

Insights

NICHQ Employee Spotlight: Olivia Giordano



Each month, we profile a member of the NICHQ team and learn

more about their work and contributions to children's health. For this month's NICHQ Employee Spotlight, we speak with Olivia Giordano, MPH, Project Manager at NICHQ, as she shares how her work with [**NICHQ's Supporting Healthy Start Performance Project \(SHSPP\)**](#) is supporting 101 Healthy Start community sites to harness lessons learned, implement innovative approaches to improvement, and ultimately start to close the disparity gap in maternal and child health.

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

"As an undergraduate in New York City, I studied Global Public Health with a focus on food studies. This gave me a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the food insecurity and other health inequities impacting New York's communities of color. Upon graduation, I began working in communications at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I worked on a variety of public health publications and campaigns but was continually drawn to those focused on maternal and child health, such as the Health Department's Birth Justice and Early Intervention work. This led me to pursue my Master of Public Health in

Sociomedical Sciences with a certificate in Child, Youth, and Family Health. Upon completing my MPH, I was eager to join an organization devoted entirely to children's health and to dedicate my time to advancing and protecting the health of our nation's mothers and infants. That is what led me to NICHQ!"

Tell us about SHSPP and how this initiative supports Healthy Start programs across the country.

"The SHSPP is a cooperative agreement with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) within the Division of Healthy Start and Perinatal Services (DHSPS). Learn more about the project [here](#).

Our team serves as the Technical Assistance & Support Center (TASC) for the federal Healthy Start Program, a community-based federal program seeking to eliminate disparities in infant mortality and perinatal outcomes by working in communities across the country to improve systems of community care. The program currently consists of 101 projects in 34 states, Puerto Rico and Washington D.C.

TASC supports the 101 Healthy Start grantees by providing technical assistance (TA) on a variety of topics, such as breastfeeding, equity, fatherhood, and behavioral and mental health, among others. This support is delivered through various mediums, including all-grantee webinars; group-specific activities such as Cohorts, Learning Academies, the Healthy Start Collaborative Innovation Network (COIN), and a mentoring program; and 1:1 individualized TA provided by subject matter experts. TASC also provides capacity-building assistance by providing Healthy Start staff with scholarships to complete certifications and trainings, such as the Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC) training, the 24/7 Dads training, and wellness coaching training, among others. Our team aims to strengthen and enhance each Healthy Start project's ability to serve their clients and reduce racial disparities in health outcomes for infants, mothers, fathers, and families."

What are some of the biggest take-aways or findings from this SHSPP?

"Healthy Start grantees are rural, urban, border, and tribal communities where the infant mortality rate is at least 1.5 times the national average. These communities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as the racial disparities in poor health outcomes and food, housing, and economic insecurities they already experienced are exacerbated by the virus. Compounding this is the lack of access to technology and internet, which has posed a challenge for Healthy Start projects continuing to serve existing clients and enrolling new clients throughout the pandemic. Despite the many obstacles facing the grantees and their clients, the Healthy Start community remains as strong and committed to their work as ever. Moved by the resolve of this community, the TASC created the #HealthyStartStrong hashtag to lift up the program's perseverance and commitment to serving its clients. The TASC features grantee stories, including their creative strategies and solutions for engaging and supporting clients during COVID-19, in our monthly newsletter and during many of our webinars. Each day – especially over the past ten months – the grantees have demonstrated how unique and devoted the Healthy Start community is and remains to be. Their work inspires me every day and drives the TASC team to continue developing creative and effective TA and capacity-

building assistance to the Healthy Start community."

What are some 2021 goals for SHSPP and what are you and your team hoping to achieve?

"The SHSPP recently received supplemental funding from HRSA to complete activities related to COVID-19 and, as a result, successfully completed a Beyond COVID-19 webinar series and a Breastfeeding & COVID-19 webinar series, and launched a Healthy Start Support Group for Project Directors and Frontline Staff. In 2021, our team hopes to continue building out our COVID-19-related activities, including developing a virtual home visiting webinar series, a COVID-19 mental and behavioral health resources catalog, and a virtual services toolkit. We are also significantly expanding our group-specific TA offerings by launching several new cohorts (Fatherhood, CAN, Breastfeeding, and Evaluation) and Learning Academies (CAN and Quality Improvement). In doing so, we hope to further enhance grantees' knowledge around these topic areas and equip them to implement strategies to strengthen their project's activities."

What is your favorite memory from being a member of the SHSPP team?

"One of my favorite memories of working on the SHSPP is the planning and execution of our three-day Healthy Start Grantees' Meeting. We began planning before the COVID-19 pandemic began and our small, three-person team began adapting our plans when it became clear that a springtime in-person meeting would not be possible. Around this time, we welcomed our fourth team member, Senior Project Manager Nikki Maffei. Nikki was the perfect addition to our team and could not have arrived at a better time! Despite never meeting Nikki in person, our team immediately clicked and Nikki jumped right into action. We worked together to convert the meeting to a virtual platform and successfully host the Healthy Start Program's first-ever virtual meeting. The meeting culminated with a dance party, with Kenn leading the participants through 'the Healthy Start dance.' It was a great way to unwind after months of planning and feel connected to the TASC team and the broader Healthy Start community."

Interested in learning more about NICHQ team members? Read last month's [employee spotlight](#) featuring Becky Russell, MSPH, Senior Director, Applied Research and Evaluation