

Leslie Lewis, MPH, RD, LDN, Nutrition Consultant Incorporating Nutrition Education in Louisiana's Home Visiting Programs

Home visiting programs in state and local health departments around the country help low-income families make healthy choices. In Louisiana, the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is one of the state's home visiting programs for low-income women. Through the Partnership, registered nurses work with first-time mothers from early pregnancy through their child's second birthday. Together, the nurse and the new mom set goals for the mother's health, relationships and nurturing parenting. Since 1999, NFP has worked with nearly 12,000 families around the state. Parents as Teachers (PAT), a new home visiting program in Louisiana, serves low-income pregnant women and families with young children both in their homes and at community group sessions.

As in many states, Louisiana does not require that state and local home visiting programs include public health nutritionists. With growing concerns about the nutritional needs of low-income new mothers, in 2012 the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals surveyed home visiting nurses with the state's Nurse-Family Partnership Program. The survey identified common nutritional challenges the NFP nurses observed in their clients. The top concerns the nurses reported were that the pregnant women 1) are obese, 2) made poor food choices, 3) were not motivated to change their habits, and 4) often did not have sufficient access or money to purchase healthy foods. The nurses also indicated that they themselves had varying degrees of knowledge about nutrition and that they were interested in gaining additional training and resources.

Leslie Lewis, MPH, RD, LDN, a nutrition consultant with Louisiana's Bureau of Family Health, thought that the perfect place to offer the nurses and other home visiting professionals nutrition training was at the annual education meeting of the Louisiana Maternal and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program. The MIECHV annual education meeting is mandatory for all Home Visiting Program staff, including the Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers programs. These NFP and PAT professionals are nurses, social workers and educators. In addition, psychologists, data analysts and evaluators in the programs attend the annual meeting, as do many community partners.

Leslie received a Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN) to develop and organize a session



Pictured: Leslie Lewis, MPH, RD, LDN, Nutrition Consultant, Bureau of Family Health, Louisiana Department of Health

About Leslie

Leslie has been a nutrition consultant with the Louisiana Department of Health's Bureau of Family Health for eight years. Before joining the Bureau, she worked for four years as a project manager in obesity research at Pennington BioMedical Research Center. Leslie has a seven year-old daughter and twin four year-olds, a son and a daughter. They keep her very busy!

Leslie is a member of ASPHN's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Nutrition Council. She is also on the Steering Committee of ASPHN's Obesity Prevention Nutrition Council, the Chair of ASPHN's Collaboration Committee, and a member of the ASPHN Board of Directors.

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at the MIECHV meeting that would give home visiting professionals who work directly with low-income pregnant women and new mothers more skills and tools to help their clients improve their health. The meeting was in June 2014 in Baton Rouge. With the mini-grant, Leslie organized a session on the role of nutrition in infant mortality.

Sandy Perkins, ASPHN Consultant, was the session presenter. Sandy used ASPHN's brief, **The Role of Nutrition in Infant Mortality: A Public Health Perspective**, to frame the training. In her presentation, Sandy highlighted the importance of pre-natal nutrition and breastfeeding. She also explained the critical role that public health nurses and nutritionists play in preventing infant mortality. She shared tips and ideas for how home visiting staff can sow the seeds for a lifetime of healthy habits by incorporating information on healthy eating, healthy weight, breastfeeding and more into their work with pregnant women and new mothers.

Successes and Challenges

Close to 200 people attended the session, right on Leslie's target number. Sandy Perkins' presentation received great reviews. In their evaluations, participants wrote: "Great information." "Wonderful speaker! I learned so much." "I gained a lot of new information." "Very beneficial for teaching my clients in NFP."

As part of the nutrition education session, attendees received jump drives full of nutrition resources. The home visiting staff told Leslie that they were very excited to have all these new resources at their fingertips.

Lessons Learned

Leslie said, "I knew that the home visiting staff was eager for nutrition information, but the positive responses underscored the importance of providing even more nutrition resources for the staff." She added, "I am hoping we can pilot a nutrition education program within MIECHV." Leslie is looking at two programs to provide additional nutrition training and resources for the home visiting staff, the National Maternal Nutrition Intensive Course and the Baby Behavior Trainings. She also plans to meet with home visit staff around the state to answer their nutrition questions and identify additional training needs.

The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist

As a public health nutritionist, Leslie identified a real need in the state's home visiting programs, and she stepped up to fill that need and shape healthy habits for life. Her strong background in maternal and child health as well as her expertise in best nutrition practices were key drivers in her project to bring nutrition training and messaging to the state's home visiting staff. Leslie is one of very few public health nutritionists employed specifically by a state Title V Maternal and Child Health program. She feels very fortunate to have this role and to be able to provide nutrition expertise to various public health programs including home visiting.

ASPHN in Action

ASPHN is a non-profit membership organization that provides state and national leadership on food and nutrition policy, programs and services aimed at improving the health of our population. Our vision is to create new environmental norms where healthy eating and active living are the easy and natural choices for all Americans.

At ASPHN, we build our members' skills as public health nutritionists by providing key resources and professional development. Funding from our Association's Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant program helped Leslie, an ASPHN member, launch the nutrition messages training in Louisiana.

To learn more about ASPHN, please visit us on the web at www.asphn.org.



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Supported in part by the Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau (contract #HHS250201300026C). 03/15