

MARWIC

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

LACTATING WORKERS IN VIRGINIA GAIN NEW PROTECTIONS

By Jarene Fleming, IBCLC, RLC, State Breastfeeding Coordinator, Virginia Department of Health

Employees who are pregnant or breastfeeding have more on-the-job protections thanks to the Virginia Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, which went into effect July 1, 2020. The law requires employers to make reasonable accommodations, including more frequent breaks and access to a private location to express milk.

“The new law will remove barriers and help families continue to provide milk when returning to work. The Virginia General Assembly recognized August 2019 and each succeeding August as Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Virginia and it’s National Breastfeeding Month #NBM2020, so this is a great time to emphasize human milk feeding as a public health priority and highlight the importance of law and policy in this area,” said Megan Nason, Virginia WIC Program Manager.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Office of Family Health Services, Division of Community Nutrition, collaborated with the VDH Division of Prevention and Health Promotion, the Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce to raise awareness about the Virginia Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.

Virginia WIC employee and VDH State Breastfeeding Coordinator Jarene Fleming produced a webinar titled, “New Lactation Law: What Every Employer Needs to Know: During COVID-19 and Beyond,” which addressed the intersection of lactation accommodation laws, CDC guidelines on infection prevention, and the best practices for creating lactation spaces to support lactating employees.

The Virginia Pregnant Workers Fairness Act is part of the Virginia Human Rights Act. Unlike older policies that exempted entire professions, such as teachers or doctors, the new law does not have any profession-wide or industry-wide exemptions. The webinar was recorded and is posted online along with handouts from the session.

“The return to work can be a major hurdle for lactating parents, but thankfully there are now several laws that provide clear guidance to employers on how to meet their breastfeeding employees’ core needs,” said Jessica Lee, staff attorney at the Center for WorkLife at the University of California Hastings College of the Law.

The featured presenter, Lee discussed what constitutes a “reasonable” accommodation. Common accommodations include break time to pump milk as needed, a private lactation space that is not a bathroom, and a place to store milk. However, because circumstances vary, other accommodations may be needed, for example, retail store workers were normally not allowed to bring bags into work with them, so there had to be accommodations made to allow them to bring in their pumping equipment and coolers to store expressed milk.

“The law does have some flexibility so that both the needs of the employer and the worker can be met,” Lee said. All are welcome to view the webinar and share the information with colleagues, family and friends at bit.ly/VALactationLaw. ■

NEW LACTATION LAW:
What every employer needs to know,
during COVID and Beyond.

WEBINAR

SPEAKERS:

- Jessica Lee
Staff Attorney, Center for WorkLife Law,
UC Hastings College of Law
- Angela Love Zaranka
Chair, Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition
- Jarene Fleming
State Breastfeeding Coordinator,
Virginia Department of Health

Recorded Wednesday,
July 22, 2020

View the Recording Here
bit.ly/VALactationLaw

VDH VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH | WIC | Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition | #ManyVoicesUnited | #VABreastfeeds

Publicity for the webinar



Jessica Lee, J.D.

FALL 2020

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NEWS FROM THE USDA: USDA CELEBRATES LOVING SUPPORT AWARD WINNERS

By Joseph Dybas, Pathways Intern

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO) for the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is excited to announce that Delaware State WIC, the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey (NJ), Chesapeake Health District (VA), and Randolph Elkins Health Department (WV) are recipients of the 2020 Gold Loving Support Awards!

To celebrate and officially recognize the recipients, MARO hosted a virtual event on August 18. The Loving Support Award program was established to recognize local WIC agencies that have provided exemplary breastfeeding promotion and support activities. The intent is to provide models and motivate other local agencies and clinics to strengthen their breastfeeding promotion and support activities and ultimately increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates among WIC participants.

