“Learn the Signs. Act Early”:
Statewide Expansion of the
WIC Developmental Milestones Program

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A Partnership Between Missouri WIC and University of Missouri (2010-2018)

- Project developed innovative ways to enhance parental awareness of developmental milestones using the CDC’s Learn the Signs. Act Early. (LTSAE) messages and materials
- Focused on families in WIC agencies whose children may be at risk for delays in early identification and intervention
- WIC staff helped shape the program so that it is easy to implement
- Program evaluations show a positive impact on children and WIC staff
Presentation Objectives

- To present an overview of the Missouri WIC Developmental Milestones Program
- To describe how the program expanded across Missouri
- To share statewide evaluation data and staff response to the program
- To help you consider how this program might be adapted for your state
Why “Learn the Signs. Act Early.”?

- 1 in 4 children (ages 0-5) is at moderate or high risk for developmental, behavioral, or social delay
- 1 in 6 children (ages 3-17) has developmental delays or disabilities
- About 1 in 68 children has autism spectrum disorder
- Many children are not identified until school entry, particularly those from low-income groups
- Too many children miss the opportunity for early intervention
- Early intervention services make a difference!
Learn the Signs. Act Early.
Messages for Parents

- Learn and track the signs of healthy development during early childhood
- Act early if there is a concern
- Talk to your child’s doctor
Why WIC and Learn the Signs?

• Ongoing relationship with traditionally underserved families and children ages 0 to 5 years who are at risk for delays in early identification
• Young children from low-income families and those with nutritional risk factors may also be at increased risk for developmental delays
• Trusted source of information for parents
• LTSAE is closely aligned with WIC’s mission
  — Healthy development of young children
  — Provision of referrals for services
WIC Developmental Milestones
Program Goals

• To develop materials and methods that
  — Educate parents from low-income groups about healthy child development
  — Help WIC staff know when and how to refer children with potential developmental delays

• To develop procedures that fit into WIC clinic flow, ensuring acceptance and ease of use by staff

• To evaluate the program’s impact on parents, children, and WIC staff
WIC Developmental Milestones
Program Timeline

• Phase I—program developed with WIC staff in 11 clinics in St. Louis City

• Phase II—Refined and replicated in 9 WIC clinics in four counties surrounding St. Louis City

• Phase III—Statewide expansion
Core Program Elements

- Individualized parent education using LTSAE checklists
- Environmental graphics
Children who show signs of potential developmental delay are referred to their doctor for follow-up.
Checklist Program Provides Parent Education

- Program process centers on set of nine LTSAE checklists (2 months-4 years)
- Parent invited to complete age-appropriate checklist for child
- Nutritionist reviews results with parent and refers to child’s doctor if concerns exist
- Process integrated into WIC certification and mid-certification appointments (every 6 months)
“Initially it was hard to imagine how the checklist program would fit into an appointment, but it flows really well. There is some down time between taking the child’s measurements and entering it in the computer. So the checklist gives the parent something meaningful to do, rather than just waiting for us to finish our data entry.”

Brittney Stone
WIC Education Supervisor
Environment Reinforces Messages

- Colorful, family-friendly wall and floor block graphics
- Quick useful information for parents
“The graphics introduce the subject of developmental milestones before the family ever comes to my desk. They are anxious to see how their child matches up with others their age.”

*Liz Wise, WIC Nutritionist*
Snapshot of Program Materials

WIC Developmental Milestones Toolkit

MILESTONES AT 4 MONTHS
- Begins to bubble
- Responds to affection

MILESTONES AT 9 MONTHS
- Has favorite toy
- Understands "no"

MILESTONES AT 4 YEARS
- Likes playing "make-believe"
- Names some colors

Have questions? Need materials?
Contact Project Coordinator Lee Falk at (314) 873-2091 or leefalk@ mindspring.com
Program Evaluation (Phase II)

- Study 1: Parent Survey
- Study 2: Referral Outcomes Tracking
- Study 3: WIC Staff Survey
Parents completed a survey about the WIC Developmental Milestones Program before and after program implementation.

- **Environmental Graphics**
  - 99% said they spent time looking at the graphics
  - 97% said graphics helped them learn about their child’s development

- **LTSAE Checklists**
  - 41% said they filled out a checklist
  - Of those who completed a checklist
    - 98% talked with WIC staff about the checklist
    - 97% learned new information from the checklist
122 children (12 to 48 months) with developmental concerns on LTSAE checklist were referred to the doctor in the first 6 months.

Parents of 84 children completed a Referral Outcome Tracking form during subsequent WIC visits.

