

## **Breastfeeding Peer Counselors**

### **Making a Difference for WIC Families in Henderson County**

**September 20, 2011**

Hendersonville, NC – New mothers in Henderson County’s WIC program are getting help and support in breastfeeding their babies from experienced moms, thanks to the NC WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program. Mother-to-mother support has proven to be one of the most successful approaches to encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies.

Henderson County WIC Program Peer Counselors help mothers start breastfeeding and provide information on what to expect during the first few days and weeks of breastfeeding. Henderson County has the best breastfeeding initiation rate in the state at 88.5%, exceeding the state rate of 60.5%. The county is also ranks third statewide in breastfeeding rates at 12 months after initiation.

“The idea at the heart of the Peer Counselor Program is that mothers with breastfeeding experience have the unique ability to help and influence other mothers,” said State WIC Director Alice Lenihan.

WIC breastfeeding peer counselors receive a training course that includes breastfeeding basics, and counseling skills. They are laypersons who work under the guidance of a health professional with breastfeeding expertise in their agency.

The NC WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program was initiated to improve infant health through increases in the practice of breastfeeding. The goals of the program are to increase the number of pregnant WIC mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants and to provide follow-up support for mothers after delivery to help them initiate and continue breastfeeding.

Since the program began, more than 200 mothers have been trained as peer counselors in North Carolina. Today approximately 125 peer counselors are working in 70 Local Agency WIC Programs. Studies have shown that mothers who experience a peer counselor contact during pregnancy choose to breastfeed at a higher rate than those who do not.

“WIC is so much more than people realize,” said Lenihan. “The breastfeeding promotion and support that peer counselors provide really give infants a healthy start in life, which is so important.”

To receive WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program services, mother or baby must be enrolled in the WIC Program. The WIC Office at the Henderson County Department of Public Health is open Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM and late hours on Thursdays.

For more information about the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program or to make an appointment call 694-6023 or visit the WIC Web site at [www.nutritionnc.com](http://www.nutritionnc.com). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

###