnership to better the community support available to the population the WIC Program serves. ■

NEW JERSEY'S NORTH HUDSON WIC CELEBRATES WORLD BREASTFEEDING MONTH DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

By Wamaita Mirie, Breastfeeding Manager

The world has drastically changed in the last few months. We have sacrificed much of our individual freedoms in order to protect and support our families and communities. We have acquired new skills such as the use of virtual platforms, meeting etiquette and safe guarding online privacy.

Throughout these uncertainties created by the global COVID-19 pandemic, New Jersey's North Hudson Community Action Corporation WIC Program has adapted and evolved to continue to provide breastfeeding support. Although most people are used to juggling multiple responsibilities, the pandemic has added new stressors at a time when we are increasingly isolated. So when World Breastfeeding Month came around, it only seemed natural for us to want to bring people together.

Using Zoom, we were able to host our first virtual fair on August 28. The event was lively and included a variety of activities such as a segment on leave time benefits, an open discussion forum, a dance session and a raffle. The 15 participants in attendance were excited to connect with each other and to have their concerns addressed. At the conclusion of the event, we felt a greater sense of community and we realized that our participants were also longing for mutual connections and support.

The NHCAC WIC Program hopes to continue to satisfy their needs using virtual tools until we can return to a semblance of normalcy. We would like to thank Yarrow Willman-Cole, Workplace Justice Program Director, NJ Citizen Action Education Fund, for her presentation on leave time benefits, and Amerigroup and Bravado for their donation of breastfeeding aides to our attendees. ■



Ana Velazquez, NHCAC WIC Program Lactation Instructor, posing with raffle gifts.

GETTING FRESH PRODUCE A BREEZE WITH VIRGINIA'S WEST PIEDMONT DRIVE-THRU FARMERS' MARKET

The West Piedmont Health District (Rocky Mount, VA) participated in the 2020 WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) Expansion. West Piedmont WIC issued vouchers to enrolled participants at two sites: the Henry-Martinsville Health Department and the Franklin County Health Department. The Franklin County site had two farmers present on Monday mornings for a drive-thru pick up. Each participant received \$30 worth of vouchers to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs from an approved farmer's market location or roadside stand. Due to COVID-19, this alternative method was implemented.

Tonya Judd from Naked Farms and Mrs. Peters from Peters Farms were present so that WIC participants could use their vouchers on the same day of issuance. Several additional WIC district programs in Virginia participated in the 2020 FMNP as well. The last day of voucher issuance was September 29 and the last day to spend vouchers was November 21.

The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services sponsors the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, also known as the Farm Market Fresh for Seniors and WIC Program. All farmers authorized with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Division for Community Living (DCL) may participate in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (S/FMNP) in Virginia. The Farm Market Fresh for Seniors and WIC Program is a federal nutrition program administered by DCL which authorizes farmers to accept Senior and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefit vouchers. ■



Lending a hand at the drive-through Farmers' Market were (left to right) Tonya Judd from Naked Farms, Lisa Blackwell (VA WIC), Regina Honaker (VA WIC), Mrs. Peters from Peters Farm.

WELCOMING BACK A FAMILIAR FACE AS WEST VIRGINIA WIC DIRECTOR

On September 14, 2020, Heidi Staats rejoined the Office of Nutrition Services as Director of the West Virginia WIC Program and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. Heidi had been working on child welfare reform to build a managed care program for children in foster care, kinship care and subsidized adoption. Her previous 13 years with the WIC Program were where her passion remained so she is pleased to return to the state agency.

Earlier in her career, Heidi served as the WIC Vendor Manager, revising peer groups, building the Vendor Advisory Board, and implementing minimum stock exemptions. She also spent time as the statewide WIC Outreach and Special Projects Coordinator. Heidi began her career in state government as a child protective services worker, investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect. She is a licensed social worker and received her MSW from West Virginia University and BA from West Virginia Wesleyan College.

"I am happy to be back to apply what I have learned while away from WIC," Heidi said, "As I think about it retrospectively, I revived my social work roots, and it increased my loyalty to WIC in meaningful ways." ■



Heidi Staats

CHARLIE BATCH MEDIA CAMPAIGN INCREASES PENNSYLVANIA WIC PARTICIPATION

By Jamie Sztas, WIC Public Health Program Manager, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

As reported in the Fall issue of MARWIC TIMES, the Pennsylvania WIC Program's Charlie Batch Media Campaign, "Champion for PA WIC," kicked off in September. Billboards highlighting Charlie Batch are now advertising the WIC Program. Charlie's family received WIC benefits when he was an infant and child, and he was one of PA's first WIC babies.

