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Local WIC Mothers Breastfeeding More Than National Average
Sixteenth Street Community Health Center's WIC Program Celebrates Success with a Breastfeeding Mom's Reunion

MILWAUKEE -- Mothers involved in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program at the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center are exceeding national trends for breastfeeding.

The success of the breastfeeding program was celebrated today at the Center, 1032 S. 16th St., Milwaukee, during a breastfeeding moms reunion.

"The theme for this year's event revolved around recycling," said Sally Callan, WIC breastfeeding program coordinator for Sixteenth Street. "The messages of recycling fit perfectly with what mothers are taught through the WIC program -- learning to maximize the resources you have available and reaping the benefits of that resourcefulness."

Mothers gathering at the reunion shared experiences while children were treated to toys such as kazoo's, matching games, "bugs," and shakers made from recycled WIC food packaging.

"The reasons for breastfeeding children haven't changed, but the numbers of mothers doing so has definitely increased," said John Bartkowski, Sixteenth Street's chief executive officer.

More than 65 percent of the WIC program's participants who were on WIC during their pregnancy breastfeed their child at birth, compared with 49 percent of WIC moms

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Breastfeeding Moms/Add One

who were not on WIC during the pregnancy. The numbers are consistently higher as the child gets older--at 12 months, 39 percent of the moms are still breastfeeding, while those who didn't participate in WIC during the pregnancy stop breastfeeding entirely.

National numbers showed that in 1995, both the numbers of mothers and duration of breastfeeding increased from previous years. From 1989 to 1995, the number of WIC mothers breastfeeding increased 36 percent compared with the 12.9 percent increase of non-WIC mothers.

"Breastfeeding may seem like it would come naturally after a pregnancy, but mothers really need the guidance and support offered through a program like ours," Callan said. She said having Hmong- and Spanish-speaking peer counselors helps make the program successful.

"We get so many thanks for teaching moms about the benefits. It not only is healthier for both the baby and the mother, but creates a bond between them,"

Breastfeeding also protects the child from allergies and flu-like diseases and helps prevent breast cancer for the mother.

"The goal of our breastfeeding outreach project is to have the majority of the mothers who come into our clinic breastfeeding six weeks after the birth, and to encourage 100 percent attendance at our breastfeeding and parenting classes."

Sixteenth Street Community Health Center offers primary care services and other programs that include prenatal, preventive health education classes, HIV case-management services, the WIC program and school-based health services.

In 1996, the Center recorded more than 84,000 patient visits. Nearly half of the Center's medical patients are under 12 years of age. The Center has been recognized by federal officials as a model for providing quality, cost-effective care to an underserved community.

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