

MARWIC

T · I · M · E · S

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

NEW JERSEY'S NEWARK WIC CO-HOSTS THE GLOBAL BIG LATCH ON

By Sharon Schopfer, BS IBCLC RLC

August 6, 2021, at 10:30am, The Leaguers, in partnership with Newark (NJ) WIC Program, held the annual "The Global BIG Latch On" event at The Metropolitan Church Hall in Newark, NJ. We had 18 pregnant mothers and two breastfeeding mothers who participated in this event. Sharon Schopfer, WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator, IBCLC was the guest speaker and Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Jennifer Rodriguez attended and enjoyed the interactions with our partners and the mothers.



The Leaguers prepared gifts for the mothers a good latch.



WIC Lactation Consultant Sharon Schopfer describing a good latch.

The breastfeeding mothers participated in The Global BIG Latch On, and we presented a demonstration on how to correctly latch a baby onto the breast using a red lipstick and small balloon representing a breast. The mothers certainly enjoyed the visual demonstration on how to illustrate a correct breastfeeding latch! This was a great icebreaker and conversation starter for the participants. The expectant mothers especially, learned one of the most important skills of how to latch your baby onto a breast!

After the demonstration and discussion, refreshments were served. The final activity was a series of raffles and giveaways for all who participated. Some of the items which were raffled, and giveaways included car seats, a breastfeeding Boppy, baby baths and diapers. Several of the winners were Newark WIC mothers and two are committed exclusive breast feeders.

It was an enjoyable day for all who participated! ■

DELAWARE WIC USES TEXT MESSAGING TO GREATLY IMPROVE NO SHOW RATE AND SURVEY RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPANTS

By Maria Shroyer, MS, RD, LDN

In April 2018, Delaware WIC implemented the text messaging system, One Call Now. Participants receive text messages for appointment reminders. The No-Show Rate (this is when clinic was in-person) dropped from 28% to 22% statewide. The stark decrease is attributed to participants receiving a text message with the option to call to reschedule if they cannot keep their appointment.

In the Summer of 2020, Delaware WIC conducted a survey of WIC services during the initial phase of the COVID clinic closure. Due to sending text messages with the survey link, over 6000 surveys were completed!

In January 2021, a survey was conducted of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. More than 2,600 surveys were completed at that time.

Text messages are sent out to participants to advertise online breastfeeding classes (two times monthly) and changes to WIC benefits, such as the Cash Value Benefit increase. Text messaging is also used for client incentive promotions such as the 12 Days of Holidays, which garnered 20,000 entries!

WIC credits text messaging with improvements in No-Show Rate, survey responses, and the ability to reach participants with special news to promote the maximum use of their WIC benefits. ■

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NEWS FROM THE USDA: HAPPY NEW (FISCAL) YEAR!

By JoAnna Hazard MS, RD, CSO, LDN

Breastfeeding Awards

A great way to kick off a new year is by celebrating recent successes in our Region. One such success was seen with the WIC Breastfeeding Awards of Excellence, formerly known as the Loving Support Awards. These awards recognize local WIC agencies that have implemented exemplary breastfeeding promotion and support activities and serve as models for other local agencies. This last year and a half has been incredibly challenging, but these agencies were able to provide outstanding service by showcasing their creativity and flexibly. We were so pleased to celebrate the eight Gold Award winners this year, which is double what we had last year! Our winners for FY21 are:

- The District of Columbia – Howard University Hospital WIC (See related story on page 5.)
- Maryland — Upper Shore WIC
- Pennsylvania — Bi County WIC (See related story on page 3.)
- Puerto Rico — Arecibo & Ponce Regions
- West Virginia – Monongalia County Health, TSN WIC Program & Valley Health Systems, Inc. WIC

We held a virtual ceremony to honor our winners, which included a great panel discussion looking at best practices and special remarks from Under Secretary Stacy Dean. Congratulations to all the winners!

Be on the Lookout for New VENA Trainings!

State staff will soon be trained on a series of introductory videos, discussion guides and supplemental materials that support the recently updated VENA guidance. These materials and trainings were available to clinic staff in December.

WIC 390 Modernization Fund

The 390 Modernization Fund is a part of the American Rescue Plan. After facilitating 27 listening sessions and conducting 43 discovery interviews it was determined that the two goals of the funds would be to increase enrollment, participation, and retention in WIC and to decrease disparities in program delivery. To achieve these goals FNS will focus on initiatives that:

- Raise awareness of WIC's benefits and services
- Certify people for program benefits in a way that is participant centered and reduces disparities in program delivery
- Improve the shopping experience
- Ensure equitable access to program benefits

This is an exciting time in the WIC Program, and we look forward to watching these goals come to fruition! ■

MATERNAL AND FAMILY HEALTH SERVICES IS THE NEW WIC PROVIDER IN BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

By Jean Holmgren, Communications & Digital Marketing Specialist,
Maternal and Family Health Services

Maternal and Family Health Services (MFHS) became the new provider of the WIC Program in Bucks County, PA, effective October 1, 2021. Bucks County Department of Health, the former WIC provider, and MFHS worked closely together with the Pennsylvania Bureau of WIC to ensure a successful transition with uninterrupted access to WIC services for families in Bucks County. The addition of Bucks County also means MFHS is now the largest WIC provider in Pennsylvania, both in terms of participants served and geographical reach.