Charlie Batch posted the commercial on his Facebook page and gave a shout-out to www.pawic.com.

Overall, the campaign has generated over 9.5 million impressions, nearly 32,000 clicks to the website and 1.9 million video views. This campaign has increased participation by approximately 2,000 participants. This is PA's first increase in participation since the pandemic started. The commercial ran for the entire month of September and started again in mid-December and will run through the new year. The commercial can be viewed on cable channels such as Bravo, MTV, BET, TLC, Discover, E, Nick, Cartoon Network and on ESPN for Monday Night Football. If you missed the commercial in September, keep your eyes open for it now. ■



Charlie Batch, a former NFL quarterback and one of Pennsylvania's first WIC Babies, is featured in a PA WIC media campaign aimed at new participants.

WEST VIRGINIA'S TSN STAFF WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK VIRTUAL OUTREACH PROJECT PROVES SUCCESSFUL

By Diane Landy, TSN/WIC Outreach Coordinator

As we all know, World Breastfeeding Week and National Breastfeeding Month always generate a certain level of excitement each year for WIC staff. This year, however, proved to be a game changer in finding ways to reach out and spread the word about the many benefits of breastfeeding.

TSN/WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator Kathy Rotenberry routinely encourages and inspires TSN Breastfeeding Peer Counselors to step up their game and reach out to hospitals and community partners during the month of August each year, so it seemed only natural when she brought TSN/WIC staff together for a virtual supportive message about breastfeeding on our agency Facebook page.

This virtual project was effective in that it provided a great opportunity for agency staff to come together, albeit virtually, even though they were miles apart. Staff was able

to convey all the important information about WIC breastfeeding services and made the message more personal by telling participants that TSN staff missed seeing them in person. Moreover, because WV WIC had only recently brought Pacify on board, a new app for 24/7 breastfeeding support that is offered free to WV WIC participants, we were able to include that in the video as well.

I invite you to listen to this short video production online. If you're viewing this edition of MARWIC online you can listen to our video here: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=737195520408442>, but if you're reading a hard copy, please head on over to our agency Facebook page WIC in Southern WV, @wicwv, and scroll down and click on videos until you find the image connected with this article. Please leave a comment if you do; we'd love to see what you have to say about our resourceful initiative! At present, the post has had 356 views and of course has the potential to reach many more. Please know, too, that if you are interested in learning how you can create a video like this for your WIC agency, I am just an email away. Feel free to reach out to me at Diane.M.Landy@wv.gov to learn the very simple steps in putting together your own agency video. National Nutrition Month is right around the corner! ■



TSN/WIC staff (top left to right) Kaitlynn Day, Cheryl Legg, (bottom left to right): Elise Leef, Kathy Rotenberry, Ashley Byrd take part in virtual World Breastfeeding Week meetings.

WEST VIRGINIA'S VALLEY HEALTH'S CLINIC TRANSFORMED WITH NEW NATIONAL WIC BRANDING

By Mary Caldwell, WIC Director, Valley Health Kanawha WIC, Charleston, WV

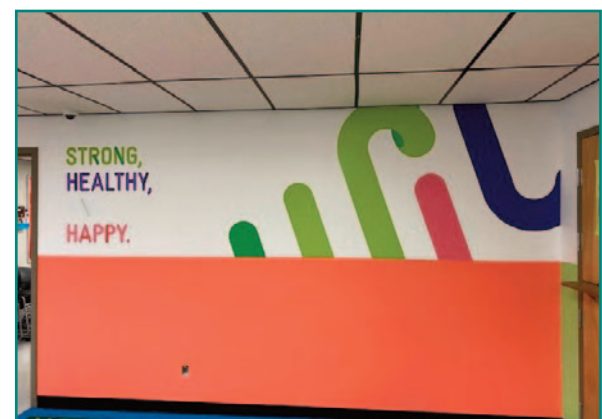
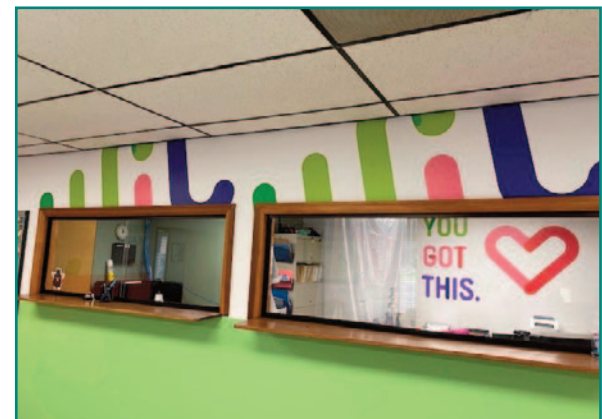
The COVID-19 pandemic and USDA waivers for physical presence for WIC services compelled us all to serve participants by phone.

