



LEARNING FROM STORIES:

# Breastfeeding Promotion to Increase Awareness and Confidence

*best start  
meilleur départ* )

by/par health *nexus* santé

 Ontario

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The Best Start Resource Centre thanks the key informants (women and their health care providers) who contributed to these stories and reviewed to ensure that the stories accurately reflected their experiences. The key informants are listed at the end of each story.

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## Use of this Resource

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## Introduction

Through funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Best Start Resource Centre has been supporting Ontario service providers in addressing populations with lower rates of breastfeeding. In developing this resource, the Best Start Resource Centre used a Healthy Communities Approach<sup>1</sup> to explore the actions being taken in Ontario to public awareness of breastfeeding.

The qualitative<sup>2</sup> results of the interviews were gathered into stories by the interviewers/writers.

We know that narrative is the primary form of human understanding<sup>3</sup>. In telling these stories, we hope to help health care and social service providers in Ontario to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding. We thank the women, health care and social service providers who shared their wisdom and insights through these stories.

Gillian Szollos, a health promoter, completed the interviews for the case stories in this booklet. She reports the following:

In 1996, The Ontario Human Rights Code (as approved by the Ontario Human Rights Commission) made it clear that:

Women have the right to breastfeed in public. Women should not be told that they cannot breastfeed their children because they are in a public area. Women should not be asked to 'cover up' or move to another area that is more 'discreet.'<sup>4</sup>

In spite of such clear wording, we still hear many stories each year about women who are made to feel uncomfortable while breastfeeding in public or who are asked to leave public places such as restaurants or malls. Public health officials, together with community supporters of breastfeeding, have tried to reduce this barrier to breastfeeding exclusivity and duration by striving to increase public awareness and support for what is biologically normal: Breastfeeding. Anywhere, Anytime. What follows are stories of creative approaches to doing just that.

## References

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2. Wyse, S.E. (2011). *What is the Difference between Qualitative and Quantitative Research?* Accessed online March 11, 2016. [www.snapsurveys.com/blog/what-is-the-difference-between-qualitative-research-and-quantitative-research/](http://www.snapsurveys.com/blog/what-is-the-difference-between-qualitative-research-and-quantitative-research/).
3. Sandelowski, M. (1991). Telling Stories: Narrative Approaches in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, Vol3;No3;161-166. Accessed online March 11, 2016. [http://academic.son.wisc.edu/courses/N701/week/sandelowski\\_tellingstories.pdf](http://academic.son.wisc.edu/courses/N701/week/sandelowski_tellingstories.pdf).
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## CASE STORY ONE:

# Big City, Big Plan

While considering options on how to mark the 2014 National Breastfeeding Week, Jill Mather, a Registered Nurse with Toronto Public Health, came across an online news posting in the Registered Nurse Journal<sup>1</sup> that caught her attention. The article highlighted the use of life-sized cutouts of breastfeeding mothers by Algoma Public Health to increase knowledge and acceptance of breastfeeding in public. Jill was familiar with the outcome of a 2010 study<sup>2</sup> published by Toronto Public Health that had demonstrated that women who were comfortable breastfeeding in public or in front of their friends were nearly three times as likely to exclusively breastfeed their baby to 6 months of age. Jill and her colleagues wanted a fresh approach to promoting community support for breastfeeding in public. Using the Algoma life-sized cutouts as inspiration, they crafted a multimedia campaign that impacted thousands.

Jill and her colleagues began with clear objectives:

- To promote mothers' rights.
- To encourage breastfeeding in public spaces anytime, anywhere.
- To support breastfeeding as the cultural norm.
- To advocate for broader community support and acceptance of breastfeeding women.

Jill explains, “We wanted to educate the public on women’s rights to breastfeed in public, promoting community acceptance of breastfeeding in public and promoting breastfeeding as the cultural norm.”

