

west howe
breastfeeding
support
group

for all
breastfeeding
women

every

Thursday

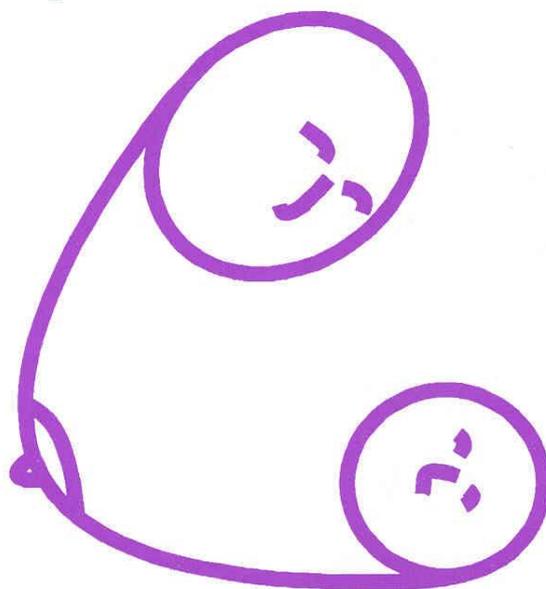
11am-12.30pm

Sure Start Centre

Moore Avenue

West Howe

Bournemouth



Making a difference
January 2004

"Breastfeeding was really hard and I often felt like giving up. But having the support from this group and having buddies listening to me and encouraging me, helped me carry on" - (West Howe Mum)

Evaluation Team - IHCS, Bournemouth University
West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group - Sure Start Bournemouth

Special thanks to all the parents who participated in the evaluation.

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Summary

This report describes the findings from the evaluation of the West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group at Sure Start Bournemouth. The aim was to discover how women who attended the group felt about it, their experiences of the group and the support it provided. The evaluation also aimed to find out if the group was reaching the Sure Start National objectives.

Mixed methods were used in the study which included, questionnaires to users and health professionals, individual interviews with mothers from the Sure Start area and a focus group interview with peer supporters (bosom buddies).

Findings show high satisfaction with the breastfeeding support received:

- The group provides a strong social network for new mothers who would otherwise feel isolated after the birth of their baby. Mothers with young children also benefit from this support as they can access a service where their child can socialise with others while they can receive the information needed about breastfeeding.
- Results from the questionnaire show that the breastfeeding support group appears to be extremely successful in supporting women and providing a positive environment that enables mothers to continue to breastfeed for at least six weeks following their first attendance.
- The evaluation has suggested that the buddy initiative in providing support to peers has been very successful in enabling women to have access to others who have had similar experiences and difficulties with breastfeeding. This 'common ground' has shown to be fundamental in the continuation of breastfeeding for many women.
- The buddy training has provided women with confidence and self-esteem needed to be able to successfully breastfeed in public and get through the difficult early stages. It has also enabled women to talk to others about their experiences and offer much needed support. Sharing experiences, informing others and providing mutual encouragement were the main aims of the support group and these have evidently been achieved.
- The West Howe breastfeeding support group is meeting many of the Sure Start National targets, especially objective 1, improving social and emotional well being and objective 2, improving health. The presence of project workers with experiences and expertise in a variety of professional fields at the group also ensures that targets within the other Sure Start objectives are being addressed.

It is clear that the West Howe breastfeeding support group is providing a much needed support service to many new mothers and their partners in the community and it has been shown that the group is instrumental in promoting and increasing breastfeeding rates in the area. Plans for increasing the number of buddies and outreach support to women is underway and many buddies are undertaking a breastfeeding counselling course. These future plans will ensure that the group continues to provide a peer-support service that is facilitated by women from the Sure Start community along side Sure Start project workers and in collaboration with health professionals from the local area.

Contents	Page
Introduction	9
◆ Background	9
◆ The West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group	11
Purpose of the study	12
Findings	14
◆ Bosom Buddies Focus Group	14
◆ The Questionnaire	18
◆ Individual interviews with mothers	21
◆ Health Professionals views	30
Conclusions	32
Update	34
References	35
Appendices:	37
Bosom Buddy training programme	
Initial contact form	
Members questionnaire	
Interview guides	
Health professionals questionnaire	



Introduction

This report describes the findings from the evaluation of the West Howe breastfeeding support group at Sure Start Bournemouth. This evaluation is part of the overall research and evaluation strategy of the Sure Start programme that aims to examine the effects of Sure Start programmes on children, families and communities.

This local evaluation was designed to look at how the breastfeeding support group was meeting the need of Sure Start residents and how it was addressing government targets for Sure Start, especially objective 2, improving health. This objective is concerned with supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth and includes the target of promoting and providing information on breastfeeding.

Involvement in the breastfeeding support group also aims to promote self-esteem and achievement in parents, thereby contributing to the other Sure Start objectives, especially improving social and emotional wellbeing (objective 1).

Background

The health advantages of breastfeeding are well known but despite this the majority of women appear to discontinue breastfeeding during the first few postnatal weeks. This is for a number of reasons including; family attitudes, lack of support from the local health community and inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate information from health professionals. There is also the pain and inconvenience breastfeeding can cause the mother. Another 'side effect' of trying to breastfeed is the sense of isolation mothers can feel when the process becomes difficult. There is increasing acknowledgement that the provision of extra support for breastfeeding mothers is an important factor in increasing the duration of breastfeeding (Sikorski and Renfrew 1999)

In order to help and encourage mothers during this period, funding became available from the Department of Health to promote and encourage breastfeeding in socially disadvantaged areas as it is also known that women with low incomes are less likely to breastfeed than other women (Forster et al. 1997).

Going under such names as 'Simply the Breast' and 'Bosom Buddies' these groups give mothers the opportunity, on a regular basis, to learn from a breastfeeding specialist and Bosom Buddies, view relevant educational materials and talk to other women about their experiences, all this taking place in a relaxed and informal environment. The distinctive feature of these support groups is the involvement of local women who have successfully breastfed in the past. After a training course in breastfeeding support they act as mentor and individual friend to the breastfeeding mum giving information and encouragement over the phone or face-to-face in the new mum's home.

The support groups are aimed at:

- pregnant women who want to learn about breastfeeding.
- new mothers learning to breastfeed for the first time.
- mothers experiencing any problem connected with breastfeeding.
- those mums thinking about returning to work and wanting to know how to carry on breastfeeding
- AND those women who enjoyed breastfeeding and who would like to help and encourage others.

