SURE START RAVENSDALE BREASTFEEDING SURVEY.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
26 breastfeeding mums from the Sure Start Ravensdale area were surveyed during December 2003 to assess the impact of Sure Start and the Breastfeeding Incentive scheme on their breastfeeding. Participants valued the availability of the Sure Start midwife in providing support and ongoing encouragement and the peer support provided by mums they had met through Sure Start. 23 % of mums said that the incentive scheme influenced their decision to continue breastfeeding.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. 40% of known breast-feeders (26 mums) responded to a postal questionnaire.

2. 68% of mothers had always wanted to breastfeed

3. Of the 8 mothers who had not, 75% were influenced by individual encouragement from the NHS midwife, 62% by the Sure Start midwife and 37% by the Health Visitor. These contacts had far more influence than the media, friends and family.

4. The majority (68%) of mums said they had decided to breastfeed when they got pregnant (Pre-birth 9 months) which tallies with the 68% of mums who had said they had always wanted to breastfeed.

5. There was a mixed experience of feeding support in the hospital.31% of mothers said they received very little or no support. It would seem that mothers have to be quite determined to breastfeed when met with mixed support and offers of bottles by Health professionals.
6. 69% of mums would have liked the support of an experienced breastfeeding mum on the ward during their hospital stay, particularly for first time breast feeders.

7. Personal encouragement from Health Professionals, Sure Start and family was highly valued as motivation to carry on, as was the support of other breast-feeding mothers.

8. 73% of mothers said they had problems that put them off breast-feeding.
   - Physical difficulties such as sore nipples (23%) and infections (8%) and
   - Social pressures such as partner and relatives objections (28%) and poor facilities and public distaste at feeding in public. (28%)

9. Despite this 79% of the mothers surveyed continued to breastfeed for 4 months or longer. When asked what made them stop breastfeeding when they did, no one gave social pressure as a reason.

10. 92% of respondents (all but 2) knew other mothers who breastfed.

11. 50% of the women surveyed had met other breastfeeding mums at Sure Start

12. 65% of mums (17) had participated in the Sure Start Incentive scheme

13. Only 23% of women said the incentive scheme affected their decision to breastfeed. However 100% of those that used the scheme, (and even some who didn’t), thought it was ‘brilliant’, excellent or good.

14. Of the 18 mums who introduced formula 1/3 continued to breast feed as well (33%) for between 2 and 6 months longer.

15. 54% of mums were still breastfeeding when they introduced solid food.

16. 45% of mums were still Breastfeeding at the time of the survey.
   Of the rest 21% stopped at or before 3mths, 39% breastfed for 4-6mths, 40% continued past 6 months.
17.27% of mums (5) said their baby had an infection whilst breastfeeding. These were Oral thrush (2) Mastitis (2) eczema, ear infection and a sick bug on a foreign holiday.

35% of mums were interested in supporting new mums during the first few weeks after baby’s birth.

**RECOMMENDATIONS.**

It is recommended

1. That both one to one professional support and peer support opportunities continue to be provided to mothers in both the antenatal and postnatal periods by Sure Start Ravensdale.

2. That the Breast-feeding incentive scheme be continued as a vehicle to introduce mothers to Sure start and provide ongoing support.

3. That Sure Start Ravensdale explores ways to improve support for breastfeeding mothers in hospital either by volunteer peer support or by working with the Midwifery services to provide more consistent provision.

4. That Sure Start Ravensdale explores ways to support bottle-feeding mothers and prevent them from feeling excluded.

5. That Sure Start Ravensdale explores ways to improve public and family perceptions of breastfeeding as an acceptable activity.
NOTE

Since the Sure Start midwife’s role was changed and her hours reduced in April/May there has been a significant reduction in the number of mothers attending the Breastfeeding support group (from 10-12 per week to 1-2) and an absence of new mothers attending the Babble Bumps and Babies Group.

Part of the original midwifery role was to visit all mothers within 2 months of the birth and introduce them to Sure Start services. The persistence of Margaret and June in home visiting, support phone calls and contact through the incentive scheme resulted in mothers feeling able to use Sure Start services. It is planned that Healthcare assistants will take on some of this work eventually but in the meantime a whole new population of new babies and their mothers (average of 10 babies per month) are missing out on Sure Start support because there is insufficient staff time to carry out the work.

When interviewed Community midwives agreed that the timing of the first interventions with new parents were vital- to provide support when it was most needed and when the parents are most receptive (at about 4-6weeks) and before mothers return to work.

