

# Strategies for Increasing WIC Child Retention:

## Connecticut's WIC and Head Start Cross-Program Collaboration Pilot Project

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Marjorie Chambers MS, RD  
Connecticut WIC Program  
[Marjorie.Chambers@ct.gov](mailto:Marjorie.Chambers@ct.gov)



# History

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- Awarded FY 2011 WIC Concept Paper grant
- Sequestration!
- Received a FY 2013 Non-competitive Concept Paper grant
- Awarded FY 2014 WIC SPG Full Grant

# Program Similarities

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- WIC and Head Start (HS) programs serve similar populations and provide similar messaging
  - Low-income women and children up to age 5
  - Nutrition education messages
  - Targeted referrals

# Purpose of the Project

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- Increase WIC Participation rates
- Develop a formal system of collaboration between WIC and Head Start
- Track and evaluate project to build on success and learn from challenges identified
- Based on lessons learned implement collaboration statewide

# Rationale for Improved, Formal Collaboration

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- WIC participation declines when child reaches 2 years of age
- Real and perceived barriers to WIC participation and services
- WIC and HS lack formal, local and state level collaboration
- Missed opportunities to share similar nutrition education resources and messaging

# Purpose/Goals of the Pilot Project: January 2014-September 2015

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- Pilot test concept paper methods and tools in New Britain, CT: Bristol WIC Program and Human Resources Agency (HRA) Head Start Program
  - Increase co-enrollment
  - Improve referrals for “at-risk” families
  - Coordinate services
  - Share best practices
- Use lessons learned to improve Full Grant

# Kick-Off!

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- WIC and Head Start Collaboration Project Kick-Off Meeting and Activity
  - Local WIC and Head Start, State WIC staff (DPH) and CT HS Collaboration Office (State Department of Education), University of St. Joseph (USJ) and Project Liaison
  - Collaboration activity, meet liaison, interactive activity, review of focus group findings
  - Overview of Pilot project
    - Review of monthly surveys (via SurveyMonkey)
    - Collaboration activities expectations

# Locally Identified Barriers to Stronger Collaboration

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- The MOU did not specify sharing of information between both programs
- No formal tracking method at WIC for referrals made to Head Start
- Lack of Head Start staff understanding of WIC application process and risk factors associated with WIC eligibility
- Strong language of the WIC termination letter
- Lack of WIC understanding of Head Start eligibility requirement and application process
- Strong desire of Head Start staff for WIC site co-located at Head Start
- Lack of sharing of nutrition education resources and messaging



# Solutions:

## Increase Understanding of Programs

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- Clarify WIC and Head Start Enrollment Processes
  - Head Start Enrollment Manager presented at local WIC staff meeting to discuss eligibility requirements
  - WIC Coordinator and Program Nutritionist presented at the Head Start meeting to discuss WIC application process and program benefits
  - WIC contact information was provided to Head Start staff, identifying staff who performs the application process and who performs nutrition counseling

## Quote

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*“WIC helps our program because they introduce Head Start to the parents.”*

- HS Staff member

# Solutions: Make Referrals Easier

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- MOU was updated to include sharing of information between both WIC and Head Start
- Revise language of WIC termination letter
  - State level changes to modify system-generated letter with a more positive tone
  - Local WIC Agency began to include local agency contact information with the mailed letter

# “Termination” letter – from Old...

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## **Denial of Participation:**

“Your application to participate in the WIC Program has been reviewed. Based on the information made available to us, we have determined that you are NOT/NO LONGER eligible to participate in the WIC Program for the following reason(s): **You failed to pick up WIC checks two months in a row.**”

# “Termination” letter - to New!

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## **Notice of Participant Status Change:**

Our records show that you or your family members have not completed the yearly WIC recertification process. **WIC Program rules require that WIC participants recertify or reapply for WIC nutrition services every year. If participants miss this recertification appointment, they are not eligible to continue to get WIC benefits until they complete this process.**

The information WIC staff receives at recertification visits (you or your child’s weight, height, blood work and daily eating habits) helps WIC staff provide you with tips and support for having a healthy pregnancy, meeting your breastfeeding goals or raising a healthy, active child. WIC not only provides benefits to help with purchasing healthy foods but also with providing nutrition and health tips so you and your family may live a healthy life. **Please contact your local WIC program today to schedule an appointment. We will be waiting to hear from you.**

**If you have already contacted WIC please disregard this letter.**

# Quote

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I have a "*Better understanding of their process and how to refer to them*".