West Virginia's Valley Health WIC Program serves a six-county area which includes the two larger urban areas of Charleston and Huntington. With open spaces and safe work zones, an initiative began to transform our WIC clinics with the new national WIC branding.

In the Kanawha County WIC office in Charleston, the lobby and public clinic areas were repainted using the new brand colors. The new brand icons and upbeat messages were placed on walls.

All offices have new signage and logos replaced. Entry doors and building windows were updated with the new branding to advertise that WIC is here to help families in a positive and life-affirming way with encouragement, sharing WIC nutrition and healthy lifestyle information, and referrals.

We love these new colors and messaging at our clinics and are excited for participants to come back when it is safe to see our new look! ■



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WIC COVID-19 PARTICIPANT SURVEY FINDINGS
By Nora Portillo, Intern for the DC WIC Program

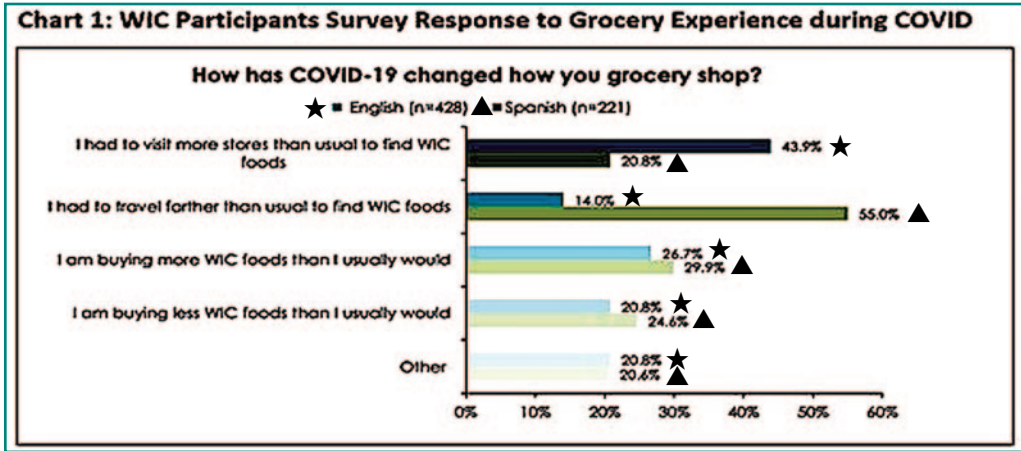
The DC WIC state agency administered an on-line survey to participants, in both Spanish and English, in May to gather real-time feedback from WIC participants and assess the satisfaction of DC WIC's response to the COVID-19 emergency in order to make necessary changes to DC WIC COVID-19 program operations.

The 23-question survey asked participants about their experience since the onset of COVID-19 with WIC customer service over the phone, remote WIC appointments, grocery store staff customer service, shopping with WIC checks at grocery stores, as well as their assessment of the implementation of the waivers and ideas on how to improve the remote services experience. A link to the survey was received by 3,752 English-speaking DC WIC participants and 615 English survey responses were captured, a 16.4% response rate. Of the 1,835 Spanish-speaking DC WIC participants that received the survey link, 401 responded to the survey, yielding a 21.9% response rate. Overall, there were 1,016 responses to the survey with a total response rate of 18.2%. Participants from all 15 DC WIC clinics were represented in this survey.

The main findings of the survey indicated the majority of DC WIC participants were satisfied with DC WIC's response to the COVID-19 emergency. Participants reported high satisfaction with phone-based customer service and phone-based appointments. Many participants requested that phone appointments become a lasting part of the WIC Program. Participants also showed a high level of interest in video-based individual appointments but showed less interest in live video-based group nutrition and breastfeeding classes.