A number of these projects have now reached the evaluation stage and there is some literature on the subject in the public domain. The Easterhouse project (McInnes et.al 2001) on peer support for promoting breast-feeding showed an increase in the intention to breastfeed during pregnancy and a significant greater proportion of the group actually initiated breast feeding at birth. Interestingly though there appeared to be no significant difference from a control group after six weeks. The Easterhouse project also felt that there was little peer support in the community as mothers in the study voiced a lack of support from their social network. Some health professionals were also quite negative about the project and this often appeared to be associated with a negative attitude towards breastfeeding. A frequent comment from health professionals was that there were other more important issues such as drug abuse or alcoholism, and mothers living in such circumstances had enough to worry about without worrying about breastfeeding. The enthusiasm of the helpers was sometimes seen as a threat as they were quoted as being 'too enthusiastic' or 'over zealous'. Eventually however the sheer enthusiasm of the volunteer helpers swept away professional reservations. (Kirkham 2000)

However, not all health professionals were initially against peer support groups for breastfeeding. Within the Easterhouse project community midwives were seen as consistently supportive and encouraging. (McInnes et.al 2001). Also midwives closely involved with the Doncaster scheme reported that breastfeeding Mums were able to discuss issues with the volunteers that they would not necessarily discuss with them. (Kirkham 2000)

An evaluation of the Blandford and Salisbury groups concluded that these groups "appear to be highly successful in supporting women to continue to breastfeed for at least six weeks following their first attendance". The groups also seem to provide important psychological and social benefits for the mothers. These included access to expert advice and consistent information and the value in being able to talk to someone who would listen and give support based on first hand experience.

The West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group

A breastfeeding support group and peer supporter training programme was launched in 1996 in Blandford Forum, Dorset and was followed by a sister group in Bemerton Heath, Wiltshire in 2001. Evidence shows that both groups are extremely successful in providing improved breastfeeding support to all women who wished to breastfeed by offering a relaxed and informal place to meet others, make friends and get expert advice. Both the Blandford and Bemerton Heath groups are now run independently by Bosom Buddies who have all qualified as breastfeeding counsellors.

Breastfeeding rates in West Howe are below the national average. Most women do not even start breastfeeding and of those who do, the majority give up within a few weeks. Sure Start Bournemouth believed that in order to increase and sustain breastfeeding rates in the area the Bosom Buddy support group would be beneficial to the programme by providing much needed support to mothers in the community (Sure Start Objective 2).

A total of 28 mothers have been trained as Bosom Buddies for the West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group. The first Buddy course took place in March 2002, when 7 mothers from both the Sure Start area and surrounding areas were trained. A second course followed in January 2003, successfully training 11 buddies, with over half being Sure Start residents and a third course is currently underway with 10 mothers. The aims of the Bosom Buddies course are to:

- Increase the number of women who breastfeed successfully in West Howe and the surrounding area
- Improve the health of women and children in this area
- Offer all breastfeeding women more support via a network of breastfeeding supporters
- Give knowledge about breastfeeding back to women

The Bosom Buddies course consists of six sessions of two hours and includes sessions by a midwife, health visitor, breastfeeding counsellor, midwifery tutor and counsellor. The emphasis is on learning about supporting breastfeeding in a relaxed and informal way. There are no exams or fees. The course itself covers a variety of topics which aims to inform women about all aspects of breastfeeding and providing support to other women who wish to breastfeed their babies. A sample programme of the course can be seen at the end of this report.

After completion of the first training course the group opened its doors to mothers in May 2002. Initially 6-8 women attended the group, which soon built up to 10-15 mothers attending each week. A high proportion of mothers who accessed the group were from outside the Sure Start area at the beginning, but gradually over time more local mothers began to hear about the group and started to attend.

The group meets once a week for one and a half hours at the Sure Start centre. All of the women who access the group fill in an initial contact form giving details of address, family information and breastfeeding experiences. The form is shown at the end of the report. A breastfeeding counsellor facilitates the group along with support from Sure Start project workers and Bosom Buddies. The aim for the future is to have buddies trained as breastfeeding counsellors themselves so they can take over the facilitation of the group enabling it to become solely led by mothers from the community.

The group now has on average eighteen mothers attending each week. Many more Sure Start residents are now accessing the group, a total of thirty one Sure Start mothers have attended since May 2002. The appointment of a Sure Start midwife who visits new mothers in the area and facilitates other groups has also been instrumental in increasing the number of women who use the group from the local area.

The group is informal, relaxed and open to all new mothers who wish to breastfeed their baby and ensures that both professional groups and mothers work together to meet the aims:

- to provide a relaxed environment where women can come and talk to other women who are breastfeeding, bring their babies and breastfeed them without any problems
- to help solve breastfeeding problems and provide support during those 'difficult patches'
- to share knowledge and provide mutual encouragement to women to continue breastfeeding
- to provide educational information about breastfeeding (including videos, leaflets, books etc)
- to create a network of women in the local Sure Start area who are breastfeeding
- to promote breastfeeding as the normal way for women to feed their babies
- to increase the number of women successfully breastfeeding in the local Sure Start area
- to campaign for better breastfeeding facilities in the local Sure Start and surrounding area.

Purpose of the study

The aim of the evaluation was to discover how women who attended the breastfeeding support group, either as a new mother or as a newly trained buddy, felt about it, their experiences of the group and the support it provided. The evaluation also hoped to find out if the group was reaching the Sure Start objectives outlined in the Sure Start Bournemouth revised plan, 2002-2004.

Preparation for the study

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the study from the Dorset Local Research Ethics Committee. Information letters and consent forms were given to all women who were registered with the support group and to all of the buddies. Everyone had the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation and could withdraw at any time. The facilitators of the group and Sure Start Project Workers were familiar with the evaluation plan, having been consulted at the evaluation working group or at various meetings.

Methods used

A variety of methods were used in the evaluation to ensure that as many women as possible who used the group could participate and share their experiences and opinions.

- A focus group interview was undertaken with six women who had completed the buddy training and had been providing support at the group for four months. Two of the women were Sure Start residents.
- A self-completing questionnaire was sent to all women six weeks after they had registered with the breastfeeding group. The questionnaire included questions about their satisfaction with the group and their breastfeeding experiences. It also gave respondents the opportunity to comment on any other aspects of the group. This questionnaire had been previously used in the Bemerton Heath Bosom Buddies Project.
- Individual interviews were carried out with six women who had been accessing the support group for at least eight weeks. All of the women were Sure Start residents. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were carried out at the Sure Start centre. Participants were asked to share their experiences about their time at the group and the contact they had with buddies.
- A short questionnaire was sent to 42 health professionals who practiced in and around the Sure Start area. These included Health Visitors, Midwives and GPs. Questions about knowledge of the group and referral patterns were asked.

Copies of the interview guides and the questionnaires are shown at the end of the report.

Findings

Bosom Buddies Focus group

A focus group facilitated by a researcher was undertaken with six Bosom Buddies. All of the buddies interviewed had completed the Bosom Buddy course at Bournemouth and three of them were still breastfeeding their baby. The interview lasted one hour and was before a breastfeeding support group meeting at the Sure Start Centre.

A semi-structured interview guide was used in the interview which explored a number of issues relating to expectations, experiences and views of the support group and buddy course. Participants were encouraged to share their points of view and engage in the discussion.

The following describes the data that came out of the interview and quotes from participants are shown anonymously.

Accessing the group

The first topic of discussion was about how each of the participants had heard about the group and why they had wanted to become a buddy. Three of the participants had been told about the course by either a health visitor or a midwife and the others had heard about it from a Sure Start Project Worker or from the course coordinators.

