

MARWIC

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

GRAPPLING WITH FOOD INSECURITY IN WEST VIRGINIA'S APPALACHIA: TSN WIC OUTREACH A PRIORITY

By Diane Landy, Outreach Coordinator, TSN/WIC Agency

With food insecurity at an all-time high for communities in Southern West Virginia, the TSN/WIC Program tirelessly works to keep outreach a focus. Feeding America data indicates alarming child food insecurity rates for the nine TSN counties, ranging anywhere from 34.7% to 19.5%, the most disturbing being 137.7% higher than the national average. Collaborations with community partners are key in being able to reach potentially eligible participants.



WV RFTS staff show their support after the WIC presentation with a group photo.

With lower rates of coronavirus infections, Spring 2022 brought an opportunity to refresh the Right From The Start staff about the WIC Program at a quarterly RFTS staff meeting held at The Tamarack, in Beckley, WV.

Diane Landy, TSN Outreach Coordinator, presented "The Power of WIC," a presentation illustrating the powerful effect the WIC Program can have on both community members and on communities in general. RFTS staff received WV WIC community partner referral pads to help make WIC referrals more efficient.

"The presentation on WIC services in the Southern part of the State was very informative," said Jackie Newson, Director of the West Virginia Home Visitation Program. "It was exciting to see participants (RFTS staff) taking notes and asking questions. I think people left that day with a better knowledge of the impact of WIC on food insecurity and the revenue brought into counties and small communities. This was a unique way of showing the impact on not only the families served, but the impact on communities."

RFTS is a statewide program available to pregnant women or women who have a child less than one-year old. TSN/WIC referrals to the RFTS program totaled 1,105 for the FY2021. Newson added, "During COVID and now that Right From the Start is operating on a hybrid model of services (virtual and in-person), [knowing] how to connect families to WIC is critical," and "aligning Statewide breastfeeding and lactation support messaging between the programs ensures moms have the most current and reliable information."

TSN/WIC continues its commitment to creating working relationships with community partners as part of their fervent outreach program to level the playing field and achieve health equity in Appalachia. ■

DELAWARE WIC PROVIDES INFORMATION TO HELP AFGHAN REFUGEES AND WESTSIDE HEALTHCARE PATIENTS

By Maria Shroyer, MS, RD, LDN, Consultant Dietitian

Jewish Family Services (JFS) of Wilmington (DE) is helping Afghan refugees with local resources and finding social services. JFS reached out to Delaware WIC to learn more about WIC services and to help answer the questions they were receiving from the refugees. Alisha Beckford, who works for the Food Bank of Delaware and serves as a Nutrition Specialist working on WIC outreach, joined a Zoom meeting with JFS staff on February 14. Alisha provided information on WIC, documentation needed, and contacting WIC to receive services.

This effort is a true display of the Civil Rights principle of making WIC services known to population groups in need. Delaware WIC hopes to continue this relationship with JFS as they extend their outreach to pockets of people who may be displaced and might qualify for WIC services. This could be a benefit to many families.

In addition, in March, Maria Shroyer, RD was a speaker on two Zoom calls facilitated by Westside Family Healthcare. One day was in Spanish (Westside provided an interpreter) and another was in English. This was a wonderful opportunity to have a Q&A time. Many questions were asked about the formula recall, and it was very helpful for the Westside patients to hear guidance directly from WIC, especially those who are Limited English Proficiency. The "lunchtime learn" created a space where the complex situation of the formula recall was explained and individual questions could be answered. Delaware WIC hopes to continue periodic lunchtime Q&A sessions facilitated by Westside Family Healthcare, which provides health services in Delaware regardless of ability to pay. ■

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NEWS FROM THE USDA

By Joseph Dybas, FNS-MARO

FNS Mid-Atlantic Regional Office Welcomes New Staff

Please join the FNS Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in welcoming Patrick Farrell to the WIC team! Patrick joins FNS as a program specialist, focusing primarily on funding, rebates, monitoring, audits, and disaster response. He previously served as a claims specialist at the Social Security Administration, adjudicating disability and retirement claims within the Supplemental Security Income program. Prior to working at SSA, he served as a Pathways student at both US Citizenship and Immigration Services and the US Attorney's Office.

Patrick holds a Master of Public Administration from Penn State University and a Bachelor of Arts from Saint Peter's University. In his free time, he likes to spend time outdoors with his dog, go to the beach, and travel to new places.



Patrick Farrell

Support Local Agriculture! The 2022 WIC-Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Season is Upon Us

What "beets" fresh produce from the local farmers market? Beginning in 1992, Congress established the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) seeking to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of, and sales at farmers' markets throughout the United States. In the Mid-Atlantic Region, we are fortunate to have a Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in each state, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Typically operating annually from June to November, the WIC FMNP reaches millions across the country. In Fiscal Year 2020, nearly 1.2 million WIC participants received WIC FMNP benefits, effectively ensuring millions of low-income families have the opportunity to access locally grown produce and interact with local food systems.



Photo credit: USDA-FNS, Public Website

As USDA seeks to advance nutrition security, we look forward to partnering with our state and local partners for another great season – see you at the market! ■

WIC LGBTQ+ FAMILY INCLUSIVITY IN PENNSYLVANIA

By Charlotte Dorsey, BS, CLC, WIC Education Manager, Community Progress Council

Community Progress Council WIC Program of York County in Pennsylvania made huge efforts to make sure our WIC LGBTQ+ families feel heard and included stepping into the WIC clinic. All Nutritionists completed a three-part webinar series to address guidance of LGBTQ+ families during lactation conversations by using inclusive language.