Spanish participants reinforced the importance of having Spanish-speaking staff and translated materials available to them, as needed. Almost a quarter of respondents reported being unaware of the temporarily expanded food package, and additionally, more than half of respondents reported having to travel to multiple grocery stores to find WIC-approved foods (see chart above).

Overall, the survey helped DC WIC address necessary changes to the Program and will take these findings into consideration to provide participants with more positive experiences when it comes to communication and shopping for WIC-approved products in the future. Based on survey feedback, DC WIC identified the following areas of improvement and potential next steps which include updating the database of contact information, improving messaging and outreach in all communication avenues, ensuring that participants are able to successfully reach WIC staff in providing delivery of services and phone appointments to participants. ■



HIRING AND ON-BOARDING AT THE NEW JERSEY STATE WIC OFFICE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

By Mary Higgins, Coordinator, Primary and Preventive Health Services and
Cindy Weiss-Fisher, Program Manager, Nutrition and Breastfeeding Services

We were excited to find out in February 2020 that we could begin the interviewing process for our two vacant Public Health Consultant, II, Nutrition positions. Interviews were set. The last one concluded the day before we were put on lock down and instructed to start working remotely in March.

The process to hire in government organizations can be lengthy but add in an international pandemic and working remotely creates an even longer process.

Fast-forward to August 14, we were notified we could offer our two top candidates the positions.

Grace Amaechi and Tiffany LeRoy enthusiastically accepted and were scheduled to start on September 14, for on-boarding and orientation with Mary Higgins, Coordinator, Primary and Preventive Health Services and Cindy Weiss-Fisher, Program Manager, Nutrition and Breastfeeding Services.

Hiring and training two new State nutritionists during this pandemic came with the realization that the process would have to be accomplished predominately remotely. Most state staff continues to work remotely, with very limited time in-office.

Tiffany and Grace continue to work one day a week at the office and the rest remotely.

Maintaining good communication was a challenge. We did find that delegating assignments and setting expectations need to be clear and concise with specific deadlines. This increased the number of emails as well as our use of TEAMS meetings; seeing each other face to face and even on screen helps with communication.

Both Grace and Tiffany worked at a WIC local agency. They bring lots of energy and experience to our New Jersey state nutrition team. We are very grateful they accepted their offers during such strange times in our country. ■



Mary Higgins (left), Grace Amaechi (top right) and Tiffany LeRoy (bottom right) on a TEAMS call.

WIC VENDOR MANAGEMENT IN A VIRTUAL WORLD, A PENNSYLVANIA PERSPECTIVE

By Luke D. Sutliff, WIC Program Representative, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC

Necessity is the mother of invention” is a phrase we can all relate to over the past few months. The Pennsylvania WIC Program has re-examined processes, regulations, policy and procedures with lenses rarely used before. Routine job functions suddenly became a safety concern. Seemingly innocuous wording of regulations became major roadblocks to adapting to current circumstances. Meanwhile, broadly worded regulations gave leeway to complete job functions in ways never thought of before. There are many facets to the WIC Program, but few aspects are more exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic than the food vendors and WIC vendor management staff.

Pennsylvania has over 1,500 WIC-authorized vendors operated by over 800 different ownerships. Those vendors are overseen by 24 different local agencies, with state agency oversight. Out of PA's 67 counties, the lowest COVID-19 case count for a county was eight cases; the highest case count for a county is over 32,000.

The large size of some vendors is conducive to social distancing during onsite vendor reviews. While on the other end of the spectrum, PA has about 400 vendors with store sales floors of about 1,000 square feet or less. Social distancing real estate begins to disappear very quickly, when factoring in one or two WIC staff, two or three store employees, plus the multitude of customers flowing through the store in the amount of time it takes to complete an onsite vendor review. Those factors make proper social distancing difficult, if not impossible. A noticeable trend is that these small stores are often in the areas with the highest prevalence of COVID-19.

With the great variation of circumstances between locales, the PA WIC Program has looked to give staff and vendors more flexibility with an increased use of technology. PA WIC explored a hybrid onsite review incorporating video communication in developing a process that would maintain program integrity.

Due to current state regulations, a completely remote video communication vendor review was not feasible. PA WIC hybrid plan for onsite reviews requires WIC staff to be onsite to establish video communication with the store staff. WIC staff can then remain outside the store to ensure proper social distancing. Using a guidance document and verbal instruction, WIC staff will guide store staff through the selection criteria, minimum inventory, freshness, and competitive price checks, while observing through the video communication. WIC staff will need to enter the store to document any findings, or areas of non-compliance. By using video communication, the goal is to drastically reduce exposure time of WIC staff.

