



WIC watch

Looking Ahead

For many people, fall is their favorite time of year. The summer harvest has transitioned to fall foods and winter crops are on the way. Nature puts on a show of colors. The sunlight is softer. As a nation, we take time to share our gratitude.

On behalf of the CWA staff, we want to express our gratitude to all California WIC staff for their enduring dedication this last year. On top of the pandemic, they have been dealing with the infant formula shortage and added complexities of a simultaneous formula contract change. We're also grateful for grocers, technology and business partners who have stepped up to collaboratively ensure the best services are provided to families, even in the toughest of times.

As 2022 comes to a close, there is widespread agreement that opportunities to make long overdue improvements in the WIC food package should be approved, using the recommendations of the NASEM report and current comment period as well as operational updates through Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Thoughtful quality improvement strategies will make for a brighter future for children and their families.

We trust you will appreciate what you find inside this issue of the WIC Watch. We're grateful for so many stories we received from local WIC staff. Reflecting the resilience and dedication of California WIC state and local staff and their connection with WIC families, these stories are emblematic of WIC services across the U.S. They are not only heartwarming but remind us of the impact WIC services have on millions of children and their families across generations.

The CWA staff appreciates and enjoys the myriad opportunities we have to engage with WIC staff and to advocate on behalf of the WIC program. We look forward to more chances to connect in the year ahead.

*Warm wishes,
Karen, Jodi, Grace, Lena, Sarah*



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CWA put on a new two-part WIC Works Webinar series this year titled *Human Lactation in the LGBT Community*. We were incredibly grateful to welcome speakers Dr. Lauren Hanley, MD, FACOG, FABM, IBCLC, and Dr. Andrea Braden, MD, FACOG, IBCLC. The first session was on *Inclusive Language & Supportive Practices*, introducing key terms and their usage to help WIC staff and community partners maximize inclusivity when working with families and breast or chestfeeding people. Dr. Hanley and Dr. Braden reviewed strategies regarding how to integrate these supportive practices into all aspects of caring for families in various timeframes, including ante, intra, and postpartum care. We wanted attendees to better understand how to create a safe space in whichever field they work and to welcome members of all communities.

The second session, *Clinical Applications & Case Scenarios*, built on the work we did in the first session and helped attendees find ways to use these skills to practice with case scenarios, involving LBGTQIA+ families. Our goal was to learn how to best support ALL families using evidence-based medicine and care, while at the same time creating a safe environment to improve quality of care.

A little more about our speakers...

Dr. Hanley is a General Obstetrician and Gynecologist at the Family Health Centers of San Diego. She is also an IBCLC and Fellow of the Academy



Dr. Lauren Hanley

of Breastfeeding Medicine. She went to medical school at the University of Miami in Florida where she also became proficient in Spanish. She did her Obstetrics and Gynecology residency training at Brown University/Women and Infants' Hospital of Rhode Island. She is the founder of the Lactation Clinic at the Massachusetts General Hospital, where she previously worked for just over 20 years before relocating to San Diego. She was on the faculty at Harvard Medical School during her tenure at Massachusetts General Hospital. She has been an active teacher of residents and medical students for her entire medical career, previously in Boston and currently in San Diego. She also served as the Chair and Co-Founder of the ACOG Expert Work Group on Breastfeeding for over 10 years. She has authored several documents and protocols about various aspects of lactation, including how medical systems can best support lactating people and families. She is a new Californian for just over a year, and currently lives in San Diego with her husband and 2 teenage daughters.

Dr. Braden is an Associate Professor of Gynecology & Obstetrics at Emory University School of Medicine, a Board-Certified Lactation Consultant, and the Founder & CEO of the lactation innovation company Lybbie. She graduated with a B.S. in Biology from the University of Alabama in 2003 and then attended the University of South Alabama School of Medicine from 2003 – 2007. Dr. Braden then completed residency training in Obstetrics & Gynecology at the University of Connecticut in 2011. Her academic focus centers around the postpartum period, with a particular emphasis in breastfeeding medicine, perinatal mood disorders, transgender healthcare, and female sexual dysfunction. Additionally, she is a member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Breastfeeding Expert Work Group and a graduate of the inaugural Women's Wellness through

Equality and Leadership (WEL) physician leadership training program. Dr. Braden has been the recipient of multiple research grants

from the Emory/Georgia Tech Coulter Translational Fund and the Georgia Research



Dr. Andrea Braden

Alliance to support her work in improving breast pump technology. She is a co-investigator with the researchers from the Grady Trauma Project on 2 NIH-funded studies that seek to understand the effects of trauma exposure on women's reproductive health. Furthermore, Dr. Braden is one of the founding physicians for Grady Memorial Hospital's Gender Center, a multi-disciplinary clinic that addresses the specific health care needs of the trans population. In 2019, she was awarded an American Medical Association's Inspiration Award in recognition of her time, wisdom, and support throughout the professional careers of fellow physicians, residents, and students. Dr. Braden's company Lybbie was selected as one of two startups to represent Emory University in Berkeley's SkyDeck University Innovation Partners Program in 2021, during which she was awarded both the Judges' and Audience's Favorite Pitch Awards. When she is not working, Dr. Braden can be found loving on her husband and 5 adorable children, devouring a good book, playing piano while singing her heart out, volunteering at her children's school, and exploring the world one exotic destination at a time.

If you are interested in viewing either workshop, please visit <https://www.calwic.org/events/wic-works-webinars/>.

Harnessing the Power of WIC to Advance Healthcare Reforms

Health care leaders in California are gaining momentum with historic reforms to improve care and outcomes for those most in need, and also to address population health and prevent costly chronic disease. Partnerships and innovative business models will be key to advancing these reforms and for responding to both medical and social needs of patients.

WIC local agencies are poised to be critical partners in this work to benefit children and their families, and potentially for addressing the needs of other patients. With a long-term presence in communities throughout the state and a highly skilled workforce, WIC can help Medi-Cal achieve its goals in several ways.

First, WIC can do what it does best – provide high quality nutrition and lactation care to all Medi-Cal prenatal, postpartum, infant and young child enrollees. Since reaching all eligible individuals requires new referral processes and outreach strategies, WIC agencies can build on successful models of linkages and data sharing to make it easier for healthcare providers to make referrals and for their patients to become participants.

For example, **Community Bridges WIC** local agency in Santa Cruz, is working with **Santa Cruz Health Information Organization** and **Unite Us** for improved referrals and care. **Riverside County WIC** is working with **Inland Empire Health Plan** and the county health clinics in new ways. Improved linkages with healthcare providers can facilitate coordination of care and contribute to achieving population health goals for improved perinatal and child health outcomes.

The new Medi-Cal contracts and benefits will require business relationships with community organizations and a large and diverse workforce to provide benefits outside of traditional medical care. With over 3,000 staff, WIC agencies have

California's largest nutrition and lactation workforce and can be important partners for expanding provider capacity. WIC staff not only have excellent assessment, counseling and education skills, they also have diverse language capabilities, cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Building on existing staff sharing models, WIC agencies can explore opportunities to contract with Medi-Cal Managed Care plans to provide Community Health Workers or other services.

Working with the local agencies, an updated template MOU is available for WIC agencies and Medi-Cal plans, previously updated in 2004. The MOU is framed to include the health reforms and opportunities for WIC, in addition to urging strong partnership for WIC referrals, outreach, participation and quality outcomes. The MOU can be individualized for the agreements between the health plans and each WIC agency. CWA encourages WIC agencies to meet with their health plans now that new contracts will be in place and reform is underway.

To keep local agencies informed as healthcare reforms roll out, CWA hosts monthly virtual meetings featuring local agency sharing and invited speakers to highlight opportunities for WIC engagement. In addition to these monthly sessions, planning is underway for a virtual summit in early 2023 to provide a forum for relationship building and meaningful engagement between WIC agencies and partners involved in healthcare data exchange and benefits delivery. CWA will share details for the summit before the end of the year.

Additionally, CWA provides the WIC local agencies with an online discussion platform, The Forum, where all meeting resources are available, and related questions can be posted, and discussions take place. For more information on the monthly meetings contact Karen and for the Forum, contact Lena.

CWA Workforce Assessment & Needs

One of the many special aspects of WIC since the program was started in the mid 1970's, is that it has been commonplace among WIC staff, serving in the local agencies and state programs, to have worked in the WIC program for decades. Employees express great satisfaction working with families and fulfilling the mission of WIC. There are many examples of staff working on long term career opportunities – continuing to learn, completing various levels of education and certifications, and feeling challenged.. Unfortunately, workforces are stretched, and for the first time, that includes WIC. As the state's – and nation's – largest nutrition and lactation workforce, this is concerning. To gain a better understanding of the opportunities, challenges and issues for the WIC and public health nutrition and lactation workforce, CWA is holding listening sessions with WIC staff and partners. Findings and recommendations that are actionable at the local, state and national levels will be lifted up. If you would like to participate by sharing your experiences, or have research or data to inform our work, please contact Jodi.

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State and Federal Policy Updates

WIC Cash Value Benefit Increase

In June 2021, with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, the WIC fruit and vegetable cash benefit was increased from \$9-11 per month to \$35 per month. In September of 2021, the increase was renewed via a continuing resolution from Congress, but at an adjusted rate of \$24-47 per month, which was aligned with the 2017 National Academy of Science Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) recommendations from their 2017 report on the WIC food package. Since then, NWA, CWA and the WIC community from around the country has been vocal about urging Congress to maintain the increased benefit with each round of Congressional funding negotiations. Significantly more money for fruit and vegetables has been transformative in the way that WIC families shop and eat, with WIC kids getting an extra 1/4 cup each day of fruits and vegetables. At the end

of September 2022, Congress extended the CVB increase through December at a slightly increased rate to adjust for inflation - \$25-49 per month. At press time it is our sincere hope that a year-long extension of the increased CVB will be included in Congress's Omnibus funding package by the end of December, and we are pleased to note that a permanent increase in the fruit and vegetable benefit has been recommended in USDA's WIC food package review!

Child Nutrition Reauthorization

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) bill represents an opportunity to make changes and improvements to the WIC program and a host of other federal child nutrition programs. While the CNR is supposed to be passed every 5 years, the last passage was in 2010, leaving programs like WIC long overdue for improvements and updating. Earlier

this spring, the CNR was introduced in the form of the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act, which includes several important WIC provisions: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/healthy-meals-healthy-kids-act.pdf>.

Although the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act was introduced in the House in July, and passed through the House Education and Labor Committee, it has since failed to make progress

through the House or to be taken up by the Senate. At press time, we are hoping (and encouraging our members of Congress to support) key WIC provisions of the CNR will be passed into law by the end of the year, such as extended child and postpartum eligibility, streamlining family recertification, and making the ability to serve WIC participants remotely a permanent option.

WIC Food Package Review

The White House Office of Management and Budget has completed its review of the WIC food package, and the public comment period has opened! The proposed changes to the food package are in line with the 2017 NASEM recommendations and what we'd hoped – more fruits and vegetables, more choices, less juice, more canned fish! Now more than ever we need WIC voices to urge support of these proposed changes for a WIC food package that is evidence-based and provides meaningful help (particularly in this age of high inflation) for families who need access to healthy food. Join CWA and NWA in making your voice heard! Check with Sarah to find out about template comments, social media opportunities, and ways to learn more about the WIC food package review: sdiaz@calwic.org.