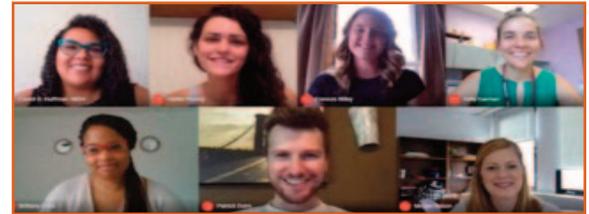
The recipients of the Loving Support Awards of Excellence demonstrate competency in fulfilling the required program components of the USDA's Loving Support model. Specifically, the recipients have excelled in the areas of staffing, training, customer service, maintaining a breastfeeding-friendly clinic environment, and establishing community partnerships that are supportive of breastfeeding. Moreover, it is imperative to note that due to the hard work and efforts by all of our Programs, MARO's fully and partially breastfeeding rate in 2018 was 12.2% and 17.7%, respectively.

Please join us in congratulating the recipients for their tireless efforts and unwavering support for our breastfeeding community! ■

VIRGINIA/MARYLAND WIC DIETETIC INTERNS GRADUATE VIRTUALLY

By Megan Nason, MS, RD

The dietetic interns from the Virginia/Maryland WIC Dietetic Internship completed program requirements a little differently this year. The class of 2019-2020 graduated in August through a virtual graduation platform. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many interns experienced delayed and cancelled supervised practice rotations. The interns were extremely flexible and with the help of the new Internship Coordinator, Laurel Huffman, they were able to complete the internship program requirements through alternate supervised practice hours with assignments such as case studies, simulations and research article reviews.



Congratulations to the Virginia/Maryland WIC Dietetic Internship Class of 2019-2020!

Virtual graduation afforded an opportunity for interns and program administrators to "meet" and interns were able to present their Capstone Projects. The Virginia/Maryland WIC Dietetic Internship is proud of the interns and their ability to adapt during these difficult times. ■

NFL QB CHARLIE BATCH IS PA WIC'S SPOKESPERSON AND A WIC BABY HIMSELF

By Jamie Szitas, Public Health Program Manager

In August 2019, Pennsylvania WIC started a project titled "PA WIC Champion." Our goal was to find a local hero to be the Program's champion and spokesperson. This person would promote the importance of WIC as a public health nutrition program that provides nutrition education, nutritious foods, breastfeeding support and healthcare referrals, as well as help de-stigmatize the Program.

In October 2019, Charlie Batch graciously agreed to be the PA WIC champion and spokesperson. Batch is a former NFL quarterback with the Detroit Lions and Pittsburgh Steelers, including two Super Bowl wins. He is also one of Pennsylvania's first WIC babies.

The commercial filming and photo shoot were to take place this past March at Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Due to COVID-19, this was canceled. We were finally able to reschedule for June, but had to change the location. The advertisements (TV, radio, billboards and digital) are expected to be live in September.

The Pennsylvania WIC Program is very excited about this campaign and is extremely grateful to Charlie Batch. ■



Pennsylvania WIC's ads feature retired NFL QB Charlie Batch, who was one of PA WIC's first babies.

MEMORIES AND THOUGHTS ABOUT WIC

By Pat Dombroski, Regional Administrator for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service who is planning her retirement after 43 years of federal service

I began my career with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO) of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) right out of college, having majored in Health Education. I thought I was going to be a teacher. Within two years of joining FNS, I transferred into the newly formed WIC team (1977) and felt at home. It was an exciting time... the Program was an infant and it was both fun and a little daunting to be a part of designing and implementing something from the ground up. There were few regulations, no standard eligibility criteria, a very basic funding formula; vouchers were mimeographed at each local agency, and no state-wide programs were in place.