The three-part series works to establish basic inclusive language for attendees specifically in the healthcare field, reviewing the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in a healthcare setting, and providing resources and tools to provide inclusive patient care. Each webinar focuses on a particular topic. The three webinars covered "LGBTQ+ & You: Understanding Inclusive Healthcare for ALL Families to Optimize Human Lactation Care," "The Critical Significance of LGBTQ+ Education in Healthcare: How Non-Inclusive Practices Impact the Community," and "Healthcare in Action: Tools, Resources, and Outreach for Inclusive Human Lactation Professionals."

The first webinar provided basic knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community and needs the community has in a healthcare setting. The second webinar focused on strengthening the LGBTQ+ knowledge related to breastfeeding, chestfeeding, and/or bodyfeeding. The last webinar reviewed the tools the WIC nutrition team can use to better service our LGBTQ+ families and resources to provide continued inclusive care for all WIC families.

Our WIC team is observing an increase in LGBTQ+ families with young children on the WIC Program in York County. As our WIC population changes, the education WIC provides must also change to include all our participants, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Our Breastfeeding Nutritionist, Hazel Fuentes, had a great experience with a father who recently delivered twins and began breastfeeding both babies. Hazel provided basic breastfeeding education to Dad, issued a breast pump to use and explained the use of the pump, and quickly scratched out 'Mommy's' from the "Mommy's Help, The First Six Weeks of Nursing" booklet and wrote in 'Daddy's.' This small change can make a huge impact with our WIC families and feeling secure in our WIC locations. ■

CELEBRATING NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH WITH PUERTO RICO WIC

By Magdaliz Bonilla

March is National Nutrition Month, a nutrition education and information campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. This campaign focuses on the importance of making informed food choices and developing physical activity habits, which aligns with the objective of WIC being one of the pioneering nutrition education programs. Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Day is celebrated during National Nutrition Month, on the second Wednesday of March. This celebration increases awareness of nutritionists/dietitians as the indispensable providers of food and nutrition services. Accompanied by this celebration every year, a different theme is chosen. This year's theme was "Celebrate a World of Flavors," which enhances flavors from cultures around the world and appreciates diversity.

Throughout the month, different activities were carried out in the clinics to highlight the month of nutrition and to educate our participants. But since the stars of this month are the nutritionists, our program and their director wanted to recognize the work they do and how essential they are. So, a virtual educational activity was put together for the nutritionists of the Puerto Rico WIC Program. This educational activity contributes to their professional growth and as a bonus, they received a certificate with hours of continuing education.

To choose the conferences, innovative but important topics were thought of, that line up with the program's objective and contribute to the VENA initiative. The first conference was "Sensitivity and Diversity in the Management and Delivery of Nutrition Services," a theme that is very important because we must face it regularly in our work scenarios. This also goes hand-in-hand with the fact that the program wants to provide health equity to all the participants and equitable access to nutritious foods and breastfeeding support. The resources for this conference were Alana Marrero, who is a nutritionist who specializes in this theme; and psychologist Dr. Viviana Barron. The second conference was titled "Optimizing Our Resources to Address WIC Participant Nutrition Security." The resource for this conference was Dr. Maribel Campos, who not only is the Principal Investigator of the Baby Act Trial, but also has greatly contributed to our program.

The conferences were virtually formatted and all our nutritionists attended. The Puerto Rico WIC Program is grateful to their nutritionists and this educational activity was a great ending to such an important month. ■



Joining Puerto Rico's National Nutrition Month festivities are Lcda. Alana Marrero, Dr. Viviana Barrón, PR WIC Program Director Nilmarie Albarrán, Dr. Maribel Campos and PR WIC Supervisor of the Nutrition Division Lcda. Milane Medina.

A REVIEW OF 2021 WEST VIRGINIA WIC'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FOOD SECURITY

Last year, the West Virginia WIC Program provided monthly fruit and vegetable benefits to approximately 33,000 participants across the state. With the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger and poverty have worsened throughout the country, with a projected 42 million people, and 13 million children, experiencing food insecurity in 2021. Food insecurity is defined by the USDA Economic Research Service as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."

In an effort to meet the health, food, and nutrition needs of Americans, WIC worked diligently to increase benefits and expand food access for participants. West Virginia WIC is excited to share 2021 WIC accomplishments in food security, thus recognizing the hard work of its staff locally and nationally.

Key West Virginia WIC accomplishments in 2021 include:

- West Virginia WIC opted-in to the WIC CVB increase for \$35 per adult and child per month from June 2021 to September 2021. As a result, more than one third of WV WIC participants spent over 90% of the increased benefits!
- In September of 2021, WV WIC CVB was adjusted to \$24 per month for children, \$47 for breastfeeding women and \$43 for pregnant and postpartum women. WIC CVB increases have remained steady with Congress' continuing resolutions, allowing thousands of families to access more fruits and vegetables and support food security in the state.
- In August 2021, three local agencies of West Virginia WIC received the WIC Breastfeeding Gold Award of Excellence. WV EMS Technical Support Network (TSN) WIC, Monongalia County Health Department WIC, and Valley Health WIC were all among 90 Gold Award recipients. Breast milk is both free and often more nutritious than alternative infant feeding methods. We are so proud of our WV WIC staff!
- Four staff members at Valley Health WIC earned their International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) credential in 2021. The IBCLC is the highest level of breastfeeding credentialing, and the work of our breastfeeding educators is essential to the WIC Program.
- Since October 1, 2020, WV WIC has added 13 new authorized stores. Having more WIC retailers will expand the Program's reach and increase participant access to WIC foods and nutrition materials.

