SUMMARY

Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children (CPHMC) grant coordinators joined the Richmond Health Action Alliance to launch #RVABreastfeeds, a social media campaign to raise community support for breastfeeding mothers during World Breastfeeding Week. The campaign generated 100,000 unique hits.

#RVABreastfeeds will be used year-round to share breastfeeding resources, information on WIC eligibility and services and updates on policies that protect a

CHALLENGE

The health and economic benefits of breastfeeding are tremendous and can help diminish the burden of disease on all communities, particularly African-American and Latino communities.

In the United States, 75% of babies initiate breastfeeding; however, after six months, those rates drop dramatically to 43%. In a survey of African-American first-time mothers who were recipients of Richmond City WIC and whose infants were born from 2010 to 2013, 55% initiated breastfeeding and only 14% breastfed at six months. Mothers encounter multiple obstacles when they attempt to reach the American Academy of Pediatrics’ recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding for six months including not enough opportunities to network with breastfeeding mothers; lack of up-to-date and culturally relevant instruction and information from health care professionals, limited accommodation to breastfeed or express milk in public or at the workplace and inadequate paid maternity leave.

SOLUTION

The campaign placed life-sized cutouts of culturally diverse breastfeeding women in over 30 businesses, non-profits and healthcare organizations across the city to normalize breastfeeding in public spaces and engage a wide variety of citizens, stakeholders and business owners in a dialogue about their role in creating support for breastfeeding in Richmond City. Other campaign components included community leaders serving as “Breastfeeding Champions,” the dissemination of breastfeeding facts and local resources in English and Spanish, and peer-to-peer support in the form of tips for expecting and breastfeeding mothers on various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
RESULTS
During World Breastfeeding Week, #RVABreastfeeds received 100,000 unique engagements on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as well as three local television segments. This media presence created a space to begin a community discussion on breastfeeding. Volunteers with each cut-out also engaged hundreds of Richmond City residents in over 30 locations and distributed 1,700 pieces of collateral with breastfeeding facts and resources including WIC eligibility requirements and services. Conversations with citizens provided feedback on how to shape messaging in future initiatives. The collaborative campaign also strengthened partnerships between Richmond City WIC and the Richmond Health Action Alliance, building a foundation for future collaboration to improve breastfeeding rates and awareness in Richmond City.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS
This year the Richmond Health Action Alliance will conduct outreach to businesses to provide an update on the law passed in July 2015 which protects breastfeeding mothers’ right to breastfeed in public and distribute “Breastfeeding Welcome Here” stickers to business allies. The breastfeeding cut-outs will also be available for check-out community- and faith-based organizations, health fairs, etc. to continue the conversation. #RVABreastfeeds created a website to share breastfeeding resources and tools that will continue to be built out in English and Spanish. Passionate community members and leaders who learned about the campaign will also be invited to serve on the coalition to help plan for next year’s World Breastfeeding Week.

CONTACT
Leslie Lytle, MS, LCCE
Breastfeeding/Richmond Health Action Alliance Coordinator
Richmond Healthy Start Initiative
4100 Hull St - Southside Services Center
Richmond, VA 23224
804-612-6366
Leslie.Lytle@Richmondgov.com