Carol Fahey was MARO's first Regional Director of the Supplemental Food Programs, which included the Woman, Infants and Children Program (WIC) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). I became Regional Director in 1983, until I was asked to take leadership of the MARO Regional Food Stamp Program (now SNAP Program) in 1991. In my WIC role I had the pleasure to visit WIC clinics, talk with moms, hold babies, and listen to state and local staff, along with Commissioners of Health. I learned from each visit and conversation. I remember a Virginia Department of Health Commissioner who was passionate about the education provided through WIC. The Commissioner helped me see early on that while the food provided by WIC targets income-eligible families, the information around breastfeeding and the types of food infants, pregnant and postpartum woman, and children should be consuming applies across all economic levels. Many have heard me say that both my sons were raised having only WIC-approved cereals and juices!

After my time with WIC, I had the good fortune to have a Regional leadership position in all of our major programs, and I carried with me the basic values I learned in WIC, caring for the health and well-being of our Programs' customers while ensuring good fiscal stewardship. And I'm happy to say I think I was able to convince some Food Stamp/SNAP Commissioners of the value of a hug before and after a meeting... lessons learned from WIC.

The look of WIC has certainly changed over the years; more complex funding formulas, greater variety in the food package, and automation brought us sophisticated eligibility systems and EBT. But the cornerstones of WIC: nutritious food, breastfeeding support, nutrition education, and ties to health care remain. The ability of WIC to adapt and change, while holding the core close has given the WIC Program its strength and endurance over the years and for years to come.

I could go on for pages, but I hope you can see that while I am humbled to have been a part of all our Agency's programs, WIC will always be the FNS Program nearest and dearest to my heart.

I will leave you with a quote that was on a card I've kept from my visit to Valley Health WIC clinic in West Virginia many, many years ago. "To the world you may be only one person, but to one person you may be the world. Thank you for the love and care that you give every day to the children in your life." It beautifully sums up WIC, those that work in WIC and why WIC works! ■



Pat Dombroski and her staff through the years!

PUERTO RICO WIC CONTINUES TO OFFER SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND REMAINS OPERATIONAL

By Gloribel Rabelo, LND, CLE and Outreach Coordinator

On March 15, a lockdown and curfew were decreed in Puerto Rico by the Governor's Executive Order as a measure to control the spread of COVID-19. In the face of this new and unexpected reality, measures were immediately implemented to ensure service to our WIC participants.

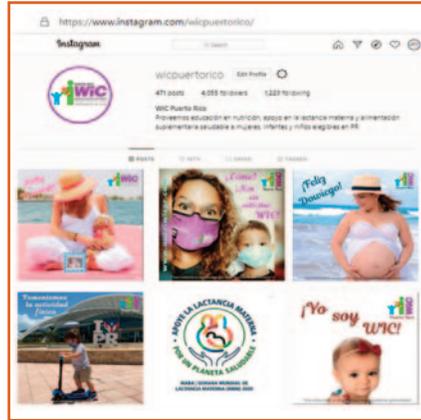
Among the measures taken were: create a fully virtual service scenario where assessments were carried out remotely by telephone without physical presence, and digital platforms created such as the MI WIC PR application, and redesign of the website www.nutriwicpr.com, to confirm their postal address and telephone number. In addition, as the established platform for nutrition and breastfeeding education at a distance, NERI was continued. Also, the PR WIC Program began to send checks by postal mail to all active participants. A portal for physicians was created to digitally submit prescriptions through the form WIC-050 (medical documentation), promoting telemedicine service.

As the weeks went by during the lockdown, many challenges arose which were effectively solved, which has led us to have more WIC participants than before the pandemic. At PR WIC, anyone who is interested in participating can apply to our Program through our website, under "COVID-19 Services."

During this situation, Facebook and Instagram have taken on a new boom and have even served as essential tools for the dissemination of information as the changing scenario develops. After participants register on our website, nutritionists and CPAs contact them by phone for certifications.

As government orders have been relaxed by the lockdown, several of our clinics have been partially opened without physical presence of participants to obtain the widest possible scope and to serve participants who have difficulty with remote service or their internet connection, because of how quickly all these changes have occurred.

We can say to this date that this pandemic has given us great challenges, but from a positive perspective, has challenged us and taught us that we must amplify our services to reach what fits our new reality. ■



Puerto Rico WIC's website offers many ways to connect during the pandemic.