WIC participants experienced uninterrupted access to WIC benefits as MFHS transitioned into Bucks County. The new MFHS WIC centers in Bristol, Warminster, and Quakertown, PA are now open, the staff have been trained, and participants and partners have been notified of the change in WIC providers and locations.

"MFHS is proud to add Bucks County to our service network, and grateful for the dedicated staff who are working together across multiple departments to make this a successful transition. It's been a remarkable team effort," said Shannon Hayward, Vice President of WIC Service Delivery Operations. ■

MARYLAND'S HOWARD COUNTY WIC CELEBRATES BREASTFEEDING ALL MONTH LONG

By Amy McCarthy

Maryland's Howard County WIC Program wanted to be sure to have the chance to celebrate their breastfeeding moms this year. World Breastfeeding Week is the first week of August and with the support of the State of Maryland, it is declared a month-long celebration for Marylanders. The Howard County WIC Breastfeeding Team, determined to have



Howard County WIC staff Stefani Spells, Ademiloye Oluwabukola, Patricia Reyes and Omotunde Omoniyi-Alake celebrated Breastfeeding Month at a variety of locations.



a celebration even if there was a change in guidance due to COVID-19, decided to set up a drive-thru event. The team created beautiful gift bags to honor and celebrate their breastfeeding moms; educational materials were provided, and moms had the chance to ask any breastfeeding questions they may have had with their Breastfeeding Peer Counselor. We were sure to have music playing and plenty of dancing when moms pulled up.

The Program was happy to have a proper celebration this year after scrambling last year due to the uncertainties of COVID-19. Howard County WIC was able to email certificates to breastfeeding moms last year and post about Breastfeeding Month on social media, but they weren't able to do anything in person.

Despite this being a drive-thru event, it was great for the Breastfeeding Peer Counselors to meet face-to-face the moms and babies that they have been providing phone support to over this past year. ■

PENNSYLVANIA'S BI-COUNTY WIC RECOGNIZED FOR EXEMPLARY BREASTFEEDING SERVICES FOR THE SECOND TIME

By Betsy Huff, Bi-County WIC Program, Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's Bi-County WIC's Breastfeeding Peer Counselor (BFPC) Program received their second Gold Award through the 2021 USDA Breastfeeding Awards of Excellence during the COVID-19 pandemic. (See related story on page 2.) Our trained staff and BFPCs go above and beyond to help each mom feel empowered by feeding their baby breast milk. Our education, encouragement, and support not only takes place in all our WIC clinics, but also by providing breastfeeding services at our local baby-friendly hospital, UPMC Susquehanna Birth Center. This is also coupled with our 24-hour local Breastfeeding Helpline and our monthly 'Milky Way' breastfeeding support group.

A few of our best practices pre-pandemic include introducing all newly enrolled pregnant women to our Certified Lactation Counselors (CLC) at our Lactation Station. This brief stop puts a face with a name, along with providing a business card and a promotional flyer. During the initial certification process with the WIC Nutritionists, staff encourages the participant to add their BFPCs phone number directly into her phone as they are talking. During a woman's pregnancy, she has routine contacts with her peer counselor to address any barriers, provide encouragement along with needed support. A breastfeeding postcard including a breastfeeding message along with mom's name and phone number is sent when moms are unable to be reached by phone. Women are also encouraged to attend our "How to Breastfeed" class.

When a woman delivers at our local baby-friendly hospital, our BFPCs are on-site to assist with breastfeeding support and obtaining a breast pump through the insurance company. Upon discharge, breastfeeding women are given a list of all breastfeeding services in our area, which includes our local WIC CLC and IBCLC services. During the pandemic, BFPCs created a breastfeeding incentive bag which includes a letter of encouragement and peer counseling service hours along with milk storage bags, nursing pads, an adorable baby t-shirt, and bib.

Our BFPCs are very visible in the local community by way of attending health fairs, job expos, and community-hosted events such as Kids Day downtown on "First Friday" in August. A 'Meet the Peer Counselors' stand is available where BFPCs provide information on the benefits of breastfeeding, WIC services and offer games and prizes to help engage with the community. We also hold annual events such as Baby Showers, Luncheons, and the BIG Latch On. Our agency always extends the invite to interested local organizations, which in turn leads to a reciprocated invite when they have an event.

Annually, our BFPCs will make visits to the local OB/GYN offices. A scheduled appointment is made with the office manager to review our breastfeeding services, hours of availability, breastfeeding flyers and the latest version of Dr. Thomas Hale's book, *Medications and Mother's Milk*. These visits have been helpful and a few physicians have called our office for breastfeeding information as a result.

Lastly, our BFPC Program is currently involved with the local breastfeeding coalition. The Lycoming/Clinton Breastfeeding Coalition recently received a mini-grant from the First Food Program that entails a 10-step process for our counties to become a Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community. The Peers will be involved in presenting our area as a welcoming atmosphere for the Breastfeeding Family. This will include, but not be limited to, "Breastfeeding Welcome Here" signs at local establishments, a breastfeeding proclamation signed by elected officials, and a business case for breastfeeding will be presented at local companies and/or universities.

