

# The BUSINESS CASE for BREASTFEEDING

STEPS FOR CREATING A BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY WORKSITE

## OUTREACH MARKETING GUIDE



## B O T T O M L I N E B E N E F I T S



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# HOW EMPLOYMENT AFFECTS BREASTFEEDING

Employment plans play a key role in a woman's infant feeding decisions.

The reality is that although 55 percent of women with children under the age of 3 are employed, only one-fourth of employed women with children under 1 year of age combine working and breastfeeding for at least one month (Zinn 2000). The Healthy People 2010 goals of having 50 percent of women breastfeeding at 6 months and 25 percent at one year are not being met. A woman's career plans have the most significant impact on both exclusivity and duration of breastfeeding (McKinley 2004). This process appears to begin during the second trimester of pregnancy, with breastfeeding duration rates declining from weeks 2 to 12 postpartum (Taveras 2003). Most breastfeeding women who return to work have discontinued within the first month back at work (Cardenas 2005).

## Factors that Impact Breastfeeding among Working Women:

### Full-Time Employment

Women employed full-time are less likely to initiate breastfeeding and to continue breastfeeding once they return to work (Ryan 1997). Mothers planning to work part-time are more likely to initiate breastfeeding (Scott 2001) and to breastfeed longer (Fein & Roe 1998; Ryan 1997), with longest duration rates associated with part-time employment of less than 20 hours per week (Gielen 1991). Women who are not employed at all tend to breastfeed at least 8 weeks longer than mothers who work full-time (Fein & Roe 1998). The reality, however, is that many women choose full-time work due to economic necessity and fringe benefits (Galtry 1997).

### Ethnicity

Although maternal employment is an obstacle to breastfeeding in all ethnic groups, it is a particular concern in the African-American population. African-American women tend to have lower rates of breastfeeding and are more likely to work full-time and to return to work sooner than other population groups (Cricco-Lizza 2002; Caulfield 1998; Klerman 1994; Galtry 1997; Ryan 1997). The need for worksite support is especially crucial with African-American mothers (Hermann 2001).

### Income

Disadvantaged women of lower income levels appear to have greatest difficulty combining work and breastfeeding (Kimbrow 2006), and are often employed in low-wage jobs where job settings make continued breastfeeding difficult (Cricco-Lizza 2002). The Welfare Reform Act has led to more women returning to work sooner than they had planned, resulting in significant issues with maintaining lactation (Haider 2003).

### Maternity Leave

A 16-country study found that adequate maternity leave policies might increase breastfeeding sufficiently to prevent 0.5 to 1.0 post neonatal deaths per 1000 live births (Ruhm 2000). A 16-week maternity leave is considered ideal for helping mothers establish and maintain a good milk supply (Galtry 1997), and a leave of at least 6 weeks results in increased likelihood that women will initiate breastfeeding compared to those who take a shorter leave (Fein & Roe 1998). However, the reality is that many women in the United States are not able to take a long maternity leave due to financial pressures. African-American women and women employed in low wage jobs tend to take shorter maternity leaves (Nichols 2001; Anderson 1996).

Although the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act provides for unpaid maternity leave, many women do not take advantage of these benefits. Only 20 percent of mothers in the United States meet the eligibility criteria, which include employment in a workplace of more than 50 employees, working more than 24 hours per week and employment for at least a year of continuous service (Galtry 2003). Other women choose not to participate in FMLA because they cannot afford unpaid leave.

### Accommodations in the Workplace

There is ample evidence that a supportive worksite environment with a private place to express milk and access to a quality breast pump helps women feel more confident in continuing to breastfeed after returning to work (Galtry 1997; Frank 1998) and that lack of accommodations contributes to lower breastfeeding duration (Cobett-Dick & Bezek 1997). Women who do not remove milk regularly experience a drop in milk supply that leads to early weaning (Arora 2000).

# SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING WORKING MOTHERS

## *Solutions for Combining Employment with Breastfeeding*

Although balancing employment and motherhood can be challenging, a supportive worksite environment can help women reach their breastfeeding goals.

### **Help Mothers Succeed**

The research is clear that the following four components of a worksite lactation support program help create the positive environment that women need to be successful in combining employment with breastfeeding:

#### **1. A Place to Express Milk in Privacy.**

An employee can express milk efficiently using a quality electric breast pump as long as she is in a safe, clean location. Being able to express milk in a comfortable, private place helps release the hormones necessary for milk to flow. A designated space within the worksite for a lactation room is one of the health benefits most valued by breastfeeding employees.