NEW JERSEY'S NEWARK WIC: ON-GOING BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT DESPITE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By Sharon Schopfer IBCLC, Breastfeeding Coordinator

Given this unprecedented time, we at Newark WIC are working diligently to provide continued breastfeeding support to our pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. While many offices in New Jersey have been serving their clients exclusively remotely since March, we have been open to clients since early June to participants who chose to pick up checks, need a change of checks or need in-person breastfeeding assistance.

Unfortunately, this pandemic has negatively affected our Agency's breastfeeding rates to an unprecedented drop in exclusive and breastfeeding mothers. Perhaps due to fear, uncertainty, food insecurities, and lack of confidence, many of our mothers are choosing formula over breast milk. The breastfeeding staff has been fervently working since the beginning, to reach out by phone, text, mailings along with weekly Zoom meetings (in English and Spanish) to provide continuation of breastfeeding support and needed information. In addition, the lactation consultant resumed her hospital visits to provide the additional breastfeeding support to our WIC breastfeeding mothers during their postpartum hospital stay.

On August 4, we celebrated World Breastfeeding 2020 virtually and included Bravado Designs as a guest speaker. Isabel-Norman Vitorovich discussed all we needed to know about nursing bras and the importance of correctly measuring and the need for a well-fitting nursing bra during pregnancy and beyond.

The breastfeeding staff here in Newark WIC is committed to our clients and will continue to provide information, education, and in-person support as needed. ■



Newark WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselors Jennifer Rodriguez and Renee Suppa preparing a breastfeeding support mailing for our clients.

WEST VIRGINIA'S TSN/WIC AGENCY CONTINUES OUTREACH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By Diane Landy, TSN/WIC Outreach Coordinator

On June 4 at 6pm, TSN/WIC Outreach Coordinator Diane Landy met with members of WV RAPP, the West Virginia Relatives as Parents Program, a Mission WV group dedicated to helping family members who are raising another family member's child by providing helpful information and resources. Nikki Snuffer, Family Liaison and Adoption Recruiter for Mission WV, arranged the meeting with WIC, which provided the WV RAPP group with a brief but thorough overview of the WIC Program. The WIC presentation reached 91 members of WV RAPP.

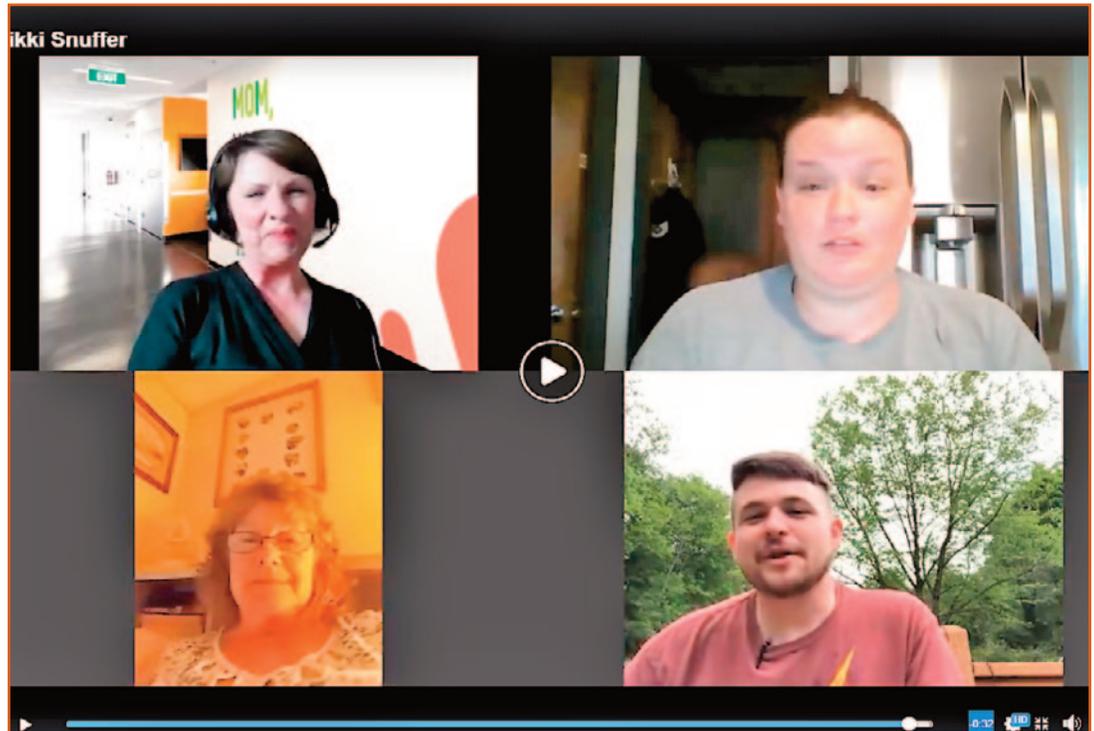
You might be wondering just how this was possible during June 2020, given we were in the midst of a full-blown pandemic with social distancing and restricted travel requirements, right? The answer is simple: meeting virtually.