State Policy Updates

California wrapped up its legislative season at the end of September, and CWA supported several bills as well as some administrative advocacy. The 2022-23 CA State Budget provided \$10 million to the Department of Public Health to expand the early childhood literacy program for WIC, Black Infant Health, First Five and other worthy programs. Those



Members of the California Work and Family Coalition celebrate the Governor signing SB 951.

books are culturally diverse and will be wonderful additions to the program that began in the previous year. CWA was also pleased the Governor signed SB 1183 into law which will provide an additional \$58 million in books for state libraries per the Dolly Parton Books for Children Program.

CWA also supported the provisions in the recently enacted State Budget and Budget Clean Up Bills to:

- Expand Medi-Cal to Undocumented Persons 26-29
- Provide Continuous Eligibility in Medi-Cal for Children Ages 0-6
- Provide Subsidies Under Covered CA (ACA in CA)
- Continue Telehealth Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

A big triumph for California families was the signing of SB 951, championed by the California Work and Family Coalition and its members, including CWA. SB 951 will maintain the current wage-replacement rate for individuals who take paid family leave (absent any action the rate would have fallen), and in 2025 will raise the wage replacement rate to 90% for low-income Californians. We hope that more families will be able to take time to care for an ill loved one, or to bond with a new baby and recover from birth with this increase!

We are also gearing up for a potential recession in 2023 and possible State Budget shortfall if revenues do not meet projections. In previous difficult State Budget years, cuts were made to Medi-Cal benefits, so we will be monitoring that very closely. The good news is that Governor Newsom and the Legislature provided for a healthy fiscal reserve for economic uncertainties and for natural disasters, but time will tell if the reserve will be sufficient to hold up under difficult economic times.

Congratulations, Madam Secretary!

Did you know that CWA has a counterpart organization based in Washington, DC? The National WIC Association (NWA) is the non-profit voice of the 12,000 public health nutrition service provider agencies and the over 6.3 million mothers, babies, and young children served by WIC nationwide. As a nonprofit, and like CWA, NWA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. We're thrilled that Samar McGregor, MPH, RD, one of CWA's most ardent activists and Deputy Director at PHFE WIC, was recently elected Secretary of the NWA Executive Board.

Having served WIC for over 34 years, Samar is a program expert clearly dedicated to supporting young families. She's been involved in various special projects, too, focusing on nutrition education, obesity prevention, early literacy, preventive nutrition services, and linkages with health care providers.

Advocating for the WIC Program is one of Samar's strengths. She is recognized as a strong WIC leader in California, serving as CWA Board President (2016-2017) and continuing on the CWA Board currently. She also co-presented two sessions at the 2022 NWA National Policy Conference: "Preparing to Educate Policymakers" and "Preparing for Capitol Hill Education Day" and has been an active member on the NWA Legislative Committee since 2016.

Serving on the NWA Executive Board has been Samar's goal, as it provides an opportunity to be involved on a national level and create connections with colleagues from all over the country. She also can elevate the voice of local agencies at the national level, especially now that we are on the cusp of exciting changes with the passage of Child Nutrition Reauthorization and celebrating



WIC's 50th anniversary.

In her application for the position Samar wrote, "I bring a tenured WIC record, deep passion for the work we do every day, and incredible networking and relationship building skills combined with graceful charm. I lead by example and would be an exceptional Secretary on the NWA Board." We couldn't have said it better!

Samar isn't new to the NWA Board; she served as a Local Agency Representative for the Western Region from 2017 to 2020. She reminds us that "serving on the board - whether for CWA or the NWA - provides an opportunity to share one's experience, learn from others, and bring new ideas back to the local agency."

Serving as Secretary is a well-earned honor and gives California another voice within NWA. Congratulations, Samar! We appreciate your ongoing passion and dedication to WIC and the families we serve.

Retirements

Julie Grunsky

Other than some time out for a pregnancy and other family situations, Julie Grunsky served California WIC agencies enthusiastically for 37 years before retiring in May 2022. Julie worked for both **Delta Health Care WIC** and **San Joaquin County Public Health WIC** in both direct service and managerial roles. She appreciated her experience in both an independently-functioning private nonprofit agency and a highly-structured county health department agency, each with benefits and challenges. On her retirement, Julie shared with CWA a few lessons she learned along the way.

WIC local agencies provide amazing support to each other.

"From Regional Meetings to CWA conferences, sharing common experiences and possible solutions to issues is remarkably valuable. Getting to know people from other agencies gave me resources to tap into when I had questions or problems and needed outside input that was less 'biased' or influenced than my usual group of co-workers. In-person visits to other WIC agencies - such as Sonoma County before WIC MIS installation and Solano County prior to WIC WISE introduction - proved very worthwhile!

Getting involved in job-related activities is a real "plus." Whether serving on California State WIC's Training Committee (in person) or NWA's Com-



mittee on WIC Policies (by phone), Julie met WIC colleagues with similar interests from all over the state and nation. "It was interesting and fun, and fellow committee members became people I could reach out to for ideas and suggestions in the future. I also learned how different WIC can be in other states, and that a lot of what we do is "just" California WIC!"

CWA Annual Conferences are always valuable. "It was fun to be with co-workers away from our workplace, and eating out with new and old friends from around the state was special. I loved hearing the different speakers and learning new things; some speakers we invited to Stockton for training events open to additional community agencies. Although not the same as in-person conferences, the pandemic-driven "virtual conferences" were a reasonable solution to an unprecedented problem – no need to travel, cheaper, and a great chance to connect."

A few of Julie's words of wisdom:
 "(1) **Take care of yourself** – you can't be of much use to others if you can't do that (though perfection is not required)!
 (2) **Take breaks** – get away from your work setting, take walks (no matter the weather), get some fresh air.
 (3) **Think before you speak or act** - maintain a sense of humor while being careful of what you say or email to anyone; once someone is offended, it's almost impossible to fix that.
 (4) **When reasonable, make work fun** - just make sure WIC participants or other "customers" don't feel they're missing out, being excluded or worse, being laughed at.
 (5) **Seek new perspectives** - expose yourself and your staff to people (such as guest speakers) from outside your agency."

All of us at CWA thank Julie for spending her professional energy and sincere heart with WIC!

Dawn Wilt

Back in 1988, Dawn Wilt, RD, IBCLC, worked for **San Luis Obispo County WIC** in a temporary position to cover a maternity leave. She "never planned to work for WIC as it was not a rotation that appealed to me during my dietetic internship." Yet it was a way to stay in San Luis Obispo County and, after six months, she "fell in love with WIC" and was hired as a permanent employee. WIC had a small caseload and no permanent clinic sites, while the public health department also provided the Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program (CPSP), so Dawn's time was initially split between OB clinics and WIC clinics.

Dawn's passion for breastfeeding began with the birth of her first child. Thanks to a First 5 grant, she became the breastfeeding peer counselor coordinator and lactation educator for WIC in 2001. She remembers fondly, "All the peer counselors were WIC participants. A few went on to have careers in lactation support, and two became WIC employees!"

In 2016, Dawn had the opportunity to become the WIC IBCLC. She found it very rewarding to help families and staff meet their breastfeeding goals, and was grateful the hospitals were very supportive of breastfeeding. While the onset of COVID and subsequent shutdown brought numerous challenges to offering support



Retirements

for breastfeeding difficulties, the situation helped her and other staff develop new skill sets such as conducting video appointments and scouring the internet for helpful links.

Dawn shares one of her most unforgettable WIC memories from just before she retired in June: "During the formula shortage, a participant was highly motivated to relactate. I was very honest with her about the effort that was required for it to work, and she made the commitment to try. At first she collected only drops.



Dawn and a colleague at her retirement party.

The staff and I kept encouraging her, and soon she had enough to cover the bottom of the bottle. In my last week of work she was up to collecting an ounce at a time and, although she had run out of formula, she had enough breast milk saved to feed her baby!"

Dawn remembers that, at one of her first WIC conferences, Laurie True, former CWA Director, predicted someday WIC would become paperless and have EBT cards. It took awhile but Dawn was glad to see it finally happen in 2020! In retirement, Dawn plans to keep active, swimming with her Masters Swim group and hiking, cycling and camping with her husband. She's eager to have more time to quilt, too!

Wendy Fertschneider

Over the past 34 years, Wendy Fertschneider, RD, worked for both **San-ta Barbara County WIC** and **San Luis Obispo (SLO) County WIC** Programs. As often happens in WIC, her work with WIC fit in with raising her family (her child was one year old when she started in SLO county) and other part-time work; for Wendy, it was with the Senior Nutrition Program (Meals on Wheels).

Wendy recently recalled a few highlights in her WIC work. "The release of the new food package in 2009 was the most fun time to work at WIC. The state [CDPH-WIC] did a fabulous job with the inspiring Healthy Habits educational materials for staff and clients. It was such a relief to align the food package with our nutrition message. My clinic in Paso Robles was part of the yogurt study that paved the way to add yogurt to the food package." In 2014-15, Wendy was honored to work with the local health department and the CDPH on an educational program for WIC clients on Climate Change and Health.

The last three years before she retired in June, she says, are best summed up by "It's always something!" From the long-anticipated transition to WIC WISE, complications and daily changes during the pandemic, to ending her career in the midst of a formula shortage, Wendy experienced her share of challenges. Yet WIC is able to meet such challenges when people feel like Wendy did, affirming, "My coworkers are like family to me, supporting each other through ups and downs."



Wendy, a vegetarian for 38 years and vegan for four, says she loved helping clients who were vegetarian/vegan, knowing she had a unique ability to offer supportive and accurate nutrition guidance. She also took pride in going the extra mile to help clients with special needs like therapeutic formula.

Wendy reminds us all, "It's gratifying to come through for families during tough circumstances. We can be the bright spot of compassionate support for them. I hope WIC continues to evolve in both service delivery and nutrition messages that best serve our families."

While retired from WIC, Wendy still works a flexible part-time job with the Senior Nutrition Program. She now has more time for family and friends, for running, going to the gym, and cooking with her husband, and for enjoying endless projects at home and traveling.

Happy Retirement!



Retirements

Pamela Stanley

After 28 years of service with **Antelope Valley Medical Center**, Pamela Stanley, RD, retired as the WIC Program Director in June. She held several positions in WIC, including Site Supervisor and WIC Program Coordinator, before being promoted to WIC Director in 2005. Pamela successfully oversaw two WIC sites in the Antelope Valley region, serving 12,000 young families every month.

Over the last 28 years, Pamela says she enjoyed being part of the collaboration and connection between the WIC Program, the hospital and the community organizations that benefit the families of the Antelope Valley. For Pamela, working for WIC never seemed like a job.

At a party in her honor, she said, "the WIC Program staff are the most dedicated, passionate, and resilient chosen family I could ever have. I am very proud to have worked for Antelope Valley Medical Center and I will miss the professional relationships that develop from working at one place for almost 30 years."



Lisa Marasco

Lisa Marasco didn't start her work life as an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). In fact, her bachelor's degree was in Business Administration/Accounting. However, motherhood changed her trajectory. She recalls, "I loved breastfeeding and I hated seeing how many of my friends stumbled and fell because there wasn't enough help."

As a La Leche League Leader, Lisa discovered a passion for problem solving and learned how important active listening is ...for any situation, but especially when working with breastfeeding parents. After the birth of her fourth child, she decided to leave accounting behind and pursue IBCLC accreditation along with a master's degree in human development.

