

Promoting a Positive WIC Shopping Experience in Wichita County

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SUMMARY

The local Women, Infants and Children (WIC) agency reported a steady drop in participation rates over the past several months. When client surveys revealed poor shopping experiences contributed to the decline, the Community Partnership program met with WIC staff members to brainstorm ideas for improving the shopping experience. Through partnerships with the Health Coalition, WIC clients and store personnel, a number of easy shopping tools were created for clients and training provided for store personnel to improve the WIC shopping experience.



CHALLENGE

The Wichita County Women, Infants and Children (WIC) participation rates are dropping. In December, 2015, the county served 3,725 clients; 60% of the WIC agency capacity. Agency records indicated a 1% drop monthly over the past several months. According to a WIC vendor incident survey, the main reason clients withdrew was due to poor shopping experiences. Clients were having a difficult time finding WIC approved foods due to mislabeling of products;

studies from a 2011 Altarum Institute report echoed similar barriers nationally. This creates an often frustrating experience for clients who are less likely to utilize their benefits negatively impacting sales in the local economy. According to the National Academy of Sciences 2015 report, Review of WIC Food Packages, local agency staff are instrumental in providing participant-centered one-on-one and group education and nutrition counseling.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Increasing awareness of the WIC program in your community will improve the health and well-being of pregnant mothers and young children. Cost is a barrier for some families when trying to access healthy food choices, and frustration about the shopping experience can be a deterrent for some. Store employee and WIC client training can help a great deal to get the families what they need without the frustration. When visiting stores, ask the store manager for their WIC approved shopping guides.

"Depending on what store you go to, everything is different. There are different brands. Fruit is a big one, it is different at every store. Some have the pink WIC tags and some are not tagged. It would be a lot easier with the shopping guide."

*- Caroline Stansbury, WIC mom
and Walmart Cashier*

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SOLUTION

A WIC survey was used to determine the most visited stores by clients. A resulting WIC vendor training with local store managers was convened to address the problems clients were having and help brainstorm solutions. After further collaboration with community partners, it was determined that store specific WIC guides would be developed and used with the national WIC guides. Additionally, one minute cashier training was developed to educate cashiers on the use of the new guides. Also, a bulletin board in the WIC office displaying the shopping guides was created to help educate clients. Finally, a website, <http://likronsta.wix.com/easyswichopping> was developed to help promote the new program.

RESULTS

The pro-active approach of the Community Partnership Program and the local WIC agency was key to the success of this project. They were able to spend the time needed to gather all required Less Expensive Brands (LEB) forms, develop shopping guides and follow up with WIC vendors. The training provided to managers and cashiers on the use of the store specific guides helped to ease confusion and stress related to identifying WIC approved items and foster a better relationship among WIC clients and grocers. Presently, one of the stores has updated its WIC labeling so the approved WIC product matches with the WIC sticker. Most importantly, the WIC clients are very excited about the new shopping guides and believe this will alleviate confusion when shopping for WIC products and create a much better shopping experience.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Oversight of the new shopping guides and vendor training will be managed by the local WIC office after the Community Partnership for Healthy Mothers and Children Program ends. Store visits will continue and store managers and cashiers will be updated on changes to the program and do additional training as needed. The local WIC office staff will visit any new stores participating in the WIC program to provide training. The Health Coalition of Wichita County will be briefed periodically on the continued progress of the initiative and a follow up survey with WIC clients will be conducted to determine if the shopping guides and store training have been a success.