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Welcome in Wakefield

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Emma Ashworth introduces Wakefield's Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme

When my first child was born, almost 9 years ago, I was given a list of places in the town that I was living in which had signed up to its 'Breastfeeding Welcome' Scheme. I found it to be extremely helpful, knowing that I would be fully supported when feeding my little one.

A few years later I moved to Wakefield, and had another baby. At that stage I was completely confident about public breastfeeding (not to mention the Equality Act which had by that point clarified the law protecting mums while breastfeeding in public), and I would breastfeed anywhere and everywhere without thinking about it. But I did remember where I started out, and when I heard that there had been a scheme running which needed a new volunteer to get it going again, I decided to jump in.

I firstly put together an information pack for businesses. This included information about the scheme and its benefits to the business, a sheet for staff to read so that they were aware of how to support mothers and how to deal with the unlikely situation of a complaint, and a signup form where the business agreed to place our sticker in their window and for us to promote their business on our website. We were very lucky to have a beautiful logo donated to us by local designer Ian Harrison.

The stickers were funded by the local NHS Trust, and we had some printed for windows (with a sticky front) and some for walls (sticky back). Places such as soft play centres put the sticky-back ones on the walls around the room.

The Council's 'Eatwell' Scheme (Scores on the Doors) had included 'being breastfeeding friendly' in their pack, and I worked with them to upgrade the breastfeeding section of their pack to include all of our material. That helped to get more businesses included, which was really helpful in a city like Wakefield which covers a very large area.

Building a team of volunteers was crucial, and Facebook was a wonderful tool for that. We now have a volunteer who collates new sign-ups, records them and sends them to be updated to the website's database. We have a team of people who go round doing sign-ups as and when they can, and another who wrote a tool to audit companies who had been signed up.

We had great coverage by the local media, and I've done a number of radio and newspaper interviews. I was able to point out how rare it is for a breastfeeding mum to actually come across any negative reactions, yet because they are reported in the media it seems like they happen far more often than they

actually do.

Our local NHS Trust has been very supportive, including us on its website pitterpatterchatter.org. This is a work in progress, but once it's running properly will have a full database of signed-up companies, and lots of information about the scheme and how companies can join it.

I have been approached by a town in Kent wanting to use our pack for their own scheme, and I'm looking to expand into the next town along from Wakefield as well. It's not hard to do, it just takes a bit of time and enthusiasm!

I really hope that the scheme helps other women to feel comfortable breastfeeding in public. As 9 out of 10 women who stopped breastfeeding in the first six weeks stopped before they wanted to,1 and an estimated 40% of women stop breastfeeding before they want to because they are worried about breastfeeding in public, anything that helps them to be more confident could really help to improve breastfeeding rates.

Emma Ashworth

References

1. Trickey H and Newburn M (2012) Goals, dilemmas and assumptions in infant feeding education and support. Applying theory of constraints thinking tools to develop new priorities for action. Maternal and Child Nutrition. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