#### **2. Flexible Breaks and Work Options.**

Women usually need to express milk every 2-3 hours (i.e., three times during a typical 8-hour work period). Each milk expression time takes around 15 minutes plus time to get to and from the lactation room. Normal paid break times are usually sufficient for women to express milk; in some situations any extra time needed can be made up before or after work.

#### **3. Education.**

Planning ahead can make the difference. First time mothers, in particular, cannot fully anticipate the type of breastfeeding support needed when they return to work, and human resource staff at the company play a critical role in helping them anticipate their needs for managing working and breastfeeding. Options include prenatal “lunch and learn” classes for pregnant employees and their partners and family members, prenatal education packets, online education through the company Web site, or a library of breastfeeding and parenting resources. A “return to work” class or consultation also helps mothers, fathers, and family members feel better prepared when they return to work by providing them with specific strategies that will be useful in their situation.

#### **4. Support.**

A positive, accepting attitude from both supervisors and co-workers helps breastfeeding employees feel good about their decision to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. Having access to a lactation consultant through a corporate program or in the community also provides the important technical support needed to deal with the initial and ongoing challenges of breastfeeding.

It is possible for women to successfully breastfeed after returning to work. Lactation and health professionals can be instrumental in providing practical solutions. Following are a few of the common challenges working mothers face, and strategies that can help.

### **Lack of Support**

#### *The Issues:*

Support from family (especially the baby’s father and maternal grandmother), friends, and the workplace is critical. Many women report their workplace environment is also not conducive to breastfeeding or they are wary of approaching a supervisor and colleagues about their needs.

#### *Strategies that Work:*

- Tell women about breastfeeding mothers’ groups in your community. New mothers derive confidence from talking with other mothers who have breastfed their babies.
- Start a support group for working mothers in your community.
- Involve the baby’s father and maternal grandmother in education efforts.
- Encourage worksites to facilitate mother-to-mother support. Successful worksite support ideas used by some companies include:
  - Informal mothers’ groups over lunch;
  - Electronic discussions among breastfeeding employees through the company’s Web site or e-mail listserv group; and
  - Bulletin boards posted in lactation rooms for users to share stories and successes.
- Remind employers that workplaces may make other accommodations such as fitness breaks; supporting breastfeeding employees is an added health benefit as it results in reduced healthcare costs for the company.

### **Lack of Space for Expressing Milk**

#### *The Issues:*

Although women employed in managerial office positions may have a private office that can be locked, it is far more common for women to be stationed in modular cubicles or open spaces, or employed in job settings that lack privacy. In addition, some worksite environments are unsanitary and may not be conducive to expressing milk. In those situations, mothers should be counseled about ways to maintain their milk supply so that they can continue to breastfeed when they are home with their baby.

### *Strategies that Work:*

- Help women develop a personal breastfeeding plan for when they return to work that accounts for work hours, environmental factors, childcare options, and milk expression/feeding options (Biagioli 2003).
- Help women consider creative options for expressing milk in privacy, preferably before they go out on maternity leave. Possibilities include a private office of a co-worker, a conference room, dressing room, etc.
- Encourage the mother to approach a company nurse, member of the wellness team, or supervisor about the need for a lactation room. The *Easy Steps to Supporting Breastfeeding Employees* booklet provides many useful options.
- Approach workplaces in your community to advocate for breastfeeding-friendly worksites. Materials in *The Business Case for Breastfeeding* can be used in educating managers and human resource staff.

### **Lack of Flexible Scheduling Options**

#### *The Issues:*

Flexible breaks are not always possible in some worksite settings, such as factories, schools, and other settings. Women may also be concerned about schedule disruptions affecting meetings and other important time-sensitive activities that may make pumping at regular intervals a challenge.

#### *Strategies that Work:*

- Explore with the mother her personal work schedule to help her devise appropriate milk expression times (approximately every 3 hours).
- Provide information on where to access a high quality electric breast pump to efficiently remove milk and minimize time needed to pump (see the “*Resource Guide*” of the *Toolkit* CD ROM for details about accessing quality breast pumps).
- Counsel women on how to establish and build milk supply before returning to work.
- Remind women that smokers are often provided breaks to support an unhealthy practice; taking her allotted leave time to express milk is a positive practice that helps both the mother and her employer.
- Encourage the mother to speak confidently with her supervisor regarding her needs.
- Provide employers with information about the relatively simple needs of breastfeeding employees and evidence that their temporary needs for flexible scheduling are cost effective. This information can have a significant impact when framed in terms that are relevant to the employer.