Participants explained how many of them had been successful in breastfeeding their babies and had wanted to share their experiences with others in order to promote breastfeeding in the Sure Start area. One buddy described how she had almost given up breastfeeding but had received advice and support from one of the group facilitators and had continued to successfully breastfeed her baby. This led to her being asked to do the course and help others who may have experienced similar difficulties.

Other buddies explained that they had gained confidence from the course and really wanted to 'give something back' and be able to help others who wanted to breastfeed their baby but were anxious about it. All of the buddies were extremely positive about the training they had received and felt confident to pass that knowledge onto others.

Participants then went on to talk about what the group was like at the beginning and how it was progressing. All of the buddies agreed that the first few weeks of the support group was quiet with very few mothers attending. This was felt to be due to a number of things, which included not being aware of the group, lack of advertising and promotion, health professionals not knowing about the group and some confusion about who the group was aimed at. One participant felt that the group should be for all new mothers in the community and promoting it as only for Sure Start led to confusion about who could attend.

One buddy however, talked about how mothers from outside of the Sure Start area were accessing the group and was concerned that families from the West Howe area were not using the service and had not heard about the group. She also had some worries about the appropriate use of resources.

I find it quite uncomfortable when a mum who lives within the area wants to borrow a sling, or wants to borrow a particular video and it's on loan to someone outside the area.

All of the buddies were aware of this and believed they were teething problems and felt quite sure that as time went on and the group became known within the community, Sure Start residents would start attending and benefit from the support on offer. A buddy explained how it was necessary to encourage as many women as possible to attend the group in the early days, in order to attract local mothers and be able to provide a network of breastfeeding mothers within the group. This stage of the group's development was essential for its future success.

This led on to the next topic of discussion about how to encourage local mothers to access the group. All of the buddies talked about the need for advertising the group in a variety of places, including hospitals, health centres, schools, libraries and in local shops and services. They believed that posters and leaflets left in these places would increase awareness of the group and more importantly reach those mums who were unsupported. An increase in referrals from health professionals and the possibility of outreach work by the buddies were also considered to be ways to increase awareness and encourage new mums to access the group.

The buddies felt strongly about reaching women when they were first pregnant and encouraging them to attend the group before they had their baby. One buddy talked about how it was important for young pregnant women to see others breastfeeding and talk to others about what it was like.

It's great when a young girl who is having her first baby can actually watch someone else breastfeed well and see that it isn't so hard to do...they need to be able to go somewhere where they can talk to others who have felt the same.

All of the buddies agreed that they wanted the group to be accessible to all pregnant women, whether they had decided to breastfeed or not. By doing this, women will be able to see others successfully breastfeeding, be able to ask questions about breastfeeding, receive up to date information and get expert advice and then make an informed decision about breastfeeding their baby. One buddy felt that this was especially important for the Sure Start area as breastfeeding rates were low. The fact that the group was central and therefore easily accessible to residents would allow all pregnant women the opportunity to attend.

Supportive environment

It was clear from the buddies that the aim of the breastfeeding group was to provide a strong supportive environment, not only in giving advice and support about breastfeeding, but also offering other means of support such as social, emotional and practical. All of the buddies were keen to share their own experiences of the problems they had with breastfeeding when their baby was born. They explained how a lack of support in hospital often made them doubt their ability to breastfeed successfully and how common it was to see other women struggling to feed their babies. This enforced their feelings of wanting to make the support group work for women in the Sure Start area.

- Social network

Although it was early days, the group had started to become a place where women could meet and share experiences, not only about breastfeeding, but about all aspects of childcare and family life. Buddies agreed that women who were new to the group soon integrated and could share any problems with them or with others attending the group. They attributed this to the informal, relaxed atmosphere of the group and hoped that this would continue and that many new friendships would be formed.

Women come along to the group for a chat and then you can see them starting to talk and their confidence grows and then they are talking about the feeding problems they are experiencing.

Buddies were aware that there were many young mums in the Sure Start area that were isolated and unsupported and felt that the group needed to attract these mums, offering them a place where they can meet others, get information and receive support in all aspects of childcare. It was also hoped that these young mums would take up the opportunity to do the buddy course in the future and therefore ensure that the breastfeeding peer support group continues in the community.

- Practical help

A number of resources are available to all of the women who attend the group, these include videos, books and equipment to help with breastfeeding (a photo of the home-made resource bookcase is shown on the next page). The buddies explained that this practical help is vital for women wishing to continue breastfeeding, particularly if they are experiencing some difficulties. They went on to talk about how women would often struggle on by themselves at home, so having access to these materials along with the option to phone a buddy at home was so important.

- Outreach working

Buddies discussed how they would like to become involved in helping women with their breastfeeding problems on a wider scale and felt that they could offer greater support by visiting women in their homes, visiting postnatal wards and giving talks in a variety of healthcare settings. An extended service was felt to be important in promoting breastfeeding to a wider area and could focus on the hard to reach families who often needed increased support.

It is clear from the buddy focus group that the aims of the breastfeeding group are beginning to be met by creating an informal and relaxing environment, responding to women's individual needs and providing much needed support and advice on breastfeeding and related child care issues. The buddies are passionate about breastfeeding and feel that the course has prepared them to offer a supportive environment for women wishing to breastfeed, although making it clear that collaboration with health professionals was also important to the success of the group.

It is so important that we work together with midwives and health visitors, they are usually the first people a women sees so it's vital we work together as a team.

We have to get other health professionals on board....they need to come and see what we do here and then they can tell women about the group.

The results of a questionnaire sent to a sample of health professionals in the local area about their views of the support group can be seen later in this report.



The bookcase containing leaflets, books, videos and breastfeeding equipment.

The Questionnaire

A self-completing questionnaire was posted to every women who had previously sent back a consent form saying that they were happy to take part in the evaluation. A total of 59 questionnaires were sent out and 45 were returned, giving a response rate of 76%. Table 1 shows how the questionnaires were distributed and how many were returned from Sure Start residents.

Table 1.

	Number of questionnaires sent	Number of questionnaires returned
Sure Start Mothers	13	8
Mothers from outside the Sure Start area	46	37

The average age of the baby at the time of questionnaire completion was 20 weeks (range 2-104 weeks). Of those who responded to the questionnaire, 89% were still breastfeeding at the time of questionnaire completion. Of the five women who had stopped breast feeding none of them had discontinued because they did not like breast feeding.

Their reasons for discontinuing are shown in Table 2. The commonest reasons cited were;

- the process was too tiring or took too long.
- the mother had insufficient milk and therefore the baby seemed hungry
- breasts were painful
- it was hard to judge how much the baby had drunk

Of the five babies that stopped breastfeeding four did so before they were 9 weeks old (range 3-8) and one did so at 48 weeks.