We look forward to continuing quality breastfeeding services in WIC and creating a breastfeeding friendly culture in our community through both new opportunities and tried and true methods. ■

WEST VIRGINIA'S TSN/WIC TRUNK OR TREAT A HUGE SUCCESS

By Diane Landy, TSN/WIC Outreach Coordinator

When the local Read Aloud in Mercer County (WV) approached TSN Outreach Coordinator Diane Landy about 200 Halloween-themed books the organization had to giveaway to pre-K children, that became the inspiration for planning an outdoor Trunk or Treat at the Bluefield WV WIC clinic.

The event was held early, October 14, so the books would still be relevant to the children leading up to Halloween. Staff cleared their schedules for the two-hour event from 3 to 5 pm, and was happy to have the opportunity to interact with new moms and little ones in person.

WIC staff had lots of fun helping plan the event, which was open to all WIC-aged children, not just WIC participants. The event has the potential to improve retention rates and bring in new participants. Inviting local and state community partners proved to be a great asset.

WIC staff and community partners' Halloween themes were creative and complementary to the WIC mission:

Provider/Organization

Mercer County Read Aloud
CASE HS, EHS
CASE MIECHV
WV Mercer County Ex. 4-H Division
Blue Sky Orchard
Birth to Three

WIC Staff

Darlene Lester
Ashley Dowell
Emaleigh Rose
Meagan Rotenberry
Kathy Rotenberry
Missy Franklin

Theme

The Great Pumpkin
Journey the Bee
Healthy Start
It's Not Easy Being Green
Fresh Pasteurized Apple
Great Beginnings

Theme

Toy Story
Nemo
Pet Shop Owner
Carnival
The Great Pumpkin
Snow White and the Apples



Trunk or Treating at WV's TSN/WIC in Bluefield

Beautiful weather, community partners, and WIC staff contributed to the great success of the event, which reached over 5,000 people from the TSN/WIC in Southern WV Facebook page. Approximately 250 children attended. ■

WORLD BREASTFEEDING MONTH CELEBRATIONS AT VNAHG/WIC IN NEW JERSEY

The VNACJ WIC Program in New Jersey celebrated World Breastfeeding Month with one virtual and three in-person outdoor events. WIC partnered with community and professional groups to provide education, fellowship and fun for our families. Participants heard from a local pediatrician, Healthy Families, Nurse Family Partnership, WIC Peer Counselors, Council for Young Children and a local library.



VNAHG WIC breastfeeding event in Freehold



Congratulations to the breastfeeding basket winner

Moms shared their breastfeeding stories and showed off their beautiful babies and toddlers. Everyone went home with a bag of breastfeeding information, school supplies, books for young children and a coupon for a family-sized pizza! A basketful of wonderful items for babies, children and families was raffled off at each event.

COVID may have changed the way we celebrate breastfeeding, but it did not prevent us from safely celebrating with our breastfeeding families! ■

AUGUST 2021 WAS AN OUTSTANDING MONTH FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S WIC BREASTFEEDING PROGRAM

By Noni Robinson, MS DC WIC State Agency Program Manager

DC WIC had an impressive and rewarding August 2021. Not only were we busy with National Breastfeeding Month, we also developed new partnerships with community-based organizations, and hosted an array of activities and initiatives throughout the District at the local agency sites. Throughout the month we celebrated and educated WIC participants and the community through monthly breastfeeding classes, drive-by celebrations, community resource tables, and National Breastfeeding Month incentives.

Our Breastfeeding Peer Counselors outdid themselves and developed a monthly BFPC newsletter which includes monthly breastfeeding rates, upcoming trainings, webinars, and employee highlights. Breastfeeding Coordinator Tamera White, CPPA of Howard University WIC, was invited to be a panelist during the Breastfeeding Awards of Excellence Ceremony conducted by FNS. Tamera discussed how she was able to pivot successfully and still provide breastfeeding services during COVID. Tamera conducts monthly BLESS (Breastfeeding Lactation Education Support Services) Cafes where moms and moms-to-be discuss breastfeeding concerns. The Café continues to be a success with WIC moms.

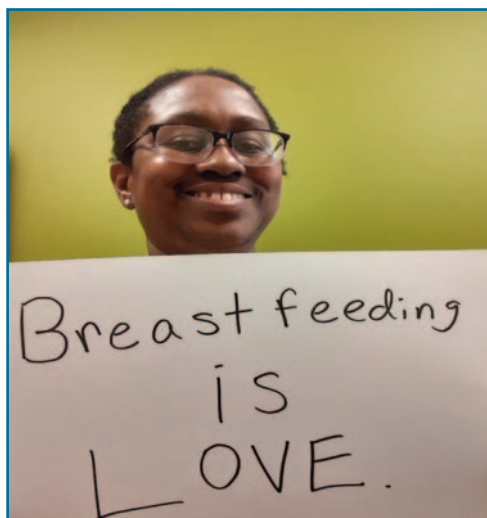
Let's also congratulate Howard University WIC for being a recipient of this year's WIC Breastfeeding Award of Excellence. The award was established to recognize local WIC agencies that have provided exemplary breastfeeding promotion and support services. (See related story on page 2.)

