

**The Elland Baby Café:
A partnership approach to breastfeeding support**

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Abstract

Baby Café is a partnership venture between Sure Start Elland, Calderdale PCT and Calderdale & Huddersfield NHS Trust. Its primary aim is to improve local breastfeeding rates by offering expert help to support mothers to breastfeed for longer.

Breastfeeding confers major health benefits on both mother and baby. However only one third (35%) of babies in Calderdale are still breastfeeding at 6 weeks old. National surveys show that the reasons given for stopping breastfeeding by the great majority of mothers relate to problems, which could be avoided or solved if they were better supported. (Hamlyn, et al, 2002). This joint initiative has been developed to support breastfeeding mothers in the area by offering a weekly drop-in facility where they can relax, feed their baby, meet other mothers and know professional advice will be available.

Key Points

- Breastfeeding confers many health benefits on mother and baby, despite this only one third (35%) of babies in Calderdale are still being breastfed at 6 weeks old.
- The Baby Café provides local mothers with a weekly drop-in facility in Sure Start Elland, to relax, feed their baby, meet other mothers and know that professional advice will be available.
- The Baby Café is a centre of excellence in the provision of breastfeeding information and support. Mothers are given the information needed to make informed choices that are most appropriate for them, their baby and family.
- The information given is a blend of evidence-based, practical suggestions, with appropriate explanations and rationale. A midwife with specialist training and experience in supporting breastfeeding mothers provides this support.
- The Baby Café also offers a comprehensive range of resources for mothers to borrow, including books and videos.
- The Baby Café is one way in which different health agencies can work towards common goals.

Baby Café – working in partnership

Baby Café is a collaborative initiative between Sure Start Elland, Calderdale PCT and Calderdale & Huddersfield NHS Trust to support breastfeeding mothers in the area by offering a weekly drop-in facility where they can relax, feed their baby, meet other mothers and know professional advice will be available. Its aim is to improve the local 6 week and 4 months breastfeeding rates by offering expert help and support to breastfeeding women every Friday morning. Sure Start Elland funds 4 hours of midwifery time and hosts the café, the Calderdale & Huddersfield NHS Trust funds an additional 4 hours of midwifery time, and the Calderdale PCT has funded publicity.

The Café opened for business on the 27th September 2002 and has been open every Friday since with the exception of 27th December. It is run by Marilyn Rogers, Infant Feeding Advisor (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust) and Deborah Hughes, Sure Start Midwife (Sure Start Elland). The café opens from 9.30 to 11.30 am but, in effect, continues into the afternoon most weeks. It welcomes all breastfeeding women and their friends and family, regardless of where they live.

Breastfeeding rates in Calderdale and DOH targets

Breastfeeding confers major health benefits on both mother and baby. However only one third (35%) of babies in Calderdale are still breastfeeding at 6 weeks old. National surveys show that the reasons given for stopping breastfeeding by the great majority of mothers relate to problems, which could be avoided or solved if they were better supported (Hamlyn, et al, 2002).

At birth: 72.5% (66%)

At 6 weeks: 35% (42%)

At 4 months: unknown (27%)

(National figures in brackets from www.babyfriendly.org.uk)

Increasing the initiation and duration of breastfeeding is now a clear DOH target and PCTs are now charged with the task of increasing rates by 2% per annum (<http://www.doh.gov.uk/planning2003-2006/appb.htm#8>). In addition, one of the Sure Start targets is to improve local breastfeeding rates and reduce hospital admissions for infantile gastro-enteritis, something breastfeeding has a major role in.

Baby Café – building community health

In the first 20 sessions:

- 45 women (and 44 babies) attended (also friends, family, siblings!).
- There were 200 attendances in total (excluding friends, family, siblings).
- Average attendance per woman: 4.5 sessions (range 1 – 16 sessions).
- Average of 10 attendees a session (range 2 – 17 attendees).
- Youngest baby was 3 days old.

14 women attending (31%) have been from the Sure Start Elland area, 2 women (4.5%) are from the Sure Start West Central Halifax area, and the remaining 29 (64.5%) come from elsewhere in Calderdale and Huddersfield, particularly from the Brighouse, Town and Shelf areas. However, probably due to ease of access and the community-based links that are made, 45% of attendances are by women from the Sure Start Elland area, 4% from the Sure Start West Central Halifax area, and the remaining 51% from elsewhere in Calderdale and Huddersfield. No woman from the Sure Start North Halifax has attended to date.

Building community support networks

A small group of women who attended over the first 3 months have recently formed a small support group and meet in each other's houses on a weekly basis. A small number of women have expressed interest in becoming peer

supporters in their localities and we plan to take this forward if and when proper funding is secured for training, administration, support and resources.

Baby Café – the concept

The Baby Café idea originated in Haywards Heath, following Department of Health funding to look at original initiatives to increase breastfeeding rates and to support mothers to breastfeed for longer.

Key Concepts

- Breastfeeding mothers are often already isolated, segregated and discriminated against – whether subtly or obviously; at home or in public (Dykes and Griffiths 1998; Frossell 1998; Langley 1998).

The Baby Café is a place where all pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are welcome.

- Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are also consumers within a society where high standards of service and care are expected (Durdle et al, 1996).

The Baby café is a place of excellence with regard to breastfeeding information, help and support.

- Breast milk and the breastfeeding relationship confer innumerable benefits to babies, mothers, families, societies and the environment (Leon-Cava et al 2002).

The Baby Café is a place where breastfeeding and the breastfeeding relationship, at whatever stage, is valued, respected and protected.

- The public portrayal of breastfeeding often implies that breastfeeding is problematic, funny, embarrassing and middle–class (Henderson et al, 2000).

Breastfeeding is viewed as the natural way to nourish and nurture a baby/child.

