

# WIC-SUPPORTED BREASTFEEDING INITIATION AND MAINTENANCE DURING SHORT-TERM INCARCERATION: A CASE STUDY

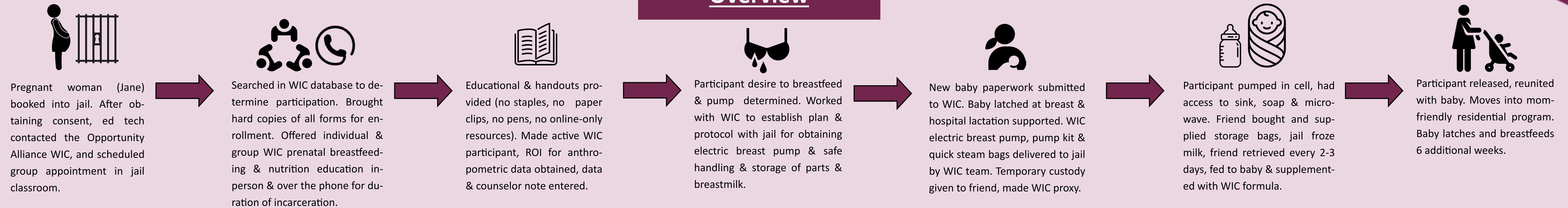


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THE OPPORTUNITY ALLIANCE WIC PROGRAM



## Overview



## Introduction

- According to a 2010 report titled *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children* published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, nationwide there were more than 120,000 incarcerated mothers with minor children ages 0-17 years.
- A 2004 Bureau of Justice Statistics report titled *Medical Problems of Prisoners* states that "among female prisoners, 4% of state and 3% of federal inmates said they were pregnant at the time of admission." (Glaze and Maruschak, 2010)
- Since 2010, the female jail population has been the fastest growing correctional population, increasing by an average of 3.4% annually. (Kaeble and Glaze, 2013)
- In September 2017 fifty-six of the 393 inmates at the Cumberland County Jail were female. WIC was informed in September 2017 that 4 inmates were pregnant. If the national statistic of 4% is used, it is safe to assume that on average, at any given time, 2.2% of the Cumberland County Jail female inmates are pregnant at the time of admission, an average of 1-2 inmates. (Cumberland County Sheriff's Office)

## Methods

- An education technician (ed tech) at the county jail contacted the Opportunity Alliance WIC program regarding pregnant women wishing to pump breastmilk while incarcerated. The jail would allow but would not provide the pumps.
- WIC BF Coordinator and WIC Director met with and certified three incarcerated women who were pregnant and interested in breastfeeding.
- One woman, Jane (pseud.), would remain incarcerated for 3 months postpartum. She wanted to breastfeed and provide pumped breastmilk until reunification.
- The ed tech at the jail was instructed to call WIC when Jane was in labor to facilitate pump exchange.
- WIC attempted to meet with Jane and baby at the hospital; security refused to acknowledge that Jane was on the unit. Pump was provided to the jail.
- WIC contacted hospital lactation and asked them to instruct Jane on pump use.
- Plan in place for baby to be taken care of by a family friend for the 3 months Jane would be incarcerated. Caretaker agreed to retrieve breastmilk twice weekly.
- At jail Jane had to ask a correction officer to bring her the pump cord and retrieve her milk once she had finished pumping.
- Soon she was transferred to a low security section of the jail, allowing increased freedom and the ability to keep the entire pump with her in her room. She had access to a fridge for milk storage.
- While allowed to have contact visits with her baby in the low security unit, she did not feel comfortable attempting to nurse at the breast.
- WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator was able to maintain contact, provide support, and have two in person meetings at the low security unit.
- Jane was released approximately 3 months after baby was born. She maintained full custody. Jane and baby moved into a baby-friendly sober living home. Baby latched without a problem and continued to breastfeed for six more weeks.

## Barriers

- Jane was hesitant to use the electric breast pump because she feared relying on the correctional officers for the necessary parts each time she needed it.
- WIC staff who visited the jail had to go through a background check including fingerprinting (up to a 2 week process).
- Dependent on hospital to complete initial postpartum pump demonstration.
- Lack of support both socially and from some jail staff.
- WIC clinic schedule and jail schedule. Maintaining contact with the client was challenging during incarceration.
- Postpartum women are not able to continue medications for opioid dependency in county jail; withdrawal can be immediate after birth.
- No contact rules prevent nursing and skin-to-skin contact at visitations.
- Mom may not be open to nursing in the hospital because she knows baby will be separated from her.
- Jail may not always have a safe and clean space for women to express her milk.
- Jane's baby and caretaker stayed local, not always the case.

## Client Outcomes

- Bonded with baby & increased parenting confidence for Jane.
- Maintained feeling of connection during separation.
- Reunited with baby upon release and housed at sober living facility.
- Pumped breastmilk for 3 months while incarcerated.
- Re-latched & breastfed for 6 weeks post reunification.