During National Breastfeeding Month, DC State Agency WIC and our local agencies partnered with an organization, 1,000 Days, to build awareness and support for the policy and practice changes that are needed to enable everyone to meet their breastfeeding goals.

This partnership and campaign highlighted how the WIC Peer Counselor program supports breastfeeding parents. Breastfeeding Peer Counselors provide ongoing support and counseling to WIC mothers. They are moms from the community who have breastfed their own babies, and as a part of the WIC team they serve as a role model for families, connect with and provide encouragement to moms, and help mothers manage common breastfeeding concerns.

Peer Counselors from DC WIC participated in the #Breastfeedingiscampaign launched by 1,000 Days and the National WIC Association. The Peer Counselors shared what breastfeeding meant to them and why it is so important to support their clients along their breastfeeding journeys.

DC WIC appreciates our community partners and breastfeeding peer counselors, for all their continued excellent work providing breastfeeding services, especially during these unprecedented times! ■



Tamera White, Breastfeeding Coordinator at Howard University WIC



Lisle Cole, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor at Mary's Center WIC



Chrissone Henderson, IBCLC, at Children's National WIC interacts with a participant

WEST VIRGINIA'S MID-OHIO VALLEY WIC PARTICIPATES IN COMMUNITY WIDE BABY SHOWERS

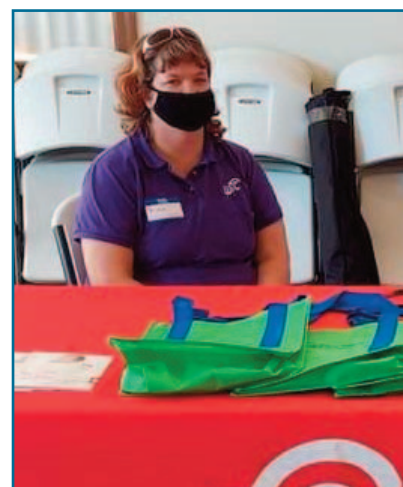
By Tina Smith, Outreach Coordinator

West Virginia's Mid-Ohio Valley WIC was busy during the summer months collaborating and attending the region's Community-Wide Baby Showers. Community Baby Showers were postponed in 2020 due to COVID-19. It was a breath of fresh air to be able to attend these events and become somewhat normal again with seeing individuals face to face.

Baby Showers were not held in the traditional manner, due to COVID-19 precautions and rising numbers of COVID-19 cases, organizers based their event on the safety of everyone involved. Different hybrid models were used depending on the community. Some held their event outdoors or drive-thru so social distancing could be maintained. Others held their event indoors with participants scheduling appointments for a more one-on-one with vendors.

Participation was lower than previous years; however MOV WIC was pleased to be able to provide participants information and acknowledge that WIC is open for their needs. ■

MOV WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Kima King attending the Jackson County, WV Community Baby Shower. Photo Credit: Jackson County FRN



PUERTO RICO WIC DEVELOPS MY WIC PUERTO RICO APP

By Alejandra Seda Almodóvar, LND, RDN, Outreach and Plaza Las Américas Clinic Supervisor, Puerto Rico WIC Program

The Puerto Rico WIC Program has been concentrating all of its efforts on creating new resources for participants, even with the challenges faced with the pandemic, so the Program services are accessible for the participants. Among the initiatives to facilitate remote certifications, the Program created an application for iPhone and Android phones: My WIC PR. It can be configured in Spanish or English. The app is a versatile education tool about the Program's services which also facilitates the certification process by allowing the submission of documents required for the certification process. This application is a user-friendly tool as it helps the participant to access authorized foods through the product's UPC number or by scanning the barcode. It also has available the list of authorized foods, the list of exempt formulas and nutritional eligible products in WIC, information on the location of clinics and authorized vendors, as well as delicious recipes that can be prepared with the foods that WIC provides. Besides, this application not only allows the participants to send securely encrypted documents, but also allows employees to review the documents digitally and have a digital file.

The process to download the application and register is simple. First, the participant must enter the Google Play or the App Store on their phone, search for the application and download it. Then a registration must be completed, where basic information is asked. A username and password are created. The registration must be completed individually for each participant. Once this process is completed, the participant has full access to the application and will go to the menu screen where all the alternative actions that can be performed in the application are presented. The document submission process is accessible to participants. Once the participant is logged into the application, they must select the option to send documents. Then proceed to select the type of documents and the number of pages. A photo of the document can be taken or a previously saved image from your photo gallery selected. Once the participant submits the documents, the nutritionist or CPA can evaluate the documents instantly. Participants are also provided with a digital file of the documents submitted in the document history.

Once the participant completes their certification process, the application allows them to see what their food package contains. Together with the barcode scan, it facilitates the participants the food purchasing process since they can see what their food package contains and if the food they are interested in is one authorized by the Program. Furthermore, the application can generate the participant's virtual identification card so it can be presented to the vendors directly from the phone.

Finally, the application offers the alternative of sending messages so that the participant can contact us through it. Designated personnel from the different areas of the Program work every day answering the messages received through the application, which makes it an excellent instrument of communication to maintain contact with the participants and clarify doubts and questions. It also allows potential participants to contact us since registration in the application is not restricted to active participants.