In 2022, USDA intends to increase participation in WIC through modernization and outreach efforts using \$390 million from the American Rescue Plan Act. West Virginia WIC hopes to address nutrition education and benefit utilization, WIC FMNP modernization, program outreach and food security community partnerships. ■



IMPROVING ORAL HEALTH IN PENNSYLVANIA WIC USING COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

By Melissa Bishop, Vice President of Nutrition Services, Family Health Council of Central Pennsylvania

The Family Health Council of Central Pennsylvania's (FHCCP) Tapestry of Health 11-county WIC Program has long recognized that oral health care is an unmet need among rural WIC clients. The dearth of dental providers that accept Medicaid, multigenerational poor oral health, barriers related to insurance status, payment, lack of knowledge about dental care, and transportation all prevent economically marginalized pregnant/postpartum women and their children from accessing dental services.

In 2021, FHCCP received a four-year grant from the federal Rural Health Care Outreach Services program to implement a dental navigation and care program in three rural WIC counties in central PA — Snyder, Union, and Northumberland. Named *SUN Smiles*, the program routinely screens all WIC participants for dental need during clinic visits to identify those in need of oral health care. WIC participants that need assistance with accessing dental care are referred to Community Health Workers (CHWs) to help identify and address barriers to care. CHWs help clients enroll in Medicaid, provide transportation vouchers, schedule appointments, arrange for payment from program funds if needed, and provide basic dental education.

The *SUN Smiles* program is a partnership between FHCCP's WIC Program, two local community action agencies, and a large non-profit dental clinic that is one of the few providers in the region that accepts Medicaid. In addition, one of the PA Medicaid dental managed care plans provides education and fluoride varnish at the WIC sites. In the first seven months of the program, over 1,300 WIC clients have been screened for dental need, with 37% of screenings resulting in referral to CHWs for oral health care navigation. Comprehensive data is being collected for the project to allow the *SUN Smiles* program to assess progress on project goals, which include a lower incidence of cavities, larger numbers of WIC participants with dental insurance, a higher percentage of WIC children who receive fluoride varnish, and higher percentages of adult and child WIC clients who see the dentist as recommended by national guidelines. Based on the success of the *SUN Smiles* program, FHCCP is working to identify funding that will expand the program to more of the organization's rural WIC sites. ■



Geisinger Health Plan Public Health Dental Hygienist Cortney Young and Leo the Lion at the PA WIC's Snyder County dental varnish event

SUCCESSFUL USER ACCEPTANCE TESTING (UAT) EXPERIENCE FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WIC'S MIS AND eWIC PROJECT

By Doris Kuehn, MS, RDN and Syeda Haq

In April of 2022, the District of Columbia WIC Program celebrated its completion of a statewide initiative to implement a new management information system (MIS) and roll out the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. As part of the multi-year project, DC WIC joined the Arizona Health and Nutrition Delivery System (HANDS) Consortium, a collaboration of WIC state agencies led by the Arizona Department of Human Services. Members of the HANDS Consortium use the HANDS MIS to determine applicant eligibility and issue WIC benefits. User Acceptance Testing (UAT) was a crucial phase of this project. The goal of UAT was to ensure HANDS could handle all federally required State and Local Agency tasks in real-world scenarios as well as support day-to-day clinic activities. Syeda Haq, DC data quality lead, guided UAT activities.



DC WIC State and Local Agency staff in Arizona for HANDS UAT

The entire UAT phase took place over seven weeks and included testing of 1) migrated data from DC WIC's old MIS into HANDS; 2) HANDS functionalities; 3) WIC Direct (HANDS' eWIC interface system); and 4) Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) systems.

Fifteen team members from the DC WIC State and Local Agencies travelled to Arizona for the first week of HANDS UAT. The remaining weeks of testing for HANDS and WIC Direct took place at the DC WIC State Office. The UAT phase concluded with DC WIC State and Local Agency staff testing the English and Spanish lines of the eWIC customer service IVR system.

Altogether UAT testers performed over 200 test scenarios and 95% of issues reported were fixed and retested within the seven-week UAT phase. After successful completion of UAT, the DC WIC Program moved directly into the piloting phase of the MIS/eWIC implementation project and then to the final phases of rollout. Successful implementation of this statewide project can be credited to several years of planning and hard work, and to a dedicated team of partners including MIS vendor CMA (Currier McCabe, and Associates), eWIC vendor CDP Inc. (Custom Data Processing), Arizona WIC State Agency, USDA FNS regional offices of MARO and SWRO, and federal partners at USDA FNS. ■

MARYLAND/VIRGINIA WIC DIETETIC INTERNS ATTEND NWA POLICY CONFERENCE

The five dietetic interns from the VA/MD WIC Dietetic Internship Program attended the National WIC Association Policy Conference February 14-17, 2022. Part of their internship project was to meet with legislators and/or their staffers for Hill Education Day and advocate for the WIC issues that are important to them and their participants.

Here's what our Virginia-based interns, Heather Brunk, Kenneth Makaiwi, and Kelly Jung-Kim had to say about their experience:

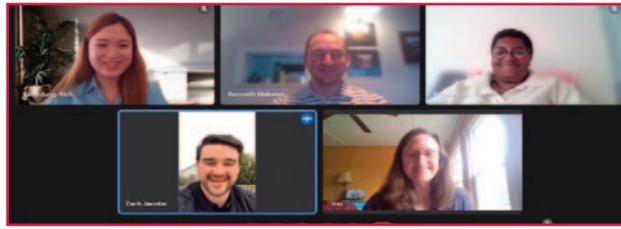
"We focused on the increased CVB, the continued allowance of remote services, the recommended changes to the food package, and the desire to modernize the program. We also discussed the proposal to allow online shopping and expanding eligibility periods for postpartum women and allowing children to stay on until they are 6 years old.

