

Virginia Community Unite to Strengthen Support for Nursing Mothers

Lakesha Butler

Summary

The Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children (CPHMC) subgroup, based out of Galax, Virginia, is using a multi-sector approach to address breastfeeding disparities in the Twin Counties region. In an effort to encourage the healthiest nutrition for babies, the CPHMC subgroup is assisting local businesses and agencies in establishing resources that foster supportive breastfeeding-friendly environments for nursing mothers.

Challenge

Thousands of children within the Twin Counties region are at increased risk for poor nutrition and health conditions associated with obesity. In 2011, Virginia ranked 23rd in highest rate of childhood obesity in the country- at 29.8%. According to the Mount Rogers Health District, the Twin Counties far exceed the rate of the state. While lack of physical activity and access to nutritionally rich foods are contributing factors, the decline of initiation and duration of breastfeeding in the area presents disparities in terms of optimizing infant, child, and adult health and development. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2012 report, Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk, "Given the documented short-and long-term medical and neurodevelopmental advantages of breastfeeding, infant nutrition should be considered a public health issue and not only a lifestyle choice."

Solution

In an effort to increase the number of businesses that publicly promote and welcome breastfeeding, the CPHMC subgroup is focused on making environmental changes that promote, educate, and provide resources for nursing mothers and their babies in environments where women work, learn, and socialize. The subgroup is assisting school officials, public businesses, and agencies in providing safe, private spaces for women to nurse comfortably. In addition to implementing lactation rooms throughout the region, the subgroup is working with each site to establish policies and procedures that support break periods for nursing mothers.



Your Involvement is Key

Breastfeeding provides the key nutrients needed to protect babies from illnesses and kick start their path to good health! Find out how you too can use your voice to raise awareness and support for nursing mothers as part of the Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children project by contacting Lakesha Butler at 276-781-7450 or Lakesha.Butler@vdh.virginia.gov.

Results

The initiative inspired new partnerships with local businesses, community agencies, and town managers, further extending the group's ability to educate the public on the benefits of breastfeeding and fostering baby-friendly atmospheres. The on-boarding of 12 schools, 3 public agencies, and town sponsored lactation stations is the first stage of a wide scale campaign to promote breastfeeding via system and environmental change. The group is also working closely with the Twin Country Regional Hospital as they take action steps to becoming an accredited baby-friendly facility. Additional resources coming soon include the development of training workshops and support networks to sustain breastfeeding welcome environments.

Contact

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"I was headed back to the car to nurse her, then I saw the sign! It's nice to have a cool place to feed and change her. I appreciate the town for providing this for us."

- April Summerlin

Sustainable Success

The initiative's goal is to continue building strong community partnerships, allocate resources where needs are, and develop a sustainable plan to continue addressing breastfeeding disparities within the community. Future plans include continuing to support and provide resources that promote breastfeeding friendly environments through community engagement opportunities, building the business case for breastfeeding through education and training workshops, and partnering with the Twin County Regional Hospital and La Leche League to offer a breastfeeding education resource guide to be distributed at local WIC clinics, OB/GYN and pediatric offices, as well as partnering agencies.