61% of these children saw a doctor because of a WIC referral.
Referral Outcomes When Seen By Doctor (n = 51)

- 31% Doctor Not Concerned
- 29% In Office Action Only
- 28% Received Outside Testing Only
- 12% Received Outside Testing and Services
WIC Staff Survey (n = 20)

- 95% Families willing to complete checklist
- 80% Program takes 5 minutes or less
- 90% Helps staff learn when to refer and how to support parents
- 95% Referred one or more children
- 95% Promotes healthy development
WIC Staff Focus Group Themes

- Checklist program is easy to implement
- Parents are empowered
- Doctor referrals are strengthened
- Staff members are empowered
- Parent literacy and concentration issues can be barriers

All seven WIC agencies (20 clinics) continue to use the checklists
Statewide Expansion (Phase III)

- 1-year WIC Developmental Milestones Program expansion beginning October 2016
- Aimed to develop, implement and evaluate a statewide model for the expansion of the WIC Developmental Milestones Program in Missouri that can be shared nationally
- Funding provided by the CDC and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
Statewide Expansion: Resource Materials

- Introductory and training videos
- Program implementation manual
- Printed LTS AE checklists and environmental graphics
- Missouri WIC Milestones webpage
  - Enrollment form and materials order form
  - Links to videos and Implementation Manual
  - http://health.mo.gov/living/families/wic/wiclwp/wicdevelopmentalmilestonesprogram/
Snapshot of Training Video
WIC Developmental Milestones Checklist Program Talking Points

WIC NUTRITIONIST/COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY’s ROLE:

- At each certification and MCA appointment, give parents the opportunity to complete the age-appropriate checklist. The checklist may also be used any time the parent or the WIC staff has a concern about the child’s development. If the parent does not have other topics they would like addressed, the checklist review can count as a nutrition education contact when appropriate education on growth and development is included. Have the parent complete a checklist for each child being seen that day. If the child is between checklist ages, use the younger checklist.
- Refer the parent to their child’s doctor for follow-up as indicated. The referral can be noted in MOWINS and can be used to set a goal, if appropriate. See details in purple box below.

KEY WORDS:
- Developmental Milestones
- Talk to the doctor
- Learn the Signs. Act Early

TALKING POINTS:

- “We are using this checklist to help track your child’s development. Thinking about how _______ plays, speaks, learns, moves and acts is just as important as measuring his/her height and weight.”
- “Let’s go through this checklist of Developmental Milestones and see how _________ is progressing for his/her age. Let’s answer these first two questions together about what most children do at this age. Does _____ (read first item? Does _____ (read second item)?”

Be sure the parent writes the child’s name, age and the date on the checklist and _______and______ both columns of the checklist. Provide assistance if needed.

Then review the checked boxes to determine next steps:

- Fewer than 3 black boxes missing checks AND No purple boxes checked
  THIS INDICATES THE CHILD IS REACHING HIS OR HER DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES.
  - “It looks like _________ is on track for meeting those developmental milestones.”
  - “Take this checklist home with you and show it with your family so they can see how great _________ is doing.”
  - “If you ever have any concerns or questions about _________’s development, be sure to talk to the doctor.”

  Give the checklist to the parent.

NOTE: If the parent answered the question at the bottom of the checklist, use your clinical judgment to determine if the child should be referred to their doctor or for other community services.

- 3 or more black boxes missing checks OR 1 or more purple boxes checked
  THIS INDICATES NEED FOR A REFERRAL.
  - “It would be a good idea to talk with your doctor about this checklist. I really care about what the doctor has to say about _________’s development.”
  - “Please call _________’s doctor and schedule a follow-up appointment to talk about his/her development.”
  - “I am going to give you the checklist so you can give it to your doctor or he or she knows exactly what you want to talk about.” (Hold checklist in hands with the referral information facing out, write in doctor's name.)
  - “I want to know what the doctor has to say the next time you come for your [date] WIC appointment.”
  - Encourage the parent to set a goal (“Growth and Development”): “Follow up with the doctor on the developmental checklist before _______ (date).”
  - Check for understanding.
  - You can use an alert to note the referral: “Referred to doctor for follow-up on developmental checklist before _______ (date).”
Program Dissemination

- Presentations at six WIC district meetings and statewide meetings (30-60 minutes)
- Monthly articles in Missouri WIC e-newsletter
- Technical assistance from designated WIC state nutritionist and project staff, as needed
Statewide Expansion: Evaluation

• 64 WIC agencies enrolled in the program between May 2016 and January 2017
• 59% of Missouri WIC agencies
• Agencies enrolled from all 6 WIC districts in the state
• 59 staff completed a survey about the program at the end of December 2017
Key Program Materials Used

- Checklists: 97%
- Wall/Floor Blocks: 73%
- Implementation Manual: 56%
- Training Videos: 85%
Staff Response to Program

- Checklists easy to use: 97%
- Checklists fit easily into WIC certification appt: 88%
- Referral process fits easily into WIC certification appt: 88%
Time Program Added to Appointments

- No extra time: 7%
- Less than 2 minutes: 17%
- 2-5 minutes: 52%
- More than 5 minutes: 24%
Families willing to complete checklists: 98%
Checklists easy for families to understand: 95%
Families look at floor/wall blocks: 98%
Impact on Parents (Staff Report)

- Checklists help parents learn about development: 93%
- Parents will share checklist with healthcare provider, when asked: 91%
Impact on Staff

- Learned when to refer children at risk: 97%
- Learned how to support concerned parents: 85%
- Improved referrals to physicians, community professionals: 90%
- Program promotes healthy development: 98%
Next Steps

• Incorporate a language nutrition component
  – Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing
• Public awareness campaign to improve children’s early brain and vocabulary development
• Empower parents to use easy activities to improve learning
  – Describing things while walking outside, eating, etc.
  – Singing songs during bath time
  – Reading books or playing games
• http://talkingisteaching.org
How can this program work for you?

- CDC plans to create a “generic” version of program materials for use by other states
- WIC programs across the nation will have the opportunity to voluntarily adapt and customize the program
- If you would like to learn more, contact
  
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