Once certified, Lisa launched a private lactation support practice in Santa Maria. Through the local breastfeeding coalition, she met Meg Beard, breastfeeding coordinator for **Santa Barbara County WIC**. After covering Meg's maternity leave and another consultant's disability leave, Lisa moved into a permanent LC position with WIC.

Lisa remembers, "Though I was already specializing in more complex cases at this time, I was astounded by the number of complicated cases at WIC. Lower socio-economic status brings higher health risks and problems, and I have seen much over the years that I probably wouldn't have seen otherwise. I also had to learn more Spanish, and with the patience of the families and support of WIC staff, I was eventually able to conduct consults in Spanish on my own."

One of many career highlights Lisa recently shared with CWA: "I have had the opportunity to mentor my colleagues and aspiring IBCLCs and also have enjoyed having Dietetic interns shadow me. I love to teach and I hope that some



will eventually pursue work in lactation consulting!"

Lisa's number one priority for retirement is spending more time with her grandchildren. She also looks forward to traveling and camping with her husband, canoeing with friends, gardening, and cooking more nutritious meals. She assures us "I will continue to teach at conferences and to research and write - things that I love." Admitting "I will always have a fond spot in my heart for WIC families," Lisa will continue to help mothers, especially those with unresolved lactation issues, and hopes to work as extra help at WIC.

Read more about Lisa's reflections on the lactation profession, cultural humility, reasons to support lactation in all circumstances, and ways to enrich your career in the article on page 22.



Lisa and Meg Beard at Lisa's Retirement Party

New WIC Directors

Desiree Rivas

Antelope Valley WIC

Having worked at **Antelope Valley Medical Center** for 14 years, the past eight years being within the WIC program, Desiree Rivas is thrilled to step into the WIC Director position, determined to follow as best she can in the footsteps of recently-retired Pamela Stanley (see article page 8).



Hired in 2008 as a Diet Aide in the Dietary Department, Desiree continued five years in that position while pursuing her degree in Nutrition at California State University Northridge. In 2010 Desiree obtained her Bachelors of Science degree in Nutrition and Dietetics and in 2013 became a degreed nutritionist for Antelope Valley WIC.

At WIC, Desiree developed a passion for community nutrition and breastfeeding support and went on to pursue her International Board Certified Lactation Consultant license in 2018 and achieved Registered Dietitian status in 2020.

Jake Campbell

Del Norte County WIC

Jake Campbell originally moved to Arcata in Humboldt County to attend Humboldt State University (now Cal Poly Humboldt) and says he "fell in love with the area." He became the **Del Norte County WIC** Program Director in June 2022. He began his WIC career as a WNA for Humboldt County WIC in late 2017 and completed WNA training in 2018. After briefly leaving WIC for a position within CalWORKs, he returned to Humboldt County WIC as the Health Education Specialist in August 2019.

Jake says, "I am very eager for the opportunity to be part of a newly-established Del Norte WIC program and excited to see how WIC continues to grow and evolve to meet our participant's needs. At home, I enjoy being outside gardening, spending time with my wife, cats, and dog, and discovering new ways to prepare whatever fruits or vegetables I am currently growing."



Dr. Marisela Montoya

Lundquist WIC

Dr. Marisela Montoya became executive director of **Lundquist WIC and South Los Angeles Health Projects** in September 2021.

Marisela, who is a native of Mexico, immigrated to the US in 1972 and was raised in West Los Angeles.

She is Lundquist WIC's first Latina female executive director, demonstrating the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

As executive director, Marisela is already building and executing strategy, delivering on operational excellence, forging a strong relationship with community partners, modernizing systems and processes, building on the agency's commitment to sustainability and diversity, and evolving workplace culture.

Montoya joined South Los Angeles Health Projects in 2014 as Lundquist WIC's chief of operations.

Prior to her promotion to executive director, Marisela was already working with staff to build on the progress we've made on sustainability, social responsibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"I am so proud of our agency's culture," Marisela said. "Our staff's dedication to our mission and their work is what makes South Los Angeles Health Projects an outstanding organization. I am excited to lead this organization as we take on the challenges and opportunities the future will present."

She and her husband have three sons, two granddaughters, and two chocolate Labradors.



New WIC Directors

Angel Flores

Sonoma Indian Health Services

Angel Flores, the new WIC Director at **Sonoma Indian Health Services**, came to WIC 12 years ago as a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor. She recently described to CWA her response to a mailed letter with the following questions: Do you like talking on the phone? "Yes!" Have you exclusively breastfed an infant for at least one year? "Still breastfeeding!" Are you Native American? "Pomo baby!" If yes, come attend our Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Training. "I'm there!"

Angel attended the training and says she "fell in love with WIC. With such enthusiasm, it's no wonder she was soon hired as a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor. Within five years, Angel became the Local Vendor Liaison (LVL) while earning her bachelor's degree in Psychology at Sonoma State University, graduating in 2016. Soon after, Angel earned her WNA certification and, a year later, became Office Manager. With an obvious desire to keep learning, Angel participated in the WIC Leadership Academy 2021-2022, and was recently promoted to Director.

Angel shares, "What I love about WIC is working with the families. I have been working with some of them for over a decade and I love the relationships we have formed. It means so much to me that they see me as someone they can trust."

Angel is enrolled in the Round Valley Indian Tribes and a mother of four athletic children. She says, "When I'm not at work you can find me at a baseball or soccer field. I am also a Pomo Singer and my children are dancers. I love to read fantasy books - there has to be a strong female character, love story and magic. I always have a book with me or I will be listening to an audiobook."

Welcome to the wonderful world of WIC Directors, Angel!

WIC Staff Awarded Leadership Fellowships

In partnership with the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Rockwood Leadership Institute recently announced the recipients of the 2022-23 California Fellowship for Leaders in Early Care, Learning, & Health (ECLH). CWA congratulates these three staff from California WIC local agencies who are among the impressive list of awardees:

- Elizabeth (Liz) Krey, Lactation Coordinator, Tulare County WIC
- Ninoska (Nina) Ayala, WIC Director, Native American Health Center
- Nora Mendoza, WIC Project Manager & Translator, Lundquist Institute WIC/South Los Angeles Health Projects

The Institute states, "this transformative fellowship is designed to support leaders working in roles that support all children, focusing on birth through age five. Especially as COVID-19 and contemporary social uprisings highlight the systemic racist inequalities, this fellowship will create networks of support as leaders fight for more equitable systems to support children from birth through age five." You can read more about all 24 Fellows on the Rockwood website: <https://rockwoodleadership.org/announcing-the-2022-2023-early-care-learning-and-health-fellows/>



Liz Krey



Nina Ayala



Nora Mendoza

Leadership Class 2022

- Katherynne Marjorie-Anne Aggabao..... Orange County Public Health – Health Care Agency
- Alejandra Arellano Lundquist WIC Program
- Julius Caesar D. Terencio SLAHP WIC
- Sharon Cai..... PHFE WIC
- Patricia Calvillo..... Fresno EOC WIC
- Karen Delacruz Sebastian..... PHFE WIC
- Sarah Downard Inyo County HHS—Public Health & Prevention
- Wen Ting (Wendy) Fung PHFE WIC
- Naira Gavurmadzhyan..... PHFE WIC
- Reyna Gonzalez..... PHFE WIC
- Maciel Gonzalez City of Long Beach WIC Program
- Tanya Green Lundquist Institute / SLAHP WIC Program
- Paul R. Knipp SDSURF WIC Program
- Katerra Leak Lundquist Institute/South Los Angeles Health Projects
- Rosario Lopez American Red Cross WIC
- Lilia A. Martinez Lundquist WIC Program/South Los Angeles Health Projects
- Byanka Melgar Northeast Valley Health Corporation
- Rubi Mendez..... Gardner Family Health
- Megan Mitchell..... Butte County Public Health WIC
- Alissa Oulman-Kirkpatrick..... Del Norte County WIC
- Gaby Perlman Butte County WIC
- Krystal Richards Community Medical Centers WIC
- Jenna Rohling PHFE WIC
- Gregorio San Pablo..... PHFE WIC
- Erin Sevilla..... The Lundquist Institute, SLAHP WIC
- Mandy Shaver..... City of Long Beach WIC Program
- Catherine Yopez PHFE WIC

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"The leadership program has taught me how to communicate and listen more effectively. In the last few months, I have discovered that I needed to work on myself before I could be a strong leader for my team."

– Alissa Oulman Kirkpatrick
Del Norte County WIC

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"My experience with this group has been a great growth opportunity for me. Challenging situations can sometimes bring you down but working on having a growth mentality at work, especially in my new position as I'm getting to know my teams better, it really has motivated me and has helped me shift my perspective and how I approach challenges."

– Karen Delacruz Sebastian
PHFE WIC

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WIC Wellness Newsletter Team

Last summer, 10 undergraduate and graduate students from San Diego State University (SDSU), Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU), and California State University, Northridge (CSUN) became **American Red Cross WIC's** amazing 2022 WIC Wellness Newsletter Team for the remainder of 2022. Each person was selected for their unique talents and expertise to craft our wellness newsletter.

Every month this team curates timely wellness topics, some selected by California WIC Wellness Coordinators, into four succinct sections to create the W3 Newsletter. New to this team's skillset is the creation of short videos designed to provide WIC team members with the necessary skills to recreate each newsletter recipe. Ultimately, the team's goal is to provide credible and concise wellness information to inspire and empower our WIC team members to thrive. Below we introduce this year's distinctive team.

Aneth Gonzalez: Born and raised in Tijuana, Mexico, Aneth moved to San Diego to finish high school. She became interested in food and dietetics because she wanted to help her with family health issues. Now, she is a nutrition student in her junior year at SDSU and hopes to learn and contribute to the community. She does her best to stick to one of her favorite quotes: "You don't need a lot of money to be successful, you are already successful when doing what you truly love."



Anna Clancy: Anna is from Monrovia, CA, and is a junior year student in dietetics at PLNU. She hopes her future will include becoming a dietitian and working in oncology. She



is loving learning more about her passion for food, nutrition, and health all while living in one of the most fabulous cities in America.

Anna Compagno: Anna grew up in Marin County, CA and is a SDSU senior this year. A short quote she loves is, "Kindness always comes back."



Breyanna Collier: Originally from Chicago, Breyanna is a navy veteran and military spouse who has been living in San Diego for just over a year. Currently, she is a junior dietetics student at PLNU. Her goal is "to help people feel empowered to make healthy food choices by showing them that nutrition doesn't have to be complicated."



Caitlin Arakaki: Caitlin grew up in 'Ewa Beach, Hawaii, and is currently a junior dietetics student at PLNU. In the future, she hopes to become a registered dietitian and help people in her community live healthier lives, especially those of Native Hawaiian ancestry. Words to live by: "Enjoy the now."



Christine Tran: Christine grew up in Orange County, CA and is graduating with her MPH in Fall 2022.



Words to live by: "Being happy is the greatest form of success."

Iveth Lagunas: Iveth is from Los Angeles and is currently a foods and nutrition senior student at SDSU. Her ultimate goal is to become a registered dietitian to help Latinx communities develop a positive relationship with food and exercise while preserving Latinx culture.



