



Department
of Health

High Impact Area 3: Breastfeeding

Health visitor programme

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Contact details:

0-5 Public Health Transfer Team
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

0-5casestudies@dh.gsi.gov.uk

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High Impact Area 3: Breastfeeding

Health visitor programme

Prepared by Emily Mattison

Contents

Contents.....	4
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust (Hampshire): Improving breastfeeding support.....	5
East Cheshire (Crewe) ‘Cherubs’ breastfeeding support.....	7
South Warwickshire: Mothers’ experiences of Health Visiting services	9

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust (Hampshire): Improving breastfeeding support

HIA 3: Breastfeeding

Helen Long

It is well recognised that breastfeeding (BF) is instrumental in providing key health benefits for both mother and baby, including prevention of infections and obesity. Global and national evidence is unequivocal that breastfeeding services are a cost effective intervention, and contribute to NHS savings by reducing GP attendances and hospital admissions. The [Baby Friendly Initiative](#) (BFI) is a worldwide programme providing an evidence-based staged approach to sustain breastfeeding in the community. It was launched in 1994 in the UK. This process involves policy development, robust data collection and staff training to ensure that pregnant and breastfeeding women are provided with appropriate and timely breastfeeding support and information.

In December 2013, Southern Health Foundation Trust achieved UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation (which recognises that the trust meets certain breastfeeding criteria). The challenges to sustained breastfeeding in Hampshire were similar to those we see all over the country. In Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, up to 80% of mothers initiate breastfeeding at birth, but then the number falls to 58.1% at 10-14 days and to 45.1% at 6-8 weeks (August 2013 data). To address this high drop off rate, commissioners provided financial support for additional breastfeeding intervention to improve breastfeeding prevalence at 6-8 weeks and beyond while the trust were increasing the number of health visiting staff.

Three GP practices were selected across Winchester, Andover and Basingstoke to offer a phone assessment and support, signposting to local breastfeeding support groups and promote the trust's breastfeeding pages and electronic resources on their website. A home visit was provided as appropriate.

The project commenced in mid-May 2013 and has achieved positive results so far. Of the women who received this early intervention 55% to 81% of their babies were still receiving breast milk compared to 37% to 54% before the study commenced. This is an increase in breastfeeding across the three GP practices of between 14% to 76%.

The trust collected feedback from parents and 75% said that the project had helped them with breastfeeding. They said,

"It was very helpful to have someone spend the time to watch a feed, check the latch and offer support and encouragement".

"Just knowing there was someone on the end of the phone to call if having any problems helped, plus the support of the breastfeeding counsellors in the community. I had a few problems early on and the help I received definitely helped me to carry on Breastfeeding".

"I am still breastfeeding now and I am going to continue for as long as I can/until I go back to work! After a difficult delivery I was very weak and we struggled at first and we have hit some bumps along the way, having someone to quickly call to help has been amazing I have used this a number of times. It also helped diagnose oral thrush in my daughter so we got her to the doctor's quickly".

"I am exclusively breast feeding and don't think I would be without the support".

The pilot programme has been extended because of the success we've seen so far, and areas with highest need have been prioritised for the expansion. The Trust have recruited two additional staff nurses to work alongside the original project worker, delivering the service to a further 10 practices in Gosport, Havant and Waterlooville, and Eastleigh. The service is ever-evolving and evaluation is continuing.

East Cheshire (Crewe) 'Cherubs' breastfeeding support

Crewe, East Cheshire Trust

HIA 3: Breastfeeding

Nicola Wycherley, Business Manager for Health Visiting & Child Health, Infant Feeding Coordinator

The many benefits of breastfeeding have been clearly demonstrated in numerous studies, and are why it is included as one of the six high impact areas. One of these benefits is to reduce the risk of babies developing gastroenteritis through food poisoning as a result of using formula milk. When the health visiting team reviewed the Cheshire East Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), we saw that breastfeeding rates were low and we wanted to do something to address this.

'Cherubs' (Cheshire's Really Useful Breastfeeding Support) was our response. It is a programme designed to enable mums to come together in a supportive environment and gain crucial support from each other as well as receive professional expertise and advice. It also extends to antenatal women not just postnatal women.