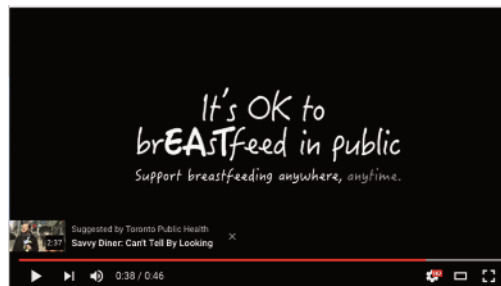
The next step for Jill and her colleagues was recruiting nine breastfeeding women to participate in the campaign. The women were interviewed about their feelings about breastfeeding in public and had their photographs taken while breastfeeding. Five women (representing different ages and ethnicities who had breastfeeding children of different ages) were used as models for the cutouts. The creation of 30 life-sized cutouts followed. The cutouts were strategically placed around the city in public spaces such as squares, malls, postsecondary institutions, and city and public buildings where they proudly shared the message. *It's OK to brEAsTfeed in public: Support breastfeeding anywhere, anytime.* Many of the cutouts were accompanied by a Toronto Public Health staff person who answered questions and promoted programs and services designed to support women breastfeeding. Each cutout also showed a web address where more information on the campaign could be found.



The cutouts went to fairs, markets, recreation centres, and libraries. They were placed anywhere that large numbers of community members might see them. The campaign did not just target mothers and women but the whole community. Toronto Public Health wanted everyone to think about the role they play in making breastfeeding socially comfortable for women.

Next was a YouTube video. The video, *It's OK to brEAsTfeed in public* addressed the question, "What if eating a sandwich in public got the same reaction as breastfeeding in public?"

Beginning on the first day of National Breastfeeding Week in October 2014, this video was shown on the giant LED screen at Yonge-Dundas Square where it could be seen from the intersection of Yonge Street and Dundas Street East (one of the busiest intersections in Canada). The video ran on a continuous loop all week long. It also ran in the waiting rooms of 62 doctors across Toronto. The video had over a million hits in the first week. It has become the most-watched Toronto Public Health video.



"I remember, I was pregnant when I saw the video. A friend shared it with me on Facebook. I was planning to breastfeed, and this was the first time I really thought about breastfeeding in public. It gave me a laugh, and I felt like it would be no problem," Shannon

The importance of social media as a tool to reach the masses was not overlooked in the campaign. Facebook and Twitter buzzed all week with breastfeeding in public promotional messaging as well as messages encouraging sharing and retweeting of a great contest. The contest encouraged community members to take selfies with the cutouts and tweet them to #bfinginpublic for a chance to win an iPad. During the campaign, tweets increased by 675% with over 11,000 being sent.

A website was developed to augment the message around breastfeeding in public and continue to spread the message – *It's OK to brEAsTfeed in public: Support breastfeeding anywhere, anytime*. Video testimonials from the women, who had volunteered to be the cutout models, were put together in three separate montages that detailed why breastfeeding in public was important to each of them. The clips were uploaded to the website along with the now popular video: *It's OK to brEAsTfeed in public*.

The life-sized cutouts still attend conferences and make special appearances around Toronto. Several have been offered permanent homes in public spaces. "Ultimately we want to see improvement of breastfeeding duration and exclusivity," says Jill. In the meantime, thousands of Torontonians got an opportunity to see the importance of supporting breastfeeding women, and Jill hopes that the campaign will have a lasting impact.

## Key Informants

- Jill Mather, Toronto Public Health
- Shannon, mother

## Resources

*Toronto Public Health: Breastfeeding in Public*

## References

1. Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO). (2013). *Nursing in the News*. Toronto, Ontario: RNAO.
2. Toronto Public Health. (2010). *Breastfeeding in Toronto: Promoting Supportive Environments*. Accessed online October 26, 2015 Breastfeeding in Toronto: Creating supportive environments. <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-28423.pdf>



## CASE STORY TWO:

# Breastfeeding – Good for Business

“I remember the day that I was looking for a private place to nurse my baby in a bookstore. He was getting fussy, and I gave up and just sat down in one of the big comfy chairs by the fireplace. A lady came up to me, and I thought ‘Uh oh, she will be mad.’ Instead, she said, ‘Thank you for breastfeeding your baby in public, you are setting such a good example for the community and empowering other mothers all around you. You are a great role model. Keep up the good work.’ She gave me a card that said pretty much the same thing. I have to say that made my day and I still have the card and my son is 19.”