### **Modesty Concerns**

#### *The Issues:*

Sensitivity about breastfeeding is a primary barrier to breastfeeding in all regions of the United States. Although there is growing support for women breastfeeding in public, many mothers nevertheless worry that their breasts will be exposed while breastfeeding or pumping, and do not want to make other people uncomfortable. Mothers who return to work may be embarrassed to speak with supervisors about their needs, and worry about what their colleagues might say. They may also worry that their breasts will become too full and leak while at work.

#### *Strategies that Work:*

- Teach simple strategies for breastfeeding discreetly.
- Teach methods to prevent leaking while at work (e.g., regular milk expression, folding arms to discreetly put pressure over the breast if she feels the milk flow letting down, wearing nursing pads, and bringing along an extra sweater or jacket to cover up).
- Help mothers explore options for expressing milk when they are at work.
- Help her feel proud of breastfeeding, even if people around her are not always aware of the benefits.

### **Real or Perceived Low Milk Supply**

#### *The Issues:*

“I don’t make enough milk” is a common concern of new mothers, and the primary reason women give for weaning during the first 6 months (Lewallen 2006). Research shows that practices that help establish a healthy milk supply in the early days, including frequent, efficient feeding or milk removal, have a direct positive effect on long-term milk supply. This is especially important for mothers who must be separated from their babies. Many women are not aware of how their bodies make milk, and over half of women do not have professional assistance once they are discharged from the hospital. (Lewallen 2006). Health professionals can assist breastfeeding mothers with good information and support beginning prenatally through the postpartum period so that they can continue to have abundant milk after they return to work.

#### *Strategies that Work:*

- Offer to teach a prenatal class at worksites in your community.
- Teach mothers how the breast makes milk, and how to get a good start with breastfeeding through appropriate positioning and attachment of the baby.
- Encourage mothers to feed their babies 8-12 times every 24 hours in the early days to help develop the important prolactin and oxytocin receptors that help ensure a healthy milk supply later on.

- Tell mothers where they can get help in their communities. Research shows that providing new mothers with names of breastfeeding resources increases duration rates among employed women (Biagioli 2003).
- Encourage mothers to phase back to work gradually, if possible, to allow them to adjust to the changing needs of their bodies in maintaining milk supply. Options include: part-time work for a brief period, telecommuting from home, job sharing, or simply resuming work on a day near the end of the usual work week. For instance, starting on Thursday or Friday in a standard weekday job would give a breastfeeding mother an immediate weekend to adjust to the stress of being separated from her baby.
- This can be tailored to the mother's work week schedule.
- Help women access a high quality electric breast pump when they return to work to continue to express milk effectively. Breastmilk is produced in direct response to the amount of milk removed from the breast.

## **Stress**

### *The Issues:*

Balancing the demands of family and work can cause many women to feel fatigued and generally stressed. For some, the idea of breastfeeding can seem particularly overwhelming

if they are employed in a job environment they feel will be especially challenging for breastfeeding. These stresses can be even more pronounced for first-time mothers (Cronin 2003). Fatigue often adds to the stress, although research shows that breastfeeding women are no more fatigued than non-breastfeeding women (Callahan 2006). Stress inhibits the release of oxytocin, the hormone responsible for good milk flow, preventing mothers from releasing milk and making a good milk supply.

### *Strategies that Work:*

- Demonstrate simple relaxation techniques to help minimize fatigue and relieve stress.
- Offer options for managing work and home demands.
- Teach women ways to encourage the milk to “let down” or flow easily (e.g., bringing a photo, blanket, or article of clothing with the baby's smell, soft music, warm compresses, and nipple stimulation before pumping).
- Tell women about mother-to-mother support groups in your community or already in place through a corporate lactation program, or encourage them to start a support group at their workplace or in their community.
- Help mothers to feel confident in their efforts to give baby the best!



# SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR OUTREACH TO WORKSITES

Successful advocacy begins with increasing your understanding of the employers in your community. Developing a working relationship based on the needs of the employers is critical. A consumer-based, audience-driven approach includes practical solutions that address their barriers while capitalizing on the powerful motivators that can help “sell” a program to businesses.

## **Who is Providing Lactation Support Services?**

A 2005 national survey of businesses conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that around 28 percent of large businesses (500+ employees), 20 percent of mid-sized businesses (100-499 employees), and only 8 percent of small businesses (1-99 employees) provide at least some lactation support services, usually maternity leave and flextime. Only 19 percent of all businesses currently provide a lactation program or a designated area for milk expression. One study of Colorado businesses found that the businesses most likely to provide lactation support services fall in the large company category (Dunn 2004).