Undoubtedly, this application has been key to the success of distance certifications and an additional step in the modernization of the Program using technology. Furthermore, it has helped increase participants' knowledge about the authorized food list and become familiar with the food alternatives available to buy as prescribed in their food package. We are actively working to improve the application and technology resources to facilitate the certification process and increase participation in the WIC Program. ■



Check out the MY WIC PR app

PENNSYLVANIA'S ADAGIO HEALTH WIC PROGRAM CATALYZING RETENTION EFFORTS IN WIC (CREW) PROJECT

By Audrey Vidmar, MS, WIC Retail Nutritionist, Adagio Health

Adagio Health, Inc. was one of four agencies across the United States to be awarded the Catalyzing Retention Efforts in WIC (CREW) grant in March 2020. The CREW grant was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through the National WIC Association. The overall goal of the project was to improve WIC participant retention and recruitment at WIC authorized retail stores over a 19-month period.

Adagio Health's original proposal was modified to include more virtual components to account for the COVID-19 pandemic. In lieu of in-person shopping assistance, our Retail Nutritionist developed shelf tags including a phone number for WIC participants to text or call with questions while shopping at the grocery store. To date, 22 stores have shelf tags that have led to 103 calls or texts. The modifications to the proposal allowed Adagio Health to expand this project from one county to all five counties by Fall 2020.

Adagio Health received approval to enhance the grocery store experience by producing an outreach video to teach WIC participants how to utilize their WIC benefits at the grocery store. The video highlights the shopping experience along with the checkout procedure:

<https://www.adagiohealth.org/wicshopperassistance>. ■

VIRGINIA WIC CELEBRATES BREASTFEEDING AWARENESS MONTH

In 2011, the US Breastfeeding Committee officially declared August as National Breastfeeding Month. Each year in August, member organizations, breastfeeding coalitions, healthcare professionals, and individuals are encouraged to participate in activities that promote a landscape of breastfeeding support.

Virginia WIC is not one to miss a celebration! Each year, Virginia WIC partners with local organizations and also provides materials and information via its social media outlets and planned events. This year was no different. Even with the pandemic looming, Virginia WIC's State Breastfeeding Coordinator, Jarene Fleming, IBCLC, created a unique and safe opportunity to promote awareness of, and support for, breastfeeding. On August 1, 14 and 29, Jarene drove the Virginia WIC mobile van – WIC on Wheels – to Dogwood Dell, a Richmond Parks and Recreation amphitheater-styled venue, where she convened with Birth in Color RVA, La Casa de la Salud, and VCU Health Systems.

"The outdoor amphitheater was the perfect venue to return to in-person outreach," said Jarene. "All attendees could safely distance, enjoy the entertainment and learn more about human milk feeding." Information from the community partners, WIC, and other VDH maternal program materials were made available to all in attendance.

Birth in Color RVA is a birth, policy, and advocacy non-profit focused on raising awareness surrounding maternal health and reproductive justice. Birth in Color RVA seeks to 'change the narrative of black maternal health, not only in Richmond but around the world,' by providing culturally-centered support to pregnant people, their families, and birthing communities. Their services range from providing expert birth workers, doulas, and lactation consultants for expecting people, to prenatal classes and racial bias training for reproductive healthcare workers.

La Casa De La Salud was created in 2014, the result of a pilot study at the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at Virginia Commonwealth University, based on the needs of the Hispanic community. The organization launched in the city of Petersburg, VA, with a mission to 'contribute to the improvement of the health and well-being of the Hispanic community through a model that promotes healthy lifestyles and facilitates access to health services and other resources.'

VCU Health Systems leads the nation in quality, affordability, and impact as a trusted and preferred academic health system. They preserve and restore health for all people of Virginia and beyond through innovation in service, research, and education.

It was fitting that the events were hosted in Virginia's capital city. On August 26, 2020, during Black Breastfeeding Week, the Honorable Levar Stoney, Mayor, City of Richmond, VA, proclaimed the City of Richmond as a *Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community*, committed to supporting breastfeeding families. That proclamation was read to the audience in both English and Spanish. In addition, Virginia's Governor, the Honorable Ralph Northam, issued a proclamation where he recognized August 2021 as Virginia Breastfeeding Awareness Month in the Commonwealth of Virginia. That proclamation was on display for attendees. ■



Jarene Fleming, IBCLC, VA WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator; Crystal Wells, VCU Health Systems; Donesha Scott, VA WIC



Jarene Fleming, IBCLC, VA WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator; Rewada Lewis; Crystal Wells, VCU Health Systems



Kenda Sutton El, Birth in Color RVA; Milagros Richards, La Casa De La Salud

MARYLAND WIC GATHERS BREASTFEEDING MESSAGES FROM REAL MOMS TO POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By Ernest Le and Amy Resnik

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, several local agencies, including the Upper Eastern Shore in Maryland, gathered pictures and testimonials from WIC participants and make a collage to post on the “Breastfeeding Wall of Fame” in their office. Visitors would be able to see all these inspiring quotes encouraging them to breastfeed. It was one of the highlights of the office every year during Breastfeeding Month.

