

New River Community Baby Shower

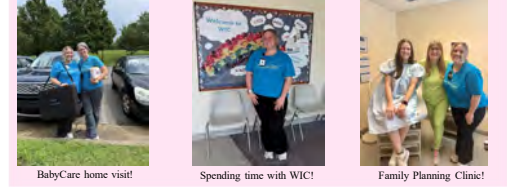
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 VDH Internship Academy Cohort 3, 2025

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Purpose:

The New River Valley offers many maternal and child health resources, yet families remain unaware of the support available to them. A significant gap in education around pregnancy and infant care often leaves new and expecting parents feeling unprepared. While the New River Health District's BabyCare program helps fill this, its reach is limited to enrolled families. To address these challenges, the Community Baby Shower was created primarily for underserved families. This event aimed to raise awareness and accessibility of vital resources, provide essential education, offer free raffles and baby supply giveaways, and create a warm, welcoming environment where families from all backgrounds can connect and feel supported. To better understand community needs and build meaningful relationships, I spent countless hours collaborating with BabyCare, WIC and our Women's Health Nurse Practitioner. This experience deepened my commitment to creating an inclusive event where every family felt empowered and cared for.



Challenges:

I was fortunate to encounter very few challenges while organizing the event; however, securing community partners to attend proved to be difficult. I extended invitations to over 50 organizations and was pleased to have more than 30 partners attend. To improve outreach, I made personal visits to their organizations to establish face-to-face connections, which significantly strengthened engagement. Funding was another challenge. Initially, there was no budget allocated for the event, so I planned with very limited resources in mind. Fortunately, we were able to secure a grant that allowed the event to exceed my expectations and become everything I had hoped for. Some partners are pictured below:



Outcomes:

- o The Community Baby Shower was held on July 19th from 11am-2pm in an event room at Radford University. We saw an incredible turnout, with over 100 families in attendance. The first 100 families each received a diaper bag valued at \$50, filled with essential items such as pacifiers, burp cloths, wash cloths, diapers, wipes, teething, and books. The Diaper Bags also turned into changing tables. Twelve prizes were awarded through a free raffle, featuring items like strollers, pack-and-plays, high-chairs, baby baths, nursing care kits, sound machines, and more.
- o More than 30 community partners participated in the event, including notable organizations such as WIC, Carilion Children's Hospital Safe Kids-who provided car seat checks, Childcare Aware, Postpartum Support Virginia, NRV Community Health Center, The Women's Resource Center, local libraries and DSS offices, CHIP of NRV, NRVcares Loving Support Lactation Consultants, the Virginia Tech Child Study Center, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. The Medical Reserve Corps was also present, offering families education on recommended immunizations for their children, as well as hands-on opportunities to learn and practice child and infant CPR and choking response.
- o Other notable tables included a miscarriage and stillbirth memorial wall, where families could write a due date or other kind words in memory of their baby. Additionally, there was a build your own bouquet flower bar, to correspond with the theme, "Baby in Bloom". Families also had the opportunity to decorate bibs and baby blocks for their little ones, using paint, markers, and more. An "affirmation mirror" table allowed families to write inspiring and positive messages on a mirror to remind themselves when they see their reflection. Children were able to create friendship bracelets, get their face painted, or color informational coloring books, making this a fun and educational event for all.
- o A post event survey revealed that 100% of respondents found the event helpful, felt supported and comfortable, and reported learning valuable parenting information and available resources. Countless guests expressed heartfelt gratitude, which was by far the most rewarding part of all. Specific quotes from guests included, "This was a wonderful event. I just wanted to say thank you so much. You have no clue how much this helped my husband and I out." and "This diaper bag was exactly what I needed, thank you for this great event."
- o Analytics and pictures from the event can be found below.

Types of Guests

Counties within the New River Valley that were served

The New River Health District team at the Community Baby Shower, featuring 'Community Baby Shower' shirts I hand-made for everyone.

Guests and partners

Raffle Prize Area

The flyer that was shared all over the New River Valley. Sharing this daily on numerous Facebook group pages greatly contributed to the turnout of the event. I also hand delivered the flyer to different community partners, took it to outreach events, and BabyCare home visits.

Ages of New and Expecting Parents that were Served

Interest in future events with NRHD

The Check-in Station, which contained all the logistics, Liability forms for all 'gifts' given, photo releases, and information about the event.

Flower Bar

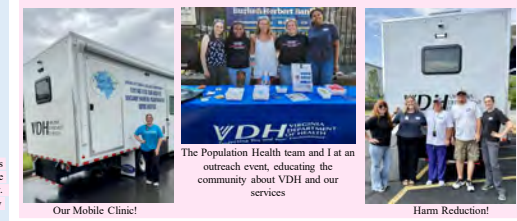
Memorial

Affirmation Mirrors

Coloring Station

Other Experiences:

During my internship, I was able to gain a broad and meaningful understanding of public health and the wide range of services that VDH offers. I spent most of my time and worked very closely with the BabyCare program, where I went on home visits and interacted with the families. Furthermore, I was able to spend time with the Disease Intervention Specialist, learning about the efforts to control and prevent communicable diseases, such as Sexually Transmitted Infections. I also participated in outreach events with the population health team, and worked with the Harm Reduction and Rise Above programs, which deepened my insight into community-based health initiatives. I also had the opportunity to accompany the Environmental Health team to inspect a Neurologically Impaired Assisted Living Facility. Last, I regularly shadowed our Women's Health Nurse Practitioner, our Resource Mothers, and WIC, gaining firsthand experience in maternal and child health.



Sincere Appreciation:

I am forever grateful to my mentor, Erin Spens, BSN RN, whose guidance and support have given me an invaluable learning experience. Erin's genuine compassion and empathy have set the highest standard for what healthcare should be, and I am truly inspired by her example. I owe much of my growth and success to her. I also want to thank the entire New River Health District team for welcoming me with open arms; and Dr. Noelle Bissell, the New River Health District Director, for giving me this opportunity. Lastly, I am so very thankful to the VDH Internship Academy for providing an enriching internship that has not only advanced my professional skills but also deeply touched my personal journey.



Closing Remarks:

My 10-week internship with VDH has been an incredible experience. I have learned so much, and it has only strengthened my passion for working with underserved populations, particularly mothers and children. Connecting with families and approaching each interaction with compassion and empathy has been deeply rewarding. I was able to use my Spanish-speaking skills to communicate directly with some families who might otherwise have needed a translator, which made those connections even more meaningful. My time with New River Health District would not have been complete without the BabyCare program, where I made strong connections with families from all backgrounds. While planning the Community Baby Shower, I had the opportunity to interact with community partners that I otherwise never would have met. I will be able to use these valuable contacts in my future work. I will hold the stories and lessons learned from these families close to my heart as I pursue my future endeavors as a physician. I have formed many lasting relationships and bonds, and for that, I am forever grateful. I have been offered a position to continue working with New River Health District as a Care Resource Coordinator while I finish my bachelor's degree, and I am thrilled to see what new journeys and lessons lie ahead through this opportunity.