– Anonymous

Feeling comfortable breastfeeding in public anytime, anywhere has been shown to increase the length of time women breastfeed<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the reality is that we do not see many women nursing in public, and they do not always feel comfortable for many reasons.

Some mothers at a La Leche League (LLL) meeting had this to say:

- “Breastfeeding one baby is one thing, but when you have two you can’t help but bare it all.”
- “I don’t want to be judged or have people stare.”
- “My family gets freaked out whenever I breastfeed openly.”

Sarah Milne, a health promoter for Grey Bruce Health Unit, was participating in community consultations with breastfeeding women about how to reduce barriers to breastfeeding when the women raised the issue of not feeling comfortable breastfeeding in public.

Sarah had been looking for a resource to promote breastfeeding in the community and reported that, “Finding something community-based was hard.” That is when she came across the *Breastfeeding Friendly Business Project* from Just Food in Ottawa.

In 2013, funding from a Healthy Communities Partnership program allowed Just Food to work together with Ottawa Public Health to develop the publication *Breastfeeding Friendly Business: A Tool Kit* (adapted from *Make Breastfeeding Your Business: An Action Support Kit* by Sarah Frittenburg and the Lunenburg and Queens Baby-Friendly Initiative Committee).

Erin O’Manique of Just Food recalls, “There were already efforts being made to make publicly-funded spaces such as libraries and arenas breastfeeding-friendly spaces. We wanted to create a tool that would enable businesses to do that as well.”



Just Food and Ottawa Public Health were excited to share their work with Sarah and the Grey Bruce Health Unit. Grey Bruce Health Unit adapted the toolkit and added a section on supporting breastfeeding employees, agreeing that employers have a responsibility to support returning staff.

The Grey Bruce Health Unit's *Breastfeeding Friendly Business: A Tool Kit* contains:

- A breastfeeding friendly promotional sign.
- A *Breastfeeding Friendly Employer Checklist*.
- A *Tips for Staff* training poster.
- A *Breastfeeding for Employees: Tips* poster.
- A letter the public can give businesses to encourage them to be breastfeeding friendly.

Very shortly after Sarah's community consultation, an incident occurred in Wiarton. A restaurant denied service to a breastfeeding mother. The incident went viral. There were over 10,000 hits on Facebook within a few days. Sarah had just uploaded *Breastfeeding Friendly Business: A Tool Kit* to Grey Bruce Health Unit's website and said, "Although the incident was regrettable, the timing was great."





The breastfeeding mothers in the community staged a ‘nurse-in’ outside the restaurant and the community started talking about women’s rights to breastfeed anywhere, anytime. The community asked for resources, and Sarah was able to point them to the *Breastfeeding Friendly Business: A Tool Kit*.

Sarah, with support from staff at Grey Bruce Health Unit, looked at the big picture. The business cards were designed to encourage businesses to support breastfeeding and guide them to the online toolkit. They have also been given out to local public health inspectors who are now handing them out to every business or group they connect with. Sarah explains, “It is a way of aligning our public health message with existing services. We are also recognizing the community connection while changing the conversation about what health units do. We are not just about immunization. We need to shift towards policy development. As a public health unit, we have a big voice and can be heard, so we need to speak with those who are typically not heard, or need help to be heard, and carry that message up to the decision makers so that our community gets what it wants and needs.”

Women have said to Sarah, “Knowing it’s my right, and the place that I am nursing is supportive of my right, makes me feel more at ease (when I breastfeed in public).” Sarah has a dream of making Wiarton the breastfeeding promotion capital of Ontario. The Grey Bruce Health Unit is taking innovative steps as they engage their health inspectors and the community at large with their resource: *Breastfeeding Friendly Business: A Tool Kit*. This is a community to watch!

