

## **“Vira’s 28 years of service helped write WIC’s history from 1980 – 2008”**

When Vira joined WIC in 1980, the program at that time served 1,000 participants with a staff of 10 and 3 facilities. Two years later, in 1982, participation increased to approximately 10, 000 clients with a staff of 30 and 5 facilities.

### **1980 – 1990**

Vira, during your first ten years (1980 – 1990) you witnessed many changes. The first was separation of responsibilities. At the time there were two teams at each center. One team was responsible for certifications, the other for issuance of food vouchers. There was very little knowledge among the teams on each other’s activities.

Issuance of Food cards required a lot of stamping and tailoring the food package based on the type of food package. Every client received 8 punch cards. Each card had to be written in a ledger book and signed by the participant. Each card required three stamps to include issuance date, director’s signature and valid month. A daily report was required to account for each card. The clerical staff consisted of Ledger, Exiting, Eligibility and Lab. Clients came in for services monthly.

Clients that came in for a certification did not require showing any written documentation for POI or POR. All required was provided verbally. At the time, many clients received certification but could not receive benefits due to caseload restrictions. Funds were unavailable for clients to receive benefits. There were over 20 – 4 drawer file cabinets with clients files awaiting approval. Only clients that were given a 1 to 3 priority received services and benefits. Everybody was asked to wait and if the certification came due then they were recertified but still did without receiving benefits.

Nutrition education was taught by Community Service Aides who also handled the eligibility process. We then began implementation of the automation system and the only data entered in the system was the client’s demographic information.

We then initiated the Farmer’s Market pilot program. Participation continued to increase to approximately 30,000.

### **1990 - 2000**

In the next ten years (1990 – 2000), more changes came about in 1995 including an improved automated system and implementation of double and triple issuance of vouchers. At this time only 3 vouchers were provided per client.

During this period WIC, at the state level, introduced the delivery of immunization since not enough community agencies provided these services.

Another change happened in Nutrition education and class choice. Now, clients had the opportunity to select the type of class they could attend. Each month, about 14 different classes were available and a catalogue with all classes

was published for clients to select from. It was at the end of this period that we introduced the Health Educator position to teach all classes.

Other enhancements to the program included the addition of two mobile units to cover over 10 locations and to provide direct services at Thomason General Hospital. Over 400 clients were now receiving certification at the hospital by a very limited staff.

The work schedule was Tuesday – Saturday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Staff was scheduled to work 10 am to 7 pm shifts.

Staff was cross trained as Clinical Clerks and a WIC Call Center was established allowing clinic staff to no longer receive client phone calls, thus focusing time on providing face-to-face service without phone interruptions.

Participants were now required to bring in proof of income and residency.

### **2000 – 2008**

During the following eight years (2000 – 2008), we stopped the immunization program. Clients were now scheduled to attend the classes. Alternative forms of NE were made available such as self paced, interactive bb, internet classes and facilitated discussion classes.

Staff was permanently for at least four years at a clinic and then began to move each employee two years or 6 months for some of you in certain cases just as early as this year.

Participation increased to 49,197 after implementation of the EBT system and the implementation of the Income Questionnaire and many other requirements for information sharing with other programs.

Other changes include the introduction and implementation of the VENA counseling and tools, implementation of a reorganization that positively impacted BF Counselors, Senior Office Assistants, Nutritionist, Administrative Managers and Health Education Specialists.

In 2008 the Health District becomes a new City department.

Today we are saddened to say good bye to a pillar of the program. Vira has been here through thick and thin. One thing I know about Vira is that she faced every change in a positive manner even though these may have had caused some personal conflicts. At times Vira serving 200 clients a day dealing with clients who may have not have been very patient. She worked at Ysleta, San Vicente, Carolina, Fabens, Thomason, San Eli and every other center in between. She gave 28 years of her life for something she believed in and was there to help improve it every step of the way. There is no money that can repay her for her passion and commitment to this organization.

However, as an employee who has been here for a while, I am taking the liberty to say that Vira stayed here because she believed in what she was doing in spite of the many obstacles and challenges she faced over the years.

At the end of her career, Vira knows she helped many, many people in need. The need may have been financial but, oftentimes, Vira's comforting words of "it will be ok, we are here to help you" made a world of difference in people's lives just because someone like her acknowledged her, the client, and showed her compassion, respect and professionalism.

Vira, for every time you comforted someone, may you remember your life at WIC as the greatest opportunity to impact many lives. May your retirement be as fulfilling and heartwarming as your life at WIC. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to have known you and worked with you.

In closing, I will repeat a joke I once heard. It goes like this, a person died and when they were taken to heaven to the pearly gates, Saint Peter asked "tell me my child, what have you done on earth to deserve a place in heaven?" The person said, "I worked for WIC." Saint Peter said, "Oh that is where we should have started. By all means please come on in and rest. You have most certainly earned your place in heaven."