This section provides advice and tips on collecting stories from some of the local WIC agencies that took part in the original WIC Voices Project. It also describes how WIC agency staff themselves benefited by taking part in the project.

PANHANDLE HEALTH DISTRICT (PHD): BONNER COUNTY, IDAHO

WHAT WAS THE CATALYST FOR PHD’S STORYTELLING EFFORTS?

The Sandpoint WIC office location of PHD participated in NWA’s WIC Voices Project in the spring of 2018. The project began slowly with WIC staff selecting clients to invite to participate. As clients started to express their appreciation for being invited to tell their stories, the invitation was extended to all WIC clients as they arrived for appointments. A variety of diverse stories were quickly collected. One key to success was the fact that local WIC agency staff were all genuinely motivated to try to help WIC clients, and the clients sensed that. The clients in turn were wanting to help others in their same predicament, and, therefore, were willing to share their stories.

HOW DID STORY COLLECTION IMPACT SERVICE DELIVERY IN YOUR WIC CLINIC?

The NWA WIC Voices Project was challenging and rewarding. It was challenging to get started and ask to relate in a more personal way to our clients. But once we got started, it became nothing but rewarding. We learned so much about our clients, which helped us to be more individualized in our assistance to them. We realized how many families use WIC as a stepping stone so that they can get through a tough time in their lives and get on to better things. Many of our families found themselves in circumstances they were not prepared to deal with. They expressed their gratitude for WIC’s assistance as they made their way out of a jam. Many families recognized how far they had come after sharing their stories with us. It caused us as a staff to slow down just a little and carefully assess where a family is on their journey. We were reminded to respect and value each family’s uniqueness. We now try to meet families where they are and adjust our services ever so slightly to meet their needs.

SHARING OUR WORK

We have also used content from the project to inspire others in the WIC community. Staff from other WIC programs in our state attended the 2018 NWA Annual Education and Training Conference and were inspired to start collecting their own stories. We also shared the stories we collected with others.

“WE LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT OUR CLIENTS, WHICH HELPED US TO BE MORE INDIVIDUALIZED IN OUR ASSISTANCE TO THEM.”
WHAT ADVICE DOES PHD HAVE FOR OTHER WIC AGENCIES?

Our advice to others considering doing a story voices project is run—do not walk—to the starting line. Ask for permission, get a release signed, and then let your clients guide the process. We had no idea that the grandfather who stepped up to take care of his grandchildren was a retired Marine. We had no idea that some of our families had lucrative careers. Then, a business shut down and let their employees go, leaving the families in a dismal financial situation they could not have anticipated, and, therefore, were not prepared for. WIC helped them get through an extremely challenging time. The WIC Voices Project allowed us to connect to our clients in a more intimate way, and, therefore, serve them better. We are hopeful this will help them move off of WIC faster and on to a future where they can help contribute to the success of others.

We all make assumptions. It’s human to do so. By collecting stories, we can help to set the record straight. Be the voice for those whose voices are often not heard. The WIC Voices Project is a rewarding and worthwhile experience that you will not regret!

SAMAR MCGREGOR, PHFE WIC SENIOR NUTRITIONIST AND LOCAL AGENCY SECTION CO-CHAIR ON NWA’S BOARD OF DIRECTORS, DESCRIBES WHY SHE CHOSE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT:

“I FELT STRONGLY ABOUT ENGAGING FORMER WIC GRADUATES AND CURRENT WIC PARTICIPANTS TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH WIC. TO ME, THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE TESTIMONIALS COMING FROM PARTICIPANTS SPEAK VOLUMES OF THE VALUE OF THE WIC PROGRAM AND THE GREAT OUTCOMES IT PROVIDES.”

Above: Story gathered by Panhandle Health District, Idaho, under the theme “Who is a WIC Family?” This story was shared on the National WIC Association’s Facebook page, where it received hundreds of views and likes.

"I am a single grandfather raising my daughter’s children ages 6 months and 2 years old. WIC helped me get formula for the baby immediately after his mother was incarcerated. They offered me resources ... to get a birth certificate for the baby, so he was able to keep his medical services. WIC staff offered advice ... to help the two-year old be less of a choosy eater. With the help of WIC I was able to get connected to an organization that gave me car seats and taught me how to set them up and use them properly."

— WIC GRANDFATHER, IDAHO
WHAT IS THE VALUE ADD OF A STORYTELLING PROJECT?

Participating in NWA’s WIC Voices Project was rewarding for DHD #10 staff because it reminded us of how our daily work makes a difference in the lives of WIC families. We felt particularly moved to share the Missaukee mom’s story because she demonstrates how the WIC program helps participants in a myriad of ways. This woman was a single mom, attended college while working full time, and needed a little extra help. By using WIC services, she was able to succeed and improve both her and her daughter’s life. Therefore, WIC was a valuable stepping stone in getting her to where she is today.

DHD #10’S PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

In order to garner participation from WIC participants, we approached families and asked if they would be willing to share their story. We learned that participants were more than willing to share their testimonials due to the value and validation that participants receive from our WIC staff.