## **What are Potential Motivators for Employers?**

### **Profits**

Nearly all business decisions are made in relationship to profit and loss considerations. When the market is particularly tight this can be the overriding concern as businesses struggle to keep the company financially solvent. Breastfeeding advocates typically promote messages about supporting breastfeeding as “the right thing to do.” Messages are more effective if they are framed around the impact of breastfeeding on the company’s bottom line. (*The Business Case for Breastfeeding* provides these important bottom-line benefits.)

### **Keeping Valuable Employees**

Employee turnover is costly for business. Companies are interested in retaining valuable employees who go on maternity leave. Some companies realize that providing family-centered programs to help employees balance family and work commitments can positively impact retention rates, resulting in cost savings to the company.

### **Positive Public Relations**

Many companies are drawn to programs that build goodwill within the community because it sets them apart from their competitors. Outreach programs that include recognition of breastfeeding-friendly worksites can be particularly effective because they provide businesses with a competitive advantage when recruiting staff or seeking favorable publicity in their respective communities.

## **Proven Track Record**

Employers are interested in programs that are proven to be successful. Knowing that other companies have worked through challenges and enjoyed success can make outlaying funds for a new program more palatable. It is especially important to provide examples of supportive worksites similar to the one with which you are engaged in outreach (see the “Recognize Supportive Companies” section on page 10; examples of successful worksite lactation programs are also found throughout the materials in *The Business Case for Breastfeeding* kit).

## **Legislation**

More than 40 U.S. states have enacted breastfeeding-related legislation. Several states now have legislation involving the rights and responsibilities of employers in supporting breastfeeding employees. If your state has enacted this type of legislation, inform local companies and offer helpful support and technical assistance so they can meet the legal requirements. (See the “Employment Legislation” section on page 11 of this booklet, as well as examples of legislation enacted by states on the CD-Rom.) Remember that discussion of legal issues can sometimes be perceived as veiled threats, so always keep your tone positive and helpful.

## **Solutions to Employer Concerns**

Positive strategies for addressing employer concerns will help produce the “can do” spirit instrumental in bringing about change in workplaces. Refer to *Easy Steps to Supporting Breastfeeding Employees* for practical details in setting up a lactation support program.

## **Lack of Awareness**

### *The Issues:*

Most employers are unaware of the positive benefits of a lactation support program, including the impact it can have on recruitment, absenteeism, and turnover rates (Dunn 2004). Unless employers have experience with breastfeeding (either personally or through a partner or other family member who breastfed), they may not be aware of the important health reasons to breastfeed and the advantages that a supportive environment can provide their company. Libbus (2002) found that the rates of breastfeeding are much lower among employers than the general population – only half of employers have breastfed compared to more than 70 percent in the general population. Research findings show that many employers are also unaware of the needs of breastfeeding employees. One study found that more than 67 percent of employers did not believe they had any breastfeeding employees (Bridges 1997) despite the fact that more than nearly 73 percent of new mothers initiate breastfeeding today.

*Strategies that Work:*

- Offer to provide information about the basic needs of breastfeeding employees in existing company trainings for managers and supervisors; management attitudes are often influenced through these types of established trainings.
- Show employers the breastfeeding initiation rates in your community so they are aware of the large numbers of women who are breastfeeding today. You can also show them the duration rates of your community at 6 and 12 months. Explain that returning to work is one of the biggest barriers to continued breastfeeding, and a supportive environment can make a difference.
- Help them see that breastfeeding is an important national health priority and benefits the company's bottom line.
- Focus on the most important basic needs of breastfeeding employees. Most businesses will be more comfortable starting with a small pilot program that includes a simple lactation room rather than starting with a comprehensive lactation support program.

**Myths about Breastfeeding**

*The Issues:*

Employers typically are unaware of ways breastfeeding impacts the work environment and performance of employees. Common beliefs are:

- MYTH: Formula fed infants are as healthy as infants who receive human milk.
- MYTH: Breastfeeding employees will be more fatigued than non-breastfeeding women.
- MYTH: Expressing milk in the workplace will interfere with an employee's productivity.
- MYTH: Women who have given birth are not as committed to their job.
- MYTH: Breast milk is a biohazard and could pose liability concerns.

*Strategies that Work:*

- Show employers the risks associated with not breastfeeding.
- Remind employers that all new mothers and fathers are tired, no matter how they feed their babies, and that stress can add to this feeling of fatigue. Providing a supportive worksite environment can help lower stress and help women feel good about continuing to provide their milk.

- Explain how little time is actually needed for an employee to express milk during the work period.
- Point out the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) guidelines showing that breast milk is not an "occupational exposure." See the U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA Web site at: [www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show\\_document?p\\_table=INTERPRETATIONS&p\\_id=20952/](http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=INTERPRETATIONS&p_id=20952/)
- Focus on the ways providing a supportive environment can increase employee retention and productivity.