We believe this early intervention is essential to encourage women to try breastfeeding and continue breastfeeding. Health visitors routinely work with mums to support ongoing breastfeeding and to promote the importance of this for the health and wellbeing of mother and baby. They also routinely refer women to this service as part of their support to encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies. Referrals also come from the breastfeeding team at Leighton Hospital in Crewe, midwives, family support workers and mothers themselves.

The programme began in 2010 in Crewe, an area with high levels of admissions to hospital due to gastroenteritis, low levels of breastfeeding and high levels of deprivation. Health visitors worked alongside other local agencies such as local children's centres and excitingly, we have increased the programme from two breastfeeding support workers in 2010 to five support workers and 14 groups across Cheshire East, with more specialist support in those areas of high deprivation.

It is a sad fact that this type of programme is often viewed as simply a community group more along the lines of a coffee catch up. But this is far from the reality.

There are a lot of complex issues as to why a woman may not start to breastfeed or choose to stop after a short period. Some of this is personal choice, but as evidenced by this programme it is also lack of understanding, lack of support and practical guidance from women who are experiencing the same thing or who have 'been there', and lack of specialist expertise.

But the final word should come from the mothers. One mother was new to the area and her comments sum up the wider, less obvious benefits of this programme:

"I am not sure what I would have done without this group. I was struggling with depression and coming to the group has actually got me out of the house and not only lifted my mood, but helped me meet other mums and grow a support network. As I also struggled with breastfeeding at the start, the help of the health visitors has been invaluable. I am not sure if I would have felt comfortable going anywhere else".



South Warwickshire: Mothers' experiences of Health Visiting services

HIA 3: Breastfeeding

Mary MacDonald

In South Warwickshire, breastfeeding rates are going up and parents are seeing a real difference in the service they receive. This is improving parents' experience and the outcomes for children and mums. We know that breastfeeding offers many short and long term health benefits for both mum and baby. The increasing prevalence of obesity amongst children is now a major public health issue and as breastfeeding has been found to generally reduce the risk of obesity we need to ensure that all mothers are able to make a fully informed decision about their chosen method of feeding.

South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust Integrated and Community Care Division, along with Warwickshire Children's Centres, have recently been accredited as being Baby Friendly by the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, one of only 12 organisations across the UK which has jointly been accredited.

Breastfeeding duration rates continue to slowly increase across Warwickshire and listening to mother's experiences would suggest that satisfaction rates are increasing much faster.

During the assessment, seven local Children's Centres (Abbey, Ladybrook, Newbold Riverside, Badger Valley, Kingsway, Sydenham & Lillington) were visited and the assessors were able to interview mothers on their experiences of local Health Visiting and Children's Centre services. Some of their comments about their Health Visiting experiences were recorded:

"I couldn't have done it without them"

"I really appreciated her being non-judgemental"

"Contacting them is easy and there's good communication between the teams"

"Health Visitor is amazing – really helped me to work through the problems"

"Pretty perfect really – felt like she really listened"

"Health Visitor warm & caring, helped me feel more confident this time"

"Service changed since last baby – really appreciate the home visits"

"Been brilliant, had not had much contact with the NHS prior to pregnancy so my care has been a very positive revelation"

Collaborative working is evident across Warwickshire between health Visiting and Children's Centres, all baby clinics being held in Children's Centres alongside other groups, which facilitates excellent joint-working and easy access for families. The mothers were overwhelming in their praise of the relationships that they developed with these members of staff. They loved the social environment with cushions and toys available, other groups being on at the same time and that the staff sat down on the floor alongside them to talk. Many mothers in the sample attended baby clinics and were complimentary about the experience. They felt that they could chat, ask questions and let their children play. Baby massage, breastfeeding groups and music groups were also attended. Some mothers noted that the member of staff introduced new mothers into the group and helped the mothers to get to know each other.

The continuity of care within the health visiting service was much appreciated by the mothers. Home visiting, the building of relationships with one person and the level of communication were all valued highly.

And UNICEF did a [Report](#) in November 2014 and said a number of positive things: “Innovative programmes nurture both mothers and staff” and “these innovations illustrate the creative way the services have faced challenges”.