While WIC staff have been successful in communicating amongst themselves and with WIC participants throughout this horrific pandemic by phone and through email, when we think of outreach, we typically think of in-person contact, personally delivering materials and attending community partner meetings, don't we? Thinking out of the box and utilizing social communication tools like Zoom and Webex to continue to have face-to-face interaction with groups who need information about the WIC program is essential.

There are positive elements and reasons to embrace virtual presentations – presentations done virtually still have that human element and, if recorded and then put online, have the potential to reach far more people than a one-time deal in-person presentation. The TSN June presentation, for example, still has unlimited potential to reach new WV RAPP members as they join the group.

There is something to be said about mental health here, too. WIC staff confined to communications only by phone or email may miss out on that human element. Being able to see other people, their gestures and facial expressions, is comforting during this difficult and isolating time. Continuing to meet with our community partners and continuing to provide presentations is comforting and helps us know that life is still going for others, we are all in this together, still trying to effectively meet work goals and trying to establish a new normal.

The drawback of virtual outreach? Initially, it can be uncomfortable and there may be a slight learning curve for its technical aspects, but the good news is that, just like anything else, the more you do it, the better you get at it. WIC Outreach staff may want to consider embracing the new normal, if they haven't already. ■



Making a virtual presentation to participants are (top row, left to right) Diane Landy, TSN/WIC Outreach Coordinator; and Nikki Snuffer, WV RAPP Family Liaison and Adoption Recruiter.



TSN/WIC presentation cover as seen virtually.

DELAWARE REACHES MORE PARTICIPANTS WITH ONLINE BREASTFEEDING CLASSES

By Ida Lewis, IBCLC, RLC

The Delaware WIC Program began offering virtual breastfeeding classes using the Skype for Business platform in March 2020. This was a direct intervention to combat dwindling participation of in-person infant feeding classes, as well as COVID-19 safety precautions. The hope was to extend support to pregnant and/or breastfeeding women and their partners in a way that was more convenient and accessible.

Vernisha Waters, a nursing mother, WIC participant, and WIC breastfeeding peer counselor in northern Delaware, independently developed the first virtual breastfeeding prototype and advertising model. The energy she invested in this project has produced a tool that is now essential in educating prenatal and nursing mothers.

The virtual classes are scheduled on the first and third Wednesday of the month, twice per day at 11am and 5pm. Pre-COVID-19 class attendance ranged from five or six participants; current class attendance is averaging between 17 and 33 participants. The classes are a success!

The virtual platform allows participants the convenience of online learning from the comfort of their home or work without the added cost of a babysitter, transportation, or asking for time away from employment. Participants have an opportunity to receive information and ask questions before the baby's arrival with a bonus of listening as many times as they like, because the class never expires.