**Dealing with Intimate Issues in the Workplace**

*The Issues:*

Although breastfeeding is natural and normal, many people in the United States view it as personal and private. This may be because breasts are widely used to sell commercial products and are rarely portrayed as a natural part of infant feeding. Some employers may be reluctant to discuss breastfeeding and feel it is an activity that belongs at home, not at the workplace. Some say it is uncomfortable to think of their female employees as breastfeeding women.

*Strategies that Work:*

- If possible, identify a "champion" in the workplace authority structure who personally breastfed or whose partner may have breastfed. A breastfeeding "champion" may be more effective at swaying managers to commit to the program.
- Help employers see that breastfeeding is a natural way to feed infants.
- Avoid materials with photo images depicting exposed breasts or women breastfeeding, as this can add to the employer's discomfort or cause misunderstanding about the nature of a lactation support program.
- Advocate for community media messages that promote breastfeeding. Encourage local media outlets to air breastfeeding public service announcements, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) National Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign ([www.womenshealth.gov/](http://www.womenshealth.gov/)) or the WIC National Breastfeeding campaign television and radio spots. ([www.fns.usda.gov/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/))

**Lack of Space for a Mothers' Room**

*The Issues:*

Employers know that space equals money. Allocating premium space for a lactation room is a primary concern for business managers. Many imagine that a full-sized office space will be needed and are generally unaware that a space as small as 4' x 5' could suffice.

### *Strategies that Work:*

- Offer assistance to employers in identifying little used spaces that could be converted to a lactation room. Refer to the booklet, *Easy Steps to Supporting Breastfeeding Employees* for concrete strategies.
- Ask that facility staff be included in discussions so that future renovations or new building construction can include space for lactation rooms from the outset.
- If no space is available, offer other solutions such as a private office, conference room, dressing room, etc.

## **Flexible Scheduling**

### *The Issues:*

Many employers are concerned about allowing flexible scheduling, particularly if it is not standard company policy. Some companies have rigid scheduling systems, and “flex” time is not an option. Some are unaware of the actual amount of time needed to express milk and assume that employees will be away from their work station for long periods of time.

### *Strategies that Work:*

- Refer to the *Easy Steps to Supporting Breastfeeding Employees* booklet for effective outreach and educational strategies with employers.
- Inform employers of the actual time required to express milk. Most women need a total of 1 hour or less per day to express milk, which can easily be accommodated during regular breaks (Slusser 2004).
- Provide options for ways employees can make up any extra time that may be needed, including coming in early or staying late, using a portion of the meal period, or taking unpaid leave.
- Remind employers that supporting breastfeeding women means supporting healthy activities that will reduce health care costs. Provide data to validate these claims.
- Encourage employers to discuss individual scheduling needs with their breastfeeding employees. The number of breaks and amount of time needed to pump varies greatly from woman to woman and depends on many factors, including the age of her infant, whether solid foods or supplemental feedings are being given, her breast storage capacity, and the mother’s personal breastfeeding goals.
- Help employers see that providing this flexibility is a temporary need of employees. As babies grow the need to express milk begins to diminish. Most nursing mothers are no longer expressing milk regularly by 12-15 months postpartum.

## **Resistance from Other Employees**

### *The Issues:*

Some employers are concerned that providing new programs such as a lactation support program might cause resistance among other workers (Frank 1998). Employer concerns over potential negative reaction among co-workers is a significant barrier to implementing new programs, and employers carefully weigh those perceived barriers against the potential benefits of the program (Colella 2001). Employers know that perception of unfairness by co-workers can predict numerous work-related variables such as trust in management, willingness to take on extra tasks and roles, and overall job performance (Seijts 2004).

Fortunately, research shows that overall, most male and female co-workers, particularly if they have children of their own, are supportive of company health benefit programs that include lactation support services. However, other co-workers might perceive that these services are unfair, especially if they feel they must cover for the breastfeeding employee and assume some of her tasks while she is expressing milk. Research also shows that breastfeeding women, as well, are often concerned about potential negative reaction among colleagues (Frank 1998).

### *Strategies that Work:*

- Promote the program as a company health benefit.
- Remind employers that family-friendly policies benefit all employees by creating an environment that helps workers feel good about the company.
- Communicate positive reasons for the program that directly affect co-workers, including lower absenteeism and turnover rates, higher productivity, and faster return to the workplace.
- Remind employers that companies may accommodate other needs of employees (such as fitness programs, etc.).
- Suggest that co-worker representatives be included in the initial planning phase of the company’s program. This helps build buy-in.
- Encourage the mother to maintain ongoing communication with both her supervisor and her co-workers to ensure that the program is working well.
- Offer to provide a short presentation on breastfeeding for supervisors and/or employees at an employee “Lunch and Learn” session.
- Provide a breastfeeding exhibit at company employee wellness fairs.
- Provide information and newsletter “drop ins” that can be inserted in company materials and communications (see sample available in the *Tool Kit*).
- Use humor, when possible, to diffuse any tension that may arise.

