

## Lisa Richards, MS, RD, New Hampshire WIC Nutrition Services Manager Teaching the Secrets of Baby Behavior to Promote Breastfeeding

*Research on baby behavior from the University of California shows that when parents understand their infants' cues, they can better meet their babies' needs. The research also concludes that the more new moms understand their infants' needs, the more they breastfeed exclusively, the less they feed their babies formula, and the less they over feed their babies — all resulting in healthier babies!*

Several years ago, California WIC partnered with the Human Lactation Center at the University of California, Davis to investigate why inappropriate feeding practices among WIC participants persisted despite the extensive infant-feeding education WIC offered its clients. Several important themes emerged. Most participants believed breastfeeding was best for their infants. Yet many of these young moms also thought that they needed to supplement their breastfeeding with formula and solid foods to address their perceived indicators of infant hunger such as infant crying or night waking. Many of the parents participating in the California studies had unrealistic expectations about their infants' behavior and expressed their desire to have a "full," quiet, sleeping child — even in their babies' first few weeks.

With these conclusions in mind, the New Hampshire WIC nutrition staff wanted to train the state's home visiting professionals to teach new mothers how to better understand their babies' cues and their needs. The nutrition staff includes Lisa Richards, MS, RD, the WIC Nutrition Services Manager at the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Lissa Sirois, RD, IBCLC, WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator, and Frances McLaughlin, RD, MEd, Nutrition Coordinator. The Department offered a similar training in September 2013 for state WIC staff and for community agencies, with a very positive response. The WIC nutrition staff's goal was to train home visiting staff so that all providers of health and nutrition services to low-income families would be sharing the same breastfeeding and infant feeding support messages.

Lisa and her staff brought together the New Hampshire Department of Health's Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Section and the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Section to plan, promote and evaluate the training, which was set for May 5, 2014. The training was funded by a Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN).



**Pictured (from left to right):** Audrey Knight, MCH Nurse Consultant; Lissa Sirois, WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator; Lisa Richards, WIC Nutrition Services Manager; Jill Fournier, MCH Nurse Consultant; Frances McLaughlin, WIC Nutrition Coordinator

### About Lisa

Lisa has been with the New Hampshire WIC program for 30 years. She says, "I have seen so many changes in the program over the years, from great improvements in nutrition education and counseling to be more client-centered, to amazing increases in breastfeeding initiation and duration, to changes in WIC foods to include fruits and vegetables, soy alternatives, and whole grains."

In her free time, Lisa enjoys gardening, cooking, reading and traveling! She looks forward to spending two weeks every summer on a small Maine island where she reads and hikes and enjoys seafood. The island has no cars and the house has no electricity! Lisa's husband Douglas is a retired social worker. Her daughter, Laura, attends the University of Virginia, and her stepson, Nathan, is an engineer in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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The planning team included three nutritionists from the New Hampshire WIC office and two nurses with state MCH. The team contracted with Jane Heinig, PhD, to lead the Secrets of Baby Behavior training. Dr. Heinig is the Executive Director of the **Human Lactation Center** at University of California, Davis. Topics at the training included:

- Infant cues and crying
- Infant sleep patterns and parent interactions
- Teaching parents about baby behavior, and
- Newborn behavior.

The planning team set a goal of 140 people to attend the training. The team reached out to local WIC offices, community health centers, home visiting programs and prenatal programs. They also sent announcements to the New Hampshire Breastfeeding Task Force, Head Start, the Infant and Toddler Task Force, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension nutrition staff, and the New Hampshire Early Childhood Advisory Committee. They posted the training on the state's child care resource and referral website and on the state's website that lists trainings around the state for early childhood professionals. They also contacted hospital perinatal nurse managers throughout the state.

### Successes and Challenges

More than 100 people attended the training. From their evaluations and comments, the training was a success! Participants wrote, "Excellent presentation!" "Engaging and user-friendly." Attendees' favorite sessions were Newborn Behavior and Infant Cues and Crying.

A number of participants requested that Lisa and her team offer the training for more WIC staff and for other professionals who work with low-income moms. The state's Child Development Bureau also requested that the team offer the training to child care providers. Another positive outcome was the MCH staff's interest in gaining additional breastfeeding training, involving more community agency staff in breastfeeding trainings, and encouraging the staff to become certified as lactation counselors.

Since the May 2014 training, Lisa and her team secured federal funding to print Baby Behavior magazines to distribute at WIC clinics. The magazines are colorful and appealing and approach the topic of hunger cues, crying, and sleep in a positive and educational way, all while teaching new moms how to understand their new baby's personality. WIC nutritionists around the state report that they are thrilled to have these new resources available for new mothers at their clinics.

Lisa and her team offered two follow-up webinars for attendees to talk directly with Dr. Heinig about their successes and challenges in



*"I learned so much today. I feel I can better help the parents I work with to understand their infants. I do a lot of work with teens. I learned things that they will be able to relate to."*

*"The training gave me very valuable information. I just started working with mothers and babies at a baby friendly hospital. I needed to learn all these topics to assist my families. I will be sure to practice and teach all I have learned."*

implementing Baby Behavior techniques in their day-to-day work. Attendance at the webinars was very limited, however. Lisa says that perhaps the team could have taken a different approach, possibly asking training participants to submit questions to the presenter, rather than scheduling webinars.

## **Lessons Learned and Advice for ASPHN Members**

Lisa believes it is very important to bring WIC and MCH staff together to support positive breastfeeding and infant feeding messaging. The program staff has different areas of expertise and different resources — public health nutritionists and nurses, administrative support, printing budgets, and mailing lists for training events. Lisa advises ASPHN members to consider what resources a project needs and what potential partners could bring those resources to the project.

Lisa also suggests that home visiting staff are an untapped resource for collaboration with WIC programs. She says that many home visiting professionals are “hungry” for breastfeeding and nutrition information and greatly appreciate what the WIC Program offers. Lisa would like to see public health nutritionists more involved with supporting the home visiting staff.

## **The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist**

In New Hampshire, state and often local MCH programs do not have public health nutritionists on their staff. MCH nurses and other professionals look to WIC nutrition staff for information, training and resources. Lisa and her team of WIC public health nutritionists played an unduplicated role in organizing the Baby Behavior training and in all aspects of nutrition and breastfeeding promotion statewide to sow the seeds for a lifetime of healthy habits.

## **ASPHN in Action**

ASPHN is a non-profit membership organization that provides state and national leadership on food and nutrition policy, programs and services aimed at improving the health of our population. Our vision is to create new environmental norms where healthy eating and active living are the easy and natural choices for all Americans.

At ASPHN, we build our members' skills as public health nutritionists by providing key resources and professional development. Funding from our Association's Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant program helped Lisa, an ASPHN member, launch the baby behavior training project in New Hampshire.

To learn more about ASPHN, please visit us on the web at [www.asphn.org](http://www.asphn.org).



Association of State Public Health Nutritionists  
P.O. Box 1001 • Johnstown, PA 15907-1001  
[tel] 814.255.2829 • [fax] 814.255.6514  
[www.asphn.org](http://www.asphn.org)

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