"We met with staffers from two different districts in Virginia. Staffers were very open to hearing about WIC and how that affects their constituents. The interaction with Mark Warner's staff person was especially positive. She was engaged, taking notes, very supportive and excited about moving forward with WIC expansion and modernization. The staff person for Mark Warner and the staff person for Elaine Luria requested more information on the CNR, including more data. NWA is providing this for them.

"This was a positive experience overall, even though it was the first time any of the interns had ever participated in this type of advocacy with politicians. Personally, it lit the fire in me (Heather) to pursue more advocacy opportunities."

Here is what our Maryland-based interns, Pamela Hawkins and Sarah Nguyen, had to say about their experience with Hill Education Day:

"During our virtual meetings for Hill Day 2022, myself (Sarah Nguyen) and Pamela Hawkins, advocated for the extension of the WIC benefit bump. We shared our experiences and stories of what this benefit bump has done for our WIC families and how it has improved the WIC Program. We were able to discuss how it has helped families afford more variety of fruits and vegetables and even increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables. We were also able to share with them how WIC has worked towards improving health outcomes in our population served, by educating them on history and the current status of WIC services. This was such a great experience getting to be advocates for the WIC Program and the families we serve. I think the staffers and thus the representatives saw how passionate we are about our WIC families and how we want the best health outcomes for all women, infants, and children." ■



Pictured (left to right) Intern Kelly Jung-Kim, Intern Kenneth Makaiwi, NWA staff Brittany Van Pelt, Zach Jacobs, a staffer for Representative Ben Cline, and Intern Heather Brunk.



Pictured (left to right) Intern Pamela Hawkins, Intern Sarah Nguyen, NWA Staff Darlena Birch, Maryland WIC Local Agency Coordinator Jose Luis Diaz, and Daniel Clayton, a staffer for Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger.

WORK, HEALTH, HABITS, AND A PANDEMIC: HOW WEST VIRGINIA'S VALLEY HEALTH CONTINUES TO COPE

By Rachel A. Miles Hoopes, MS, RDN, LD, CLC, ACSM-EP, Valley Health WIC Program (Cabell County), Huntington, WV

The last two years have been a rollercoaster of emotions, changes and stress. West Virginia's Valley Health WIC staff have been flexible with continued changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. Including changes in client services, staffing shortages due to illnesses and job changes, policy updates, and most recently the chaotic time following the recall of infant formula during a time of shortages and supply issues. Our staff's ability to serve clients daily has been a huge show of resilience and commitment. All of us have made changes to our lives and our families' lives to get through the last two years of pandemic stress and job demands. Most are now ready for new changes that can be positive and lead to health, not just survival. Changes for themselves and their families will differ based on needs, diverse family structures, time and readiness.

This year our worksite health promotion program, Healthy Habits, has chosen to combine the four newsletters sent out each year with three activities for staff to complete. Activities are designed to help match staff needs and time, and as always, are totally voluntary. The newsletters come out every three months and will focus on one activity. Our last newsletter will provide staff the opportunity to repeat an activity again or complete one they missed during the year. After completing an activity, staff will be entered to win prizes at the end of the year.

Our first newsletter contained an activity using motivational interviewing to help staff assess current behaviors and desired behaviors. The exercise is designed to lead them through habits or actions they would like to see in their lives and then guides them through identifying barriers to those behaviors. Staff finish with looking for workarounds to the barriers or thinking of new habits that they will be able to work on at this time or soon.

The next activity focuses on healthy sleep. We know sleep is an important part of health, rejuvenation and healing. The activity reviews health sleep information and then follows with an activity. Staff can think about their sleep environment and night-time habits. The activity then guides staff to make targeted goals that could be made and kept for two weeks. The activity hopes to build sleep habits that are functional and enduring.

Our last activity focuses on mindfulness and compassion. The activity guide supports and encourages those who already have a mindfulness practice in place. For those who do not and wish to work on a mindfulness-based activity, instructions are included for a short awareness of breath activity to be completed for a few days for one week. The following week we continue the awareness of breath activity for two days and then include a short self-compassion exercise to be practiced for two days. The mindfulness and compassion activities can be completed anywhere and ask only for a few minutes four days a week.

While changes this year continue to be fast and furious, with encouragement and some individual focus, staff can make personal goals and move toward wellness while serving our WIC clients and helping their own families grow. ■

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SUPPORTS BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH WEEK EVENT

By Jarene Fleming, IBCLC, RLC, Virginia WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator

This year marks the fifth annual recognition of Black Maternal Health Week (BMHW). Held April 11–17, BMHW was created to raise awareness, deepen the national conversation about Black maternal health in the United States, and build coalitions to address the crisis. BMHW was founded by the Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA; www.blackmamasmatter.org), a Black women-led cross-sectoral alliance that centers Black mamas and birthing people to advocate, drive research, build power, and shift culture for Black maternal health, rights, and justice.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has been a supporter of BMHW since its inception. This year, staff members from the VDH Office of Family Health Services, Jarene Fleming, Virginia WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator from the Division of Community



Jarene Fleming, Virginia WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator, and Consuelo Staton, VDH Division of Child and Family Health



Jarene Fleming, Virginia WIC State Breastfeeding

Nutrition, and Consuelo Staton from the Division of Child and Family Health, represented VDH at the BMHW Black Maternal Health Summit. Coordinated by Birth in Color RVA (www.birthincolorva.org), the Summit was held April 16 at Virginia Union University in Richmond, one of the oldest historically black universities in the south. Birth in Color RVA is a community-based organization focused on raising awareness surrounding maternal health and reproductive justice. The organization provides full spectrum services for pregnant people within a maternal justice framework, to dismantle inequities in maternity care and to maximize health and well-being for young families. The organization provides services in multiple locations throughout the state and works closely with VDH.

WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator Jarene Fleming staffed a table at the Summit, and provided information about WIC services. “It was important for WIC to be present at this event,” stated WIC Program Manager, Megan Nason, MS, RD. Nason said, “We are working hard in Virginia to raise awareness about human milk feeding and centering WIC as a resource to improve breastfeeding rates and the overall health of WIC families. We are glad that Jarene was able to share information about our program and discuss the important role that WIC plays in reducing maternal mortality with the attendees.” Attendees were directed to learn more about the impact WIC has on maternal health outcomes by visiting the National WIC Association’s website and viewing the full report, *The Role of WIC in Reducing Maternal Mortality*, at www.nwica.org/position-papers.

The Black Maternal Health Summit highlighted the urgency of improving birth outcomes and decreasing maternal mortality and morbidity for African American birthing people, both in the Commonwealth of Virginia and throughout the nation. National and local presenters shared health data, state and federal legislative regulation updates, their lived experiences, and promising solutions. Among the solutions discussed with the audience was an increased use of birth support services provided by doulas. Virginia is the fourth state in the nation to have Medicaid reimbursement for doula services and has instituted a State-certified Doula Program. Information about Medicaid reimbursement and the certification process was highlighted at the summit. Summit attendees, primarily medical providers, midwives, home visitors, and doulas, traveled from all across the state. ■

WEST VIRGINIA STATE WIC OFFICE CELEBRATES NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH WITH GROCERY STORE TOUR

By Emily Jarvis, MS, RD, LD

To celebrate National Nutrition Month, Angel Cunningham, WIC Registered Dietitian and Department of Health and Human Resources Wellness Committee member, planned a virtual grocery store tour. WIC Registered Dietitian Emily Jarvis assisted Angel with this effort.

The tour was pre-recorded at a local grocery store, then the recorded video was played during a DHHR Wellness Lunch and Learn session where Angel was available to answer questions live.

Angel and Emily covered a wide array of topics while navigating the grocery store on video. They taught viewers how to avoid temptation at the store and make healthier choices. Angel and Emily also explained basic label-reading, how to find the unit price of an item, how to determine if a product is whole grain, the advantages of purchasing store-brand products, and how to compare products to choose items lower in sodium and fat.

The Lunch and Learn took place on March 23rd and was well-attended and received. Attendees were complimentary of the event and said they learned new things. ■



NEW JERSEY WIC'S ONLINE LESSON IS A GAME SHOW!

New Jersey WIC applied for and received a FFY 2021 Operational Adjustment grant (OA) that was used to make improvements to our NJWIConline.org website. The intended outcome was for WIC participants to fully participate and redeem program benefits as well as maintain positive Customer Service.

One of the highlights of the NJWIConline.org improvements included a new lesson: The WIC GAME SHOW. Below are some of the features of this lesson:

- Both participants and guests can play the game for fun, or complete for nutrition education credit!
 - A demo was recently presented during a training of MCH partners, including the MIECHV (home visitation) program.
 - The game features five categories with five questions each with fun pop ups as DAILY DOUBLES and a FINAL QUESTION to build shopper confidence when shopping for WIC foods.
 - The game may end when 12 questions are answered correctly, or when 20 questions are attempted.
- Check it out at: www.njwiconline.org. Find it as a lesson or on “eWIC — HOW TO SHOP FOR WIC FOOD BENEFITS” page. It is available in English or Spanish, with or without sound. ■



FROM PANDEMIC TO RECALL TO PREPARING FOR REOPENING IN WEST VIRGINIA'S MID-OHIO VALLEY WIC

By Tracy Bills, Nutrition Associate, Outreach Coordinator

Turmoil, uncertainty, and angst can challenge the most steadfast leaders amongst us whether it is in our work or private life. However, when the two paradigms collide chaos can ensue. The empathy, flexibility, and resiliency of WV's Mid-Ohio Valley (MOV) WIC staff provides an example of how teamwork can be achieved when everyone's goal is to provide the best service to our participants. Building an engaged team mindset and concise communication are two key components for the success of any institution. Effective leadership paves the way as interpersonal abilities effectively relay the mission and vision statements that an organization sets forth. MOV WIC Director Jennifer Habeb and Office Assistant Supervisor Ronda Davis cover the nine areas in our region which encompass Wood, Pleasants, Ritchie, Mason, Jackson, Gilmer, Wirt, Roane, and Calhoun counties. Together with Breastfeeding Coordinator Tammy Moyers, they are navigating the WIC staff through the turbulent waters of ever-changing workplace circumstances, policies, and clinical modifications.

Modern-day disruptions are not a new concept, however, the COVID pandemic and most recently the Abbott formula recall have been unprecedented for the multitude of stakeholders including, WIC participants and staff, vendors, formula manufacturers, physicians, and most importantly, the infants involved.

Jennifer and Ronda exemplified care when the MOV participants needed prompt guidance regarding their infants' formula. During the first few weeks of the formula recall, they showed unwavering professionalism and calm that kept the entire staff focused and on task to resolve the participants' numerous issues. Tammy was exceptionally busy with community outreach and providing education on breastfeeding to new and soon-to-be mothers. Tammy has been known to express that "breast milk is the best milk" for infants up to one year of age. Her passion for supporting women with their breastfeeding goals is unmatched.