~ statement from HS staff

# Solutions: Track and Follow-up on Referrals

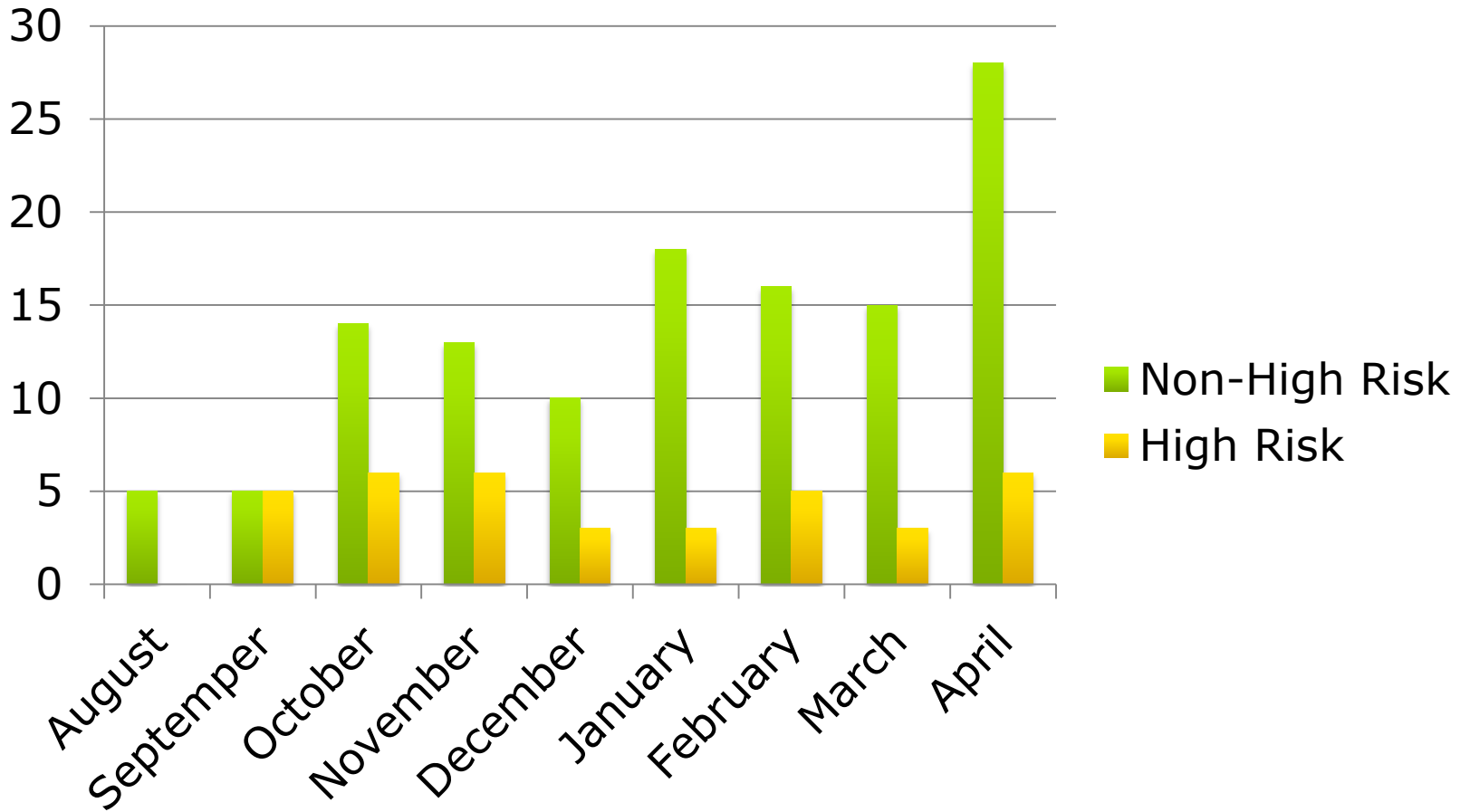
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- WIC staff developed a process to track referrals by having each nutritionist document every HS referral made and to follow-up on each referral
- High risk and non-high risk WIC participants were identified and encouraged to discuss their child's needs with the Head Start Enrollment Manager