It is recommended that some action be taken to rectify this situation so that the current wave of new babies can have the same ‘Sure Start’ as their older counterparts.
INTRODUCTION

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Breastfeeding Incentive Scheme and the impact of support from Sure Start and the Sure Start Midwife on breastfeeding mothers a survey was carried out in November 2003. The Breastfeeding Incentive Scheme began in April 2002, based on a similar scheme at Sure Start Ashfield, which had proved effective at increasing the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding amongst their population. It is accessible only to mothers living within the Ravensdale geographical boundary, whilst personal support is available at the Centre to mothers living outside the area. The Incentives offered are linked to the needs of breastfeeding mothers- nursing bras, breast pads and nappies etc.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire devised by Sure Start Ashfield was adapted, with their permission, to suit the needs of this study. The Sure Start Ravensdale midwife and Health co-ordinator were consulted to ensure that questions were accessible and appropriate.

The questionnaire was sent out to the 65 breast-feeding mothers who had been known to Sure Start Ravensdale whilst there was a midwife in post\(^1\). Contact numbers for the midwife and Evaluator were included should mums want support to fill it in.

A £5 gift voucher was offered as an incentive for the return of the completed questionnaire.

Participants of the Feeding Support Group were given copies of the questionnaire to fill in, and were also rewarded with a gift voucher.

40% of the questionnaires were returned (26)

All responses were collated onto an excel database and analysed by the Evaluator.

\(^1\) The questionnaire and accompanying letter are available in the Appendices.
SURVEY RESULTS

PARTICIPANTS
Of those surveyed, 50% were first time mums, 50% had more than one child. Of the mums with more than one child 62% (8/13) had previously breast-fed.

Mother’s age ranged from 18 (1st child) to 41 (4th child)

At the time of the survey 8% of mums were bottle feeding, 69% breastfeeding and 23% a mixture. 27% were breastfed themselves as a baby and these 5 mums also said it was normal amongst their family and friends to breastfeed.
The most predominant influences on breast-feeding choice are the NHS midwife, always having wanted to, the Sure Start midwife and the Health Visitor.

Of those mums breast-feeding for the first time 79% were influenced by the NHS midwife, 59% always wanted to, 53% by the Sure Start Midwife and 47% by the Health Visitor. Only 18% were influenced by the Sure Start Incentive scheme.

Of the 8 mothers who had not always wanted to breastfeed 75% were influenced by the NHS midwife, 62% by the Sure Start midwife and 37% by the Health Visitor.

These contacts had far more influence than the media, friends and family. However, the intention to breastfeed ‘always’ suggests influences throughout the mother’s life.
In order to explore other influences respondents were asked whether they were breastfed as a child and what was the normal feeding choice amongst their family and friends. 27% of mothers were breastfed as a child. 23% of mothers said it was normal to breastfeed amongst their family and friends.

28% of solely breastfeeding mums were breastfed as a baby and 100% of these women (5) said that their friends and family breastfed.
The majority of mums said they had decided to breastfeed when they got pregnant (Pre-birth 9 months) which tallies with the 68% of mums who had said they had always wanted to breastfeed.

**SUPPORT WITH BREASTFEEDING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much Support in Hospital?</th>
<th>How much Support from NHS midwife?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped with positioning baby to feed (50%)</td>
<td>Helped with positioning baby to feed (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Little (19%)</td>
<td>Midwife supportive (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None (12%)</td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loads (8%)</td>
<td>Leaflets on how to feed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave leaflets on how to feed properly.</td>
<td>Info. And help to express milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘I received lots of support from June (SS midwife) whilst pregnant. The reason I stopped was due to the lack of support whilst in hospital.</strong>**</td>
<td>Lots of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘Not very much- I felt as though I was hassling the nurses to help me and taking up too much of their time. On 2 occasions when I was struggling I was instantly offered bottles.’</strong></td>
<td>Offered advice on pros and cons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘None, but the Sure start midwife was very helpful’</strong></td>
<td><strong>My [NHS] midwife very successfully offered equal arguments for both sides-bottle/breast and did not put any pressure on me for either choice.’</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was obviously a mixed experience of feeding support in the hospital. Almost 1/3 of mums (31%) felt they had had very little or no support. It would seem that mothers have to be quite determined to breastfeed when met with mixed support and offers of bottles by Health professionals.

Mothers in the Baby Survey (2004) also experienced a wide variation in support by hospital midwives, not just on feeding issues but on infant care, respite and levels of
helpfulness and caring. There was no link between the age of the mother and their experience of Hospital midwives in the Breast-feeding survey\(^2\).

