

**Submission to inquiry into breastfeeding****Submitted by: Melanie Robertson, breastfeeding mother of 1 year old**

Breastfeeding takes time and commitment from the mother. It is healthy for the baby and mostly enjoyable for the mother. It encourages a strong bond between mother and baby. In putting my submission together I wondered what is it that makes mothers stop breastfeeding as the decline in breastfeeding after 3 months is marked. This has formed the basis for the following submission

1. Education for fathers and partners

One of the factors that I have observed in others and found played an important part of my decision to breastfeed for at least the first year of my daughters life is the role of my husband. Support and encouragement from fathers or partners influences this decision greatly. After learning of the massive benefits of breastfeeding for bother baby and mother, my husband and I made a decision that we would breastfeed for as long as possible. My husband has supported and encouraged this at all times.

I have observed amongst friends that at times where the partner is not as supportive of the mother breastfeeding it discontinues. For example, a male friend of ours stated that it was time his wife stopped breastfeeding so that the baby could get the full nutrition from formula. His wife and I tried to explain that "breast is best" however for some reason did not seem to be convinced, two weeks later the baby was being fed formula. It seems as though even though his wife understood that breastfeeding was the best nutrition for their baby, the father was not convinced and the breastfeeding stopped.

Education materials and even an education campaigns need to go further in targeting fathers and partners to help create a supportive environment for mothers to breastfeed. This also sits alongside the health promotion theory that healthy supportive environments encourage healthy behaviours. If a father fully understands the benefits and then values breastfeeding it may mean that mothers breastfeed for longer than 3 months.

2. A supportive community

It seems to me that our community is very supportive of mothers breastfeeding young babies. However as babies get older and approach 1, 2 and 3 years old people do not seem to think it is acceptable to breastfeed babies. A good example of this is that mothers often feel happy to breastfeed a small 3 month old baby in public but as that baby gets older, say 1 or 2 years old, that same mother feels a little awkward and may choose to feed in a babies room. From personal experience people have looked at me when feeding my baby when she was smaller and made lovely comments about breastfeeding, as she has grown people now ask things like: "how can you breastfeed now she has teeth", "they don't really need to be breast fed at this age"

Educating people about the desirable length of time to feed babies is very important. However, maybe more important is changing community perceptions and attitudes. The way I have approached this is to try and educate people if they make a comment, often this makes them at least think about the issue of breastfeeding older babies.

I have also found attending my local Australian Breastfeeding Association branch meeting to be extremely helpful in supporting me in my decision to breastfeed. This is a

place where mothers can freely breastfeed their babies no matter how old and in a safe and non judgemental environment.

3. A community issue

I hadn't given breastfeeding and the importance of it very much thought until I became a mother. Making breastfeeding an important community issue may also encourage mothers to breastfeed or breastfeed longer. If breastfeeding was more highly valued it would be easier and more socially acceptable. For example, this would encourage workplaces to provide suitable areas to express milk, shopping centres to provide nice and suitable breastfeeding areas.

4. Marketing acceptability

When I watch television I see lots of advertisements for formula. The advertising is very good, it tells us that we need to feed our babies formula to get good bacteria to fight infections and maintain health. It tells us that it is important to give our children the best start in life etc. I have found that breastfeeding information is available but you have to actively seek it out, compared to formula advertising that you see and hear whether you seek it out or not. For people who do not seek out breastfeeding information, they may not realize the full benefits of breastfeeding and even be like my friends I previously mentioned who believed that it was best of the baby started formula to get the full nutrition it offered. Marketing breastfeeding in mainstream media such as buses, billboards, magazines and newspapers, and television would increase community acceptance and support for it.

An acknowledgement for the Australian Breastfeeding Association

I have found the ABA to be an excellent resource. I attend the regular meetings at my local library as I find the support and information provided during these meetings invaluable. The meetings are attended by an ABA facilitator who facilitates helpful discussion about breastfeeding. I have found the group to be very supportive and a good guide for me when I have questions, breastfeeding problems or issues to discuss. I have also used the helpline on a number of occasions and have found the information and support invaluable.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the inquiry