Table 2: Reasons for discontinuing breastfeeding

Reason*	No. of women
Took too long or too tiring	2
Insufficient milk / baby seems hungry	2
Painful breasts or nipples	2
Hard to judge how much baby had drunk	2
Not convenient	1
Baby could not be fed by others	1
Baby lost interest	1
Lack of health professional support	1
Baby would not suck or rejected breast	1
Embarrassment	1
Found the outside world was not 'breast feeding friendly'	1

*(More than one reason could be given)

Of the respondents who were able to recall how many times they had attended the support group an average was calculated of 3.75 (a range from 1-13). Although only five mothers withdrew from the program, 59% attended the support group between 1 and 3 times. Their views concerning what was good about the group are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Aspects of the group that women considered good

What was good about the group?	No. of women	Percentage
Enthusiasm of those running group	42	93.3%
Able to talk about BF problems	40	88.9%
Access to books & videos	34	75.6%
Increased confidence in BF	25	55.6%
It is led by mothers	22	48.9%
Getting consistent advice about BF	21	46.7%
Having somewhere I can take a new baby	21	46.7%
Being able to talk about other problems	20	44.4%
Making new friends	19	42.2%
Seeing BF happening	12	26.7%
Increased confidence in parenting	10	22.2%
Seeing older babies BF	9	20.0%
Increased confidence in general	9	20.0%
Having access to a buddy	9	20.0%
Other	14	31.1%

(More than one aspect could be given)

A number of positive aspects were identified as being good by more than half of the women; that they were able to talk about breastfeeding problems, the enthusiasm of those running the group, access to videos and books and that it increased their confidence in breastfeeding. Also important to the mothers was that the group was lead by other mothers and they received consistent advice about breastfeeding.

A total of 49.2% of the aspects identified by the women related specifically to breastfeeding, the remainder related mainly to issues of a psycho-social nature such as being able to talk about other problems and making new friends. Practical issues such as somewhere to go with a new baby was also deemed important by the mothers.

Respondents were given the opportunity to comment on the things that were less good about the group. A small number of mothers identified areas where they felt the group could be improved or changed. These areas were related to the timing of the group as it clashed with activities organised for other children in the family, the actual process of breastfeeding in front of others was embarrassing and that sometimes the sessions became a 'little hectic'.

However this part of the questionnaire was also used by a number of mothers to confirm their enthusiasm for the group and state that there was nothing they felt was 'less good'.

Everything about the groups was fantastic. I would have given up breast feeding by six weeks without the group.

The level of breastfeeding success achieved by women attending the West Howe group is outstanding. A total of 88.9% of those who returned the questionnaire, sent six weeks after their first attendance, were still breastfeeding. Only five women reported discontinuing breast feeding. Of these, four reported doing so before their baby was four months of age and thus earlier than the Department of Health recommends (DoH 1994). In contrast, in 1995 in the UK only 58% of those who were breastfeeding at birth had discontinued by four months postnatally (Foster et al. 1997).

While 49.2% of the qualities identified as good by the group related to its function in supporting breastfeeding, other issues which could be classified as predominantly psychosocial (such as making friends, increasing confidence and sharing problems) were considered equally important by the participants. For example, 22.2% of the women stated that the group had increased their confidence in their parenting.

It is known that conflicting advice relating to breastfeeding remains a problem (Dykes & Williams 1999) and it is important to note that 46.7% of the women specifically identified the consistent advice that they received at the group as being one of its positive facets. This may suggest that they did not always receive consistent advice before going to the group.

It is perhaps surprising that only 20% of women identified having access to a Buddy as a positive aspect. However this question did not specify whether the access was within the group meeting or outside it and therefore may not have been interpreted consistently. Also, this data conflicted with other positive responses about the buddies showing that there could have been some misunderstanding about the question. The qualitative data from women who live in the Sure Start area also confirms the importance of having access to a buddy.

A total of 48.9% of the women specifically praised the fact that the group was run by other mothers.

Very few negative comments were made about the group and related to practical problems about the time the activity took place and the 'busy' environment within the sessions. The breastfeeding related comments focused on two mothers feelings of embarrassment concerning feeding in public and in the company of people they did not know very well.

It can be concluded from the results of this questionnaire that the breastfeeding support group appears to be extremely successful in supporting women and providing a positive environment that enables mothers to continue to breastfeed for at least six weeks following their first attendance. It also appears to provide a number of psychological and social benefits in areas of overall confidence and access to relevant peer groups.

Individual interviews with mothers

Interviews were conducted with six women who lived in the Sure Start area and had been attending the breastfeeding group for at least eight weeks. All of the women were breastfeeding and their babies were aged between 10 weeks and 10 months. The following data describes how these women heard about the group, their experiences and feelings about the group and their hopes for the future.

Access

- Hearing about the group

The women were asked how they had heard about the group and how they had first started to attend. Their midwife had told two participants about the group when they were pregnant. The others had either been told by a health visitor, community midwife, Sure Start visitor or the Sure Start midwife. Most of the women had seen leaflets about the group at their local surgery and also heard about it through friends or other Sure Start services.

The participants who attended the group while pregnant talked about how valuable this was in preparing them for breastfeeding and introducing them to other women who were breastfeeding successfully. One participant stated:

It was good because you saw other people breastfeeding, and because I am only young I didn't really see family or anything like that breastfeeding. It really prepared me.

They added that attending the group before they had their baby enabled them to get to know others and gave them the confidence to try to breastfeed and get through the difficult early days. Having access to up to date information and expert advice from the buddies also prepared these women for breastfeeding.

Participants described how they had experienced problems breastfeeding their baby shortly after birth and many said they were on the verge of giving up when they were told about the support group. They explained how important it was to be able to talk to others who had similar difficulties and overcome them. Also having access to expert advice was the key to continuing to breastfeed.

Coming here put me in touch with people who were going through similar things.

It was so stressful and I didn't think I could carry on, then I was told about the group and here I am six months on and loving it.

One participant explained how she had given up breastfeeding and felt very depressed about it. Her midwife recommended the group and gave her a number to call. Three buddies got in touch and gave much needed support, encouraging her to attend the group. Ongoing support by a buddy was given by visiting at home and spending time with her at the group.

Support for this participant included practical and emotional help, such as playing with an older child whilst she could breastfeed, advising on correct positioning and bringing books, videos and equipment to help with feeding. This participant went on to say:

I'd given up but luckily it had only been three days, my milk was still there and I had put her on the bottle. She wasn't happy, I wasn't happy. Thank god I came to the group.

- Taking the first step

Some of the women described how they had been slightly worried about going to the group by themselves for the first time. Accessing new groups or services for the first time can often be difficult for many people. The breastfeeding support group has thought very carefully about this and has taken steps to provide all women with the opportunity to attend the group. Sure Start visitors, breastfeeding buddies and the Sure Start project workers visit new mums in the area and offer to take them to the group for the first time or put them in touch with someone who attends. This has been well received and has encouraged many women to start using the group.

One participant explained how she had been told that Sure Start groups were 'not very nice places to go to' and was put off attending. It was not until a Sure Start visitor went to see her at home and encouraged her to visit both the breastfeeding group and the Let's Play parent and toddler group that she found out that the groups were exactly what she needed. This mum went on to say how both of these groups are now a 'lifeline' for her and she is planning to do the buddy training and become a Let's Play buddy

Some of the women interviewed talked about how they felt the first time they visited the group. They explained that it was hard to take that first step and join in the group, however, once inside the doors, all of the women felt welcome and their anxieties soon disappeared. One young mum explained:

I was terrified coming over on my first day. I am glad I did 'cause as soon as that door opens one of them (buddy) is there to greet you and introduce you.....the girls make such an effort with the new people.

