Breastfeeding-Friendly Communities: A Web of Support
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NMAIMH competencies addressed
Systems Expertise
- Community resources
Working with Others
- Collaborating
Thinking
- Analyzing information

“Breastfeeding is a natural “safety net” against the worst effects of poverty. If the child survives the first month of life (the most dangerous period of childhood) then for the next four months or so, exclusive breastfeeding goes a long way toward canceling out the health difference between being born into poverty and being born into affluence …. It is almost as if breastfeeding takes the infant out of poverty for those first few months in order to give the child a fairer start in life and compensate for the injustice of the world into which it was born.”

~James P. Grant, former Executive Director, UNICEF.

Breastfeeding is a public health issue with tremendous benefits to child, mother and community. Our role in supporting breastfeeding practices as a community begins with building our knowledge and resource base and encouraging families to strive towards healthy outcomes. Breastfeeding is one of the 18 outcomes specifically mentioned in the New Mexico Home Visiting Program Standards (p. 51) “Breastfeeding is provided for the baby.” World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated across the globe during the first week in August and the overarching goal is to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. This year’s theme is “Breastfeeding and Work: Let’s make it Work!” NM has a rich network of support available (see resources).

Knowledgeable and experienced home visitors can address many breastfeeding concerns during a prenatal visit and we can begin the conversation by asking, “Have you thought about you are going to feed your baby?” and continue to support the breastfeeding relationship with guidance and information. Often, new mothers may be wondering if their baby is getting enough breastmilk and some of the *signs of adequate breastmilk intake are:

- Baby should have approximately 6 wet diapers in a 24-hour period
• Baby should have at least 2 bowel movements every 24 hours during the early months of breastfeeding.
• Baby nurses frequently, averaging at least 8-12 feedings per 24-hour period.
• Baby’s swallowing sounds are audible as she/he is breastfeeding
• Baby should gain at least 4 ounces per week after the fourth day of life.
  (Note: it is common for babies to lose weight after birth)

*http://www.llli.org/faq/enough.html

Supporting breastfeeding-friendly practices means that home visitors know about and can access the latest research, information and resources. La Leche League (LLL) of NM is one such resource. LLL Leaders are accredited volunteers who can provide help in person, over the phone or online and is a good starting point for getting help and finding other resources. There is a breastfeeding helpline anyone can call (505) 821-2511 available daily 9 AM – 7 PM. LLL holds monthly meetings where mothers and home visitors can learn more about supporting breastfeeding.

NM also has a state-wide Breastfeeding Task Force (NMBFTF) that provides information about creating breastfeeding-friendly communities, hospitals and clinics, workplaces, schools and childcare. Additionally, the NMBFTF provides resources about breastfeeding and the law and tools such as state-wide statistics, chapter meetings, a registry of certified lactation professionals and support for regional community conversations and an annual summit. Check out their website: http://www.breastfeedingnewmexico.org/.

For situations that require information and support beyond the basics of breastfeeding, an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) is an expert who has met the highest standards in lactation and breastfeeding care through clinical requirements and a rigorous certifying exam process and is able to provide clinical management to breastfeeding mothers one-on-one. You can find a local IBCLC through this web site: http://www.ilca.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3337.

Breastfeeding can be a direct link in connecting children and families to home visiting outcomes:

**Breastfed babies are nurtured**- Breastfeeding may enhance mother-infant attachment through the release of oxytocin, helping reduce maternal anxiety and stress. Breastfeeding may serve as a coping mechanism for stressed mothers! (Dozier, 2012).

**Breastfed babies (& mothers) are physically and mentally healthier and ready for school**- 50% decrease in otitis media (ear infections), 64% decrease in gastroenteritis, 72% decrease in lower respiratory infections and 39% decrease in Type 2 diabetes. Maternal health cost savings: 28% reduction in maternal breast cancer, 21% reduction in ovarian cancer. Breastfeeding associated with increased IQ at age 4 (Brion, Lawlo, Matijasevich et al., 2011).
Breastfed babies are safe - Breastfeeding may protest against maternal-perpetrated child maltreatment, particularly child neglect. The odds of non-breastfed infants being maltreated by their mothers was 4.8 times higher than infants who were breastfed (Strathearn, 2009).

Breastfeeding families are connected to formal and informal supports - Nurse Family Partnership home visiting in Albuquerque achieved a 100% breastfeeding rate at birth and 48% of babies continue to breastfeed at 12 months of age. Home visitors across the state can help create a culture of formal and informal support for breastfeeding through professional development, community resources and referrals. Families connected to breastfeeding support result in lower health care costs and decreased employee absenteeism. If 80% of US families could exclusively breastfeed for 6 months the US would save $10.5 billion per year! (Bartick, 2010).

Home Visitors can unite a community by supporting breastfeeding-friendly practices that buffer the worst effects of poverty. We can participate in breastfeeding coalitions and task forces to help address barriers by creating awareness of programmatic, policy and legislative changes to support breastfeeding. Let’s make breastfeeding work!

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

- How are we currently supporting women and families in breastfeeding?
- What are cultural infant feeding norms in your community? How do these cultural practices support or challenge breastfeeding outcomes?
- Test your breastfeeding IQ [link](http://albuquerquebirthnetwork.org/test-your-breastfeeding-iq/)

References/Additional Resources

http://www.lllnm.org/
http://www.waba.org.my/