Because offices were closed during the pandemic, it was not possible to post all these quotes on the wall like before. Danya Benton, Coordinator at Upper Shore WIC, had the idea of gathering submissions from participants and making images out of them to share on social media. She proposed this idea to the State Office and we ran with it. This also allowed local agencies to share messages and images statewide instead of just within their local offices!

It wasn’t a simple process to gather these images. We were able to make a web form for people to fill out some information, enter an inspirational message, and attach an image. However, we were not sure how to obtain consent from participants to use their image. After discussing it with legal counsel at the Health Department, we determined that it would be sufficient to include language on the form indicating how the submitted images would be used and include a checkbox saying that they understood.

We developed a standardized format for incorporating the images and the inspirational text. This allowed our Marketing Specialist, Yehudis Schecter, to efficiently turn all the submissions into images that are ready for social media. At first, we were concerned that we might not receive many submissions, but we need not have worried. Over the course of Breastfeeding Month, we were able to gather and post multiple messages every week—a total of 12 images! Maryland WIC will be making this a permanent feature of our social media every August.

Maryland WIC is now working to make this a permanent feature on our website. There are technical issues to sort out and some policy decisions to make, but we hope to gather more testimonials and feature them both on social media and in physical offices as they open again. ■



A variety of posts on Maryland WIC's social media platforms

PENNSYLVANIA'S MATERNAL AND FAMILY HEALTH SERVICES CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY WITH NEW LOGO AND WEBSITE

By Jean Holmgren, Communications & Digital Marketing Specialist, Maternal and Family Health Services

As part of its 50th anniversary of serving those in need, Maternal and Family Health Services (MFHS), WIC provider in 17 Pennsylvania counties, launched a new brand identity and website. The rebrand is designed to enhance recognition of the organization and array of services it offers, particularly during this difficult period for the thousands of women, children and families who rely on it for care. MFHS began its mission of care in 1971, with a vision to improve the quality of life of families in Pennsylvania through preventative healthcare services.

"Our 50th anniversary was the perfect time to revisit our logo. MFHS continues to adapt to the needs of our community, and our new logo and website reflect those changes," said Maria Montoro Edwards, PhD, President & CEO of Maternal and Family Health Services. "As we continue to add services such as behavioral healthcare, we wanted to create a logo that is fresh and modern, but still connected to our history of creating a 'circle of care' of services for our clients."

The new Maternal and Family Health Services logo is accompanied by a new website, which highlights the services the agency offers the community – WIC being the largest program offered. The site is designed to be welcoming and easy to navigate. The improved location finder enables the community to search by zip code to find services like WIC and reproductive health care near them.

"We also wanted to rebrand now, during the pandemic, because there is so much need in the community. While our name remains the same, our logo and website are a clearer reminder that MFHS is here to help families struggling during such a difficult time," commented Shannon Hayward, Vice President of Service Delivery Operations. "The layered, circular design represents the different people we serve children, adults, parents, families, and our entire community. Our new website reflects this as well, with an updated look and a focus on easily connecting our community with vital healthcare information."

MFHS encourages the community to see its new look by visiting the new website at [MFHS.org](https://mfhs.org). ■



WEST VIRGINIA WIC PROGRAM WELCOMES CDC PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATE

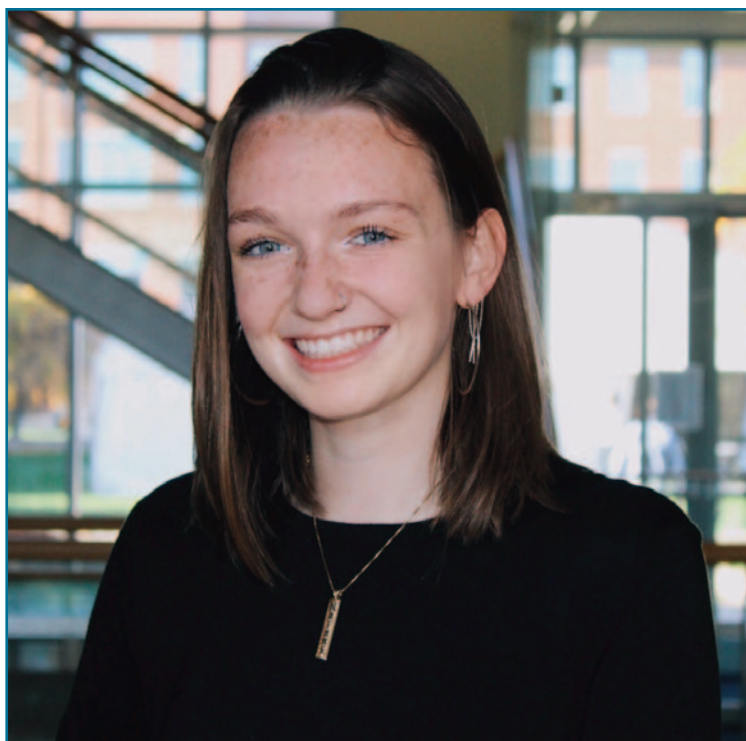
Nalani Wean joined the West Virginia WIC Program on October 12, 2021, as part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Public Health Associate Program (PHAP). She will serve as the Food Security Partnership Liaison to formulate policies, objectives and standards for food access initiatives with private businesses, other government agencies and non-profit organizations.