At DHD #10, we truly care about our clients. Building relationships with our families and forming great connections is key to our success. The WIC Voices Project provided an opportunity for our staff to discern the value that our participants see in WIC. Oftentimes, our daily work can feel mundane, stressful, and very busy. As a result, sometimes we lose sight of the bigger picture. Participating in this project allowed us to take a step back and refocus on the positive, invaluable difference we make in the lives of our WIC families.

WHAT ADVICE DOES DHD #10 HAVE FOR OTHER WIC AGENCIES?

The biggest challenge we faced while participating in WIC Voices was the short turnaround time, but, nonetheless, we had a great time gathering our stories. One piece of advice we have for other WIC agencies interested in doing a story collection project is there’s no need to be afraid to ask clients to share their story. Sometimes we worry that we might be bothering participants, or we’re afraid of hearing no. We learned to overcome these fears and found that participants were eager to share their testimonials. We would also encourage agencies to have a separate appearance release form from your parent organization in addition to the general release form that is shared when collecting participant stories or to combine both release forms into one form for simplicity’s sake.

SHARING OUR WORK

We are currently using a variety of channels to disseminate stories from the WIC Voices Project. The work was displayed at a community open house and the Annual Michigan State WIC Conference. In October 2018, our Photo Voice project will be displayed at the Michigan Public Health Premier Conference. Moving forward, we plan on making additional boards for each of our ten counties to display at various events.
WHAT INSPIRED CCWIC TO DO A STORYTELLING PROJECT?

During our participation in NWA’s CDC project, NWA staff urged us to take our communications and social media engagement to the next level. Mary Schultheis, Executive Director for CCWIC, became fully engaged in snapping photos and videos to highlight the project’s efforts. This gave CCWIC the opportunity to integrate creativity and passion into our WIC work by way of our newly found social media platform. With a new focus on communications, we have been able to share visual stories that engage clients across all generations.

WIC VOICES STORY TEAM

The opportunity to participate in NWA’s WIC Voices Project allowed us to come face-to-face with clients and hear about the positive impact that WIC is playing in their lives. We also engaged staff so that we could provide both agency and client perspectives on WIC’s importance in our community. Our approach to the WIC Voices Project consisted of two angles:

1. What is the world like with WIC?
2. What would the world be like without WIC?

Approaching the project, one key factor of success was our agency’s longstanding tradition of providing excellent customer service. This made it easy to engage our clients and get them to share their WIC stories. Hearing their testimonials, as well as the passion that WIC staff exuded during conversations on this topic, was a reminder of the good that WIC does for the world.

WAS THERE ALIGNMENT WITH STATE AND LOCAL PRIORITIES?

NWA’s WIC Voices Project also overlapped nicely with the Louisiana State WIC marketing campaign. The Louisiana State WIC video features interviews from CCWIC staff and clients, and it’s now being used across the entire state of Louisiana. In addition, the state has also put out brochures and other marketing materials with pictures of CCWIC participants. We were so honored to participate in both projects, helping to promote the great services that WIC has to offer. It has created so much excitement here at CCWIC, that now when the cameras do come out, everyone is ready to share their story about why WIC matters.

“This project created so much excitement here at CCWIC, that now when the cameras do come out, everyone is ready to share their story about why WIC matters.”

WIC services have benefited my family in so many ways. Due to financial strain, the services provided have helped me in being able to provide fresh fruits and veggies to my child. They have also allowed me to get support from the staff of Crescent City WIC services. As a first-time WIC participant, I was very hesitant [pride], but the staff made the process easier and welcoming. As a community advocate, I would always recommend WIC services to families and mothers because I know how much the family would benefit from the services.

Now, I am benefiting from the same services I would recommend to so many. WIC services are needed throughout the community due to the lack of nutritious eating. With the understanding of the various services provided through WIC, I have seen the benefits not only with myself but also with my child.

- WIC Mom, Louisiana
TRI-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT (TCHD): COLORADO

TCHD used photos and testimonials from their WIC Voices Project to create a two-page flier highlighting its WIC program. The document was designed with the national WIC brand from NWA’s Recruitment and Retention Campaign and is a great example of aligning efforts on multiple projects to enhance brand identity and the WIC participant experience.

This document is a wonderful resource for state and local WIC agencies looking to refresh promotional materials in their clinics or seeking inspiration and ideas for sharing WIC participant stories.

TCHD fully embraced the WIC Voices Project and used its stories for state and federal advocacy, social media posts, staff rejuvenation, WIC 101 training sessions, community outreach, e-publications, conference presentations, WIC promotional materials, and its agency website. Recognizing story collection as an added benefit to their core clinic functions, TCHD decided to continue their story collection efforts after NWA’s WIC Voices project ended.

WIC: EMPOWERING FAMILIES, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Please direct all questions to Quinney Harris, Director of Health Equity and Community Partnerships, at qharris@nwica.org or 202-232-5492.