68% of mums would have liked the support of an experienced breastfeeding mum on the ward during their hospital stay, particularly for first time breast feeders.

Mothers were then asked what helped and what hindered them to carry on breastfeeding. The responses can be categorised as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What helped mums carry on</th>
<th>What didn’t help.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement from breast feeding advisor, SS midwife, Health Visitor</td>
<td>Physical problems- mastitis, sore nipples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others saying I was doing a good job.</td>
<td>Embarrassment of others in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF Support Group and Incentive scheme.</td>
<td>Lack of public facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasurable experience for mum</td>
<td>Family against it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby happy</td>
<td>Midwife not helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby gaining weight</td>
<td>Health Visitor concerned about weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Breast is better for baby</td>
<td>Difficulty expressing milk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient and cheap</td>
<td>Leaving the baby with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Return to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others saying the bottle is easier.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘My health Visitor told me to stop breastfeeding as my daughter’s weight gain slowed, despite the fact she was a very happy baby. It was the infant feeding advisor at Kings Mill who put me in touch with Sure start, she encouraged me, along with my midwife to continue breastfeeding and assured me that baby’s weight gain was perfectly adequate for a breast fed baby.’

Personal encouragement was highly valued as motivation to carry on, as was the support of other breast-feeding mothers.

\(^2\) In the Baby survey younger mothers (under 25) were found to have a more negative experience of Health professionals than their older counterparts.
73% of mothers said they had problems that put them off breast-feeding. These fell into 2 categories –

1. Physical difficulties such as sore nipples (23%) and infections (8%) and
2. Social pressures such as partner and relatives objections (28%) and poor facilities and public distaste at feeding in public. (28%)

Despite this 79% of the mothers surveyed continued to breastfeed for 4 months or longer. When asked what made them stop breastfeeding when they did, no one gave social pressure as a reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for stopping breastfeeding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby didn’t want any more milk/ time was right</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby biting nipples</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infection and mastitis</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to work</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to leave baby longer</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tired and emotional</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTACT WITH SURE START

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTHER’S CONTACT WITH SURE START</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacted by the Sure Start Midwife whilst pregnant</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted by the Sure Start Midwife when first delivered</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended Babble Bumps and Baby Group</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended Breastfeeding support group</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Sure Start midwife for support</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not all mothers surveyed lived in the Sure Start area, so were not visited by the Sure Start midwife. Some had heard of Sure Start through friends, others were referred by the Kings Mill Hospital Breast feeding Advisor. However the majority came to Sure Start groups because the Sure start midwife was persistent in inviting them every time she had contact. As one mother in the Baby Survey said

‘Margaret invited me 6 times at least’
‘I wouldn’t have come if Margaret hadn’t kept encouraging me….I knew Margaret would be here, that helped. ’ (Mother in Feeding Support group)

4 out of the 5 mums who attended the Babble, Bumps and Babies group also attended the Breast-feeding support group.

100% of mums who had attended the breast-feeding group had also contacted the Sure Start midwife for support. They valued the practical advice and the emotional support they received. Encouragement and companionship were particularly valued as an incentive to continue breastfeeding.

‘Encouragement and praise from June’ (Sure Start Midwife)

‘Margaret and the breastfeeding group were invaluable for all the advice on breastfeeding and weaning.’

‘Against family opposition its fabulous to know that I’m not the only mother that breastfeeds.’

‘Having a (Sure Start) midwife around is peace of mind’.

35% of respondents didn’t attend any groups at Sure Start. The reasons given were, too busy with other children, other commitments, not knowing anyone and not being able to get ready in time. Of the 9 mothers who did not attend the Feeding Support Group, all received support either though the incentive scheme or had contacted the Sure Start midwife for support.
FEEDING SUPPORT GROUP

One mother who came made the following comment.

‘When I attended the breastfeeding group I thought advice/benefits of breast-feeding would be talked about. Instead it was just like a coffee morning (social), which in a way was support but could have been improved. I stopped coming to Sure Start groups because they became very ‘clicky’. Staff took very well to certain people and included them all the time and chatted to them etc whereas I felt left out because I did not attend 5 days per week, 7 hours per day!’

Others of course found it very helpful

‘Invaluable for advice on breastfeeding and weaning’

‘I got amazing support from the group and the midwife’

Once the intense midwifery support of the first 2 weeks of breastfeeding dies down mothers were supported by informal networks of family and friends. 92% of respondents (all but 2) knew other mothers who breastfed.

