

Title of Project: The Loving Support Campaign

Agency Name: Mississippi State Department of Health WIC Program

State: Mississippi

Key Word Descriptors: Breastfeeding, promotion, media, training

Description of Project:

The Mississippi WIC Program, a pilot state in the national USDA/Best Start breastfeeding promotion program, *Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work*, implemented a comprehensive statewide campaign to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. With the nation's lowest breastfeeding initiation and duration rates, the state embraced *Loving Support* as an important public health initiative, with support from the agency and local community.

The campaign followed social marketing principles in designing an audience-driven campaign that addressed identified barriers (embarrassment, time/social constraints, and lack of social support). Five key project component areas were included in the comprehensive campaign:

1. *Patient and Family Education.* ...including provision of *Loving Support* materials to clients and families, training for staff, coordination of special events for WIC mothers and families, and creation of a promotion video, "Breastfeeding: Another Way of Saying I Love You."
2. *Staff Buy-In...* orientation trainings provided on-site to local health WIC clinics and health departments; in-house communication; and staff training in breastfeeding.
3. *Public Awareness.* ...media saturation of *Loving Support* through television, radio, billboards in high visibility locations, and newspaper ads in smaller communities. Press packets were created and WIC breastfeeding program staff made visits to local media outlets to deliver the packets and discuss the project. Follow-up media blitz.
4. *Health Provider Outreach* ...training provided in 30 hospitals throughout the state, development of a statewide breastfeeding resource directory, and personal outreach and training.
5. *Community Awareness...* "Breastfeeding Clinic Environment Project" (funded by USDA Special Project Grant) created and publicized; nursing mothers' rooms at malls; training for childcare centers and worksites; creation of the Mississippi Breastfeeding Coalition with its statewide "Breastfeeding-Friendly Site Project" funded by the March of Dimes.

Results of the Project:

The Mississippi WIC *Loving Support* program resulted in dramatic increases in breastfeeding rates.

Initiation among the WIC population grew from 27.1 % at hospital discharge and 6.4% at 6 months in 1996 (the year before the campaign) to 37.2% at hospital discharge and 15.4% at 6 months in 1999, 2 years after the campaign was launched. Similar increases occurred in the general population.

A Special Project Grant from USDA provided for a formal evaluation of the campaign. The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Community Health conducted a comprehensive evaluation including 9 client and 2 staff focus groups around the state, an in-depth survey of low-income post-partum women, a statewide survey of health providers (including pediatricians, family physicians, hospitals, and WIC clinics), and a survey of other state WIC programs. Overall findings showed that the breastfeeding promotion program:

- Increased breastfeeding knowledge about WIC clients and staff
- Increased community awareness and acceptance of breastfeeding
- Contributed to the increase in breastfeeding rates
- Increased referrals to WIC by health providers

Formal evaluations conducted for the breastfeeding video and clinic environment projects found that the video effectively addressed WIC clients' barriers to embarrassment and time/social constraints, and that the clinic project significantly increased staff knowledge and promotion of breastfeeding, and increased clients' perception of support at the clinic site.

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