## Breastfeeding is a Non-Issue

### *The Issues:*

Companies that do not employ large numbers of female workers often believe a lactation support program is a non-issue for their company and therefore unnecessary. Other employers perceive that because they have received few requests for lactation services, a substantiated need does not exist (Dunn 2004).

### *Strategies that Work:*

- Show employers that companies can experience health care costs savings by also providing support to partners of male employees (Cohen 2002).
  - Explain to employers that many women discontinue breastfeeding within the first month back at work because of the worksite barriers; a supportive environment could help encourage these women to continue breastfeeding longer.
- Show employers examples of varied models of workplace programs (both male- and female-dominated companies) that have been effective in providing lactation support. For instance, military programs, the Pentagon, and other traditionally male-oriented organizations provide outstanding support programs for female soldiers and staff.
  - Remind employers that traditionally male-oriented workplaces may pose even greater challenges for women because of embarrassment and concerns over negative comments. Providing a supportive atmosphere will help new mothers feel confident and comfortable returning to a male-oriented company and continuing to breastfeed.



# EFFECTIVE OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

## Approach the Right People

### Human Resources Division

Most successful outreach programs begin by targeting the human resources division of a company. This division serves as a link between management and the employees, and provides services and programs that foster positive relationships, improve job satisfaction of employees, and create a climate that enhances productivity and loyalty. Human resource managers deal with employee recruitment programs, company compensation and health benefits, employee training programs, health and safety issues, and employee relations.

#### *Show Human Resource Managers:*

- How a lactation support program fits within the range of services and work-life concerns addressed by the company.
- How a program can potentially impact the company in positive ways that are of greatest interest to human resource managers.

### Wellness Program

Company wellness programs, which are responsible for providing a safe and healthy environment for employees, are one of the best ways to approach a company. Workplace wellness programs offer a wide variety of occupational health- and safety-related services aimed at keeping employees healthy, happy, and productive, with ultimate goals of reducing absenteeism and turnover rates. Helping employees deal with family-related issues is included within the scope of these programs and a lactation support program fits easily under this umbrella.

#### *Show Wellness Staff:*

- Shared goals of improving health for employees.
- How a lactation support program can decrease disease and illness in both mother and child.
- Basic needs of breastfeeding employees.
- Ways to keep breastfeeding employees safe through milk expression in a sanitary and safe environment. Pumping in the restroom is unsanitary.

### Occupational Health Nurse

Many companies hire occupational health nurses to deliver health and safety programs and services to workers. Occupational health nurses are usually employed within the human resource division or directly within the wellness division. Their role is to assist in prevention and management of illnesses and injuries among employees and

to promote a healthy environment for the workplace. They often spearhead smoking cessation and fitness and nutrition programs and provide counseling services for employees who are experiencing family-related needs and issues. They are experts in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) laws that relate to the workplace, including eligibility regulations for the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

With their focus on reducing employee absenteeism rates and lowering health care costs, occupational health nurses are generally viewed by managers as valuable team players. Gaining the ear of the occupational health nurse can be an important step toward gaining eventual support from decision-makers. Learn more about the role of occupational health nurses at the Web site for the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses, [www.aaohn.org](http://www.aaohn.org).

#### *Show Occupational Health Nurses:*

- How breastfeeding support programs fit with shared goals of improving the health of employees and helping new parents deal with family-related issues.
- The basic needs of breastfeeding employees.
- How to access lactation experts and sources for safe, high quality electric breast pumps in the community.

### Breastfeeding Employees

Never underestimate the power of an employee in bringing about change. Breastfeeding employees who are willing to speak up about their needs can be influential in convincing managers to make important changes that support their efforts.

#### *Show Breastfeeding Employees:*

- Strategies for speaking with supervisors and human resource staff about their needs, including:
  - How a lactation program benefits the company's bottom line;
  - Specific needs, including privacy and flexible breaks for milk expression;
  - Potential options for a small private area that could serve as a lactation room;
  - Research shows most co-workers are supportive of lactation support programs;
  - Reminding supervisors that this is a temporary need, and that the company accommodates other needs of employees (including smoking breaks and exercise programs, if applicable).
- How their advocacy can help pave the way for breastfeeding employees in the future.