## Key Informants

- Sarah Milne, Health Promoter, Grey Bruce Health Unit
- Erin O’Manique, Just Food, Ottawa

## Resources

*Breastfeeding Friendly Business: A Tool Kit*

*Pregnancy and Breastfeeding*

## References

1. Toronto Public Health (2010). Breastfeeding in Toronto: Promoting Supportive Environments. Accessed online October 26, 2015 *Breastfeeding in Toronto: Creating supportive environments*. [www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-28423.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-28423.pdf)



## CASE STORY THREE:

### Educating the Educators

Imagine your baby is 2 weeks old, and your body and mind are telling you it is wrong to leave her, but you have no choice. Class starts in an hour, and you need to get this credit for your degree.

Mallory, a nursing student at Trent University, knows firsthand. “I had to leave my daughter during my exam. I had no idea I could be accommodated, that I could have breastfed her during the exam if she had needed. Instead, I wrote the fastest exam that I have ever written while my mother-in-law walked my daughter around campus waiting for me to finish.”

Mallory feels that many people do not understand or value the importance of having children develop and grow at the breast, where they were intended to be. “People will say to me, ‘Why don’t you just pump and leave her with a bottle?’ The key word

is leave. Breastfeeding is not just about the food. It’s about so much more. It is a relationship. I don’t want to leave my baby,” says Mallory. “She is a BABY!”

Dr. Michele McIntosh believes Mallory should not have to choose between her child and her education. Michele, a Registered Nurse and International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), is an assistant professor at Trent-Fleming School of Nursing. It is stories like Mallory’s that have made Michele so passionate about the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative*. Michele says, “When we started talking about this project around the office no one was untouched; everyone had a story about tensions between reproduction and employment. Nearly everybody had to make a choice.”

The *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative* is a strategy to support breastfeeding mothers who attend postsecondary schools in Ontario. The aim is to encourage all postsecondary schools in Ontario to collaborate and to adopt policies which will allow breastfeeding mothers to be accommodated at school.

On October 27, 2015, the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Conference* was held at Trent University bringing postsecondary institutions in Ontario together to begin this process by engaging stakeholders and offering a platform to put the words into action.

Among the invitees were the human rights officers from each institution, campus wellness centre staff, faculty and administrators, student union representatives, nursing/health students, and breastfeeding mothers.



## The conference highlights included:

1. A discussion on healthy public policy where the Ontario Human Rights Commissioner reviewed the Ontario human rights legislation on accommodation of breastfeeding and addressed who on campus should handle these issues.
2. A keynote address from Jack Newman who spoke to the importance of institutional support for breastfeeding mothers.
3. A workshop on how to create and roll out *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative* policies in postsecondary facilities.
4. A panel discussion featured postsecondary staff who already have breastfeeding-friendly campus policies in place at their institutions who spoke about how the policies are lived at their schools.
5. An address from Dr. Michele Vancour, co-author, of the book *Breastfeeding Best Practices in Higher Education* on the best practices in the USA.
6. A panel discussion featured breastfeeding students who shared their stories.
7. The opportunity for representatives from provincial postsecondary institutions to make a pledge to commit to the implementation of the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative*.
8. The launch of the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative* website, Twitter feed, posters, social media, etc.

Dr. McIntosh's vision will have far-reaching consequences and may put an end to the assumption that babies do not belong on campus. This assumption forces women all over the world to choose between interrupting their education in order to meet their child's needs and having to leave their children in the care of others while they complete their degrees.

"Students need to know it is their right to be accommodated," states Michele referring to the duty to accommodate as outlined in the Ontario Human Rights Code.<sup>1</sup> "But they also need to know where to go to have their needs assessed and accommodations arranged."

The *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative* will help to get that message out in a number of ways. At Trent, faculty will know about women's rights to breastfeed and will support students in pursuing accommodations. Students will spread the word by going class-to-class and making presentations.