This formula recall has presented an additional talking point for the WIC Nutritionist as well. In addition, the State office (which was heavily relied upon by all the WV counties), also gave stellar support to the MOV WIC office. Although the Abbott Recall of 2022 is still part of the workday equation, there have been several on-going modifications provided to the WIC staff and participants to help ease the distress of the recall. The WIC Shopper smartphone app technology played its part and was able provide information directly to the participants without delay. WIC staff encourage participants daily to utilize the WIC Shopper app and for full benefit, to turn on the notification bell in the phone's settings for updates or any potential future recall notices.

Moving forward, the MOV WIC clinic plans to reopen for face-to-face appointments in mid-July. The overseeing of the clinics reopening by Jennifer, Ronda, and Tammy are sure to represent efficiency, teamwork, and first-rate service. They are preparing new employees on daily procedures and protocols while the seasoned employees are gearing up with stocking supplies, refreshing workspaces, and preparing for a seamless flow for the WIC participants. ■

KIDS LEARN ABOUT MYPLATE IN WEST VIRGINIA

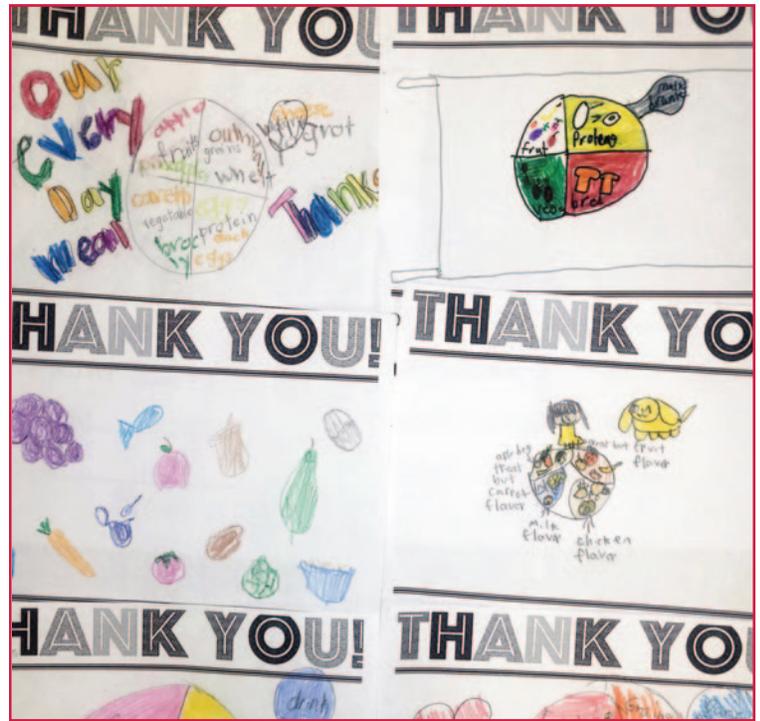
By Lauren Korzep, WIC Nutritionist

“Does anyone know what MyPlate is?” This is the first question I asked more than 100 third-graders at a local elementary school for Career Day. No hands went up. I proceeded to hold up a poster of the MyPlate graphic. A few hands went up.

As the presentation about MyPlate went on, kids were eagerly raising their hands to tell me their likes or dislikes, what new food they recently tried, or to rat out their siblings for being “picky eaters.” It amazed me how much kids really do enjoy talking and learning about food. I talked about what my role is at WIC. We also talked about how important it is to try a new food 10-15 times and how you can prepare the same food in different ways to make it taste different. I even brought in a duck egg to talk about the nutrients in an egg. They were relieved to know it was not going to turn into a baby duck.

My final question to the kids was, “How many of you like to help cook in the kitchen?” All their hands raised up. It reminded me how important it is to get kids involved in cooking. It’s a skill they want and are eager to learn. Kids can’t be told to just “eat your vegetables.” They need that hands-on experience of holding, rinsing, chopping, and smelling them first. I could just imagine how much their faces would light up in confidence if I had brought enough eggs and taught them how to crack an egg into a bowl without getting the shell in it.

Our jobs at WIC are so important to help set the stage for a lifetime love of cooking and trying new foods. We don’t give as many foods that come in boxes and bags so that parents/caregivers can have these types of food experiences with their children. They may make a mess at any age, but the reward of teaching kids about food is priceless. ■



Here are some of the lovely thank you notes the children sent after Lauren's Career Day presentation

DIAPER BANK OPENS IN PENNSYLVANIA WIC OFFICES

By Amy Gorsuch, BS, MA, CLC, WIC Nutritionist/Outreach Coordinator/Medical Liaison, Home Nursing Agency Foundation

The Blair and Centre County WIC offices in Pennsylvania received grant funding from The Home Nursing Agency Foundation (HNA) allowing the purchase of diapers to distribute to WIC participants. The diaper bank is designed to help retain infants after their first birthday.

When participants keep their regularly scheduled one-year recertification appointment, they receive a free pack of diapers for their child.

HNA WIC received the grant funding at the beginning of this year and started distributing diapers in mid-January. In the past four months, both counties have distributed approximately 3,500 diapers to WIC participants. With continued success, HNA hopes to branch out and eventually provide diapers to older children as an incentive for keeping WIC appointments. ■



MARWIC TIMES Calendar

The deadline for the Fall issue of MARWIC Times is August 5, 2022.

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

5" x 7" digital photos (saved in JPEG/PDF format) preferred.

All photographs must include a detailed caption.

MATERNAL AND FAMILY HEALTH SERVICES LAUNCHES GROW WITH WIC SEED PROJECT IN PENNSYLVANIA

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

Pennsylvania's Maternal and Family Health Services (MFHS) recently completed a successful pilot program of their Grow With WIC Seed Project, developed by MFHS WIC Nutritionist Kathy Egreczky, MS, RD, LDN. Over 300 clients at the MFHS Circle of Care office in Scranton, PA were given seed starting kits for parsley or basil, along with instructions how to grow the plants with their children.