The PHAP is a two-year paid training program with the CDC. PHAP associates are assigned to public health agencies to gain hands-on experience that will serve as a foundation for a career in public health. Likewise, WV WIC applied to serve as a host site not only to develop the next generation of public health professionals but to also increase the capacity to collaborate in efforts addressing food insecurity within the maternal and child populations, and food access statewide.

Nalani grew up in the Chicagoland area, but earned her Bachelor's degree at Denison University just outside of Columbus, OH. Most of her background work in public health has been in sexual/reproductive health along with a bit of work in vector-borne disease control and substance use prevention and care.

"Working on food insecurity at WIC is definitely very new to me, which makes this job all the more exciting," shared Wean. At home, Nalani has a younger brother who lives with her parents, and a dog named Dusty, as well as an older sibling in New York! She loves to hike, camp, read, and is hoping to learn a little more about gardening in her new home.

"I am thrilled to have Nalani join our team," said Heidi Staats, WV WIC Director. "The CDC PHAP is a very competitive national program for associates as well as host sites. It is a privilege to have such a flexible and big-picture thinker on-board to assist the WIC Program, in conjunction with other organizations, collaborate on projects, and seek funding, which enhance services and policies addressing food access and food insecurity with low-income families of West Virginia." ■



Nalani Wean

MARYLAND'S "I'M A WIC BABY" CAMPAIGN HITS THE STREETS

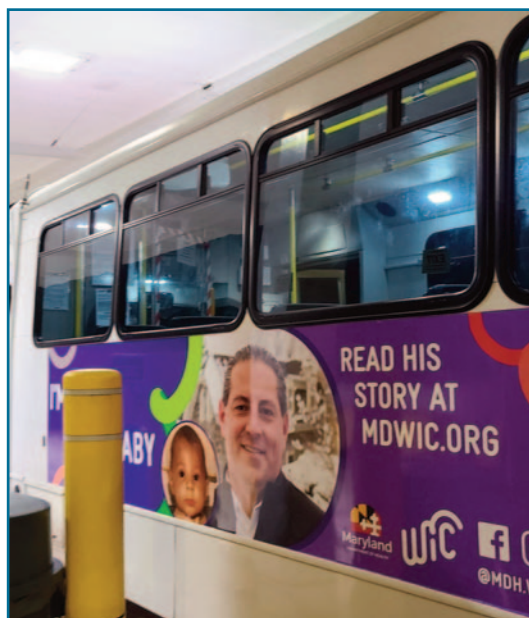
By Ernest Le

Two years ago, Maryland WIC launched a new advertising campaign called "I'm a WIC Baby," featuring adults who had been on WIC when they were children. The aim was to change the narrative and remind people that WIC participants eventually grow up to be strong, confident citizens in our society. Seven real WIC babies were interviewed and photographed for this project.

This year, the WIC Babies are hitting the streets all over the state of Maryland. They are appearing on the sides of buses, public transit shelters, and billboards. The ads are deliberately simple messages because audiences will only see them for three or four seconds at most. There are no phone numbers or email addresses (people won't have time to write them down when they see the ads). Instead, there is simply a website and our social media handles.

These ads represent the biggest push this year to increase the visibility of the Maryland WIC Program. We are grateful to the people who have volunteered their time and stories and have made this project possible.

Ads and stories from the "I'm a WIC Baby" campaign can be found on our website: https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/wic/Pages/wic_baby.aspx ■



WIC babies everywhere!

THE CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY OF NEW JERSEY-MERCER WIC PROGRAM FIRST IN STATE TO ISSUE eWIC BENEFITS CARDS

By Joan O. Martin

On September 23, The Children's Home Society of New Jersey (CHSofNJ)-Mercer WIC Program became the first in the state of New Jersey to launch a pilot initiative to issue eWIC benefits cards instead of checks. All benefits will be conveniently loaded to each participant's eWIC benefits card. The launch was a collaboration of The Children's Home Society of New Jersey and NJ WIC, administered by the New Jersey Department of Health. The launch was made possible by NJ WIC staff, including Laurie Papell, Rachel Daddio, Tiffany Leroy, Debbie McRae, Payal Arora, Grace Amaechi and Ren Zheng, the project manager. Tamika Trotman and Prateek Srivastava of NJ WIC spearheaded the development of the eWIC training modules, which prepared the CHSofNJ-Mercer WIC staff for the change from paper checks to eWIC benefits cards.

"As the Director of the CHSofNJ-Mercer WIC Program, I want to acknowledge and applaud the CHSofNJ-Mercer WIC staff. They have all been remarkable throughout the entire process," said Joan O. Martin. "When we were asked to initiate the first pilot in the eWIC rollout process, we immediately accepted without hesitation."

The very first New Jersey eWIC recipient was enthusiastic. "I welcome the change," she said. "I look forward to the convenience of the card, and not having the cashier compare and sort checks and products while other customers angrily wait behind me on a long line." Other recipients reacted by stating: "This is great! I don't have to buy all the food at once especially milk," and, "I am so happy — no more checks. Wow! It's like having a credit card for WIC."