Who else (apart from Sure Start ) supported you with breastfeeding

[Bar chart showing support sources: No-one, Friends, Family, Partner, Mothercare, Support group, Midwife]

3 See linked document- Feeding Support Group Evaluation
50% of the women surveyed had met other breastfeeding mums at Sure Start. As one mother commented ‘just someone to talk to when you’re feeling down’
It is clear that the SS Breastfeeding group plays a vital role in bringing mothers together to support each other.

INCENTIVE SCHEME

65% of those surveyed (17mums) had participated in the Sure Start Incentive scheme. The rest were not eligible either because their baby was born before the scheme was started (April 2002) or because they lived outside the Sure Start area.
Of all the mums receiving incentives at birth (17) the following proportions received it, as the baby got older.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At birth</td>
<td>2 nursing bras, breast shells, breast pads</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>manual breast pump, breast pads, pack nappies</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>2 packs of nappies, washable breast pads.</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>2 packs nappies</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 12,16,20</td>
<td>£5 gift voucher</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 24</td>
<td>£5 gift voucher, weaning cup.</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 23% of women said the incentive scheme affected their decision to breastfeed. However 100% of those that used the scheme, (and even some who didn’t), thought it was ‘brilliant’, excellent or good.

When asked to comment on the incentive scheme mothers said

‘Excellent, would really recommend it to support any new mums. (not eligible)

‘ They [the products] are useful, helpful, keep you breastfeeding and excellent value, not rubbish.’

‘ It’s a good idea. Gives something to aim for when things do get difficult.

I think the scheme is good and would encourage mums to breastfeed as well as helping with the cost of breast-feeding products.
BREASTFEEDING DURATION AND WEANING

Of the 18 mums who introduced formula 1/3 continued to breast feed as well (33%) for between 2 and 6 months longer.
45% of mums were still Breastfeeding at the time of the survey.
Of the rest 21% stopped at or before 3mths, 39% breastfed for 4-6mths, 40% continued past 6 months. The shortest duration was 5 days and the longest 16mths.
BABY’S HEALTH

Breast-feeding was perceived by mothers as best for baby. 19% of mums (5) said their baby had an infection whilst breastfeeding. These were Oral thrush (2) Mastitis (2) eczema, ear infection and a sickness bug on a foreign holiday.

PROMOTING BREASTFEEDING

58% of mums had ideas about how to promote breastfeeding. They wanted to see

- Better promotion of the support available
- Better public health promotion to improve people’s reaction to breast feeding in public and better public feeding facilities
- Lots of support and encouragement, particularly during the first month.
- Keep the feeding support group and incentive scheme going.
- Offer equal advice to support all mums.

Some mums had more specific requests

*Please do not over publicise breastfeeding. Yes- please do not RAM it down the necks of expectant mothers, please give equal advice as when it is not possible to*
breastfed any longer (as with me) the mother feels bottle is not any good for her child and feels very, very let down+ that the baby is let down.

This was a first time mum who had to stop at 3 months because ‘Baby was 10lb when born, this made him very hungry. I could not express- nor was ever shown and did not trust this method therefore I could not spend time away. I was left very tired and emotional.

Another mum wanted
‘A Buddy system of experienced breast feeders to be-friend a new mum for the first 3 months for encouragement.
A dedicated phone help line for mothers with problems
A breast-feeding mother at antenatal classes
More ‘hands on publicity, like a stand in the four seasons centre again.’

35% of mums were interested in supporting new mums during the first few weeks after baby’s birth.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Incentive scheme

Whilst a majority of mums said that the Incentive scheme did not influence them to continue to breastfeed, it may be that the increased contact and support opportunities from Sure Start that form an integral part of the scheme had an effect. To receive their incentives mothers either have to visit Sure Start to collect them or the SS midwife delivers items to the home. This creates opportunities for conversation and informal support between staff and mother. It provides a vehicle for the midwife to offer further advice or services and a means of introducing mothers to the Sure Start Centre enabling familiarisation and hopefully regular use. This was shown in the Feeding Support group where 2 mums came to Sure Start specifically to attend the breast feeding group and then once they felt more confident started to access the Babble, Bumps and Babies group and Craft and Crèche.

Since the evidence from this survey and the Baby Survey shows that parents attend Sure Start Services because of the personal invitation from a staff member and continue to breastfeed because of the encouragement they receive it would seem that the Incentive scheme provides the perfect vehicle to facilitate these conditions. The gifts themselves provide practical support for the breastfeeding mother and serve as an acknowledgement of the effort the mother is putting in.