## Make a Personal Visit

Most employers prefer to learn about breastfeeding support programs through personal contacts and visits. Employers rarely look at documents received through the mail, and mass mailings are expensive and generally ineffective.

### Sample Outreach Plan:

1. Send a cover letter to the human resource manager to announce your group's interest in providing support for working mothers and to arrange a personal visit.
2. Follow up by telephone to set up a brief in-person meeting.
3. Schedule a short 15-20 minute visit to provide materials and to briefly discuss the following:
  - How supporting breastfeeding will impact the company's bottom line
  - Rates of breastfeeding in the state and, if possible, the community. Sources of data include:
    - National and State data – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Immunization Survey at [www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding)
    - Community data – may be available from the local hospital, WIC agency, or breastfeeding coalition
  - Health imperative of breastfeeding
  - The simple needs of breastfeeding employees
  - Ways you or your group can provide technical assistance
4. Follow up with a phone call after the visit and offer additional materials as needed.

## Tell Them What They Want to Know

When promoting the importance of a breastfeeding-friendly worksite, focus both verbal and written messages on the bottom line: the simple needs of breastfeeding employees and how meeting their needs will produce cost savings to the company. Although employers need to know about the health imperative of breastfeeding, that message will be received best when it is directly tied to financial benefits.

Messages should also focus on shared goals. Show how a lactation support program will fit with the program goals already established by the company to reduce absenteeism and turnover rates, as well as improve employee morale and productivity.

## Use Professional Materials

Employers believe that the appearance of materials makes a statement about the value of the information communicated. Materials provided to employers must be packaged in a polished and professional manner and designed to fit the storage needs of the employer. Keep in mind that most employers are regularly bombarded with high quality materials. Homemade packets stuffed with copied or unprofessional materials are likely to end up in the garbage can.

Volume is also discouraging, so limit both the amount of materials and technical information. The goal is not to train employers to become lactation consultants, but to encourage them to take simple steps to provide a supportive atmosphere. Since busy employers will not likely read past the first few paragraphs, use those important "first" words to focus immediately on the desired action requested and its cost benefit.

## Offer Technical Assistance

Offer names of resources available in the community (see the "Resource Guide" section of the *Toolkit* CD ROM). Few employers have the time, expertise, or interest to research ways to meet breastfeeding needs of employees. Provide:

- Names of lactation consultants or others in the community who can teach prenatal employee lunch-and-learn classes and assist breastfeeding employees who have questions or concerns.
- Contact information for the local breastfeeding coalition or other groups available to assist the company in setting up a lactation room or program.
- Recommended breastfeeding materials and posters for employees.
- Names of local distributors of high quality breast pumps for working women.

## Recognize Supportive Companies

Recognition programs are highly valued by many organizations, particularly when they include visibility in the local media. Some local breastfeeding coalitions and state health agencies have also set up criteria for breastfeeding-friendly businesses and designate businesses that meet the criteria as "breastfeeding-friendly."

Examples of recognition programs that routinely recognize supportive worksites:

**Within Reach Program of Washington State**  
[www.withinreachwa.org/ourservices/breastfeeding.htm/](http://www.withinreachwa.org/ourservices/breastfeeding.htm/)

**Oregon Department of Human Services**  
[oregon.gov/DHS/ph/bf/working.shtml/](http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/bf/working.shtml/)

**Texas Mother-Friendly Worksite Program**  
[www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/lactate/mother.shtml/](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/lactate/mother.shtml/)

### **Promote a Breastfeeding-Friendly Community**

Build a strong community-based breastfeeding promotion initiative to help mothers feel confident and comfortable breastfeeding. Identify local businesses that are supportive of working mothers and offer to help generate media coverage. Reinforce with additional positive messages about breastfeeding throughout the community so that women, their family members, and the general public – including employers – will begin to see that breastfeeding is the cultural and community norm in your area.

## **EMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION**

Breastfeeding legislation has grown considerably in the United States over recent years, with more than 40 states now providing legislation primarily addressing a mother’s right to breastfeed in public places. Several states have expanded their breastfeeding laws to include provisions that protect her right to express milk in the workplace. Most of these laws require that employers provide reasonable time and private accommodations for employees to express milk at the workplace. A few examples of legislative language include:

**California...**requires employers to provide break time for employees to express milk and to make reasonable efforts

to provide a location other than a toilet stall for expressing milk, with a penalty for non-compliance. The governor of California is authorized by executive order to ensure that State employees are provided adequate facilities for breastfeeding and expressing milk.

