

Submission no. 143

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MC

Hi ,

I had a very difficult time with breastfeeding and I almost gave up. I found it very frustrating. I felt like I was bossed around by the hospital prior to giving birth. I had to go in and do test after test, usually 2 visits a week and then was told I had to be induced. I don't think I really did need to be brought on early but it was less of a risk for the hospital to be seen to produce a live baby.

Less than 48 hours after my son was born I was turfed out of hospital. He hadn't yet had a proper breastfeed and I was not producing much milk yet. I was tube feeding him with a syringe and the nurse gave him formula in hospital. I can't remember much of the ensuing weeks, but at 3 and a half weeks old I managed to get him to a doctors who diagnosed him with a Urinary Tract Infection. Something he had since birth.

My baby was wasting away and my supply was so low because he wasn't strong enough to suck well. It felt like had no help at all with feeding him. The thing that is the most important to a mother! I developed PND and really had a tough time of it for about 12 months before I got help myself and started on antidepressants.

I was vaguely aware that there should be some help available to me but I didn't know where and the breastfeeding help at King Edward Hospital where he was born is so far away from me and it was a major hurdle to get there just once a week.

He went on to have 3 more urinary tract infections, which I am pleased to say were treated promptly by Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. The recurrent infections were most probably caused by my son being allergic to orange juice. Something that I was later told by older women can be a problem during breastfeeding. As young mothers they were commonly advised to be aware that drinking orange juice or other reaction causing food could make an impact on their breastfed child. Unfortunately I had no to tell me about reaction causing food and my son was 5 months old before I worked out what was causing all his unhappiness and pain.

My boy Jarrah is now nearly 20 months old and he is still enjoying breastfeeding and so am I. My husband is a strong supporter of this wonderful relationship and he encourages me in volunteering and educating others.

I am involved with The Community Breastfeeding Project in my area of Mirrabooka. The project trains volunteers like myself in breastfeeding and working with families. We are linked up with pregnant mums and assist them with breastfeeding as well as educating the community at large on the benefits of breastfeeding.

These days there is no one to learn the art and the intricacies of breastfeeding from. Our mothers are a lot older and have forgotten or never knew how to breastfeed in the first place. Our friends are still at work and there is no cultural system of post natal care for mothers. In western societies women are expected to get up from the hospital bed and get back to "normal" as though nothing happened. The new role as a mother as well as learning the art of breastfeeding is totally foreign for most new mothers. They have had no training, no peers to support them, no Doula to explain the birth, breastfeeding and to care for the new mother in the early weeks. Most have a partner to help but they have no more idea on how to care for a newborn or what is happening to their partners bodies after the birth. After a week or two the visitors have stopped coming, the partner has gone back to work and the new mother is left to fend for herself with little knowledge or confidence in her new role as Mum to a tiny, hungry little newborn. It is no wonder that many new mothers and put the baby on the bottle and return to work within a few months.

Women are given credo for paid work. It is considered normal and she will spend a large part of her life earning a

wage. It is something a woman feels confident at and she is rewarded with money in the bank at the end of the week which she can spend on what ever she chooses.

There is culturally a more positive attitude to paid work than to being a mother. When a woman is used to being part of this culture it is not surprising that she will feel that there is more value placed upon her work role than her parenting role. Especially in the early months when the baby is so dependent on her to "get it right" as a mother and there is not a great deal of feed back from the baby. After 6 or 8 months the breastfeeding is sorted out and the mother can feel a pride in her abilities to feed her child and the baby is able to respond more obviously to her love and attention, but by this stage many women have already gone back to work or stopped breastfeeding. There is no obvious paycheck or reward at the end of the week for new mums. The rewards are there, but beyond a cute and sleeping baby they are a bit difficult to see with sleep deprived eyes.

I feel that there should be more funding given to the type of programs such as the Community Breastfeeding Project. New mums should have someone they can rely on, who is close by to help them with breastfeeding. Infant health Nurses are overworked and getting a doctors appointment can take days. Having someone who is trained and experienced in breastfeeding on call (and who can actually come over and see you) will really increase women's ability to breastfeed. Most new mums really want to breastfeed and do the best by their child but when it is hard and there is little help and the alternative is easily available at local chemist. What parent would let their child go hungry? All Mums know that "Breast is Best" but they don't know why it is best. Mums read all about their pregnancy and go to childbirth classes. They look after their unborn child to the best of their abilities usually, but there is so much emphasis on childbirth that women just think that breastfeeding is a doddle compared to being pregnant and giving birth. Pregnant women and their GP's or obstetricians rarely think about breastfeeding. The truth is that a woman can give birth without even being conscious but breastfeeding is something that takes learning, determination and a real input from the mother. It is not just something that happens to her body like pregnancy and childbirth. She has real control over whether it is going to work or not, but that is a big burden to put on to someone with no knowledge, experience or help. Women need more support, credo and training for breastfeeding and mothering to make it a better world where all our babies are breastfeed for as long as they want and need.

Thankyou,

Rowena Forbes - Trained in 2006 as a breastfeeding volunteer and a Australian Breastfeeding Association Community Educator. Mother of Jarrah born 6.7.2005 and wife of Justin married 16.3.1996.