

Insights

NICHQ Employee Spotlight: Sandra Widland

In honor of our [20th anniversary](#), we're sharing insights, memories and goals from the



Full name and title: Sandra Widland, MPH, Associate Project

Director

Years with NICHQ: 2.5 years

How has your background/experiences led you to join a national children's health organization?

My initial passion for public health sprung from my love for sports. I played tennis in college and spent most of my free time being outside and physically active, which motivated me to study Kinesiology as an undergraduate student. Upon graduating, I became interested in pairing Kinesiology with public health to work in the area of childhood obesity. I spent my early years working for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and used my knowledge of both physiology and health education on an initiative called Mass Moves (now called Mass in Motion). Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work on many public health improvement efforts, both nationally and internationally, and at various different levels of impact, whether that be preventative services, community engagement, or policy work. Thinking about these

experiences, I have felt most challenged, yet gratified, when working on children's health. So now with NICHQ, I have the opportunity to bring my unique experiences to improving children's health, which is exciting!

Favorite memory from a NICHQ project:

One project I'm involved with is the [Florida Children's Medical Services Learning and Action Network](#), an initiative that serves all children and youth with special health care needs in the state of Florida, regardless of insurance status and location. I'm also on the [Maternal Child Environmental Health ColIN \(MCEH ColIN\)](#), addressing lead poisoning and prevention within nine states across the country. Hearing families' stories are memories that are always embedded in my mind. Family members become involved in the work that we do and share their stories and knowledge of their child experiences from having a health condition. These memories drive me the most and keep my focus on the work that needs to be done to help create improvement.

Biggest lesson-learned when working on a quality improvement project:

With QI, you have to meet folks that are participating where they are at. Your goal is always improvement, but improvement needs to be realistic based on the resources available, knowledge of QI, and knowledge of the systems and barriers in place. So when you meet them where they are, it helps to relax the environment. You can really take a deep breath, get your bearings and understand what the next steps are. When you're starting a QI project, start small when testing a change that you hope will lead to improvement. To really experience the whole methodology behind what you are testing, focus on one person, one clinic or one provider. This will help you grasp what created the change (or not!) without the pressure to improve bearing down on you.

Funniest thing that ever happened on a NICHQ project:

I was in D.C. for a learning session and my colleagues joined me in finding my old apartment from when I went graduate school there, but I couldn't remember which one it was. We eventually found the apartment, but I wasn't sure if it was right because the front of the building had changed. I knew I would be able to identify the back of the building, so my colleagues hoisted me up over a wall to look behind the apartment. Someone from the apartment next door got nervous, so we quickly scurried away. It's a funny story, but it made me appreciate my colleagues, who are always there to literally lend me a shoulder when I need them.

What are you most proud of from your time with NICHQ?

I'm most proud of NICHQ's drive to improve health outcomes for children. Public health professionals know that statistics around certain health conditions are often pretty grim, especially for those at disproportionate risk of experiencing worse health outcomes. To work in a space where you have the opportunity to see real improvement in a defined, short period of time, with those who are disproportionately affected, is gratifying and rewarding, especially when you are so passionate about the work that you are doing.

What are your goals for NICHQ's future?

I believe that improvements in health care can be accelerated through better utilization of family partnerships. Recently, NICHQ profiled a family partner story about [two mothers who have been active in fighting for stronger lead prevention policies](#) in Michigan, after their own experiences with having a child exposed to high amounts of lead. By sharing their painful and personal stories coupled with their passion to ignite change, these brave moms campaigned for and secured funding to address lead in homes throughout Grand Rapids, Michigan. These women are now working closely with the Michigan State team of the [Maternal and Child Environmental Health Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network](#) to share their expertise and to continue driving improvement. That's incredible!