The virtual classes are taught by a breastfeeding peer counselor who has successfully completed the USDA course, "Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work, A Journey Together" and scored 95% or higher on a written exam. Supervision is provided by an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant for questions that may arise beyond the peer counselor scope of practice.

The breastfeeding class covers information on the importance of skin-to-skin, latch, position, breast changes, milk production, milk changes, milk storages and the importance of breastfeeding support. Suggestions on topics are requested by the class host, allowing new class topics to be developed. Local breastfeeding peer counselor information is shared at the conclusion of each class for participants who need additional support before and during the early postpartum period.

Greater things are expected in the future as the program increases the variety of breastfeeding topics offered to participants. ■



Vernisha Waters

MARYLAND'S MONTGOMERY COUNTY WIC HOSTS LIVESTREAM FOR BREASTFEEDING MONTH

CCI WIC is the Local Agency in Montgomery County, Maryland. For a long time, CCI had planned a series of activities for Breastfeeding Month, including a Run Baby Run 5K. We do these activities every year.

However, due to COVID-19, CCI WIC decided to hold events virtually this year. Several times a day during the week of August 10, CCI hosted livestreams on Facebook in both English and Spanish. Virtual sessions included recipe demonstrations, breastfeeding Q&A sessions, science experiments for kids, Bingo games, trivia, and fitness classes. Participants could interact by commenting and sending in questions during the live session.

The events culminated in a socially distanced 5K run on Saturday, August 15, at Wheaton Regional Park. Participants could win prizes and treats. CCI WIC also handed out information on COVID-19 and healthcare resources in the community. ■



Katia Howell and Barbara Reyes demonstrate how to make breakfast egg bite muffins. Also participating, but not shown, are Ana Cordova and Karen Blanco.

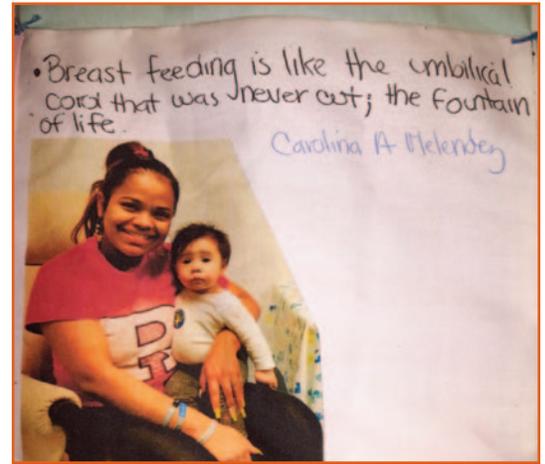
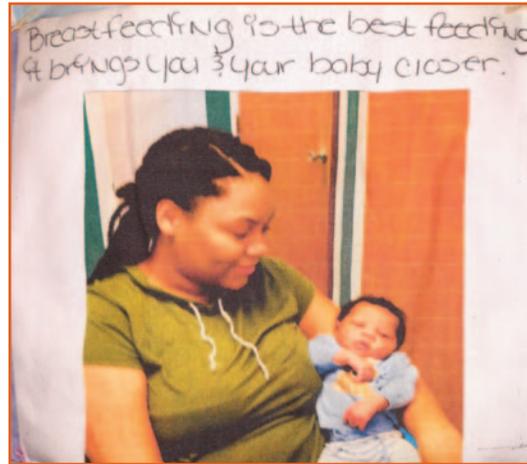
NEW JERSEY'S BURLINGTON COUNTY WIC CELEBRATES WORLD BREASTFEEDING MONTH

By Sakinah Ishmael, Peer Counselor

Plans for World Breastfeeding Week began in early 2020. Discussions ensued and it was decided that a beautiful quilt should be made to highlight our breastfeeding mothers. Burlington County (NJ) WIC breastfeeding participants were asked to be a part of the project. Mothers who agreed wrote out quotes on the beautiful bond formed with breastfeeding and had their pictures taken with their babies. Staff member Ginger Nielsen and her mother used their talents to design and put together the quilt.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, we knew our breastfeeding mothers would need our support and encouragement. The quilt, which now hangs in our clinic, serves as an inspirational testimony to the breastfeeding services we give to our families. We didn't let COVID-19 keep us from providing quality guidance during this crucial time or dampen our excitement.