There will be a website where students can blog their stories, post pictures of themselves nursing on campus, and learn about supports and services available to them at whatever school they attend. There will be individual webpages on creating policy, creating supportive environments, students' rights, and different ways to get that information out to students and faculty, reorienting health services to be inclusive of breastfeeding students, etc.







Faculty who want to join the initiative, or augment what they already have to support breastfeeding mothers, can go to the website to search for examples of what other schools have done. They will find sample policies, photos of breastfeeding-friendly spaces, ways to enhance support such as on-site breastfeeding support peer groups, policy toolkits, and more.

“And we will have posters,” exclaims Michele, who is excited about the posters with good reason. “Imagine a poster that shows a student in safety boots and a hard hat and a caption that reads “My name is Sarah. I’m studying mining engineering, and I’m nursing my son Jason. Is your campus breastfeeding friendly?”

Mallory thought it was a great idea and posed for a poster too. In her poster, she is surrounded by her supportive peers. “I was passionate about breastfeeding before my daughter was born, but I have become more aware of the feeling of what it’s like to breastfeed in public. I have become more aware of the spaces I’m in. I think, ‘Is this somewhere I could sit to nurse my daughter?’”

Mallory is aware that there is an internal dialogue that goes on in many women’s heads that might prevent them from breastfeeding

in public. Thoughts such as ‘Is it okay?’ and ‘What will other people think’ can take priority over what their baby needs or wants.

Mallory says, “It took me a few minutes to wrap my head around the fact that there would be photos of me breastfeeding everywhere, but I felt I had to practice what I preach. I think it is so important that there is a visual out there to let students know that there are students breastfeeding and that it is okay, they have a right to be accommodated. I have a right to be accommodated.”

Michele has called breastfeeding students, “... a truly invisible group. No census has been undertaken to document this population, yet increasing numbers of women attending university and the numbers of child care bursaries awarded by Ontario Student Assistance Program. suggests their numbers are significant. Certainly increasing complaints to Human Rights, Equity & Accessibility Offices suggest that this population and their need for accommodation are emerging.”



Breastfeeding students are not invisible at Trent anymore. The university is now surveying all of their students about breastfeeding. Students are asked about barriers and facilitation strategies. This information was shared at the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Conference*.

Michele is adamant, “I want breastfeeding women to go to school. Women have babies and women go to school. Having a baby should not preclude women from pursuing their education.” She recalls the image of an Inuit woman with the baby on her back in an amauti while she is scaling fish. Women have worked and breastfed for millennia, in the fields, on the farms, and on the oceans. Pursuing an education is just another form of work.

Michele’s vision for the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative* is to create an environment where we can, “... demonstrate that women are scholars and mothers and to support them in the contributions that they are making to society by breastfeeding, which they alone can do. We, as a community, must acknowledge the benefits to society which women can uniquely confer by breastfeeding and accommodate them.”

Trent will be piloting an on-campus La Leche League meeting as one of the ways they will support their breastfeeding students.



“I had teachers who helped me work my schedule around my daughter’s needs. They went out of their way to help me keep breastfeeding after I had to return to school when my daughter was just 6 weeks old. I think they did it because they were mothers too, but there was not a policy that I was aware of, I was just super lucky.”

– *Samantha*

If the *Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative* is championed by all higher learning institutions in Ontario, then that option will be available. More and more mothers, like Mallory and Samantha, will have the opportunity to give back to society by nurturing their children optimally as well as pursuing their professional passions, and not have to choose between the two.

## Key Informants

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Nursing Adjunct, Queen's University at Kingston
- Mallory  
Mother, student
- Samantha  
Mother, student

## Resources

*Breastfeeding Friendly Campus Initiative*

## References

1. Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Pregnancy and breastfeeding (brochure)*. Accessed online at <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/pregnancy-and-breastfeeding-brochure>

## CASE STORY FOUR:

### Supermodels

Samantha was sitting at home one afternoon when a friend called her and told her about a breastfeeding promotion project happening at The Indian Friendship Centre in Sault Ste. Marie.