**Hawaii...**states that it is an unlawful or discriminatory practice for an employer or labor organization to refuse to hire a lactating employee. This non-discriminatory provision includes a penalty for terminating an employee because the employee breastfeeds or expresses milk at work.

**Minnesota...**adds the provision that employers must provide a room or location that is not only private but sanitary.

**Mississippi...**requires childcare providers to (a) provide a sanitary place for milk expression or breastfeeding, (b) train staff in the appropriate handling and storage of human milk, and (c) display breastfeeding promotional materials.

**Texas...**authorizes the designation of “Mother-Friendly” for employers who provide supportive worksite policies for breastfeeding employees.

**Washington...**encourages employers to provide a supportive environment for breastfeeding employees, and includes an incentive program for compliance. See the “Legislative Language” examples on the CD-ROM for more information about legislation affecting working women that has been enacted by a variety of states. For a complete listing of current breastfeeding laws in the United States, check the La Leche League Web site at [www.la lecheleague.org/Law/LawBills.html/](http://www.la lecheleague.org/Law/LawBills.html/)

For help in advocating for breastfeeding laws that protect working women in your community, contact breastfeeding coalitions in states that have successfully lobbied for legislation to benefit from lessons learned.

## SNAPSHOTS: OUTREACH PROGRAMS THAT **WORK!**

### **Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington**

*A Program of the Washington State WithinReach Program, formerly known as Healthy Mother Healthy Babies Coalition of Washington State.*

The Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington (BCW), comprised of 23 local coalitions and 1,500 individuals, has been actively involved in organized worksite outreach for five years. Members successfully worked with business groups to establish a law in Washington to encourage employers to support their breastfeeding employees. The law was used as a catalyst for effective local outreach activities. Local coalitions contact targeted businesses in their community and respond to complaints from breastfeeding employees by offering technical assistance to companies. The BCW also provides free downloadable resources, including the “Working and Breastfeeding: It’s Worth It!” packet in English and Spanish for employees and employers. At the centerpiece of their efforts is the prestigious “Outstanding Employer Award,” an annual recognition of an exemplary breastfeeding-friendly business. BCW believes this prestigious award is greatly valued by businesses, and it garners significant media coverage.

#### *Lessons Learned*

- Recognition events, powerful motivators for businesses, work best when staged as a public relations “event” such as a luncheon with local dignitaries and the media.
- Individuals who are part of a particular community are more effective in making inroads with local businesses.
- Outreach works best when people seize opportunities, such as offering help to an employer whose partner is pregnant, or benefiting from connections people may have with individuals in the company.
- Link visiting a business to other activities. For example, offer to provide an informal brown bag lunch for employees and supervisors on a related topic such as “How to return to work after the baby is born,” and use that opportunity to dialogue about ways the company could support breastfeeding employees.

#### **Contact:**

Program Coordinator  
Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington  
11000 Lake City Way NE, Suite 301  
Seattle, WA 98125  
(206) 281-8032  
[www.withinreachwa.org/](http://www.withinreachwa.org/)

### **Texas Mother-Friendly Worksite Program**

*Under the Auspices of the Texas Department of Health Services*

The Texas Mother-Friendly Worksite Program has been successfully conducting outreach to Texas businesses since 1995. The program began as a simple health agency employee lactation support program within the WIC Program. When subsequent legislation was passed encouraging employers to provide support, the State health system responded by sending an official letter from the State Health Commissioner to 50,000 Texas businesses, informing them of the law and the model program in the health agency, and inviting them to apply for designation as a mother-friendly business. The program quickly gained momentum. To date, Texas has designated over 100 businesses as mother-friendly.

The process includes a self-assessment application (available online) that demonstrates provision of private space, flexible time for milk expression at work, and a worksite policy that is disseminated to employees. The Texas Web site provides downloadable resources for employers and lists all mother-friendly businesses in the state to encourage peer pressure among businesses. Designated employers receive a certificate, a decal to display in a prominent area, and a press release they can customize for their local media.

Although it has been many years since the initial letter was circulated, the program continues to grow thanks to word of mouth and referrals by health professionals and educators who counsel new mothers about returning to work.

#### *Lessons Learned*

- Use professional, polished materials that are easily accessed electronically.
- Make allies with community leaders and others who have connections with businesses.
- Focus messages on the bottom line benefits to the company.
- Be responsive and proactive. Return phone calls promptly, and initiate contacts with businesses. Don’t wait for them to come to you!

#### **Contact:**

Title V, Health Resources Development  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
1100 West 49th St., Suite M355  
Austin, TX 78756  
512.458.7111, ext. 6663  
[www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/lactate/mother.shtm/](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/lactate/mother.shtm/)

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