Women and families who use other Sure Start services are also told about the breastfeeding group and given the opportunity to go along with someone else if they wish.

- Welcoming and encouraging others

All the mums who were interviewed agreed everyone at the group was friendly and welcoming, this was seen as the reason why the group was so successful and increasing its members. One young mum said:

As soon as you walked in the door, someone was there to greet you and introduce you to the other mums. You were put at ease straight away.

All of the participants had very positive feelings about the facilitator of the group. It was felt that the group's success was mainly due to the enthusiasm and openness of the facilitator and the way in which she welcomed new mothers and maintained support. One mum went on to say how she had experienced groups where she had been pushed into a corner and not spoken to. She was amazed how everyone was so friendly and happy to share their problems about breastfeeding and other aspects of family life.

One of the aims of the group is to increase the number of women who breastfeed successfully in the local community and surrounding area. It was clear from talking to participants in the interviews that they were often the only mother breastfeeding amongst their family and friends. Participants agreed that not enough new mums in the area were breastfeeding and did not know about the benefits for their baby. Trying to let women know about the support group and about other Sure Start groups was seen to be vital in order to encourage all mothers to join and meet others in similar circumstances and therefore create a strong community network of support.

Most of the participants hoped to undertake buddy training and therefore feel able to educate some of their friends and family about the benefits of breastfeeding and encourage more women from the Sure Start area to access the support group.

- The environment

The environment and available resources were discussed in all of the interviews. All of the participants felt that the Sure Start centre was a perfect environment for the group as it was central to the majority of families in the area and offered clean and well-equipped facilities. The group also provided a wide variety of breastfeeding literature and equipment for women to borrow. The opportunity to access books, videos and breastfeeding aids was greatly appreciated by all of the women interviewed.

It is great how we can borrow things like cushions, breast pumps and slings. Most of us in this area wouldn't be able to afford these things and wouldn't get the opportunity to use the things that help with feeding our babies.

Participants agreed that having access to new equipment and information materials was excellent. All of the women had either borrowed a book or some type of breastfeeding aid, such as a pillow, sling or breast pump. Being able to watch others use this equipment and get opinions about them helped with sustaining breastfeeding as they were able to try them out for themselves.

Some of the women stated they would not have known about this equipment and may have given up breastfeeding all together if the problems they were experiencing had not resolved.

Support

- Information giving

Access to 'expert' advice and consistent information from the group was repeated in all of the interviews. Many of the women felt that understanding how breastfeeding worked helped them. For example, how the 'let down' reflex works and the nutritious value for the baby. Group facilitators and the buddies took the time to explain breastfeeding in depth to all of the mums attending the group and this knowledge contributed to the success of breastfeeding for many of them.

One women explained how she felt like giving up breastfeeding many times, but after meeting with a buddy or another mum at the group and being told why she was sore or why a certain thing was happening, she felt confident to carry on, knowing that it would get better. This along with being able to ask all sorts of questions, not just about breastfeeding, but about childcare, weaning, going back to work, expressing etc. contributed to how successful the women were in breastfeeding their baby.

Participants talked about being in control of the decisions they were making about feeding. Although the group was excellent at encouraging and promoting breastfeeding, some of the participants felt it could be a little intimidating if they decided to wean or give a bottle to their baby. One mum explained:

There is a danger that you can be made to feel like you have failed if you want to switch to a bottle or wean a bit earlier than they advise. Support has to be given to all women whatever their decisions about feeding. You don't want to feel guilty about giving up breastfeeding.

Another participant believed that she had been given a very balanced view about all aspects of breastfeeding and felt fully supported by the group when she decided to introduce a bottle feed.

Returning to work and being supported is very important for a lot of women. Participants talked about how they were helped in making the right decisions for them when they returned to work. Advice on expressing milk and feeding patterns was vital to them as many said they would have just given up completely if they didn't have the support from the group.

Being able to borrow the breast pump and being shown exactly what to do was why I am still breastfeeding, even though I am back at work. It's great I can do that.

It's fantastic to be able to go back to work and not worry about giving up breast feeding and I have said if I hadn't have met them I wouldn't be breast feeding. I'd be at home, I'd be miserable and I'd feel guilty... and I don't. It's absolutely brilliant.

As previously stated most women interviewed had shown an interest in doing the buddy training. Reasons for this included being able to 'give something back' to the community and help with increasing breastfeeding rates. Participants' felt that if they were able to

help others understand the benefits of breastfeeding and dispel the myths more women would try to breastfeed and hopefully do the buddy course.

One participant explained how she had been given information about a number of different courses she could take part in locally and felt that there were many good opportunities in the community to learn and take part in new activities. She went on to say that many local people were still unaware of the opportunities that were available in the community and what Sure Start was offering. Once again, having key workers to encourage and support people to make that first step was needed.

- Confidence building

Many of the women talked about how they felt embarrassed about breastfeeding in public when they first had their baby. They went on to say that by attending the support group their confidence had grown and now they would breastfeed anywhere.

I wanted to breastfeed but feeding in public worried me. Doing it at the group in front of others has given me the confidence to feed anywhere now.

I would never have imagined me breastfeeding out in public places, but apart from a few strange looks while shopping I feel really good about it and know it's because of the group.

Many of the women talked about being reassured they were 'doing it right'. This reassurance results in women feeling more confident and able to carry on breastfeeding. These findings are seen in many other studies or evaluations of peer support groups (Bemerton Heath Bosom Buddies Project, Bristol Babes Project). Other participants explained they were often under pressure from family or friends to give up breastfeeding, but the group had given them the confidence to ignore these pressures and continue breastfeeding as well as educating those around them about the benefits.

Women talked about the need for on-going support. It was clear that many had been successfully breastfeeding for a number of weeks, but they still regularly attended the group. Once again it was the need for reassurance and to be told they were doing the right things that kept women attending. One went on to add:

I just like the support 'cause if I do have a bad week I can get some advice and get back on track.

Participants agreed that the group had made them more confident, not only in their ability to breastfeed, but in themselves generally. The fact that some of them could attend a group by themselves, offer advice to other new mums, get involved in advertising the group and undertake a buddy course provides evidence that this type of peer support group works and is meeting the needs of mothers in the area.

- Common ground

All of the women interviewed talked about how good it was to see other women breastfeeding and hear about their own experiences. It was important to them to discover

that others had similar worries about feeding their baby as they did and it was great to be able to talk about these worries.

They (buddies) are mums themselves and a lot of them are still feeding. They have been through it and they know that it's hard to get started and established.

Participants described the importance of seeing other women breastfeeding and not being embarrassed about it. Many of the mums admitted that they were initially embarrassed to breastfeed in front of people they didn't know but said that they soon gained the confidence to try and after only one or two visits to the group were breastfeeding openly, both at the group and in public.

