



Monday, 19 February 2007

To: The Honourable Alex Somlyay MP  
Chairman  
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing,  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA

Re: Submission for the parliamentary committee inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding.

My name is Tamar Boas and I am a mother of three children, all breastfed for at least 12 months and a Breastfeeding Counsellor with the Australian Breastfeeding Association, Tarragindi Group Brisbane, Qld.

I would like to share my breastfeeding experience with my first child.

I was determent to breastfeed Ella because of my family history of allergies and Asthma. The Child Health Nurse that visited me (after a Caesarean section) gave me instructions on how to feed my baby and when I told her I was feeding my newborn every 1.5 hours asked me to stretch the feeds to at least every 3 hours. This caused much unnecessary unsettledness and lots of extra crying in the household. Later, When I approached my GP about going back to work when my baby turns 6 months he said, "she will be on solids by then". This led me to start my baby on solids at 4 months of age.

I feel that all this misinformation I was given, undermined the importance of breastfeeding and of my ability to continue to exclusively breastfeed my baby to 6 months.

Attending a Breastfeeding Education Class and ringing the Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline helped me get through many difficulties and breastfeed my other 2 children with greater confidence.

Since becoming a Breastfeeding Counsellor (2005), I have heard many stories from mums on the other side of the Helpline. They often say things like "My Doctor said my milk is not good enough for my baby and I should give him formula" or they are advised by Child Health Nurses to give themselves a break and give their baby formula so they can get some sleep. It is clear to me that these mums are keen to breastfeed but the Health system is giving them mixed messages. They are feeling confused and worried about how to feed their babies and many times feel guilty for continuing to breastfeed for longer than 6 weeks.

From my personal experience I believe that there are few things that could make the situation better:

- Supplying better breastfeeding education to health professionals to prevent misinformation that leads to early weaning.
- Educate and inform the general public about breastfeeding. Teach the public that breastfeeding is a normal way to feed a baby.
- Support and encourage new mums to breastfeed. As far as I am aware, mums who join the Australian Breastfeeding Association feel more confident and comfortable in breastfeeding their babies and are more likely to feed longer and possibly choose to breastfeed their subsequent babies.
- More government support to The Australian Breastfeeding Association could make a big difference to breastfeeding rates in Australia.

Signed: Tamar Boas