We know that breastfeeding is the safest, most nutritious and reliable food source for babies. Breastmilk is always the right temperature, requires little preparation and is readily available during times when supplies are limited. During these difficult times, the life-saving protection of breastfeeding is more important than ever to help keep families healthy and sustained. Amazingly beneficial for breastfeeding mothers, they've had more time at home to focus on mothering and reaching their personal breastfeeding goals. ■



This quilt provides inspiration for all Burlington County WIC breastfeeding mothers.

MARYLAND LAUNCHES "I'M A WIC BABY" AD CAMPAIGN

By Ernest Le, State Outreach Coordinator, Maryland WIC

Human beings are wired to create narratives. When we see a basketball player sinking several shots in a row, we think the player is "on fire" even though it might just be random coincidence. When we see children playing together, we quickly identify which ones are more assertive and imagine what their peer relationships are like. Psychological studies have confirmed that our brains are set up to take observations and weave them into a story.

WIC has a narrative, too; and last year it was a narrative that was going the wrong way. Participation was declining, the political atmosphere was hostile to government assistance, and the stigma made participants hesitant to acknowledge their participation in the Program. As I thought about these problems, I realized that the narrative was missing the perspective of the infants and children. Kids are cute, but they usually don't speak for themselves to the public.

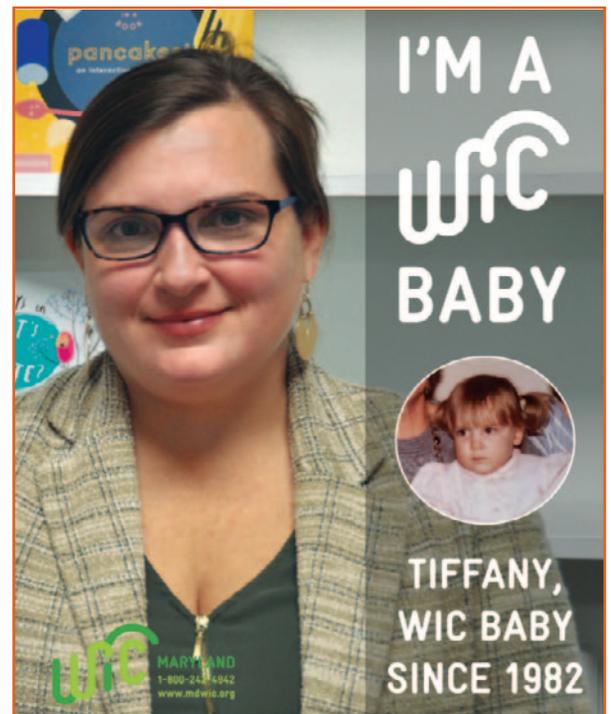
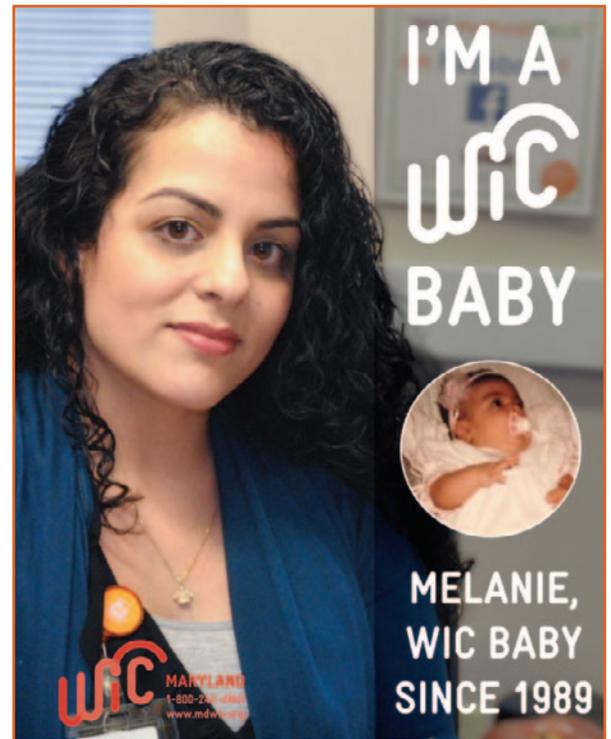
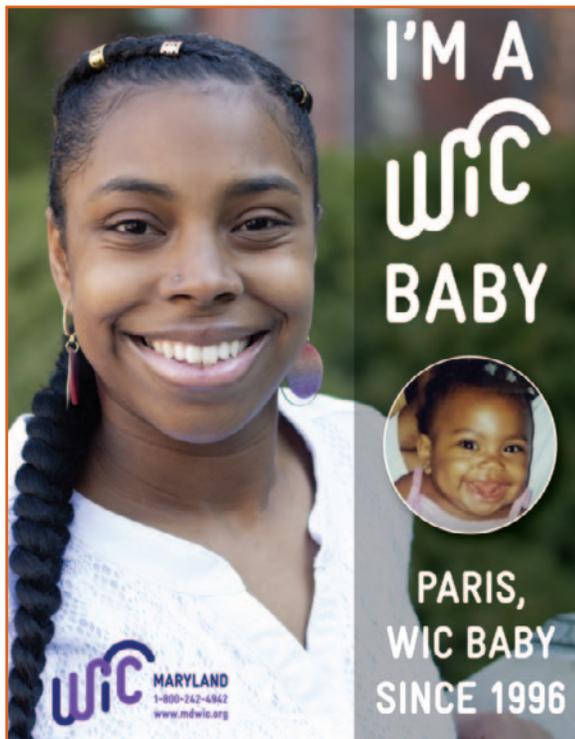
What if we could find adults who used to be WIC participants and tell their stories? What if we reminded people that every WIC Baby is a future member of our community? Would that change the narrative? As I thought about this, I came up with the idea for a new ad campaign summed up in just four words: "I'm A WIC Baby."