It was great to see others breastfeeding cause you just don't see it outside, especially in this area. It really made me feel that I could do it and give my baby the best start.

- **Bosom Buddies**

All of the participants repeatedly talked about the support given by the buddies at the group. It is clear that all of the women felt that having someone to talk to that has experienced similar problems with breastfeeding has helped them enormously with their own problems. The women explained that there was a number of ways in which the buddies offered support, including giving individual and relevant advice, follow-up advice, either by telephone or a home visit and most importantly being able to spend time listening. One mum stated:

I would get to the point where I was in tears and thinking why am I trying to feed this baby. They (buddy) tried to support me through that really, just with phone calls, just listening, being there and giving advice.

It was important to some of the women to be able to talk to the same buddy and forge a relationship with them. This continuity of care and advice is a common requirement for all aspects of health and social care and has been discussed in other Sure Start projects by local residents as being important to them and their families.

It's all about having a familiar face to talk to, someone you know who will listen and offer good advice and tell you when you are doing it right.

All of the women agreed that the advice and the information they were given from buddies was helpful. If they were experiencing any problems, they felt confident that the support received was up to date and relevant to their individual need. The credibility of the buddies and especially the facilitator of the group was seen to be responsible for its success and for increasing attendance.

Once again, it was the fact that the buddies had all breastfed themselves and some had experienced problems with feeding their own babies that helped women the most.

Knowing that they could overcome these problems and successfully breastfeed played a major part in women continuing to breastfeed their babies.

Participants agreed that the group offered a wide range of support, not only about breastfeeding, but about all aspects of childcare and family life. This corresponds to what emerged from the buddy focus groups as one of the group aims. Although the focus is on breastfeeding and increasing breastfeeding rates in the local area, the group also enables women to talk about many different issues that affect their lives. One participant explained:

The support from the buddies is fantastic and it doesn't matter what the problem is. It doesn't have to be a breastfeeding problem, that is the nice thing.

If you are just feeling a bit emotional or something else isn't going right they(buddies) still have time to listen.

- Professional Support

It was generally felt by the participants that many health professionals did not have the time, especially in hospital immediately after birth, to give adequate support to breastfeeding mothers. They talked about being left on their own while trying to feed and relying on their family to offer advice, which according to many of them, would often make the whole experience harder. One mum explained how her mother had tried to help her breastfeed as there was no other support and had tried to encourage her to give a bottle feed when things got difficult.

Women talked about how some health professionals had admitted they were not up-to-date with breastfeeding advice and would sometimes suggest a mother either give a bottle feed if they were worried or get advice from a breastfeeding counsellor. Conflicting advice and a lack of support during difficult times with breastfeeding were common responses when asked about women's experiences with health professionals.

However, some of the women had positive things to say about their contact with health professionals, particularly with their community midwife. One participant talked about how her midwife had been especially supportive after a home delivery, but due to busy schedules and days off could not offer the continuous support that was needed for her to establish breastfeeding, but had given her information about the breastfeeding group and offered to go with her on the first visit.

Participants felt that a stronger link between the group and health professionals was needed in order to maintain continuity and to reach more women who wanted to breastfeed. They believed that professional groups were starting to take more notice of the breastfeeding group and were recommending it to the women they were caring for, both while pregnant and after birth. However, participants made it clear that it was important that the group remained women-led and did not become another professionally led service.

Social Network

Participants agreed that the group had become important to them in other ways apart from getting breastfeeding advice, for example, a place where they could meet other new mothers and share child care experiences. They felt that a strong social network had developed and many new friendships had been made, with the opportunity for them to discuss all aspects of family life. Many of the women admitted that they would have stopped breastfeeding early on if it wasn't for the support they received from the group and this was greatly due to the fact they had somewhere to go and socialise with others.

It is just nice to meet other people that are going through the same sort of thing and have a chat about everything.

Participants felt that the group had become much more than a breastfeeding support group with many new friendships being formed that often continued outside of the group and resulted in some attending other Sure Start services together, for example, the Let's Play Together Parent and Toddler group. The photo below shows a typical group session with mums supporting each other.



One young mum talked about how important the breastfeeding group was for the area. She felt that there were many young, single mothers in the community that had nowhere to go and meet others in similar circumstances and the group really met that need. She went on to say how difficult it was sometimes to keep breastfeeding as she was the only one doing so in her circle of friends and that the breastfeeding group had enabled her to make new friends who lived in the area. She added:

I have met a lot of people in the group that live round here and it's great that they are all breastfeeding. We even meet up outside the group now.

Another mum spoke about how she needed to keep going to the group to get out of the house and meet the friends she had made. She explained how it was important for her to maintain these friendships, as she was a single mum and often felt isolated at home.

I find that I don't need so much support from breastfeeding now it is the other support that they give you. It is the rest of it.

One participant explained how many of the mothers carried on going to the group even when breastfeeding had been well established. Although they no longer had any difficulties with feeding, they wanted to continue the contact with friends and offer support to others within their community.

The way forward

Participants agreed that the West Howe breastfeeding support group was vital to the local community in promoting breastfeeding and that it should continue offering support to all new mothers in the area. They felt that more needed to be done to encourage Sure Start mothers to access the group and benefit from the on-going support it offered, not only for breastfeeding, but for all aspects of parenting.

All of the women felt there was a need for more trained buddies so that more women could receive individual support and also to help with the practicalities of running the group. Home visits and telephone contact could also be increased if there were more buddies as both of these activities had proven to be extremely important to all of the women interviewed.

The women believed that visiting hospitals, surgeries and other healthcare services would promote awareness of the group and result in more women attending. It was seen as vital for women to know about the group when they were first pregnant. This could be achieved by visiting antenatal groups and advertising in surgeries. Providing information in schools, youth centres and other community venues was also felt to be a good way to promote breastfeeding and raise awareness of the group. A participant said:

It would be great if there could be a key worker, a buddy, who could link into the hospital and visit women as soon as they have had their baby to give breastfeeding support.

One woman felt that a buddy could become a familiar face at the hospital and would help women attend the group as they would know someone - 'a friendly face'. Another talked about her experience in hospital and explained how she often heard women saying that they did not want to breastfeed at all and that they were never asked about it. She felt it was unfortunate that they never had the opportunity to visit a support group and receive information about breastfeeding.

It's about getting to them when they are pregnant, at the surgeries when they go in for their checks or even at the parent craft groups.

Links with health professionals was seen to be important for the future of the group. As previously noted, relationships with professionals was sometimes felt to be inadequate in relation to breastfeeding support. Inviting midwives, health visitors and GPs to the group was suggested by the participants so they could gain a better understanding of what happens there and therefore feel confident to refer new mothers and pregnant women to the group.

Health Professionals views

A short questionnaire was sent to 52 Health Professionals, which included Health Visitors, Midwives and GPs who worked within the Sure Start area.

The questionnaire consisted of five questions which included questions on awareness and knowledge of the breastfeeding group, as well as referral patterns. Respondents were also asked about their feelings of peer support groups.

A total of 28 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 54%

Awareness of the breastfeeding support group.