Influences on initiation and maintenance of Breastfeeding.

‘For women on low incomes intending to bottle feed, one to one educational programmes work in encouraging them to breastfeed whereas group programmes are more effective for those already planning to breastfeed.’

This evidence from the Health Development agency (2003) ties in with the results of this study, that for those mothers not already planning to breastfeed, one-one encouragement from the midwife or Health Visitor influenced their choice.

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‘Qualitative research exploring why some women on low incomes do not want to breastfeed concluded that breastfeeding is a practical skill. The confidence and commitment to breastfeed successfully are best achieved by exposure to breastfeeding rather than talking or reading about it.’

It is for this reason that Sure Start Ravensdale encourages pregnant mothers to attend the Feeding Support Group ante-natally. Mothers can listen to the experiences of breast feeders and watch them as they feed their babies, on a weekly basis. They are then equipped to make an informed choice about breastfeeding, and have already established peer support relationships within the group. Several users of Sure Start Ravensdale have chosen to breastfeed their latest child after experiencing their friends and other users successfully using this feeding method.

‘Peer support programmes as standalone interventions have been shown to be effective in both the antenatal and postnatal periods for women who expressed a wish to breastfeed, but not for women who had decided to bottle-feed.’

It is vital therefore that both one to one professional support and peer support opportunities services continue to be provided to mothers in both the antenatal and postnatal periods.

Support when initiating Breastfeeding

31% of mothers in this survey said they had received very little or no support in hospital with breast-feeding. One mother who gave up after 4 days said

‘I received lots of support from June (SS midwife) whilst pregnant. The reason I stopped was due to the lack of support whilst in hospital.

69% of mums would have liked the support of an experienced breastfeeding mum on the ward during their hospital stay, particularly for first time breast feeders and 35% of mums were interested in supporting new mums during the first few weeks after
baby’s birth. Providing greater support to mothers in hospital whilst they are establishing breastfeeding, both by Hospital staff and peer supporters, should lead to an increased number of mothers successfully establishing and maintaining breastfeeding.

**Supporting all mothers.**

It is important to remember that not all babies or mothers can successfully breastfeed. Women in this survey had tried and failed with previous babies for both medical and individual reasons (family trauma, baby not thriving.), yet succeeded with others. Each mother-child interaction is unique and it is vital that encouragement to breastfeed does not make bottle feeders feel like unfit mothers. Support services have a crucial role to provide expectant parents with sufficient information and practical skills to enable them to feed their baby healthily, whether it is by bottle, breast or a mixture.

33% of mothers in this survey introduced formula milk because their baby was not fully satisfied by breast milk or to enable them to leave the baby with another carer because of personal commitments, yet continued to breast feed as well for between 2 and 6 months. This option is not encouraged or publicised by Health Professionals generally and yet provides an effective middle ground solution for some mothers.

The Feeding Support Group was intended to include bottle-feeders but did not appeal to them. Parental perceptions were that it was for breast-feeders only. It is recommended that Sure Start again explore ways to support mums who bottle-feed in order to prevent them feeling ‘like a failure’ in the eyes of health professionals as this obstructs the development of a positive relationship between mother and Health professional.

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5. *A peer support scheme was introduced at Sure Start Ravensdale during 2001 but was discontinued due to lack of volunteers.*

6. *See feeding Support Group report*
Public reactions to Breastfeeding

Almost 1/3 of mothers were put off breastfeeding by social pressures such as partner and relatives’ objections (28%) and poor facilities and public distaste at feeding in public. (28%)

To change this trend in public opinion requires long term Health promotion on a National and local scale. Marketing ‘Breast is best’ can cause resentment in the community amongst those who don’t or can’t breastfeed. Perhaps a message that says ‘Breast is as normal as bottle’ would be more effective in persuading the ‘hard to reach’ families that they not excluded from ‘good parenthood’ by their feeding choices.

Recommendations.
It is recommended that:

1. both one to one professional support and peer support opportunities continue to be provided to mothers in both the antenatal and postnatal periods by Sure Start Ravensdale.

2. That the Breast-feeding incentive scheme be continued as a vehicle to introduce mothers to Sure start and provide ongoing support.

3. That Sure Start Ravensdale explores ways to improve support for breastfeeding mothers in hospital either by volunteer peer support or by working with the Midwifery services to provide more consistent provision.

4. That Sure Start Ravensdale explores ways to support bottle-feeding mothers and prevent them from feeling excluded.

5. That Sure Start Ravensdale explores ways to improve public and family perceptions of breastfeeding as an acceptable activity.