Janeza Bridges: Janeza is from Coronado, CA. She is currently a dietetic intern with Wellness Workdays and works as an online personal trainer. She loves spreading her passion for nutrition and fitness wherever she goes. Janeza is also the Communications chair for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (San Diego District) and is the social media and marketing specialist for her local gym.



Kalia Firmage: Kalia, a SDSU senior student in dietetics, is from Marin, CA. She always had a love for food from many aunts and uncles who cooked, and has developed a passion for wellness in recent years. She plans to graduate this spring, travel, then go to graduate school to become a registered dietitian. "Have courage and be kind" is a quote that has always stuck by her.



Rebecca Muntslag: Rebecca grew up in Brazil and now is a senior at SDSU. She always had a passion for nutrition, and before pursuing a career as a registered dietitian, worked in the hospitality industry and obtained a culinary degree. Her power word for the year is communication.



Ampla Health WIC Wellness Success Story

At WIC we are often excited to share our wellness success stories related to exciting changes we have made in our physical bodies. We don't often talk about our mental health. Marcy is sharing her story to bring awareness to the importance of mental health and to encourage others to seek help when it's needed, and know that you can feel better.

June 2020 marked the beginning of feelings of anxiety, depression, and constant fear for Marcy. She can remember that the feeling of dread started after a brief conversation with a friend that centered around the chaos of the times we were living through. She went home that day not knowing this feeling would stay with her for the next 6 months. What followed was a loss of appetite resulting in 15 pounds of unintentional weight loss, constant worry, and crying excessively.

Marcy was coming to work but struggled to focus as her thoughts continuously returned to "what if" thinking. What if she died, what if her kids were

without her, what if this was the end of the world? Since Marcy is normally the office cheerleader and very talkative this version of her at work was noticed by coworkers and her supervisor. Her supervisor, Rose McIsaac, served as a support person by offering a listening ear and encouraging her to use some time off to get help and take care of herself. Family and friends continued to express their concern and encourage her to seek help.

Marcy's journey back to finding her peace came through multiple changes. She reached out to a family friend for help. Her recovery consisted of a daily 15-minute prayer and conversation with her support person. She also began to limit her time on social media because it was amplifying the "what if" thoughts she was determined to move away from.

Marcy is happy to report that she is in a much better place today. She continues to work as a WNA and Breastfeeding Peer Counselor for WIC, and is the proud mother of three beautiful children.



She is eternally grateful for the love and support of her husband who was her greatest source of support during those tough times. She has made her mantra "Faith over Fear." She is committed to the daily renewal of her mind and encourages others to seek help if you need it and remember to focus on what you can control.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, there is help available. Mental health services may be available to you through your health insurance plan. Talk to your doctor and ask to be referred to a mental health provider. If you need immediate help, call or text 988. The Lifeline provides 24-hour, confidential support to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.



Celebrating Breastfeeding Awareness Month



A day of fun and sunshine, celebrating breastfeeding moms at Alameda County WIC, with Acting Branch Chief, Melissa Baker, USDA/Western Regional Office



Ampla WIC's drive-through Breastfeeding Week event drew a crowd!



Berkeley's 2nd Annual World Breastfeeding Week WIC-nic was a hugely successful event!



At Antelope Valley Medical Center WIC's drive through August breastfeeding event, breastfeeding mothers were given a single user breast pump and a swag bag filled with breastfeeding goodies and community resources.





Community Bridges WIC partnered with a number of local agencies and organizations in Santa Cruz County to host a drive through event for World Breastfeeding Week in Watsonville. WIC was joined by staff from Watsonville Community Hospital and community clinic Salud Para La Gente, to hand out over 200 goody bags! This was the second annual drive through event and many community partners came together to promote and support this project.

A Long Beach WIC participant receives their gift bag during the City of Long Beach WIC's third annual drive thru give away event celebrating World Breastfeeding Week.



Mono County Health WIC hired a lactation-enthusiastic professional photographer to provide breastfeeding photos to nursing parents who attended the event. Babies as young as 8 days and as old as 18 months were photographed with their beautiful parents!



Fresno EOC WIC celebrated their 2nd annual breastfeeding drive-thru event on August 11. There were gifts and goodies for all moms, Books 4 Kids, and farmer's market coupons to those that were eligible.



Butte County WIC partnered with a local doula to host a breastfeeding class in person for World Breastfeeding Week. Here's the happy winner of the raffle for a breastfeeding basket which included items such as a Moby wrap, Boppy pillow, nursing pads and other self-care items for mom!



Orange County WIC participated in a variety of National Breastfeeding Month activities, here they are tabling at a New Parents Resource Fair and provided breastfeeding information and promotion to the community of Westminster!



Santa Clara WIC, in partnership with over 10 community partners, hosted a Breastfeeding Celebration and Resource Fair for WIC participants and community members in downtown San Jose!



PHFE WIC held three National Breastfeeding Month "Celebrating Families" events, partnering with 60 community-based organizations and drawing 1000 people! Here PHFE's Samar McGregor recognizes exclusively breastfeeding moms with a member of Congressman Lou Correa's staff.

Solano County WIC celebrated the grand opening of the Solano County Collection Center for Human Milk. It was a collaboration with the Mothers' Milk Bank and Solano First 5 Program. Here's the first official donation!



Tuolumne County WIC partnered with their small rural breastfeeding coalition to host a World Breastfeeding Week celebration at a local kids' park. Seven family service agencies set up on the picnic tables under a shady gazebo with lots of giveaways, drawing prizes, activities for kids, cold water bottles, and refreshments, including snow cones!



In recognition of World Breastfeeding Week, TrueCare held its 2nd Annual Breast Milk Drive, Health Fair & Community Blood Drive in San Marcos. The event also kicked off National Health Center Week! The breast milk drive was in partnership with the University of California Health Milk Bank - this year's event was a huge success, yielding 56½ gallons of breastmilk from 8 mothers!

Stanislaus County WIC partnered with the Modesto Farmers' Market for a Latch-On event titled "Eat Local" as a way to publicly acknowledge and celebrate WIC breastfeeding moms in the county during World Breastfeeding Week.

Breastfeeding moms enrolled at WIC received a text invitation to a picnic style celebration that included giveaways, a box lunch (sponsored by a community partner), photo booth, raffle prizes, and a mommy and baby yoga demonstration. An IBCLC was available to provide breastfeeding support. They had 66 breastfeeding moms in attendance! The environment and atmosphere of the event at the farmers' market was heartwarming and inspiring as moms socialized, made connections, participated in yoga with their infants and most importantly breastfed their infants! There was a strong sense of community at this wonderful and successful event!



San Ysidro Health WIC staff help moms celebrate National Breastfeeding Month with goody bags at their drive-through event!



Tehama and Shasta County WIC celebrated National Breastfeeding Month with a unique painting activity - we love their beautiful artworks!



Siskiyou WIC Pump Story

WIC: A CULTURE OF CARE

Alison (Mt. Shasta): Hey Sarah, our neighbor, Alison, just had her baby a few days ago, and breastfeeding isn't going so well. She has been getting some help from a lactation consultant, but doesn't have a breast pump. Do you know anyone up here who might be able to help?

Cindy (Mt. Shasta): Sure Mom! Let me see what I can do.

Sarah (Sacramento): Hey Karen, do you know Tracy's phone number? I hate to bother her on a weekend, but my parents' neighbor just had a baby, and is really struggling and needs a pump ASAP. There isn't anywhere in Mt. Shasta that sells them.

Sarah (Sacramento) & **Karen** (Davis): Judy will know Tracy's number, I will send you Judy's contact info.

Sarah (Sacramento): Hi Judy, this is Sarah from CWA. I'm so sorry to bother you on a weekend, but my parents' neighbor really needs a pump immediately. I was hoping maybe Tracy would have some idea on how to help. Can you share her number?

Sarah (Sacramento) & **Judy** (Alta): Sure, I will send Tracy's contact info!

Sarah (Sacramento) & **Tracy** (Bieber): Hi Tracy, this is Sarah from CWA. Sorry to bother you on a weekend, but my mom's neighbor had a baby a few days ago in Mt. Shasta, and breastfeeding is not going well. She is getting help from an IBCLC, but she really needs a pump ASAP. Do you have any ideas?

Liz (Weed) & **Sarah** (Sacramento): I live out of town, but I spoke with Liz, and she is going into Yreka in a while and can grab a pump. Could someone meet her in Weed? I told her I would give you her number.

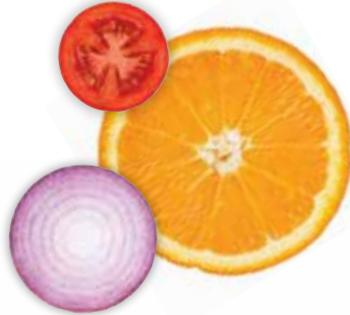
Liz (Weed) & **Sarah** (Sacramento): Hi Liz, this is Sarah from CWA. Sorry for bugging you on a weekend. I appreciate you helping my mom's neighbor who is having such difficulties! Can you meet my mom and dad in Weed to get the pump for Alison?

Sarah (Sacramento): Hi Sarah! Yes, that's fine. I will be going to Yreka in the next few hours.

Sarah (Sacramento) & **Cindy** (Mt. Shasta): I just spoke to someone from Siskiyou County WIC who can help! She is going to pick up a pump in Yreka in the next few hours, and then you and Daddy can meet her at the Ray's in Weed to get the pump. Here is her contact info, she is expecting you to get in touch!

Sarah (Sacramento): Mission accomplished! It's a nice pump and they said she can keep it. She's feeling very upset and freaked out by everything, so hopefully this helps, poor thing!

Thank you!



Thank you.

In the last few years, WIC local agencies have overcome significant challenges in succession, from a global pandemic to national formula shortages. Your inspiring dedication to serve WIC families is what makes California WIC a unique and fulfilling place to work.

Thank you for being WIC's pride and joy!

—The CDPH/WIC Team



TikTok Videos Offer Breastfeeding Support

This summer, **Native American Health Center WIC** (NAHC) collaborated with the LatCH (Latina/Chicana) Breastfeeding Taskforce and Alameda County Breastfeeding Coalition to put out a social media toolkit. Three Latinx NAHC breastfeeding peer counselors (PCs), along with one from **Alameda County WIC** and one from **Tiburcio Vasquez WIC**, created 18 TikTok videos on six topics, each in English, Spanish, and Mam. The videos reflect some of the most effective messages the PCs share with mothers for some of their most common barriers. Several IBCLCs, RNs, MDs, MSWs and Peer Counselors came together to give guidance and feedback as the peer counselors worked on these videos.

