

# VENA Visions

AUGUST 2007

VALUE ENHANCED NUTRITION ASSESSMENT

## Making a Difference

*A wise man was taking a sunrise walk on the beach. In the distance, he caught sight of a little girl who seemed to be dancing along the waves. As he got closer, he saw the little girl was picking up starfish from the sand and tossing them gently back into the ocean. "What are you doing?" the wise man asked. "The sun is coming up and the tide is going out; if I don't throw them in, they'll die." "But little girl, there are miles and miles of beach with starfish all along it; you can't possibly make a difference." The little girl bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it lovingly back into the ocean, past the breaking waves. "It made a difference to that one," she replied. (author unknown)*



Each day, across the state, we help thousands of 'starfish' in our clinics, as well as in our personal lives. It may be as simple as a smile, a cheerful hello or a friendly face; or as grand as a phone call to the shelter for a woman in need of a safe place. We have the potential to make a difference for each person we encounter. We may not know which person; they may not tell us. Take pride in your work and the important part you play in the lives of our WIC families. Know that you help someone every day.

*"Often we set out to make a difference in the lives of others only to discover we have made a difference in our own."  
Ellie Braun-Haley*

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## Mooney's Message

As we prepare to implement VENA, we are working to bring you the most useful and up-to-date tools for nutrition assessment, education and counseling, as are other states. As a nation, we are collaborating and states are sharing their resources via the WIC Works website ([www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks](http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks)). The New Hampshire State WIC Program has asked to adapt our *VENA Visions* to use with their local agencies. We are fortunate to be able to share our resources, materials, and ideas. In this issue, you will read about our visit to Massachusetts and what we learned. We want to hear your ideas so they can be shared with all NYS local agencies. *VENA Visions* is your sharing board. Your creativity may be adapted to suit another agency and help them better serve their families. We encourage you to include VENA in your staff meetings and complete the LA Actions together. Remember, your regional office staff are available to help you with these activities. Have you made changes in your clinic set-up or routines to incorporate VENA philosophies? Send us your pictures and success stories to be highlighted in *VENA Visions* ([VENAvisions@health.state.ny.us](mailto:VENAvisions@health.state.ny.us)).

## The Words We Use.....

The words we use, and not use, can make a difference in how we are perceived, as well as how effective we are in our jobs. Our everyday interactions with WIC families sometimes lack words that promote positive experiences. Simple phrases go a long way to having meaningful conversations with our families. We need to remember our manners and use basic courtesies, such as 'please' and 'thank you.' Keep in mind that the initial greeting will set the stage for the entire appointment. And each subsequent interaction with various staff during the appointment will impact the effectiveness of the WIC experience.

How different do these two statements sound:

- \* "You have to bring your Medicaid card."
- \* "Please remember to bring your Medicaid card to your appointment. Thank you."

Do you have a preference as to which one you would like to hear?

How about answering the telephone:

- \* "WIC."
- \* "Good morning, Sesame Street™ WIC program. This is Oscar, how can I help you?"

Doesn't the second feel more welcoming and warm? Wouldn't you rather speak with Oscar than the grouch who just said "WIC?"

Which greeting do you prefer:

- \* "Where's your paperwork? Have a seat."
- \* "Good morning, how are you today? Thanks for coming in. Let's take a look at your paperwork."

Wouldn't the second greeting set the stage for a more positive interaction, especially for someone who was



already having a bad day when they walked in the door?

It's so easy to get caught up in the hurried pace of our WIC clinics that we often lose sight of how we interact with our families. For many of us when we get busy and stressed, our mannerisms change (i.e. how we talk, our body language and facial expressions). Especially when we repeatedly give out the same information/instructions, we may lose sight of how we say them. We may try to save time by leaving out lengthy instructions or explanations, forgetting to make eye contact or avoiding eye contact, talking faster, and listening less. All or any of these will have a direct impact on how you are perceived and the effectiveness of the interaction. Try to notice when these things happen to you and consider how that impacts the family you are working with.

For most of us, changing the way we say everyday phrases takes a conscious effort and practice. As you try to make some changes, notice how your families react. Kindness is usually met with kindness. More positive WIC experiences for our families can only lead to more positive working environments. We work in WIC because we are caring people; let's make sure that our families know we care.

Check out the LA Action for ideas on how to make changes.

*A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle —unknown*

### \*\*LA Action\*\*

In the last issue, we explored the WIC environment and how to make it more welcoming. In this issue, we turn our focus to the human element of WIC: how we, as staff interact with our families. On the common drive you will find the "The Words We Use Activity, August 2007" file in the *VENA Visions* subfolder. This group activity will provide an opportunity for each local agency to explore how their families see and interact with their WIC staff. By completing the activity, your agency will be able to establish guidance for developing and maintaining a positive, welcoming image.

Your regional Public Health Nutritionists are available to assist you in all VENA-related activities.