Green thumbs all around!



Kathy and the Scranton staff also shared instructional videos on planting, growth of plants and recipes using the herbs on the MFHS TikTok and Facebook pages. Families that participated in the program have shared how much they enjoyed the program, and that it has renewed a passion for gardening and cooking for many of them.

Here are some examples of what MFHS clients had to say in their own words:

"This project helped my toddler to learn what it means to grow. He loved taking care of our plant and watering it daily. It taught him that with a little work, we can have great things. It has increased his appreciation for plants and animals. It was so fun watching him learn."

— Jacqueline C.

"The seed project has helped my family connect because we love to garden. This was small enough for my daughter to enjoy a tiny garden of her own. She is very small, but we have been teaching her by having her watch us garden and she helps by watering plants too. Thank you!"

— Kelly Z.

MFHS is now looking at plans to expand this project to more of their WIC offices to share the love of gardening and growing your own food with more WIC families. ■

WEST VIRGINIA WIC ENCOURAGES INCREASED FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PURCHASES WITH ENHANCED BENEFITS

West Virginia WIC announced that the US Congress has extended funding for enhanced WIC benefits through September 30, 2022 for the purchase of fresh, frozen, and canned fruit and vegetables.

As part of the federal enhanced WIC benefits, children receive \$24 per month, pregnant and postpartum participants receive \$43 per month, and breastfeeding women receive \$47 per month. Without the federal enhanced increase, the benefits are usually \$9 for children, \$11 for pregnant and postpartum, and \$16.50 for breastfeeding women.

"The WIC benefit increase is one of the most effective investments that helps children get a healthy start," said Heidi Staats, Director of the West Virginia WIC Program. "WIC families want healthier options for their children. In West Virginia, we collaborate with our retail business partners to highlight the nutritious options and enhanced WIC benefits that not only help families but also stimulate local economies."

The WIC cash value benefit increase has resulted in more than triple the amount of fruit and vegetable purchases in retail locations, a greater variety of produce redeemed by WIC families and increased fruit and vegetable consumption for young children. WIC has provided enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits to more than 32,000 West Virginia women and children.

To continue these great outcomes, the WV WIC Program has partnered with authorized WIC retailers to highlight fresh, frozen and canned fruit and vegetable options available for purchase with WIC benefits. WIC-branded cooler and floor decals share the message of "Fuel Up with Fruits and Veggies." Retailers may request additional decals from the WIC Vendor Management Unit by calling 304-558-1115 or emailing dhhrwicvu@wv.gov.

WIC provides nutrition counseling, parenting advice, breastfeeding support, food assistance and referral support to help families live healthier lives. WIC services are free for pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women and children up to the age of five. Learn more and apply at dhhr.wv.gov/WIC. ■

**FUEL UP
WITH FRUITS
AND VEGGIES**

WIC WEST VIRGINIA
This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
Health & Human Resources
BUREAU FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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WEST VIRGINIA'S MONONGALIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT WIC PARTNERS WITH MEADOWBROOK MALL AND UNICARE FOR TUESDAY IS FOR TODDLERS

By Sarah Moore, Outreach Coordinator and Nutritionist

West Virginia's Monongalia County Health Department WIC Program has been attending Tuesday is for Toddlers at the Meadowbrook Mall since September of 2021. This program is held monthly and is targeted toward children that are not currently in school. The attendance is usually around 25 children, but the event seems to be growing in popularity with 75 children at the April event.

The event consists of story time, an activity, and a healthy snack. This allows children to interact with each other and develop social skills, while also encouraging a love for books and healthy eating. WIC and UniCare trade off on who brings the activity and healthy snack. When MCHD WIC hosts story time, we provide all of the children with their own book to add to their library. Since WIC supports healthy growth and development, we find it important that children are introduced to books at a young age. This allows them to develop a relationship with reading.

Stephanie Marshall (HHSA) and Kelly Rolstad (Nutrition Assistant) have attended every Toddler is for Tuesday event and really enjoy interacting with the kids. On months that have a holiday there is usually a special guest such as Santa or the Easter Bunny to make it special for the children attending. This event has allowed our WIC Program to gain more participants, while also allowing us to be actively involved in our community and gaining more partnerships with local organizations. ■



Santa is one of the special guests at Monongalia WIC's Tuesday is for Toddlers program at the Meadowbrook Mall.

TESTIMONIAL TUESDAYS AT PENNSYLVANIA'S DELAWARE COUNTY WIC

By Susan Buchmann, RDN, LDN, CLC, Outreach Coordinator, The Foundation for Delaware County WIC Program

The WIC Program in Pennsylvania's Delaware County is proud to introduce Testimonial Tuesdays. Every Tuesday, the Delaware County WIC Program is placing an ad on social media to promote our loyal clients. During the pandemic, WIC clients were very grateful for the WIC Program and the increased Cash Value Benefits allotted on the eWIC cards, which was made possible by the American Rescue Plan Act.

This past January, WIC staff set up tables in the waiting area of the clinics to gather data to see how much of a difference the increase of the fruits and vegetables has impacted our families. The outpouring of testimonials was very impressive, proving the importance of the continued increase of the Cash Value Benefits indefinitely. ■



PENNSYLVANIA WIC PROGRAM 2022 PUBLIC MEETINGS

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

As an opportunity to provide public comments to improve the WIC Program and include in the development of the 2023 State Agency WIC Plan, according to regulations 7 CFR 246.4(b): *Public comment*, the Pennsylvania (PA) WIC program planned and executed six virtual public meetings, held Monday - Saturday, between the hours of 6-9am, 12-2pm, and 6-8pm each date within the month of May 2022.