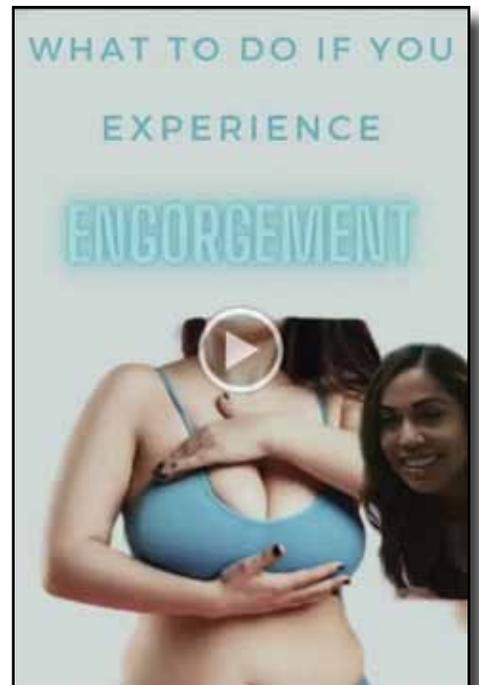
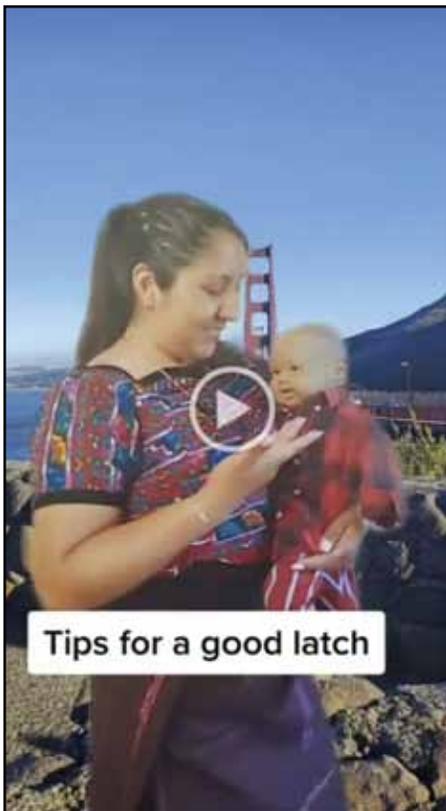
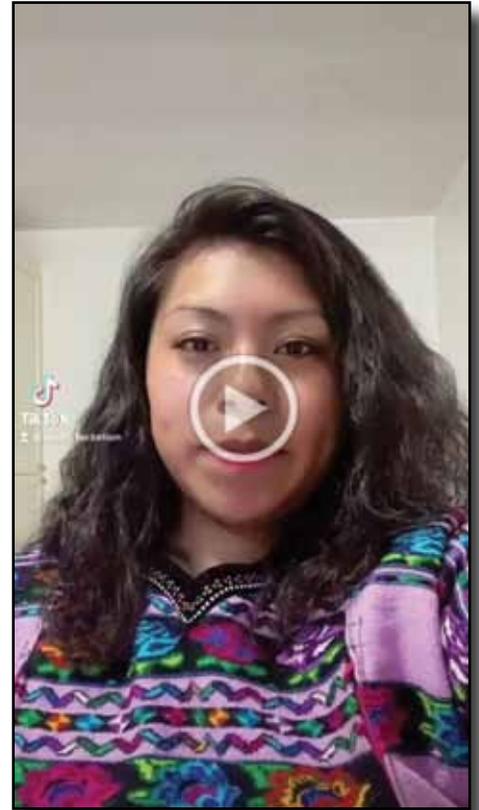
The Toolkit explains the rationale behind the videos: "Breastfeeding behavior is influenced by a mother's social network, regardless of their race or social

network type. Advice from social networks and peers is one of the most common reasons given for decisions about infant feeding, creating either barriers to breastfeeding or sources of encouragement. Having even one supportive example within a social network can enable a mother to resist opposing messages, even when breastfeeding is not the norm within their social group.

"Studies involving low-income Latina women found that mothers receiving peer support were more likely to initiate breastfeeding and continue to breastfeed at 1 and 3 months postpartum than those who received only routine breastfeeding support. Peer support programs, such as the WIC's Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program, offer culturally appropriate mother-to-mother help to address personal barriers to breastfeeding and assist them in preventing and managing breastfeeding problems.

"We hope you will share this work with your social networks so that together we may ensure all Latinx mothers can find and share positive and effective breastfeeding peer support in their social networks. We look forward to hearing about your experience with these videos."

You can find the toolkit here: <https://acphd.org/acbreastfeeds/latch/#latch-toolkit>



Joy After Sorrow: Giving Back to Help Other Moms

WIC participant Elizabeth remembers when she wasn't able to breastfeed her two oldest children, especially her daughter who was born prematurely and needed intensive care (NICU) at UC Davis. "The hospital provided my baby girl with donated breast milk to help nourish her. Sadly, she did not make it, and passed away when she was only 5 weeks old."

Years after this tragic loss, while successfully breastfeeding her daughter Violet last spring, Elizabeth spoke with Marcy of the Glenn County WIC staff. Marcy suggested that Elizabeth could donate breast milk to Mother's Milk Bank in San Jose. "I had so much breast milk in the freezer that I had no more room. So, I looked up the website and read about how the organization helps mothers and babies in need of breast milk. Now, It makes me extremely happy to give back by donating my breast milk."

Elizabeth was able to produce enough breast milk to exclusively breastfeed her three-month-old baby girl plus donate to The Mothers' Milk Bank. Using

the Milk Bank's easy-to-follow system and postage-paid materials, she sent out her first donation of 128 ounces on July 11 and 169 ounces a week later. What a gift to another mother and baby!

Promising to continue to donate as long as she can, Elizabeth says, "I'm very blessed and want to share my blessings with other medically-fragile babies and moms who are struggling to produce

their own breast milk. I want to encourage moms to breastfeed their babies and not be afraid to donate milk."

For more information about the Milk Bank or to find out how you can donate, visit www.mothersmilk.org or phone the Mothers' Milk Bank of San Jose at 1-877-375-6645. You never know when such a gift might save a life!



World Breastfeeding Week 2022

Thank You Elizabeth!

Glenn County WIC Mom Donates her Breast Milk to Mothers' Milk Bank!

Choosing to donate your breast milk can help a medically fragile baby thrive. Every Drop Counts!

Mothers' Milk Bank
1887 Monterey Road Suite 110
San Jose, CA 95112
Phone: 1-877-375-6645
Fax: 1-408-297-9208
www.mothersmilk.org

WIC DONATE MILK. SAVE LIVES.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. *California Department of Public Health*

A Near Miracle: Relearning to Latch

Each day when Lilia Torres arrives at work, she's never quite certain which breastfeeding issues parents will bring her. But she does know this: she's prepared to address any that come her way. Lilia is a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor at the Manchester WIC Office, one of 11 offices overseen by **Lundquist WIC** staff.

A worried mom walked into the office recently with her three-month-old baby. She wanted to switch from formula feeding to breastfeeding because she was concerned about the formula shortage, and scared she would become even more stressed than she already was.

When the baby was a newborn, the mom had alternated between breastfeeding her and bottle feeding. She began breastfeeding the baby less and less. By the time Lilia began counseling her, the mom hadn't breastfed the baby in quite some time. When mom attempted to breastfeed at home, it was a struggle; the baby was avoiding her breast. She

asked if Lilia could help her to breastfeed exclusively.

Lilia started by explaining, "when a hungry baby is fussy, the baby becomes agitated." She recommended that the mom offer her breast 30 to 40 minutes before she expected to see hunger cues so that the baby would be calmer. "I also suggested that she place her baby in a different position. I explained that the position is different for an older baby than for a newborn. And I showed her how to hold her breast."

Despite this guidance, both expected that the baby would be unable to breastfeed. "Usually a baby that old can't re-latch," Lilia said. To their surprise, she did!

"The parents Lilia counsels become more confident in their ability to breastfeed, and empowered as parents," Marisela Montoya, executive director of South Los Angeles Health Projects, said. "We are lucky to have her on staff."

Lactation Support

Supporting Lactation in WIC: Lessons from Lisa

Many of you may have learned lactation support tips and wisdom from Lisa



Marasco, IBCLC, at CWA Conferences or other professional workshops. Even though she retired from Santa Barbara County WIC this year (see article on page 8), she continues to

teach, write, and consult in service of low-income families. She recently shared with CWA some reflections about many aspects of working with lactating parents; we hope you'll find them inspiring as well.

If a mother doesn't feel heard, she can't hear you.

Put down the pen, turn away from the keyboard, give them some undivided attention and ask them what you can do for them, or what's going on. Then LISTEN. This is the best way to set the tone for a consult. Remember that we are spinning options and helping the mother develop a plan; we listen then make recommendations rather than give advice. What you do will be more effective if the participant is active in their care and not a passive recipient of instructions.

Cultural humility makes a huge difference.

The Spanish-speaking WIC families I've worked with have expressed much gratitude for services offered in their language and I, in turn, have enjoyed learning about their life, cultures and stories. As a tall, white, blond woman, I have had to work very hard at cultural humility in order for the parents to listen to and trust me. It has been a work in process and one that I value greatly



for my growth as a human being. Our immigrant families especially work hard and have hard lives, and I have come to respect their journeys.

Show respect for cultural practices. I've watched moms and grandmothers visibly relax when they hear me supporting their practices. They then are also more open to the few instances where I need to tell them that something they are doing is counterproductive because they know I am not coming from a place of cultural arrogance.

Breastfeeding is so much more than milk.

Supporting WIC families, we see how lactation support impacts much more in life. A mother finds the courage and perseverance to keep pushing the medical system that is ready to stop before they have answers, saving her baby's life. Simply trying a new position, like laid-back nursing, results in mothers who are shocked and happy, as are we! Dyads struggling with significant suck problems that take a long time to work through and, despite the hard work, keep at it until breastfeeding smooths out.

I'm sure you have other examples and, like me, become attached to mothers who are so amazingly determined. I have supported mothers whose babies had terminal conditions. The chance to nurse for a while meant so much to them! I was saddened that their medical providers often didn't see the point in nursing such a baby, but I felt privileged

to stand in that gap for them. It was bonding, and felt like they did their best for their infants.

It is so fun to see moms who weren't sure they were going to make six months go on to nurse two or more years. I love cheering them on and telling them how lucky their babies are to continue the breastfeeding relationship that so often terminates early because of U.S. cultural norms.

Lactation support in WIC is a growing need.

Providing in-person and hands-on support for concrete breastfeeding help is one of the most important things we can do. In our local WIC agency, I've seen the evolution of lactation consultations. We started out just seeing parents and taking a few notes, then started documenting and sending doctor reports as per IBCLC scope of practice requirements. We were able to expand from two IBCLCs to up to six due to Breastfeeding Coordinator Meg Beard's hard work on obtaining grants.

Later, when that funding dried up, Meg kept digging until she figured out how to bill for our services, creating a steady supportive income stream that allowed us to survive through future economic roller coasters. I hope that more WIC programs will be able to figure out how to expand their breastfeeding support, especially having enough IBCLCs to take care of the situations that go beyond the scope of the peer counselor.

We lose dyads when help doesn't come in a timely manner. Having some job security is a plus!

In my community, non-English speaking families tend not to reach out for help at the hospitals, and when they do, help may be limited. But they

trust WIC. One of my hospital-based IBCLC colleagues recently shared that some mothers turn down their services and say that they'd rather go to WIC. You know we are doing a good job when moms say that!

We can learn from the pandemic.

When the pandemic first started, all services everywhere kind of froze. But our breastfeeding program quickly realized that mothers still needed in-person help and so we set up safety precautions to make coming for help feel safer for them AND us. I will always remember the second Covid-era parent saw; both mom and dad cried in gratitude that we didn't treat them like pariahs.

I encourage WIC agencies everywhere to creatively devise safe ways to care for parents and infants who should be seen in person. Trying to solve everything virtually means much can be missed. Do for them what you wish done for yourself, your sibling, your daughter/child.

