



2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Onslow County, North Carolina

Jurisdiction population(s): 194,000

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: July Year: 2013

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Sheri Slater

Title: Assistant County Manager Jurisdiction: Onslow County, North Carolina

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Sheri Slater

Title: Assistant County Jurisdiction: Onslow County,
Manager North Carolina

Street address: 328 New Bridge Street

City: Jacksonville State/Province: North Carolina

Zip/Postal Code: 28540 Country: United States

Telephone: 910-347-4717 Fax: 910-989-5808

E-mail: Sheri_Slater@onslowcountync.gov

Onslow County Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program

The WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Program is the largest public health nutrition program in the United States, and nearly half of all infants in this country participate at some point in their first year of life. WIC was started in 1972 to provide nutrition education and vouchers for healthy foods, and the program has always had a primary focus of promoting breastfeeding. The education provided by nutrition experts in the WIC Program helps to promote breastfeeding; however, because of the amount of information nutritionists much cover with each client, they usually do not have the time to discuss breastfeeding in detail. Also, participants often do not feel comfortable asking personal questions or discussing sensitive issues regarding breastfeeding in these kinds of interactions.

WIC noticed a need for additional breastfeeding support and started the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor (BFPC) program in recent years to provide support to breastfeeding mothers from peers: women with breastfeeding experience recruited from WIC's target, low-income population. Peer Counselors (PCs) provide support for breastfeeding in a culturally appropriate way, and they receive training to counsel women in groups, one-on-one, and over the phone.

The interactions that PCs have with participants are very different than counseling provided by nutritionists. PCs meet with participants as peers, and the main focus is on support and guidance, rather than instruction and obtaining data. Interactions with PCs can occur without an appointment, at any time of day, in person or over the phone. This format allows for a very open and informal environment where the PC and the participant can develop a rapport and maintain continuity of care as the participant interacts with the same PC every time they contact WIC. This helps to increase efficiency of service as well, as the breastfeeding issues and difficulties do not have to be re-established each time the PC meets with the participant.

Additional breastfeeding support through the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program has helped the state of North Carolina to significantly increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates as determined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Initiation of breastfeeding, an estimate of how many women have ever breastfed, rose from 67.3% in 2011 to 77.2% in 2014 in North Carolina, which is very close to the Healthy People 2020 goal of 81.9%. Onslow County breastfeeding initiation rates have increased significantly as well, from 45.8% in 2011 to 54.8% in 2013. Breastfeeding duration rates have also improved significantly for all age groups assessed. The percentage of infants that are breastfeeding at six months of age increased from 37.0% in 2011 to 48.3% in 2014, and the percentage breastfeeding at 12 months of age rose from 19.6% in 2011 to 24.5% in 2014. The percentage of women exclusively breastfeeding, without supplementing with formula, jumped dramatically in North Carolina. Exclusive breastfeeding at three months of age rose from 28.2% of infants in 2011 to 42.6% in 2014. As for six-month-old infants, 8.7% in North Carolina were exclusively breastfeeding in 2011, compared to 20.7% in 2014. These dramatic improvements are a direct result of greater breastfeeding support in the community. The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program is a key contributor to this support as the WIC Program staff regularly interacts with a large percentage of the breastfeeding population.

Onslow County is unique in that a large percentage of the women receiving WIC are either active duty military or spouses of active military personnel. In order to relate well to the population, the Onslow County WIC Program has hired three Peer Counselors that have spouses in the military and one PC that previously served in the military. Our PCs have experience with dealing with difficulties related to military family life for both the active duty participant and spouse. These difficulties, which can impact breastfeeding, include frequent relocation; care of

Onslow County Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program

children during deployments and trainings; dealing with military commands, who may not be aware of how to support breastfeeding, for those returning to work; the strain of raising children away from one's own family; and the complexities of navigating the military health care system.

The role of the BFPC per federal guidelines is to reinforce breastfeeding recommendations and provide practical peer support. Onslow County had a tremendous amount of interest in the BFPCs positions, so the staff members chosen to fill these roles are not only exceptional at providing support as peers, but they are also breastfeeding experts. BFPCs attend required training initially upon being hired and then quarterly. The BFPCs in Onslow County have a passion for breastfeeding, which continues into their personal time. Some have paid for conference attendance or have subscribed to lactation journals to increase their knowledge and awareness of breastfeeding issues.

The BFPC program in Onslow County is hugely successful because of the firsthand experience of the PCs as breastfeeding mothers, mixed with their passion for lactation, and their commitment to having the latest information. BFPCs at Onslow County use this mix of knowledge and experience to support and promote breastfeeding, provide practical guidance based on training, and refer participants to nutritionists, International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs), and physicians when appropriate.

Part of the reason that the BFPC program was instituted in Onslow County was to fill a large gap in lactation assistance. There were only four IBCLCs in Onslow County when this program first started in 2013, and only one IBCLC could see clients in an outpatient setting. Since our program has launched, it has inspired change within our community. There are now four outpatient IBCLCs, a Breastfeeding Coalition, a more active La Leche League, and overall

more information and clarity regarding local breastfeeding support and resources. As a result, our local physicians are making more efforts to support breastfeeding as well, which in turn has aided in raising the number of low-income mothers choosing breastfeeding. This program has provided support where there was none and continues to be a pillar of progress and excellence within our community.

Onslow County WIC started with a single PC, who began seeing clients in July 2013. There was an immediate interest in the program, and her caseload increased quickly. A second PC was hired to help serve the clients, but it was clear that more support was necessary as the program continued to grow. In January 2014, six months after its inception, the BFPC program had reached a caseload of 215, meaning that the PCs were maintaining regular contact with 215 women at one time during their breastfeeding journeys. The staff was increased to four PCs, and, as of January 2015, the caseload has grown to 428 women.

BFPCs in Onslow County are very busy with their client load. However, this has not stopped them from getting involved in other breastfeeding activities. The BFPCs have started a "Mother's Milk Club Support Group" to provide women with the opportunity to meet with other women and share their experiences and difficulties with breastfeeding. This group meets monthly at the Health Department and is exceptional for this county as it is the only support group that meets after regular work hours, giving working mothers an opportunity to attend.

Without the BFPC program in Onslow County, breastfeeding initiation and duration rates would undoubtedly not be increasing at the current rates. This program is making waves in our community, not just with the low-income population, but with the entire population. WIC participants are spreading the word about positive breastfeeding experiences to their friends and

Onslow County Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program

on social media groups, increasing and encouraging interest in breastfeeding among their peers. There are more women breastfeeding in public, which is changing the view of others in the county, making it more of the norm and more acceptable. The view of breastfeeding in the military is changing as women are starting to view breastfeeding at their duty stations as normal. Our PCs' passion is inspiring collaboration and change in this community; they have helped to form a Breastfeeding Coalition, allowing health care professionals involved in breastfeeding to work together, bridging gaps between health care providers all over the county and at the Naval Hospital. As we service a large military population, our impact with this program will potentially have a very far reach, which will aid with national public health and meeting the Surgeon General's Call to Action, which outlines steps to remove obstacles to breastfeeding that women face in the United States. The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program has put us on target to meet the Healthy People 2020 breastfeeding goals and is helping to improve public health in Onslow County.