Twenty-four respondents (85.7%) stated that they were aware of a breastfeeding peer support group for Sure Start residents in the West Howe area. Of these, the majority had heard about it from another health professional (75%), with the remainder seeing a leaflet or a letter explaining the group. Five respondents also stated that they were told about the group via a meeting with a support worker from the breastfeeding support group.

Other respondents said they had also been given information about the group at either a Trust meeting, the launch of the group or by the Sure Start Project Manager. One respondent stated:

Everyone has told me!

Knowledge

All of the respondents gave some explanation about what they thought the breastfeeding group was about. Most of them felt that breastfeeding support to mothers both antenatally and postnatally was the prime function of the group, with information giving and advice to new mothers about breastfeeding being as important.

The promotion of breastfeeding and increasing breastfeeding rates was often mentioned.

To create a network of women in the Sure Start area who are breastfeeding and to promote and support others to do so.

Five respondents stated that the group trained mothers to become peer supporters and that peer support was what the group was about, with the same amount of responses about the importance of professional input.

Encourage young mums to socialise and discuss mutual questions and concerns in the presence of qualified professionals.

Only one respondent said that they thought the group was run by mothers for mothers. Another stated that the group provided support for breastfeeding mothers when professional support such as the midwife and the health visitor was less available.

Four stated that they knew the group lent out equipment and provided resources to mothers about breastfeeding.

Information, advice, support, loan of resources, eventually to become run by the mothers themselves.

In addition to the above, other responses included, smoking cessation and postnatal depression support as well as providing a place where women from disadvantaged areas and young unsupported mothers could meet others and form a network of breastfeeding support in the Sure Start area. Sharing experiences and socialising were also cited and one respondent stated that the project was for women with children under four.

Referrals

When asked if they had told any breastfeeding mothers about the group, 20 (71.4%) respondents stated they had, explaining the support that is available for them. Of the 8 who had not made any referral to the group, 4 explained it was because they did not know about it and 4 stated that they had not seen any mothers from the Sure Start area, therefore had not mentioned the group. Two respondents indicated that they had made referrals to other breastfeeding support groups in surrounding areas.

The final question asked if respondents considered it worthwhile to undertake peer support programmes. All of the respondents answered yes to this question, with one adding that it was invaluable in areas such as West Howe.

Conclusions

The success of the West Howe Breastfeeding support group

This evaluation has shown that the breastfeeding support group at West Howe has become a very important service to many new mothers, both from the Sure Start area and from surrounding areas. Women were very positive about all aspects of the group, especially the consistent support received and access to up-to-date information. The group provides a strong social network for new mothers who would otherwise feel quite isolated after the birth of their baby. Mothers with young children also benefit greatly from this social support as they can access a service where their child can socialise with others, have fun and remain safe while they can concentrate on getting the best advice about breastfeeding.

Peer support for breastfeeding mothers has been particularly effective in communities with low breastfeeding rates, where role models for breastfeeding and lack of practical support are scarce (Wright 1996). This evaluation has suggested that the buddy initiative has been extremely successful in enabling women to have access to others who have had similar experiences and difficulties with breastfeeding. This 'common ground' has shown to be fundamental in the continuation of breastfeeding for many women.

The buddy training has also provided women with the confidence and self-esteem needed to be able to successfully breastfeed in public and get through the difficult early stages. Women frequently explained how they felt able to talk to others about breastfeeding and wanted to 'give something back' to their community. Sharing experiences, informing others about breastfeeding and providing mutual encouragement were main aims of the support group and these have evidently been achieved.

- **Outreach working**

Taking that first step and attending the group initially was felt by many of the women to be the most difficult barrier to overcome, especially for young, unsupported mums in the local area. In the early days of the group, the buddies aimed to increase outreach working and encourage new mums to attend by visiting at home and offering to accompany them to the group. Visits to healthcare and community settings were also felt to be needed. Provision of updated, relevant breastfeeding information and equipment was one of the aims of the group. Women were very positive about being able to access all the resources offered by the group and often stated that without these resources they would have given up breastfeeding their baby.

- **Collaborative working**

Stronger links with health visitors, midwives and GPs were suggested by many of the buddies and mothers who use the group. Lack of time for breastfeeding support, particularly in hospital was seen to be a major influence on whether breastfeeding would be continued. Conflicting advice and lack of support early on was often quoted as the reason why many women gave up breastfeeding.

Health professionals were often invited to the group and encouraged to participate in promoting the group through their own practices. Findings from the health professional

questionnaire show that even in the early days there was good awareness and knowledge about the group and many were encouraging new mothers to access the service. Findings show that although it was important for the group to have closer links with health professionals, it was vital that it remained women-led and the peer support network was developed to include more local mothers.

Meeting Sure Start objectives

Sure Start National Objectives	
Objective 1	Improving social and emotional development
Objective 2	Improving health
Objective 3	Improving the ability to learn
Objective 4	Strengthening families and communities

It can be concluded that the West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group is meeting many of the Sure Start aims and objectives, especially Objectives 1 and 2. Supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth is the aim of objective 2, improving health. The group is evidently achieving this objective by providing information and support on all aspects of breastfeeding as well as promoting healthy lifestyles, parenting skills, safety and health awareness.

The involvement of Sure Start project workers, such as the Sure Start Midwife, Project Worker Health and the Sure Start Visitors in the group has provided an opportunity for women to access a variety of services and means of support. This multi-skilled team can offer advice and support in all areas related to child care and health. Women and their families can access other services such as infant massage group, Let's Play parent and toddler group and other parenting advice groups in the Sure Start programme. This integrated model ensures other Sure Start targets are being met.

This evaluation has shown that many of the women who attended the breastfeeding group, continued to breastfeed their babies for longer periods of time. Reasons for this included individual and consistent support from peers, access to breastfeeding information and equipment and increased levels of confidence and self-esteem. Participants often talked about how they had a sense of achievement and felt better about themselves. This coupled with the strong social network that had developed at the group greatly contributes to Sure Start National Objective 1, Improving social and emotional well being.

The peer support which exists within the group, particularly by the development of the bosom buddy training has been fundamental in providing a network of local mothers who can offer on-going support and friendship to others within the community. This is an important factor in strengthening families and communities (Sure Start National objective 4) in particular by involving families in building the communities capacity to sustain the service.

The future

At the time of this evaluation participants agreed that the support group was vital to the local community in promoting and increasing breastfeeding rates and that it should continue offering support to all new mothers in the area. It was believed that more needed

to be done to encourage women from the Sure Start area who were pregnant or had a new baby to access the group. Additional buddies as well as increased outreach support were also felt to be needed in order to develop an even stronger network of support for local families. An update of the group follows which highlights the progress achieved over the last 18 months.

Update

The group has been running for 18 months and now has an average attendance of 18 mothers each week. There are 28 trained Bosom Buddies and six of them are currently undertaking a breastfeeding counselling course, three with the aim to be qualified by March 2004. Once qualified they will be able to facilitate the group along with the buddies and with the support from the Sure Start Midwives.