I hope that we will bring back in-person classes and support groups. Just as virtual school has not been good for children, phone calls, self-instructed presentations and even virtual meetings can never take the place of personal interactions. Parents we currently see in our local offices know almost nothing of breastfeeding. As much as participants may prefer to receive services from afar, they may not know what they're missing. It's a tough balance between pandemic era safety and best teaching practices.

Network and seek out new skills and knowledge.

I think lactation challenges are more complicated now than when I started almost 30 years ago. You will never improve your skills if you don't network and learn from others. Join your local breastfeeding coalition and network with colleagues inside and outside of WIC, attend conferences, and read breastfeeding journals such as *Clinical Lactation*. Seek creative solutions!

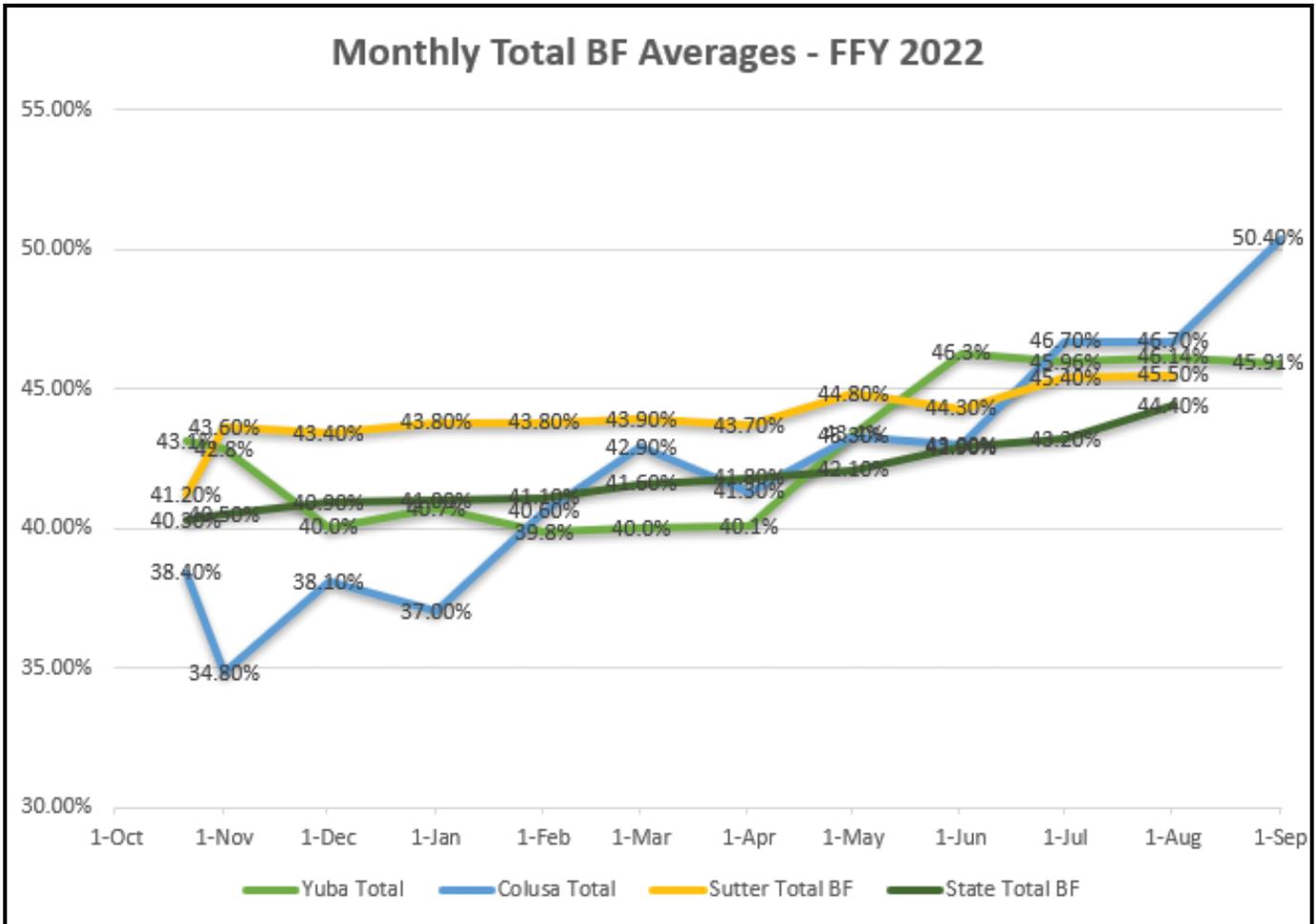


Lisa Marasco (right) networking with Santa Barbara WIC colleagues Martha, Evelyn & Cecy.

Every Baby Counts!

Ampla Health WIC is celebrating! Breastfeeding rates reached a new level in September at their Colusa office, becoming the first site in the agency’s history to have over half (65 of 129) of mothers breastfeeding in any given month. All it took to reach this milestone was one more breastfeeding mom and baby.

WIC Nutritionist Grisel Oropeza shared, “Kudos to the great work from Angie Gonzalez, Marisol Chavez and Rosario Reyes (IBCLC) who have been working extra hard on a pilot project of intensive support and breastfeeding material mailings right before delivery plus quick referrals. Their efforts transformed the Colusa clinic from a site with the lowest breastfeeding rates to the highest rates agency-wide in one fiscal year!”



Inspire.



Inspire others to join WIC. Share your WIC Story.

CDPH/WIC is looking for service providers, participants, and anyone else who has been impacted by WIC to share their unique stories on camera. We want the world to know how WIC changes lives—whether it is through working with WIC families or as a participant.

If you would like to volunteer to share your story or want to nominate a person to share theirs, please email us at WICOutreach@cdph.ca.gov



Sustaining Lactation Services at WIC

For the past two decades, **Sacramento County WIC** has partnered with First 5 Sacramento to provide expert breastfeeding care and support to WIC families in Sacramento County. This partnership enabled us to enhance our breastfeeding services from basic promotion and support to offering advanced level lactation care of an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). As a result, we saw our breastfeeding rates climb from only 6% to 24%.

Over the years, these enhanced lactation services became a core part of

our breastfeeding support program at WIC. More recently, when First 5 Sacramento's funds for upcoming contract periods became limited, WIC developed a sustainability plan to reduce the impact a reduction would have on our lactation services. As part of our sustainability plan, we reached out to the local health plans to explore a potential partnership that would help fund it. In July 2021, we partnered with three Geographic Managed Care Health Plans: Health Net, Molina Healthcare, and Anthem Blue Cross.

We are thrilled to report that through

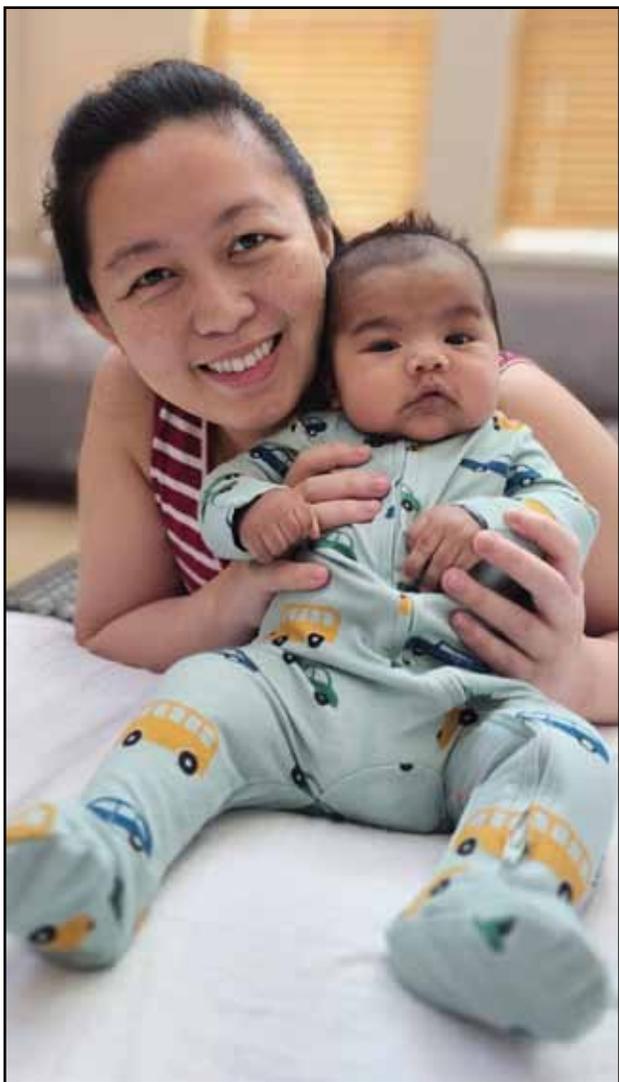
the financial support of these health plans last year, our lactation program was able to assist 218 families with advanced lactation care and support from our lactation consultant contractors. Services ranged from answering questions placed on the breastfeeding helpline to providing individual lactation consultation appointments.

One Sacramento County mother who received help from our lactation consultants told us, "The WIC team at the Rancho Cordova office has been AMAZING... I contacted WIC initially with a skeptical mind, and just with the slightest hope it will help me in some ways. It turned out to be heaven-sent, a group of angels

helping me and guiding me through this unexpectedly hard breastfeeding journey. Each one of them helped me in the best ways they could. Antonina over the phone, Maria and Susan in video call; Vika and Susan in person. Absolute shout out to Maria who, from the very first appointment, kept checking on me with the BF progress, pain levels, any other issues, and provided guidance, appropriate suggestions and encouragement. She did all of this with consistent care and tenderness throughout every interaction.

I'm very grateful that this program exists even for those who were not qualified because of income, like myself. I was still able to receive the breastfeeding services that focused on successful breastfeeding without having to worry about the financial burden of those helpful LC appointments. I'm very pleased with the LC team's level of professionalism, knowledge, and skills. I would not be able to get this far and succeed in breastfeeding, within the short time of 3 weeks, without these LCs help. When my cousin in Chicago had a baby a month after me, and was going through rough nursing times of their own, I immediately looked up WIC in their local area and recommended WIC to them. Thank you, WIC Program."

Our WIC team is truly grateful for the opportunity to continue this important partnership with the health plans. We look forward to our continued collaboration over the coming year through upcoming events and presentations. Besides the funding support that we receive from First 5 Sacramento, support from the health plans is making an impact on the health and wellbeing of families both locally and across the nation.



Ampla Health Dads Event

Ampla Health WIC hosted a "Just for Dads" drive-through event in June, inviting partner agencies to get involved, too. We had 10 drive-through booths, including a wonderful diaper and wipes giveaway.

We created a digital invitation shared through partner agencies and on social media, and also sent out a text blast invitation to our WIC families, inviting dads to come out to our event for materials and gift bags made especially for them. Check out the photo of our WIC drinkware for dads in addition to dad-focused parenting materials. Among items and materials provided by our partner agencies, the First5 trucker hats were very well-received!

We also created new Super Dad posters for our sandwich boards, in English and Spanish. Sixty dads attended our event, which we feel was a great success for our first year!



CinnaMoms Summit Returns Online

After a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the CinnaMoms Annual Summit returned in June. This summit, filled with inspiring speakers, informative breakout rooms, and incredible moments, has always been inspiring to the Black/African American families it's designed to support. This year's theme was "Strong and Empowered" in a first-ever virtual format, and the two hours were packed with interaction.