The hybrid plan is contingent upon vendor agreement and significant participation from vendor staff. In some regions, WIC staff conducts onsite reviews at 30 stores a week. Over the course of several weeks, an unbeknownst COVID-19 exposure to WIC staff could significantly jeopardize the food delivery system in a region. While PA WIC's current virtual vendor monitoring plan was developed in response to COVID-19, PA WIC is examining means to incorporate virtual vendor monitoring as part of our future processes.

PA WIC has also facilitated several other adaptations to vendor management in a virtual world, including increased use of email communication and electronic documentation with vendors. In lieu of each local agency conducting in-person annual vendor trainings, Brad Lechleiter, our vendor management staff based in Camp Hill, completed a recording of the annual training presentation. The recorded annual training was provided to vendors state-wide. PA WIC is also exploring remote inventory audits to implement innovations. ■

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA WIC WELCOMES NEW WIC COORDINATOR

By Vincent Falzone, WIC Outreach Coordinator, Norfolk WIC Program

The Norfolk District WIC office welcomes back to Virginia WIC, Denise Williams, who accepted the role of WIC Coordinator in June. Denise has more than 30 years of WIC experience. In her role as coordinator, she oversees the daily operations and administration of four WIC clinics in the City of Norfolk, Virginia.

Denise lived abroad for a few years and upon her return to Virginia, agreed to assist the Virginia WIC Program with its WIC on Wheels (WOW) project. Virginia WIC contracted Denise as a nutritionist for the special project in 2018. In this position, she provided educational and informational services to WIC participants by providing on-site assistance at local grocery stores to facilitate the utilization of WIC benefits. In March 2019, Denise accepted a nutritionist position with the Norfolk Department of Public Health; she was promoted to the site supervisor in April 2019.

Denise holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Food Service Management/Nutrition from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a Masters Degree from the University of Phoenix. Her many years working with the WIC Program include extensive experience working on military installations on the Island of Bahrain, Mainland Japan, and Guam.

Virginia WIC congratulates and welcomes Denise Williams to the Norfolk District WIC office. ■



Denise Williams

WEST VIRGINIA'S RANDOLPH-ELKINS WIC PARTNERS WITH LOCAL UNIVERSITY TO VIRTUALLY HELP NURSING STUDENTS

By Cindy M. Hughes, Nutrition Education Liaison, Randolph-Elkins WIC

Virtual learning with the click of a button! As senior college students struggle to complete their educations virtually, find preceptorships, and get exposed to real-world scenarios and experiences, WIC found a way to help! West Virginia's Randolph-Elkins WIC Program has had a long-standing relationship with the nursing department of their local private institution, West Virginia Wesleyan College (WVWC).

In past years, senior nursing students would rotate through the WIC clinic during their community and public health sector of coursework. During that time in the clinic, they would observe clerical, medical and counseling sessions for both nutrition and breastfeeding, therefore gathering valuable knowledge with real-life subjects. COVID-19 put a halt on that routine practice for Fall 2020. Nursing professor Melissa Franke and Nutritionist Cindy Hughes had to do some creative thinking to help students meet their senior requirements.

With correspondence and problem solving, Franke and Hughes developed an alternative to in-person observation and learning. Hughes developed case scenarios of WIC families that included a variety of WIC-related issues and topics that she counsels every day and presented them to Franke. Franke communicated the case scenarios with WVWC nursing students and they met independently in small groups through Zoom to discuss and problem-solve their family scenarios. Franke also had the students visit the WV WIC website, watch the "Welcome to WIC" video to explore and learn more about the Program prior to meeting with WIC staff. After completing their independent case studies in small groups, students then met with WIC staff and Professor Franke through Zoom to discuss the details of their case study.

Breastfeeding Counselor Michele Thacker also communed with students, Franke and Hughes to give guidance and address breastfeeding issues within the case studies.

Thacker said, "Although these times have been challenging, it has allowed us to come up with creative ways to collaborate. This meeting was a great learning experience for us and for the nursing students. The case studies were a fun and interactive way for the students to get a feel of what we do here at WIC on a daily basis and the common challenges we see."