Martin welcomes the change and commented: "This is a wonderful initiative; both participants and WIC staff are very happy and see the cards as a more efficient way of providing and receiving benefits and service within the WIC community."

Because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and concerns for the health and safety of staff and participants, CHSofNJ WIC Program services are mainly virtual and can be accessed by text, email and social media, as well as phone and the CHSofNJ website.

Participants scheduled for services may receive their eWIC benefits cards and further information at the CHSofNJ Mercer WIC administrative office in Ewing, or at other locations. For more information, call (609) 498-7755 or visit online at www.chsofnj.org/mercercounty-wic-program. Pickup and other curbside services are available. ■



The first person to receive a New Jersey eWIC benefits card (left) is shown with Nutritionist, Sheethal, and Clerk, Mary. (Photos by Laurie Papell)



The second eWIC benefits card was issued to a bus driver (left) who came on her break for a curbside pickup. Second from left is Joan O. Martin, Program Director, with Chief Nutritionist Kellie Boyle and Senior Clerk Christina Tidy.



Curbside services are offered by the CHSofNJ-Mercer WIC Program. Left to right: Senior Clerk Christina Tidy, Chief Nutritionist Kellie Boyle and Breastfeeding Manager Brook Cook.

WIC BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT GRANT EXPANDS PENNSYLVANIA WIC BREASTFEEDING RESOURCES

By Amelia Staub, PA WIC Grant Project Manager

Pennsylvania WIC was one of seven states awarded the WIC Breastfeeding Support Campaign grant in May 2020, only two months after the National Public Health Emergency was declared in response to COVID-19. This grant funding afforded PA WIC the opportunity to expand and improve current breastfeeding resources for WIC participants to assure consistency with generational preferences and trends. The PA WIC team established four interventions for this grant project with the goal of increasing participants' accessibility to breastfeeding information, improving their knowledge base on the benefits of breastfeeding and modernizing WIC breastfeeding education materials. All interventions were developed following USDA's WIC Breastfeeding Support branding including photos, colors, fonts, icons and logos. Intervention was completed in August and the summary of State-specific interventions, along with preliminary results, is described below.

A series of magazines was created to align with each stage of the breastfeeding journey — Learn, Start, Overcome and Thrive. Staff reported that the magazines were tools they wanted to use and “loved” the magazines, using words such as “updated, modern, and engaging.” Staff also noted that content was “clear, accurate and easy to understand.”

Participant feedback revealed that the magazines were well-constructed and that they enjoyed seeing the photos, noting how important it is for them to see images especially when learning about latch and breastfeeding positions. They also reported that they found the magazine content to be helpful for both mom and partner and the literature was easy to read. One mom said she liked having the magazine as a resource for when she felt “completely lost.”

Breastfeeding infographics were developed through this grant to better support PA WIC's effort to implement teleWIC services. This intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a step in the right direction as the nation quickly navigated the provision of virtual WIC services while maintaining programmatic quality. 50 infographics were created, each focused on a specific breastfeeding topic or to provide encouragement to moms. These were intended to be a supplemental educational tool giving WIC staff a visual aid to share during virtual communications. Many staff reported liking the infographics as a quick method of getting information to a participant and found certain topics to be very helpful. They also liked the visual appeal of them. Participants gave feedback that infographics would be helpful for first-time moms.

Ten online breastfeeding lessons were designed to increase confidence and knowledge in efforts to provide women with reliable breastfeeding information, ultimately adding to the layer of resources available through PA WIC. These served as a self-paced, virtual learning opportunity for participants. 799 breastfeeding lessons were completed by 145 different participants indicating that women completed more than one lesson in most cases even when only assigned one lesson. Reports indicated when participants completed knowledge check questions, 84.5% of responses were correct in pre-lessons questions and after completing the lessons, correct answers improved to 95.5%, showing an increase in breastfeeding knowledge.

Finally, virtual breastfeeding classes were created to provide an opportunity to educate WIC moms and provide engaging demonstrations and activities to increase breastfeeding knowledge and support while on a virtual platform.

The Breastfeeding Basics class was designed for pregnant moms to learn about the benefits of breastfeeding, what to expect and how to prepare for their breastfeeding journey. Participants reported feeling more prepared for when baby arrives after attending this class. The Breastfeeding Success class was designed for moms after delivery to address overcoming barriers and continuing breastfeeding success. All moms who attended this class acknowledged that they felt more confident in breastfeeding after attending. Both classes also showed an increase in breastfeeding knowledge after attending the class.

A special thanks to the local agency breastfeeding staff at Adagio Health, Blueprints, Cambria County, Fayette County, and Mon Valley WIC programs for their dedication to this project's success during such a challenging time! The University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) administered this grant and is currently in the process of completing overall project evaluation. Formal evaluation results will be forthcoming. ■



"Your Breastfeeding Journey" Magazine Series



**MARWIC
TIMES
Calendar**

The deadline for the Spring issue of MARWIC Times is February 4, 2022.

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

No Polaroid pictures. 5" x 7" digital photos (saved in JPEG/PDF format)

preferred. All photographs must include a detailed caption.