After kicking off with a special welcome from PHFE WIC's Director Kiran Saluja, RD, MPH, online participants danced their way into breakout sessions led by the CinnaMoms team. Thanks to partners at Black Infants and Families Los Angeles, Davion Mauldin and LeHenry Solomon, as well as PHFE Area Manager Ruben Lopez, MS, RDN, the summit also held space for a breakout session on fatherhood.

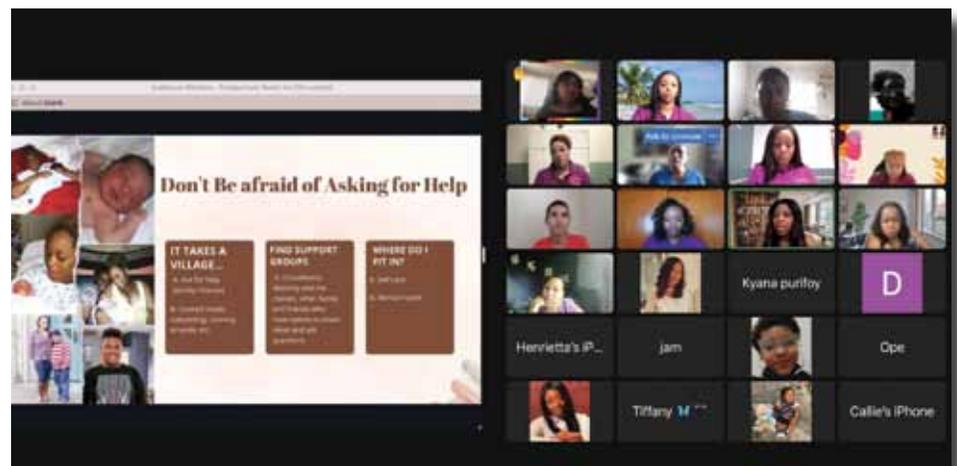
Following some fun and games, 10 "SuperCinnaMoms" received recognition from the team and from Senator Sydney Kamlager for their dedication to the CinnaMoms community. All of the excitement, camaraderie, and support left attendees feeling Strong and Empowered!

In 2015, CinnaMoms was created with the vision to increase breastfeeding rates among Black/African American women at the PHFE WIC Program. Committed staff, most of whom are Certified Lactation Educators and Lactation Consultants, host support circles (now virtually) in nine WIC centers that have a high population of African American families.

These circles extend beyond WIC services to provide encouragement and a safe space to chat about historical feeding practices, perceptions of breastfeed-

ing, familial feeding experiences, and the health benefits of breastfeeding. Support circle participants discuss interesting topics that spark conversations about maternal and postpartum health, support systems, and cultural beliefs.

Learn more about CinnaMoms at <https://www.cinnamoms.org/>, where "Every day we make a commitment to support, encourage, and lend a pair of listening ears to our community on breastfeeding."



"Every day we make a commitment to support, encourage, and lend a pair of listening ears to our community on breastfeeding."

Farmers' Market Dream Comes True in Stanislaus County

As the saying goes, "Teamwork makes the dream work." Stanislaus County Health Services Agency WIC program's 'dream' of issuing all 1,400 farmers' market voucher booklets became a reality because of teamwork. In addition to the 1,400 initially received, they also distributed an additional 150 vouchers by July 23rd.

Besides teamwork, Stanislaus County WIC attributes this year's Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) success to the following strategies:

- **Teletask:** They sent a mass text offering the farmers' market vouchers to 9,947 families and had 5,426 that replied and were interested. Respondents received an automatic reply including links to social media posts and a newly developed FMNP web page with information about market locations and distribution dates. They also texted participants the day before FMNP distribution event to remind them to pick up their vouchers.

- **Market-only Distribution:** With the hope of increasing redemption rates, the agency distributed all FMNP booklets only at the market on Thursdays and Saturdays. They also provided participants with nutrition education, voucher education, one-on-one market tours, and maps of vendors accepting the vouchers. The results? "To our surprise, many WIC families came to meet us at the market and used their vouchers immediately!"
- **Follow up:** To ensure that future farmers' market seasons continue to be a success, they will survey all WIC families who received vouchers this year and invite feedback on their experience, using the information to continue improving the FMNP in their community.

Veronica Plaucher, WIC Director, shares, "The farmers' market season could not have been successful without the help of our fantastic team! I am a proud member of an epic team!"

Cross Country WIC Meetup

WIC staff from both U.S. coasts enjoyed an unexpected, cross-country meet-up in Maine this summer. Samar McGregor, from PHFE WIC and current National WIC Association (NWA) Board Secretary, had convened with family members in Maine to vacation and explore. Meanwhile Noora Kanfash, Tim Ward, and Brian Dittmeier - NWA staff from Washington, DC - were there on business. When they realized they were in some of the same small towns and areas, they took the opportunity to enjoy the delicious local cuisine together and share stories.

These NWA staff visited with WIC providers in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to honor the dedication of local frontline staff during the COVID-19 pandemic and infant formula shortage. They also were highlighting technology improvements to WIC service delivery, including telehealth innovations and mobile-to-mobile transactions at farmers markets.



Stanislaus County WIC staff at the Certified Modesto Farmers' Market.



Good times: Noora, Tim, Samar and Brian enjoyed an unexpected, cross-country meet up in Maine this summer.

FMNP: 30 Years of a Family Legacy

Sutter County WIC has participated in the WIC Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) for nearly 30 years, and has always been supported by the market manager and local farmers. Our WIC program was one of the first agencies in the state to have a presence at the market, with staff taking turns setting up a table every Saturday in May, June, and July to distribute FMNP booklets to WIC families.

Distributing the booklets at the point of contact has consistently resulted in one of the highest redemption rates in the state. Initially, staff kept track of issued booklets by manually logging in the name, family ID and booklet number. Now, staff take a laptop to the market and enter information directly into WIC-WISE. **Sutter County WIC** has always had amazing support for the FMNP program from the Board of Supervisors, including Dan Silva, a local fourth generation farmer who realized the value of the program for both families and the farmers.

The Yuba City Certified Farmers’ Market has been managed by the Silva Family for many years. Founded by Dan and Candy Silva, the market is now managed by their daughter-in-law, Desiree Silva. She appreciates Sutter County WIC staff’s presence at the market to distribute the \$30 coupons for 6-8 Saturdays during the season. Desiree understands the value of FMNP — including several thousands of dollars of farm income each season — as well as the importance of making fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables more available to help WIC families eat healthy.

Desiree also supports the local Tri-Counties Breastfeeding Alliance (TCBA) in hosting the annual “Yuba-Sutter-Colusa Breastfeeds!” event during World Breastfeeding Week. In the past four years, a small group of local moms have gathered at the market on the first Saturday in August to celebrate and support each

other and let our community know that mothers are allowed to breastfeed “here, there, and just about anywhere!” Desiree has always said “of course you can have your event here at the market - I was a breastfeeding mom too!”

We are so thankful for the support of Desiree and the Yuba City Certified Farmers’ Market that we honored her this year with a Proclamation by the Yuba City Council. She was quite surprised and humbled by the recognition, and grateful to carry on her family’s legacy.



Proclamation

WHEREAS farmers markets serve as significant outlets for small-to-medium, new and beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran agricultural producers to market agricultural products, in turn generating revenue that supports the sustainability of family farms and the revitalization of rural communities nationwide; and

WHEREAS farmers markets is a place where food is sold directly from the farmer to the consumer, farmers and ranchers provide our community with access to healthy foods produced locally and regionally through farmers markets, which are expanding and evolving to accommodate the demand for a diverse array of agricultural products; and

WHEREAS farmers markets offer low-income women, infants, children, and seniors participating in the WIC and Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs, respectively, the opportunity to redeem their benefits for fresh produce and increasingly offer electronic benefits transfer technology for use by recipients in redeeming their benefits; and

WHEREAS, the Silva family, and Desiree Silva, were the market founders, and for many years, have been the Yuba City Certified Farmers Market managers, who oversee market events every week, and represent and promote the market in the community, and have supported for nearly 30 years, the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs.

Sierra Cascade Agencies Visit Potawot Health Village

It was a Sierra Cascade regional meeting that will shine warmly in people's memories for a long time. Roxanne Johnson, Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe and WIC Director at **United Indian Health Services** (UIHS) in Arcata, and fellow members of the UIHS community, hosted the September regional meeting. They shared the many ways the Potawot Health Village supports the health of the whole person, centered on Native American traditional values and wisdom. UIHS is a health services collaborative of nine tribes, started 50 years ago. Potawot is the Wiyot name for the Mad River and four Wiyot villages were known to have existed at one time within a half mile of the Health Village. The land was reclaimed from cattle grazing and designed in the image of the historic flow of the nearby Mad River.

Our first stop was with Master Gardener Ed Mata. Ed explained how the 20 acres of restored natural area within the Potawot Health Village — a conservation easement known as Ku'wah-dah-wilth, meaning "comes back to life" in the Wiyot language — is dedicated to enhance and protect wetland meadows. It is a place for cultural education, wildlife habitat, recreation, traditional American Indian agriculture and food production. Ed then shared the customs involved in smoking fish. After thanking the salmon, it was fileted and the pieces placed on redwood skewers around an oval fire pit with the head of the fish in the northern direction and the tail south, signifying the fishes' journey upriver.

Next, we met with Jude Marshall, the garden manager and Carol Larsen, a former staff person and current UIHS Board Member, to tour the 20 acres of ku'wah-dah-wilth used for food production including gardens and fruit trees. The green houses were full of tomatoes

and peppers. Extra produce is made into jams or dehydrated in the workshop throughout the year. Jude explained the different programs to engage the community in food production and we were there for their bi-weekly Farmers' Market. Carol shared information on the uses of native plants interspersed across the property, some of which are made into salves and sold.

We took a walk along three miles of walking paths with over 10,000 trees and shrubs planted by the community. Carol pointed out the circular design of the health village, with water circulating around it and a wellness garden in the center for patients and staff. Circles are part of the building entrance honoring the mother and entry to life via the womb. Before we parted from Carol, a professional storyteller, we relaxed in a circular amphitheater and were treated to two stories. We had not yet even been

inside the health center!

Andre Cramblit met us for a tour of the beautiful health center made of redwood, with tall ceilings, large windows, over 1,000 pieces of art and artifacts from local Native artists, and photographs depicting life of the local tribes. He shared with us the history of creating the health center and the many ways physical, mental and spiritual health is supported with Native healers and medical providers. One example of traditional health care is the use of sweat houses and healing ceremonies.

The highlight of a productive regional meeting was the delicious lunch: smoked salmon and three scrumptious salads Roxanne had made using produce from the gardens and wild rice from northern Minnesota that was traditionally harvested. Many thanks to Roxanne and her fellow community members for a very memorable and informative meeting!