There were two Zoom meetings with students, each lasting about one hour in duration. The sessions were interactive and were successful in providing students with real-life WIC scenarios.

Franke stated, "Cindy Hughes and Michele Thacker were wonderful collaborators in the effort to provide a meaningful, educational, clinical learning experience for our West Virginia Wesleyan College undergraduate senior students in Nursing utilizing Zoom to comply with physical distancing and safety during our pandemic. Cindy and Michele took the lead as they created case studies, provided preclinical exposure to the WIC website, and lead the post-conference debriefing with the students. Students shared in their clinical reflections how much they enjoyed working with Cindy and Michele's culturally appropriate case studies and how much they learned in the post conference. The students shared how impressed they were with the WIC Program and plan to utilize this knowledge in the future to help guide others who care for children under five years of age."

In conclusion, WVWC and the Randolph-Elkins WIC Program found "virtual" success when thinking outside of the box and engaging students in a slightly different way.

Hughes said, "The virtual Zoom meetings between our WIC staff and WVWC proved to be a wonderful way to help students learn more about WIC and community health. We hope to incorporate more virtual learning opportunities for students through the duration of the pandemic." ■



Breastfeeding Counselor Michele Thacker (left) and Nutritionist Cindy Hughes

PENNSYLVANIA WIC INTERNSHIP PROGRAM A SUCCESSFUL VENTURE

By Mark Shirk, WIC Director, PA Department of Health, Bureau of WIC, Division of Regional Territory Coordination

The Pennsylvania WIC Internship Program launched in 2017 and has been successful to date. The Intern Program averages four students per semester. Due to the flexible part- and full-time internships offered year-round, the Intern Program was able to allow nine interns to onboard in the Summer and Fall of 2020 despite COVID-19. Interns have been able to work remotely with the Commonwealth of PA issued equipment and are still able to earn college credits. All interns participate in WIC orientation and have projects assigned to them agreed upon by the PA state agency and their respective universities.

Since inception of the program:

- 28 students have participated in the Intern Program to date.
- 65 students have formally applied to the Intern Program.
- Majors have included Public Health, Nutrition Education, Business Management, Social Work, Psychology, and Communications and Public Relations.
- Students have participated from the following universities: Chamberlain, Cornell, Indiana University of PA, Liberty, Millersville, Moravian, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, Temple, and West Chester.
- Counties served by the Intern Program include Allegheny, Berks, Butler, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Elk, Lawrence, Lehigh, Mercer, McKean, Philadelphia, and Westmoreland.
- Notable Intern Program projects include, but not limited to: Retention Research Project, Farmers Market check distribution, Social Media Survey, Outreach initiatives and GIS Mapping.

More information is available at the following websites: <https://www.health.pa.gov> and <https://www.pawic.com>. Please contact Mark Shirk at marshirk@pa.gov or 717-783-1289 if you have any questions. ■

CONTACTLESS FARMERS' MARKET A HIT FOR STAUNTON, VIRGINIA WIC

The Staunton WIC office in the Central Shenandoah Health District in Virginia did not let COVID stop their WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program season. The staff adjusted their usual on-site market from in-person to drive-thru, to accommodate both social distancing and safety practices. From June through September, vendors and staff worked together to collect and fill produce orders for families during their three-hour market on Fridays. WIC clients received \$30 worth of local produce as well as recipes to try out at home. WIC staff worked to take their orders from printed menus provided at check-in.

The implementation of the drive-thru process was a rather seamless undertaking. WIC staff would take orders from participants and give the slips to the appropriate vendors, who then would fill bags with the requested produce. Once the order was complete, staff members would place the bags in the trunk or back seat of the participant's car to maintain a contactless method for receiving fresh produce from the farmers.

Both vendors and clients were happy with this safe method of order and delivery. Outdoor and indoor contingency plans were in place to ensure the ability to manage the drive-thru method, rain or shine. The district exceeded its goals and even beat its redemption rate from the year past with 74% redemption!

The WIC Program collaborated with Project GROWS, a local non-profit community-based organization, to make this market happen. Project GROWS served as the market manager for the vendors and offered SNAP cash match redemption in addition to the vouchers. WIC has been working with Project GROWS since 2016 to manage the farmers' market at the health department. Their mission is to provide food access and education to those who otherwise may not have access. ■



Drive-thru Farmers' Market in action.



**MARWIC
TIMES
Calendar**

The deadline for the Spring issue of MARWIC Times is February 5, 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.