*"Since the collaboration, WIC has benefited with an increased number of referrals from HS."*

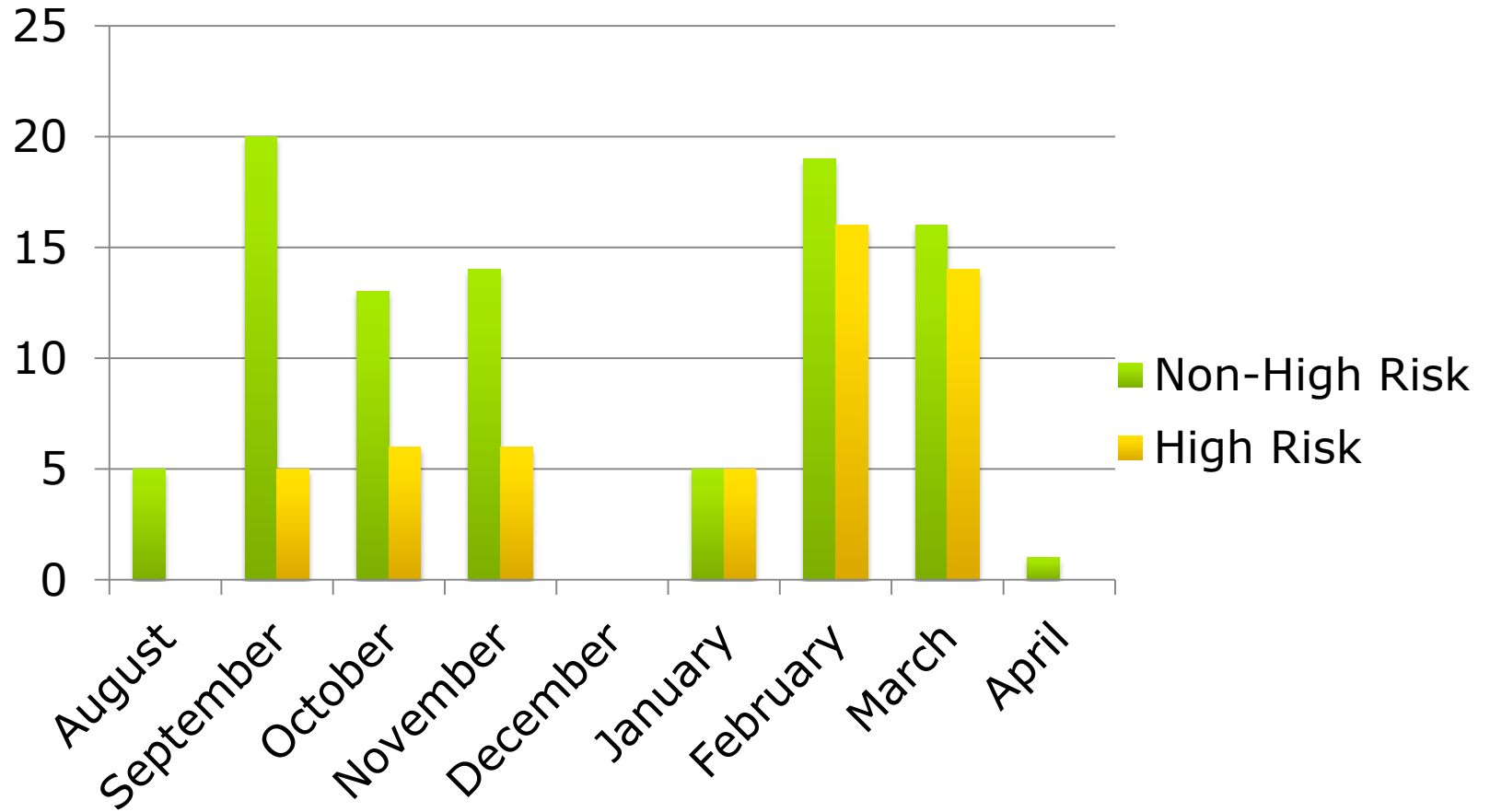
~ statement from WIC staff

# WIC Referrals to Head Start





# Head Start Referrals to WIC



# Solutions: Co-location Requires Planning

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- WIC and HS Management staff meeting
  - Room availability (storage for WIC supplies)
  - Type of WIC appointments to be offered
  - Advertisement of WIC satellite at HS
  - All WIC staff was on board with promotion of co-location
  - Flyer sent home to all Head Start families



# Assessing Participant Interest in a WIC site at HS

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- Head Start sent informational flyers/surveys to 300 HS families in the first week of January 2015
- 98 completed surveys were returned to WIC
- 44 of the 98 families expressed interest in attending WIC visits at the Head Start location
- Half of those families were not active in the WIC system or had never been enrolled in WIC before
- **Success! As of April there are 49 active participants at the co-located WIC site at HS!**

# Lessons Learned

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- Keep an open mind to co-location
  - Be realistic
  - Communicate worries/barriers between both programs
  - Communicate hours of operation including any days off for children or any change in HS schedule
- Discuss importance of MOU early on
  - Appropriate staff needs to make updates
  - Actively share participant specific information (with a release) such as anthropometric and/or hematological data