The hardest part was actually finding the WIC Babies to interview and photograph for our campaign. Our Local Agencies were valuable for producing leads. I found that the key was to ask them not just to refer WIC Babies to me but also to tell me about organizations and community members who I could talk to who might be able to point me in the right direction. Whenever I interviewed someone, I would ask them if there was anybody else I should talk to and follow up. I found two WIC Babies that way.

Maryland WIC has a contract with a graphic design firm that had a professional photographer. This was crucial to making the WIC Babies feel their comfortable and looking their best. I also made sure that nothing would be published without them seeing it and giving their approval first. One WIC Baby actually volunteered to translate her story into Spanish for us.

In the course of this project, I heard many inspiring stories about people who wanted to give back and serve others. One WIC Baby is now the director of a local non-profit. Another is a nutritionist. Another is finishing her degree in public health. It turns out that creating this ad campaign was also reminding me of why I'm doing this work. I wanted to do everything I could to make sure their stories were told.

Maryland's "I'm A WIC Baby" campaign will appear on social media, our website, transit ads, and billboards in the fall of 2020. We are continuing to seek out new WIC Babies, and we are hoping to continue this campaign for years to come. ■



These are among the WIC Baby ads which will run in Maryland this fall.



MARWIC TIMES Calendar

The deadline for the Winter issue of MARWIC Times is October 22, 2020. Submit articles, photos and calendar events to your State editor. No Polaroid pictures. 5" x 7" digital photos (saved as JPEGs) preferred. All photographs must include a detailed caption.