Samantha explains, “They told me that the campaign was to help mothers to breastfeed, and I remember how difficult the first weeks were. It takes a lot of support to get through it. I knew a lot of people in town and figured that people would see this and know that it is a positive message that I stand for, and I wanted to get involved to boost my own confidence.”

Karli heard about the project at a La Leche League meeting and reports, “I had no idea that it would be this big.”

Dee-Anna heard about the project from a Healthy Babies Healthy Children worker and jumped at the opportunity to “... encourage women in my community and the neighbouring communities to breastfeed and not be afraid to do it.”

The project these women had become involved with was called *Doodooshaaboo* or milk in the Ojibway language. Cynthia Morriseau, a health educator, was involved in helping to create this project and describes *Doodooshaaboo* as a partnership between the Maamwesying North Shore Community Health Services Inc. and Algoma Public Health.

The project was built on an earlier breastfeeding public awareness campaign done in Algoma that used life-sized cutouts, but the new project had a different a different focus. In the hopes of increasing breastfeeding duration in the region the focus became *Breastfeeding, it takes a community*. The project was launched in October 2015 to coincide with National Breastfeeding Week in Canada.

Cynthia explains why this campaign was important, “We know that the breastfeeding rates within Algoma are lower than the provincial rates, and the rates within the First Nations community are even lower. As well as the breastfeeding public awareness campaign, we wanted to create a resource directory guide for every community within the whole Algoma district. The region is filled with diverse communities over a large geographical area and not much consistent communication regarding breastfeeding support. This directory is a way to standardize how communities refer breastfeeding women and to which resources.”

The directory includes a letter to encourage community partners to take part in the referral process. It also includes quotes from Elders about the importance, the tradition, and the significance of breastfeeding in First Nations culture. Online resources, such as Breastfeeding for the Health and Future of Our Nation and the Bilingual Online Ontario Breastfeeding Services, were also be included in the directory.





Contacts in the community such as the Healthy Babies Healthy Children workers and staff at The Indian Friendship Centre in Sault Ste. Marie helped to recruit local mothers to model for the cutouts. The response from the models was positive.

Dee-Anna was so excited about the breastfeeding public awareness campaign that she agreed to be the community contact for breastfeeding support. “I want to be the mom that other moms can call,” she says. “I have four kids, and I have breastfed all of them. I encourage my friends and family to do it. If I can encourage even one other First Nations woman to breastfeed by doing this project, I would be thrilled. My family has been so supportive! My husband was more shy about me breastfeeding in public, but the campaign is helping him understand the importance of it.”

Karli wanted her cutout to send a message to mothers in her community, “Don’t be shy, baby comes first.” To her community, she says, “Embrace what needs to happen by supporting mothers to breastfeed anywhere they want to so babies can get a healthy start and mothers can have the best for their health too.”

Samantha noticed how this experience has changed her already. She reports, “I figure if I can nurse in a room filled with 10 people and cameras, I can nurse anywhere. Participating in this campaign made me feel so much more comfortable with breastfeeding publicly. Just before school started, we took a trip to Canada’s Wonderland. Roman was hungry, so I sat on the grass and breastfed him and when I looked up there was another mother breastfeeding her baby not too far away. We started talking about how both of us felt really comfortable nursing because we were not alone.”

It is the hope of Algoma Public Health and the Maamwesying North Shore Community Health Services that this campaign will empower other women to feel the same confidence Samantha did: to breastfeed anywhere, anytime.

## Key Informants

- Cynthia Morriveau, Aanjichigewin Health Educator/Promoter-West End, Maamwesying North Shore Community Health Services Inc.
- Dee-Anna, mother
- Karli, mother
- Samantha, mother

## Resources

*[Bilingual Online Ontario Breastfeeding Services](#)*

*[Breastfeeding for the Health and Future of Our Nation](#)*