The outreach work has increased considerably since the beginning of the group. As the findings from this study indicate, women felt that there had to be more support and information about breastfeeding available to all new mothers. This meant visits to hospitals, clinics and other community venues. The bosom buddies at West Howe now visit antenatal classes at a clinic to promote breastfeeding and answer questions. They also visit the breastfeeding workshop at the local hospital maternity unit and facilitate the group on supporting breastfeeding mothers. New and exciting ideas for increasing outreach work are always being discussed at the buddy meetings and it is clear that the group has become an important part of the Sure Start Programme in West Howe.

The buddies organise the day to day running of the group and the buddy outreach work that has greatly increased. Home visits are now regularly undertaken with women who need extra breastfeeding support and advice. The group offers a two hour training session to Bosom Buddies on how to carry out home visits, so that they feel confident and prepared when giving support to mothers in their own homes. They also offer buddy update training sessions on a monthly basis.



Bosom Buddies training course, 2003.

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Programme for Bosom Buddies November 2003

Fri 7th November 9.30-11.30

9.30-10.01.1 Welcome and introduction to the course.
10.00-10.45 Why are we promoting breastfeeding?
10.45-11.00 TEA BREAK
11.00-11.30 What is Sure Start

Fri 14th November 9.30-11.30

9.30-10.0 How breastfeeding work's?
10.00-10.45 Positioning basics and common problems.
10.45-11.0 TEA BREAK
11.00-11.30 Why women give up breastfeeding (or never even start).

Fri 21st November 9.30-11.30

9.30-10.30 Range of normal feeding patterns and how to cope.
10.30-10.45 TEA BREAK
10.45-11.30 Communication skills.

Fri 28th November 9.30-11.30

9.30-10.30 When women need professional help.
10.30-10.45 TEA BREAK
10.45-11.30 Contraception, menstruation, breastfeeding and sex.

Fri 5th December 9.30-11.30

9.30-10.0 Breastfeeding returning to work.
10.00-10.45 Moving on to mixed feeding.
10.45-11.0 TEA BREAK
11.00-11.30 Life with a breastfeeding baby

Fri 12th December 9.30-11.30

9.30-9.45 When Babies need professional help.
9.45-10.15 How to support women who give up breastfeeding.
10.15-10.45 TEA BREAK
10.45-11.0 Being a Bosom Buddy in West Howe.
11.00-11.30 Certificates, summing up, evaluation forms.

WELCOME TO THE BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT GROUP!

Please complete the following:

- Your name : _____
- Address (including post code) : _____

- Email : _____
- Telephone number : _____
- Today's date : _____
- Your age : _____
- How many children do you have (including this one)? _____
- When was this baby born? _____

- What type of birth did you have? Please tick (✓) a box.
If you had twins, please put two ticks!
- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Normal | <input type="checkbox"/> | Caesarean | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Forceps | <input type="checkbox"/> | Breech | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ventouse | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Other - please specify: _____ | | | |

- Was your baby born 3 or more weeks early? Yes No
- Have you breastfed before? Yes No

If Yes, for how long did you breastfeed each child? _____

- How did you hear about the group? _____
- Are you - married / living together / single / widowed, divorced or separated ?
(Please delete as appropriate)
- How would you describe your ethnic origin? _____

Are you registered with Sure Start?

Reasons for coming:

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Low weight gain | <input type="checkbox"/> | Suspects milk insufficiency | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Difficult feeding patterns | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pressure to introduce solids | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Very disturbed nights | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pressure to wean | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sore nipples | <input type="checkbox"/> | Social/company | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mastitis | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pregnant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thrush | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| specify site: _____ | | | |

Group members - Individual interview guide

Can you tell me why you came to the group?

- **Good things**
- **Not so good things**

Did you get any support from health Professionals?

What other things apart from BF advice did you get from the group?

- **Social**
- **Emotional**

Have you had contact with a buddy?

- **Support at the group**
- **Outside of the group**
- **Positive/negative**

Would you be interested in the buddy course?

If you had to choose one thing which made the group successful, what would it be?

What have you learnt from the group?

Do you feel this type of group is needed in your area? Why?

Anything else you would like to add?

Bosom Buddies Focus Group - Interview guide

Can you tell me why you came to the group in the first place?

- **what did you get out of the group?**
- **The good things**
- **The not so good things**
- **Support from Health Professionals**

How did you become a buddy and why?

Tell me about the course

- **What have you learnt**

What is it like to be a buddy?

- **Good things**
- **Not so good things**

Can you tell me if other things have happened to you because of the group?

- **Personally**
- **Friendships**
- **Confidence**

What have you learnt from the group?

Would you like the group to continue? Why?

Anything else?

Health Professionals Questionnaire

1. Are you aware that there is a breastfeeding peer support group for Sure Start residents in the West Howe area?

Yes

No

2. If yes, how did you hear about it?

From a mother

Another health professional

From meeting a support worker

Letter

Leaflet/poster

Other (please specify)

<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Can you briefly summarise what you think the project is about?

4. Have you told any breastfeeding mothers about this project and the support they can get?

Yes

No

If not why not? _____

5. Do you consider it worthwhile to undertake projects such as peer support programmes?

Yes

No

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it in the envelope provided



West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group - feedback questionnaire

1. How many times have you been to the support group?

2. What was good about the group? Please tick as many of the following as apply:

Seeing breastfeeding happening	<input type="checkbox"/>	Access to books/videos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being able to talk about breastfeeding problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being able to talk about other problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Having access to a buddy	<input type="checkbox"/>
The enthusiasm of those running the group	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is led by mothers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting consistent advice about breastfeeding	<input type="checkbox"/>	Seeing older babies breastfeeding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having somewhere I can take a new baby	<input type="checkbox"/>		
It increased my confidence in: - my breastfeeding	<input type="checkbox"/>	- my parenting	<input type="checkbox"/>
		- general	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other - please give these:

.....

3. What was less good?

4. How old is your baby now?weeks.

5. How are you feeding your baby? (please tick the box that applies to you)

Breastfeeding only	<input type="checkbox"/>
Breastfeeding plus other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stopped breastfeeding	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. If you have stopped breastfeeding your baby, when was this?..... (date).

If you can't give the date, please fill in how old your baby was at the time:.....(weeks)

Please turn over

7. Why did you stop breastfeeding? Please tick as many reasons as you need to:

Insufficient milk/baby seemed hungry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Painful breast or nipples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baby would not suck/rejected breast	<input type="checkbox"/>	You were ill	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hard to judge how much baby had drunk	<input type="checkbox"/>	Baby was ill	<input type="checkbox"/>
Breast-feeding took too long/was tiring	<input type="checkbox"/>	Embarrassment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baby could not be fed by others	<input type="checkbox"/>	Returning to work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did not like breastfeeding	<input type="checkbox"/>	You had inverted nipples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had breastfed as long as intended	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not convenient	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	Baby was teething/biting	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other reasons - please give these:

.....

8. Were the reasons/reason you stopped breastfeeding the same reasons why you came to the Breastfeeding Support Group?
(please tick the box that applies to you)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about your contact with the West Howe Breastfeeding Support Group?

Thank you very much