The public meetings notice were advertised in the PA Bulletin, within 18 local newspapers, on the PA WIC and Department of Health (DOH) websites, DOH social media, and distributed to collaborative partners and stakeholders. Local WIC agencies promoted the public meetings locally and regionally. ■

PENNSYLVANIA WIC PROGRAM WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR

By Heather Auer, Administrative Officer, Bureau of WIC, PA Department of Health

The Pennsylvania WIC Program is under new leadership as of March 14, 2022. Please join us in welcoming Sally Zubairu-Cofield as the new WIC



Director for the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Mrs. Zubairu-Cofield has extensive experience in WIC, serving not only in leadership and supervisory roles, but also in management roles in both WIC clinics and WIC programs. Mrs. Zubairu-Cofield has actively served on several community action groups, work groups, boards, panel discussions and currently serves on the National WIC Association. The WIC Program holds a special place in her heart, as she was also a teen WIC mom.

Since joining the Program as an employee, Mrs. Zubairu-Cofield has made it her personal mission to advocate not only for the WIC Program and the participants we serve, but for the special people who make the day-to-day WIC operations run. Mrs. Zubairu-Cofield has experience working with stakeholders and coalitions in both Virginia and Maryland.

Knowing the Program from all aspects – as a participant, and at all levels of WIC service – she understands this Program and its impact. She recognizes the hard work and the long hours, and knows how important this can be to the participants and is ready to take the action needed to improve PA WIC to best serve its communities. ■



Sally Zubairu-Cofield

PENNSYLVANIA WIC LAUNCHES NEW, STATEWIDE MEDIA CAMPAIGN

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

The Pennsylvania WIC Program has developed and executed a new, statewide media campaign for this spring and summer to promote the WIC Program. The overall campaign goals are to increase calls and visits to pawic.com, increase WIC applications, increase participation and retention, and promote the value of the Program and its, qualified staff, and eliminate stigma.



The new, statewide campaign has three mini-campaigns to reach three distinct audiences — existing participants, new participants, and those who are not aware of WIC and/or that they are eligible. The first focus, which aired statewide during May was “WIC and SNAP Works Together.” The second focus, airing statewide in June, was “WIC is for Breastfeeding.” And the third focus, airing statewide in the month of July, is “WIC is for Working Families.”

After the July airing, the PA local WIC agencies will utilize the campaign materials and tools locally and regionally to promote WIC. ■

MARWIC TIMES MARKS 27-YEAR ANNIVERSARY WITH GRATITUDE TO ALL

Two years ago, MARWIC TIMES celebrated its 25th anniversary. As we began production for that 100th issue, the country was in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dedicated WIC employees were struggling to provide services virtually to clients who needed them more than ever, as well as taking care of their own families. Contributing stories and photos to our publication was no one's top priority... and rightfully so. We cobbled together an issue with a few stories and a collage of the previous 99 covers in an attempt to keep the MARO WIC community connected.



In the two years that have followed, this publication has shared numerous stories of the extraordinary challenges and successes that were borne out of a necessity no one could have imagined. And just when things could not seem to get worse, the formula shortage created yet another emergency situation to navigate.

As we reach the 27-year milestone of MARWIC TIMES, we applaud the hard work and tremendous efforts of the entire MARO WIC team and look forward to sharing new and exciting events and best practices for many years to come! ■

WEST VIRGINIA'S VALLEY HEALTH CABELL WIC PROGRAM CELEBRATES THEIR 5TH ANNUAL BREAKFAST WITH SANTA EVENT

By Jenna Rose, MA, RDN, LD-Valley Health West Nutrition and Outreach Coordinator

This past year, the employees of West Virginia's Valley Health Systems, Inc. came together and financially supported our fifth annual Breakfast with Santa Event. Our previous financial support networks were unable to help us this year, but the 650+ employees of Valley Health Systems, Inc. came through big by purchasing "Shop for a Cause" Santa gear (bags, shirts, sweatshirts, etc.) through Valley Health's Charitable Giving Program.

Jessica Staples with Valley Health's Charitable Giving Program, made this event possible. Jessica designed the logo for the gear, took the orders, collected the money, distributed the items to employees, and put a portion of the proceeds of each item purchased directly into a fund for the Cabell WIC Program's Breakfast with Santa on the Go event.

From Thanksgiving through the New Year, Valley Health employees were able to wear the clothing to work that they had purchased to support our event. The Valley Health Charitable Giving Program raised \$5000 for our event this year. Multiple other local businesses also provided support through gift cards and food cards. In addition, Old Navy supported us by doing a blanket drive at their local store in the Huntington Mall. Additionally, some of their employees assisted us by volunteering during the event.

Each year our focus for this event is to help families who are active WIC participants. Participants are required to reserve a spot to be served during the event. It is done on a first-come, first-serve basis until funding is exhausted. This year we were able to serve all families who registered.

The event was a drive-through event due to COVID-19 protocols. Each family received a door prize, Christmas ornaments to decorate/make, blanket, breakfast recipe/ingredients in a bag, cookbook, and reading book. In addition, each active infant or child WIC participant received a gift, filled stocking, and a pair of pajamas. Each sibling in the house of an active WIC participant received a gift and filled stocking also.

Families were given an appointment time to drive through the event, pick up their items, and see Santa. This event requires teamwork amongst the employees to make it run smoothly each year. This year we served 40 families and a total 85 children. Sixty of these children were active WIC participants. In addition, by advertising the event we were able to sign up four participants who were not active on WIC and do their appointments and make them active so they could participate in the event. We appreciate our Valley Health families and the local community support to make this event possible for our WIC participants. ■



Scenes from Breakfast with Santa