- Organisations consciously “brand” their products or services, with the name and logo providing a visual representation of this (Durdle et al, 1996).

The Baby Café, with its name and visual representation, is considered a brand: synonymous with breastfeeding, excellence, quality, style and an informed, relaxed atmosphere.

Mission Statement

To be a drop-in centre of excellence offering information and help in a comfortable and relaxed environment, to any mother interested in breastfeeding and those supporting her.

The Baby Café.....

- Is an imaginative way of delivering healthcare in the 21st century.
- Has brand image associations, engendered by the name and visual representations, synonymous with breastfeeding, quality, style and a relaxed informal atmosphere.
- Is a centre of excellence, with regard to breastfeeding information, help and support.
- Provides opportunities for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers to meet each other.
- Offers information and support from staff with specific knowledge and skills in the area of breastfeeding and lactation.

- Provides mothers with information needed to make informed choices, which are the most appropriate for them, their baby and family.
- Offers support to mothers as they carry out their choices.
- Staff maintain confidential records and liaise, when appropriate, in a confidential manner with local health professionals.
- Is accessible to all mothers; regardless of age, religion, social status, race, and ability.

Why women come

Most women come initially with a breastfeeding problem (pain, soreness, frequent feeding, poor weight gain being the most common). 50% babies have been born by Caesarean section (local Caesarean section rate 22%) and we are finding breast thrush to be a problem in this group leading to many feeding problems. This is probably due to routine antibiotics at Caesarean section and we are looking into possibility of providing post-Caesarean women with acidophilus and/or live yogurt on the postnatal ward to see if this reduces the problem. Also a high percentage of the rest have had instrumental births with various feeding problems secondary to this (difficulty attaching to one side, unsettled at breast, colicky) and are having some good results from referring to a local cranial osteopath.

Some women come just for support and this is an important aspect of the group - many of the women are depressed when they first come but seem to recover as they share experiences and make new friends. This is proving a very important aspect of Baby Café and one that is of clear relevance to NSF (Mental Health) and other Sure Start targets.

What the mothers say - - - -

We send out evaluation forms 5 weeks after the last attendance. 16 forms have been returned to date (return rate of 80%).

The findings from the evaluation forms are:

- 10 women were still breastfeeding, whilst 6 women were not. The ages of the babies still being breastfed ranged from 8 weeks to 5.5 months. The babies no longer being breastfed had been breastfed for between 2.5 weeks and 3 months.
- 10 women found the Baby Café very helpful and the other 6 found it helpful.
- 13 women stated that attending Baby café had helped them continue to breastfeed. Two women didn't think it had helped them to continue breastfeeding, one of these was successfully breastfeeding and needed social support for other issues, which was arranged. One woman didn't know whether it had helped or not.

Below are some quotes from the women who have attended to date:

"I've enjoyed the Baby Cafe and found it extremely useful both in terms of advice from yourselves and the opportunity to share experiences (and some horror stories) with other new mothers having similar problems."

(First baby, 13 attendances, baby took 7 weeks to regain birth weight, still breastfeeding at 5 months, baby thriving.)

"We just wanted to say a big thank you for running the Baby Café. It was a real lifeline at a time when we really needed it."

(First baby, 11 attendances, still exclusively breastfeeding at 4.5 months.)

"Even though my problem was fairly minor, I was taken seriously and given some very good advice - which worked! Thank you!"

(1 attendance, still exclusively breastfeeding at 8 weeks.)

"I found the drop-in clinic an excellent source for advice and help."

(1 attendance, still exclusively breastfeeding at 12 weeks.)

"Unfortunately I was only able to attend once as my husband had to use our car for all subsequent weeks. That one visit convinced me that the staff are uniquely skilled and I felt very fortunate to have their guidance.....if only such quality support was available more widely."

(1 attendance, still exclusively breastfeeding at 9 weeks.)

"As I previously breastfed my first baby, I only attended twice to the clinic so I didn't get the full benefit – I think it's great for first time mums or first time breastfeeders. I did find out information I didn't know by coming to the clinic as you never know everything no matter how much you read up."

(2nd baby, 2 attendances, still breastfeeding at 5 months.)

"I did intend breastfeeding for a maximum of 6 weeks but the café helped me continue. I have now stopped because of returning to work."

(1st baby, 5 attendances, breastfed for 12 weeks.)

"I also found the advice on weaning helpful."

(1st baby, 9 attendances, still breastfeeding at 5.5 months.)

"The video shown of different ways to hold and get the baby to latch on was very helpful. It was also useful to talk to other mothers about other subjects such as getting babies to sleep."

(Still breastfeeding at 3 months.)

"Baby Café is an invaluable support unit for new mothers who want to breastfeed. I would have given in and put my daughter on the bottle if it was not for the expert advice, help and support I received at Baby Café. Also the social support from meeting other new mothers helped as well. Keep up the good work and more cafés please."

(1st baby, 13 attendances, still breastfeeding at 4.5 months.)

“Very encouraging! Would have definitely given up breastfeeding without their help.”

(2 attendances, still breastfeeding at 9 weeks.)

“Thank you for being there for me in my hours of need. I think that the Sure Start support services, the breastfeeding café in particular, provides a much-needed life-line for many mothers like myself.”

(1st baby, 6 attendances, still breastfeeding at 7 weeks.)

Two ambiguous comments have been received from attendees – one woman felt that Baby Café had been helpful but had come too late to solve her problems; another was upset by the information given regarding the use of dummies.

Conclusion

The Baby Café primarily supports pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, as well as being a resource for other professionals. It is a “client – led service”, responding to the mothers’ needs and involving them in the process of change and care. It is a good example of partnership working and innovation in an area that has proved to be one of the most enduring areas of health inequality.

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