## Discussion

- Offering WIC services to incarcerated women who are pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum has the potential to support mothers and children during a potentially traumatic experience, helping them maintain their identity as parents and continue or start WIC participation.
- Upon release and the hopeful restoration of custody of their children, WIC participation can help families obtain needed services and support.
- Encouraging jails to permit WIC access to inmates and to establish protocols for in-cell pumping and safe handling & storage of breastmilk may improve breastfeeding and health outcomes for mothers and babies.
- Passing legislation designating breastfeeding as a medical condition would protect breastfeeding inmates' right to electric breast pumps.

## WIC Outcomes

- Created relationship with jail staff.
- Completed jail vetting; permitting future jail visits to new & established clients.
- Learned about challenges faced by incarcerated pregnant women.
- Maintained client as active WIC participant upon release.
- Furthered knowledge of incarceration policies and procedures.

## References

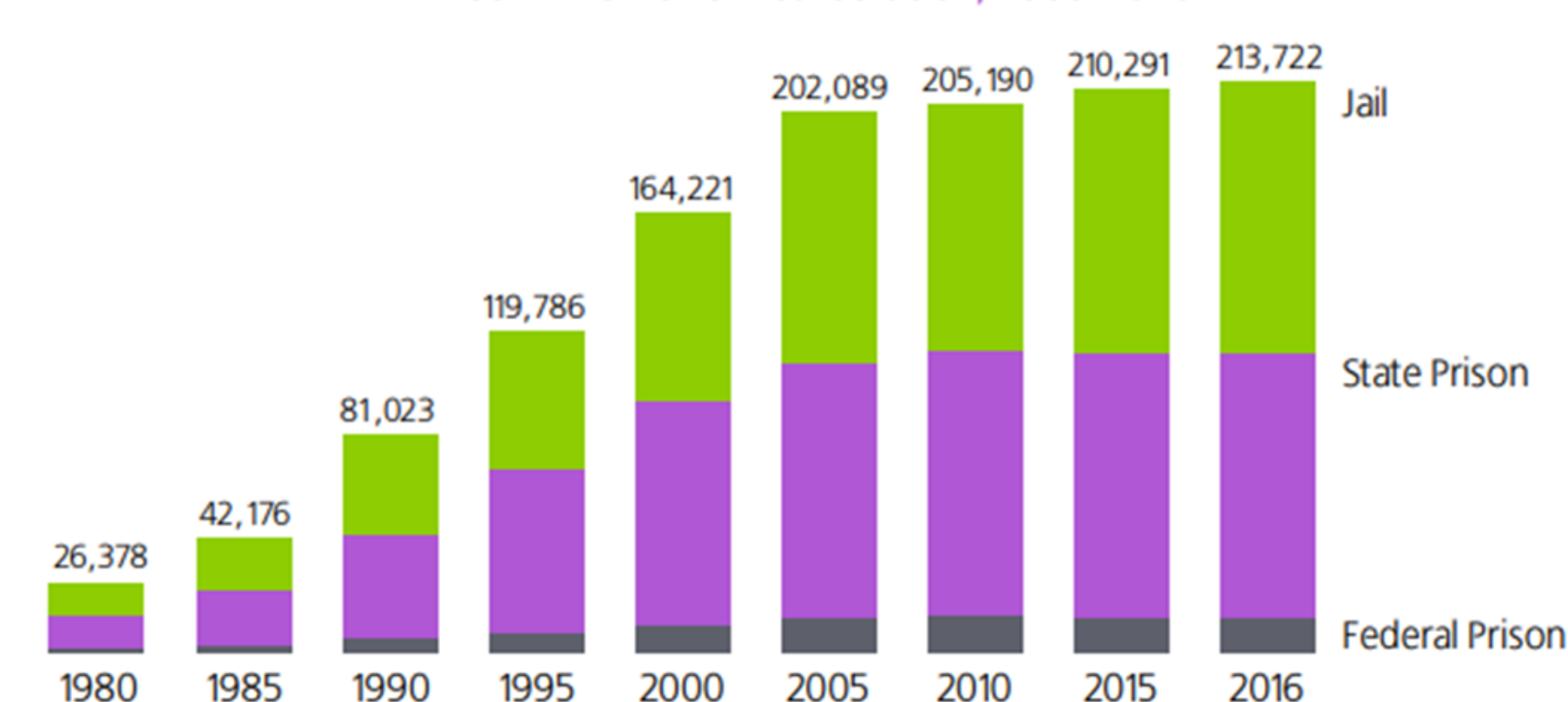
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Glaze, Lauren E, and Danielle Kaeble. "Correctional Populations in the United States, 2013." *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, Office of Justice Programs, Dec. 2014, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus13.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus13.pdf).

Glaze, Lauren E, and Laura M Maruschak. "Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children." *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, Office of Justice Programs, 30 Mar. 2010, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf).

Cumberland County Sheriff's Office, Corrections Division. "Confined Inmate List." [www.cumberlandso.org/235/Confined-Inmate-List](http://www.cumberlandso.org/235/Confined-Inmate-List)

Rise in Women's Incarceration, 1980-2016



Though many more men are in prison than women, the rate of growth for female imprisonment has been twice as high as that of men since 1980. There are 1.2 million women under the supervision of the criminal justice system. (The Sentencing Project, 2018)