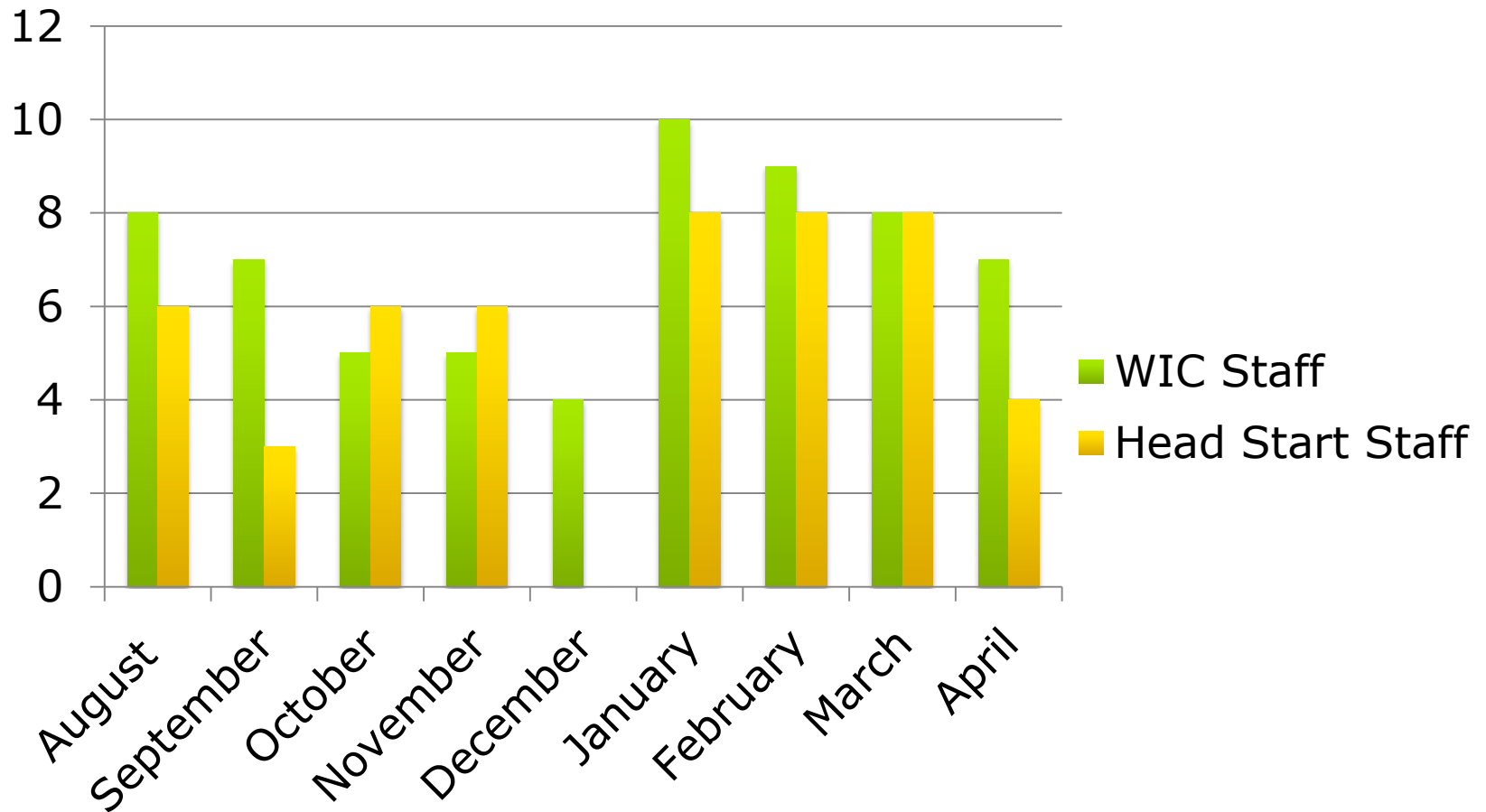


# In Process: Sharing Nutrition Education Messages

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- Sharing nutrition education messaging with the Head Start Nutrition Consultant
- Identify common areas of interest/need for families and participants

# WIC-Head Start Survey Responses



## Quotes from Staff

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- Regarding HS survey to families: *"We identified at least 20 families who were either never on WIC or had been terminated from failure to recertify/pick up checks. What a boost in caseload this will be overtime!"*
- WIC staff complementing collaboration: *"After our presentation at HS, a Family Service Worker called the office to see if she would be able to provide WIC outreach brochures at a group she facilitates. It was nice to have this contact with HS staff and it is something that will be beneficial to our participants and theirs."*

## Quotes: HS family success stories:

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- “I just gave a parent the WIC number, and she went to the appointment and she got the benefits”
- “Families were happy there will be a mobile site now available to them”
- “I was able to assist in answering questions for families interested in WIC services”
- “One of my families can't participate in WIC program because of their working schedule, and after WIC opened its branch in HRA they reapplied for WIC”
- “Family was having a difficult time attending WIC appointments, and now has connected with the mobile on-site”



# References/Data Sources

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- Martin, K. , Wolff, M. , Lonczak, M. , Formative Research to Examine Collaboration Between Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Woman, Infants, and Children and Head Start Programs, *Maternal Child Health Journal*, 18 (1), 326-332.
- Data source: Martin, K. , Wolff, M. "Connecticut WIC and Head Start Cross-Program Collaboration Focus Group Report", University of Connecticut, May 2012.
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- Statewide WIC Information System (SWIS), Individual Reports: Denial of Participation and Notice of Participant Status Change
- Data source (WIC): Chambers, M. "Connecticut WIC and Head Start Cross-Program Collaboration Project", Connecticut Department of Public Health, State WIC Program, WISP-13-CT (Non-Competitive Concept Paper), 2015 Fifth Progress Report.
- WIC and Head Start Cross-Program Collaboration Survey Monkey results: University of St. Joseph, August 2014 - April 2015