## Follow-Up on Change.....

In the previous issue of *VENA Visions*, we gave you an opportunity to explore your past or present efforts to make a change in your life. We asked you to use the stages of change model to assess how and why you may or may not have been successful. The important thing to remember is that even when people are not ready to act, they can still set the change process into motion. Movement may be forward or backward. It may even be cyclical. The key to success is the appropriately timed use of a variety of coping skills or tools. So, whether you don't want to change a problem behavior, or you've spent years hoping to change...someday, you can move along the spiral of change. This will give you a greater understanding of what we hope to offer, and expect of our participants. Empathy with the participant is paramount.

We have adapted some tools for use with your families to help guide them toward healthier choices. These tools and instructions for how to use them can be found on the Common Drive in the *VENA*

*Visions* subfolder. The circles guide sheet can be used to help you and your participants set the agenda together. Then explore importance by using the ruler sheet. Tailor your contact depending on your participant's readiness. Based on what they say, practice asking the appropriate questions. You will see the difference!



**Question:** I've been hearing about participant-centered education and am wondering what it means. Can a participant talk about anything at their nutrition education appointment?

**Answer:** Many staff have expressed this concern. Providing nutrition education that is participant-centered

## Ask the Editor/VENA Team

is a big focus of *VENA*. This style is based on the concept that behavior change is more likely to occur when there is personal interest or value. Through the *VENA* assessment process, you will be able to identify areas of interest (participant-centered) on which to focus your nutrition education. The goal is to engage the participant in conversation to establish goals

that will encourage behavior change and lead to positive health outcomes. Think of it as "Nutritionist-led, Participant-centered" education. You are guiding the conversation about nutrition, but the participant is setting the focus. Remember participant-centered is more than being nice, it involves careful listening. Send your questions to:

[VENAVisions@health.state.ny.us](mailto:VENAVisions@health.state.ny.us)

## VENA Team Visits Massachusetts WIC

Pattie Garrett and Nicole Cunningham from the state office in Albany recently traveled to Massachusetts to learn how they have incorporated the principles of *VENA* into their participant-centered nutrition education strategies. "We met with state staff, participated in a training session on Facilitated Group Discussion (FGD) called Amazing Conversations at their WIC training center, and visited two

local agencies (including the agency highlighted in the Parent Connections video). We heard first hand their experiences in implementing facilitated group discussions and using emotion-based messages for nutrition counseling".

As we start to reinvent our nutrition education materials, we will incorporate the advice and techniques from our

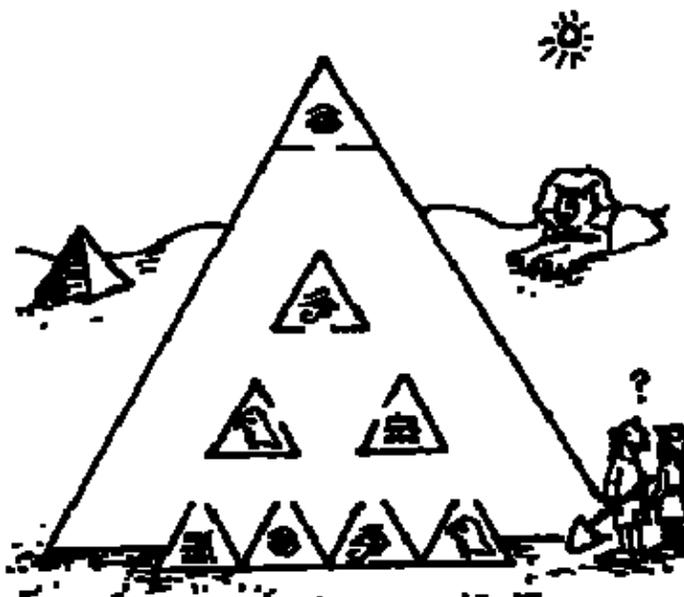
MA neighbors. We look forward to sharing exciting and innovative ideas for nutrition education and training.

Great Barrington, MA WIC Program



## Critical Thinking Puzzle.....

Ancient Egyptian pyramids were built as royal tombs. Within these massive stone structures were rooms, halls, and connecting passageways. Look at the figure below. Can you draw four paths that connect the matching symbols? The paths may not cross, they may not enter a non-matching pyramid, nor may they go outside the larger pyramid boundary.



Answer can be found on the Common Drive in the *VENA Visions* subfolder.

## VENA Training Schedule

### ⇒ **Mining For Diamonds**

(Developing critical thinking skills for all WIC staff, all-day sessions)

Western Region: September 5

Central Region: September 6

Capital Region: September 7

Metro Region: September 10-14

### **Mark Your Calendars!!!**



### ⇒ **VENA Build Training (Rescheduled)**

(All-day training sessions except conference calls)

Capital Region: October 4

Western Region: November 2

Central Region: November 5

Combined Upstate Region: November 29 (tentative)

Metro Region: October 15, 16, 17, November 14, 15, 16

Statewide Conference Calls: October 23, November 7

Albany: October 28 (WIC Association Conference)

*“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring: all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”*  
**Leo Buscaglia**