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WIC program receives national Loving Support Award

MOBILE, Alabama — The Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) and Family Health – its primary care division – are advocates for breastfeeding. Breastfeeding helps to prevent malnutrition in all its forms, ensures food security for infants and young children, and helps to bring people and nations out of the hunger and poverty cycle. It is therefore a foundation of life.

This dedication has not gone without notice. It was announced this week that MCHD’s Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program was named a 2018 Loving Support Award of Excellence award winner by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“Mobile County’s WIC program is pleased that the USDA recognized the outstanding service offered to all pregnant and breastfeeding participants,” said Amanda Arnold, M.S., R.D.N., L.D., who oversees the local WIC department. “The peer counselors support the WIC program in the commitment to promote breastfeeding.”

Each year the USDA announces the Loving Support Award of Excellence winners. The program was established to recognize local WIC agencies that have provided exemplary breastfeeding promotion and support activities. The intent is to provide models and motivate other local agencies to strengthen their breastfeeding promotion and support activities and ultimately increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates among WIC participants.

“Congratulations to our Loving Support award winners from Baldwin, Marshall and Mobile counties,” said Amanda Martin, Alabama’s WIC Program Director. “This is the second time that Alabama has received this distinction, and the first time that we have received three awards in my history.”

A statement from the USDA’s Southeast Regional Office read as follows: “These local agencies have successfully met the criteria identified as best practices, which demonstrate excellence in breastfeeding practices and support. WIC local agencies continue to play a critical role in promoting, encouraging and supporting breastfeeding! We appreciate the commitment to making breastfeeding promotion and support a priority as well as ensuring the core component of the nutrition services that the WIC Program provides to meet its mission of safeguarding the health of low-income women, infants and children.”

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MCHD has opened two lactation rooms for nursing mothers. The newest location is on the second floor of the Keeler Memorial Building (251 North Bayou Street in Downtown Mobile) near the Pediatrics department and the WIC program.

Meridith Gardner, a Lactation Consultant at MCHD, said the first lactation room was installed at the Newburn Health Center (248 Cox Street in Midtown Mobile), a facility that specializes in Pediatrics. She added both locations are available to employees and to all patients from MCHD and Family Health.

“We are very excited to get this award for the first time in Mobile County,” said Gardner, who is certified by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners. “Over the years of having WIC peer counselors, starting a breastfeeding support group and continued education for staff, we have come a long way in getting the word out to our WIC breastfeeding mothers that we are here to help. Hopefully, our continued efforts will help more mothers reach their breastfeeding goals.”

Gardner said MCHD has peer counselors for WIC participants that call them to assist with breastfeeding questions or problems. WIC also has a breastfeeding support group called TLC: The Lactation Circle. They meet every third Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. in Room 260 of the Keeler Memorial Building.

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