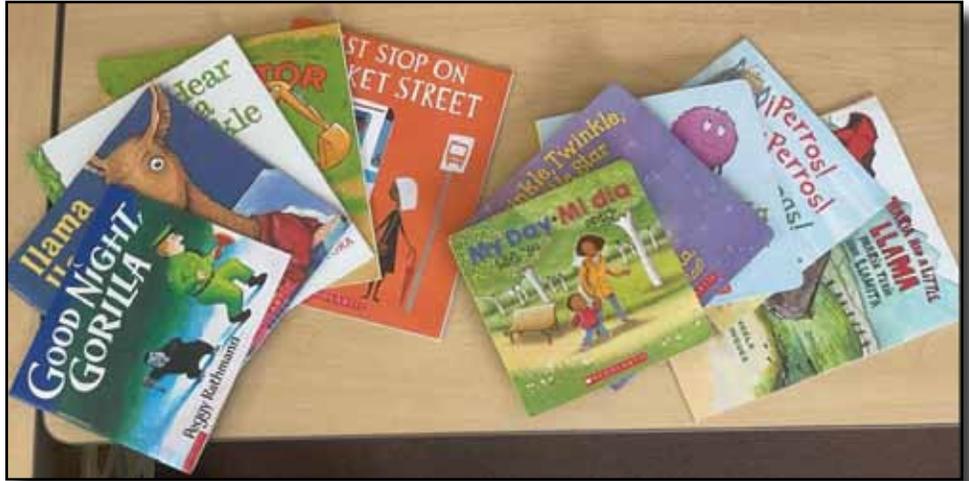
WIC representatives toured the gardens, trees, greenhouses and production kitchen for harvesting, dehydrating and classes. Pictured here: Jake Campbell, Del Norte; Ashley Fasking, Tehama; Judy Sheldon, CDPH WIC; Katy Dyr, Sierra; Valerie Haack, CDPH WIC; Roxanne Johnson, United Indian Health Services; Anne Dunn, Humboldt; Karen Farley, CWA; Andrea Campbell, CDPH WIC.

Ampla Health WIC: Books for Kids

Here at **Ampla Health WIC**, we have gotten creative when it comes to getting books into the hands of WIC kids! In Yuba county, WIC staff worked with First Five Yuba to enroll 400 new children in less than 12 weeks into the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program. Each child gets one book a month until they turn 5. First Five is the partner agency in Yuba county for the Library and has a set budget. They advertise the Library and provide a link for families to self-register online. They have been working to promote registrations throughout the county, and we have been part of these promotions.

With the Books for Kids (B4K) grant, WIC used staff time to register families for the Imagination Library at the end of their WIC appointments. Additionally, we paid for those 400 children's first 12 months of the Imagination Library books to offset First Five's budget. First Five agreed to pay for the additional months of books until the children turned five, as it is part of their overall goal. This was a fantastic partnership!

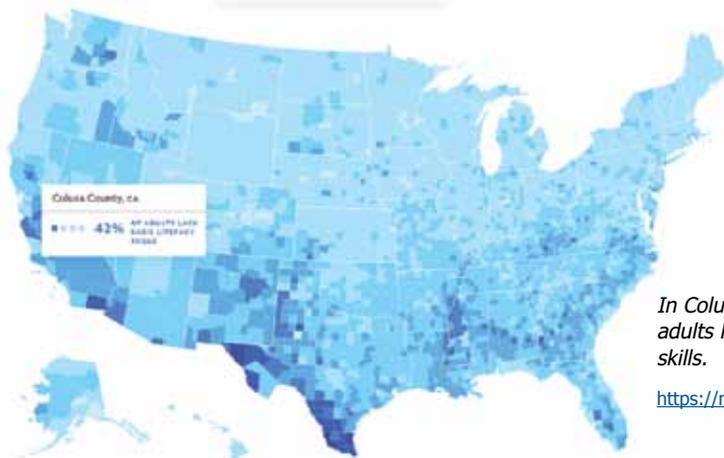
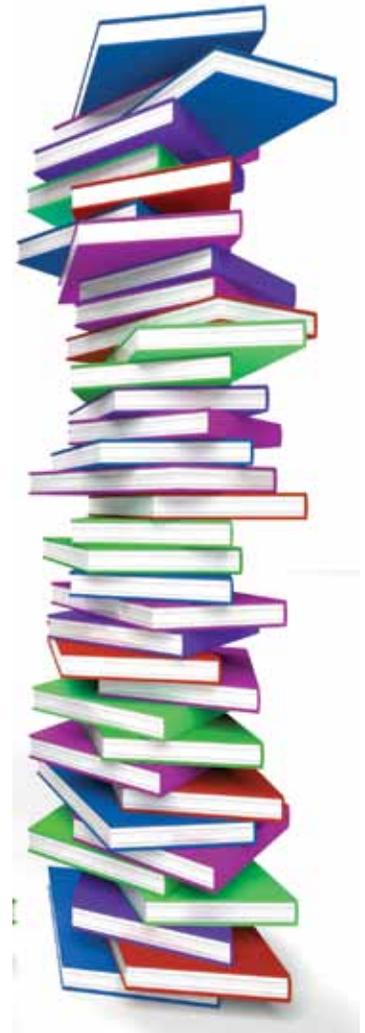
In Colusa County, as there is no Imagination Library partner agency, we purchased our own books to distribute and developed a short educational video. Families were texted a link to view the video and then invited to pick up their



free pack of five books in English or bilingual English/Spanish. We worked with Scholastic Books, who gave us a great discount as well as many free bonus books!

We also partnered with First Five Colusa, Colusa Children's Services, and the Colusa County Library who gave us promotional materials to include in the plastic book bags as well as a children's dental services flyer and our Ampla Health company brochure. You can view our video here: <https://www.canva.com/design/DAE5-OeWPGc/Ga9WHft69M7hfx-ROUcUrAA/watch>

Our families are really enjoying all the new books!



In Colusa County, 42% of adults lack basic literacy skills.

<https://map.barbarabush.org/>

Tulare County Forges AHEAD for Health Equity

In the past two years, California's WIC programs have experienced more change and challenge than thought possible. Despite wildfires, a pandemic, staffing shortages and other challenges, **Tulare County WIC** (TC WIC) is finding a future with promise and hope for a "new WIC." TC WIC has changed and modernized their operations to enhance services, better engage with participants and community partners, and prioritize building a strong team of breastfeeding experts. At the same time, they are finding strategies to improve access to WIC and address health equity gaps — and searching for funding opportunities to do this.

In early 2021, the National WIC Association (NWA) announced mini-grant funding called "Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion (AHEAD) in WIC." TC WIC was one of seven local agencies in the nation awarded this grant. These funds allowed TC WIC to work on health equity initiatives focusing on the local Native American

community, especially prenatal and post-partum mothers, and expand on current efforts led by the County of Tulare's Public Health Branch (TCPH).

Earlier work and research inspired the current work being done under the AHEAD Grant. In June 2018, the Public Health Institute (PHI) and TCPH conducted a series of focus groups targeting critical populations in Tulare County, including American Indians/Alaskan Natives. Measures indicated the need to adopt health equity strategies to address health disparities and social drivers of health.

With a grant from the Center of Sharing Public Health Services Cross-Jurisdictional Sharing (CJS), TCPH met in September 2019 with key Tule River (TR)



Tribe members to identify tribal needs. This work helped initiate projects and develop trusting relationships with the Tule River community and tribal members, so that TC WIC could pursue a relationship with the Tule River Indian Reservation to help address inequity gaps to help improve access to WIC and other services.

The AHEAD grant project's initial aim was to establish a WIC satellite site and provide WIC services on the Tule River Reservation. Due to wildfires and COVID-19 risk the teams lost several months of work, leading them to modify their goal. The new end goal was to build foundational relationships with the tribal community – to establish trust – because developing any newfound, successful collaboration cannot happen without trust. Within months, the trust established was exciting and very hopeful for both communities since it allows for collaboration on outreach and services.

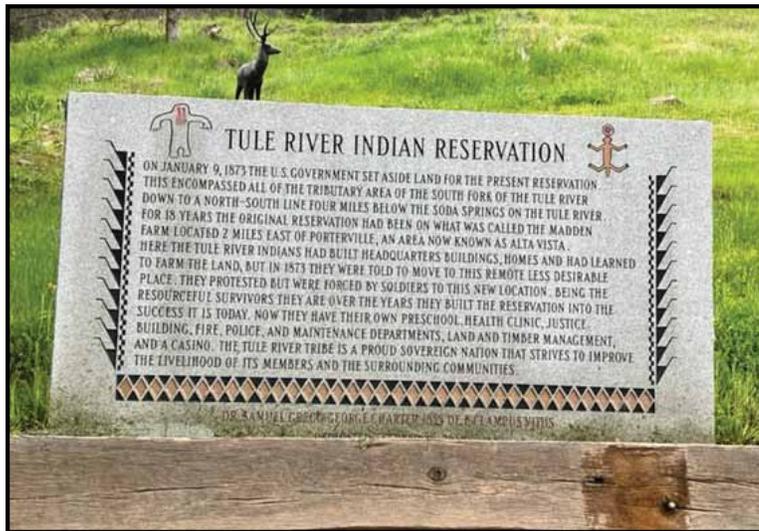
Both WIC and Tule River staff agree that it has been a fantastic journey seeing the partnership progress, and it continues to evolve. The 15-member Tule River-WIC Task Force, including Tule River Indian Health Center (TRIH) key staff, WIC leaders and others, met frequently the first 10 months to identify tribal community needs.



Tule River-WIC Task Force Membership

- WIC leadership team members
- Tule River Indian Health Center leaders
- Tule River Indian Reservation Outreach staff
- Purchased Referred Care staff
- Behavioral Health Department leaders
- Diabetes Educator
- Community Health Workers

Sharing experiences and growing together as a Task Force helped this new partnership achieve a huge milestone beneficial for everyone: TC WIC will integrate and provide services within TRIHC, aiming to open in late Fall 2022. WIC



occupying a space within TRIHC provides a consistent and direct connection to WIC for the tribal community. Moreover, because the relationship has been so natural and beneficial, WIC identified other needs such as breastfeeding support and establishing a referral process for WIC services.

AHEAD grant funds also helped WIC purchase books, outreach and educational materials. TC WIC also funded eight

staff and community members to become Certified Lactation Educators (CLE). This education gave the community a sustainable resource for breastfeeding support on the Reservation. Currently, the Task Force is developing an internal “refer to WIC” process for clinic staff to ensure patients connect to WIC and to breastfeeding support when needed, as well as a “navigator” process to help Health Center patients enroll in WIC or encourage them to attend appointments.

Everyone who comes to the table has passion and hope for their work and their communities. The bond between Task Force members is built on a shared vision to improve access to services, reduce barriers, build relationships, and improve health outcomes. They are excited and feel this is only the beginning. Key staff and leaders in Tule River now wish to collaborate with other programs and

departments within Tulare County Public Health. It is refreshing and inspiring to work with such caring and passionate people whose positive energy ensures that WIC finds a place in the TRIHC and is included

in the clinic’s referral process to connect mothers and families to WIC.

Background information about the AHEAD grant and the Resource Link to Tulare County’s Case Study can be found at NWA’s WIC Hub: <https://thewichub.org/advancing-health-equity-to-achieve-diversity-and-inclusion-ahead-in-wic-case-study-tulare-county-wic/>





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Read this and past issues of the **WIC Watch** online at
<http://calwic.org/news-a-publications/wic-watch>.

Share the link with colleagues, family & friends!



"I love the WIC staff, they
are so nice and helpful. They
have been extremely
supportive throughout.
I'm looking forward and
very happy to have them be
a part of my child's growth."

-Nael, Contra Costa County WIC Participant