

Breastfeeding-Friendly Erie County: Establishing a Baby Café Network

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Abstract

Community-based lactation support groups help improve breastfeeding duration by offering practical peer and professional help and counseling through the sharing of information and experiences in a relaxed setting. The objective of this project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was to establish at least 5 Baby Cafés in organizations that reach low-income women living in a high-need, racially/ethnically diverse, urban county with 1 of the lowest rates of breastfeeding initiation, exclusivity, and duration in New York. The New York State Department of Health partnered with the P² Collaborative of Western New York and United Way of Buffalo & Erie County's Healthy Start Healthy Future for All Coalition to facilitate the recruitment of 11 community-based agencies in Erie County, New York, to provide and/or enhance breastfeeding support. Six organizations were funded to establish licensed Baby Cafés, which provided skilled, free-of-charge, drop-in lactation support and counseling to mothers at easily accessible locations. The organizations provided staff training and staffing at the Baby Cafés, established coordinated hours of operation between all locations, and jointly marketed their services. Collectively, the 6 Baby Cafés provided 11 drop-in sessions per week. During the 7-month start-up time, mothers/babies made 276 visits and they averaged 75 visits per month, representing at least 150 clients. After the funding ended, 5 organizations continued to support and staff the Baby Cafés whereas 1 organization added another Baby Café. Future evaluation is needed to determine their effect on breastfeeding exclusivity and duration.

Keywords

breastfeeding, breastfeeding support, community support, peer support

Background

The importance of breastfeeding mothers being linked to ongoing support after hospital discharge is essential to successful, long-term breastfeeding. This is a crucial step in the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*.¹ As recommended by the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, every breastfeeding mother should be connected with local peer-to-peer mother groups, drop-in centers, or hospital/clinic-based support groups.² The setting should support facilitated discussions in a relaxed, informal atmosphere.³ Women and mothers have positive perceptions of support groups when help is authentic and shared information is realistic.⁴

A cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention supported an intervention to establish Baby Cafés in a high-need, urban county with 1 of the lowest rates of breastfeeding initiation, exclusivity, and duration in New York (NY). The Buffalo/Erie County community in western NY was selected for this project because of the high proportion of low-income women, participating in Medicaid and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), who live in racially/ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Buffalo is home to a large

immigrant and refugee population made up of 29 ethnicities speaking as many as 31 different languages.⁵ Erie County's 2010 population was 14% black non-Hispanic (NH), 5% Hispanic, 3% Asian (NH), < 1% American Indian (NH), and 78% white (NH).⁶

In Erie County, among healthy infants of mothers on Medicaid or Family Health Plus, the public insurance in NY, 41% were exclusively fed breast milk and 56% were fed any breast milk during the birth hospitalization based on 2010 birth certificate data (Bureau of Biometric and Health Statistics, New York State Department of Health, unpublished data, 2010). The Catholic Charities of Buffalo WIC local agency, serving Erie County, reported that among their participants,

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14% exclusively breastfed for at least 3 months and 7% for at least 6 months; both rates are much lower than the Healthy People 2020 goals of 46.2% for exclusive breastfeeding through 3 months and 25.5% through 6 months (NYS Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System, unpublished data, 2011).¹

Methods

The New York State Department of Health contracted with the P² Collaborative of Western New York and United Way of Buffalo & Erie County's Healthy Start Healthy Future for All Coalition (the Coalition) because they already had recognized linkages with community groups and an established infrastructure that focused on obesity prevention, including breastfeeding promotion (funded October 2012 through September 2013, with a no-cost extension through the end of March 2014). Their organizational goals included working with health care providers and organizations to increase access to and enhance health care, and also educating and empowering organizations to promote healthy lifestyles.

Project Objective

The objective of this project was to establish at least 5 licensed Baby Cafés through partnerships with community and health care organizations in Erie County, NY. Baby Cafés are run by trained staff and allow pregnant women and mothers to socially network with breastfeeding peers in a relaxed atmosphere. Baby Cafés were identified as increasing access to care by bringing together minority and young mothers from every sector of the community by offering services free of charge.⁷

The Coalition distributed funding to community and health care organizations in Erie County to set up Baby Cafés. As part of this project, these organizations were required to provide free services with no appointment needed. It was recommended that all cafés be open on a weekly basis and be easily accessible by public transportation routes. The designated space should ideally be warm and inviting and have a partitioned area to allow for private consultation, if needed. International Board Certified Lactation Consultants, Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs), and other trained breastfeeding consultants facilitated the Baby Cafés. After payment of the initial licensure application fee, an organization was entitled to use the Baby Café logo/branding and the Baby Café toolkit and access the Resource Bank for 1 year. Prior to the launch of the Baby Cafés in January 2013, 1 staff training session on the Baby Café model was provided by Baby Café USA, Inc via online conferencing. In addition, the Coalition secured enough interest to hold 3 CLC training sessions during the funding period.

Results

In 2012, there were 13 licensed Baby Cafés in the United States and none in NY. In Erie County, NY, 6 Baby Cafés

were established (certified and licensed). Collectively, they provided 11 drop-in sessions per week. During the 7-month start-up period, mother–baby dyads made 276 visits. They averaged 75 visits per month, representing at least 150 mother–baby dyads. After funding ended in April 2014, 5 organizations continued to support and staff the Baby Cafés, whereas 1 organization added another Baby Café as a result of work done during the funding period. In addition, 5 more Baby Cafés have been established in neighboring NY counties.

Project funding was used to support the initial Baby Café license fee. The 3 CLC trainings were attended by 119 individuals. All 6 organizations sent at least 1 staff to be trained to support the Baby Cafés; attendance at a 1-week training was funded. Each Baby Café also received funding to purchase baby scales since mothers expressed interest in knowing the weight of their infants.

Baby Cafés in Erie County, NY: Health Care Systems

Two health care systems provide birthing services to 50% of the low-income, Medicaid population in Erie County. One health system, which operates a regional perinatal center, established a Baby Café at their hospital location during the funding period but did not renew their license. They were challenged with staffing the Baby Café during periods of low attendance. They are planning on rebranding and marketing a support group in the future as part of their process to become certified as a Baby-Friendly hospital.

The other health care system oversees 2 local area hospitals; each hospital established a Baby Café: 1 at their largest private obstetric practice, and a second 1 at the hospital primary care center. After March 2014, a third Baby Café was established at their OB/GYN center in a professional building.

Baby Cafés in Erie County, NY: Organizations Serving Diverse Populations

One health center in the county facilitates navigation of the health care system mainly for refugees by connecting them with a volunteer mentor, refugee doula, perinatal education, and access to community resources. They support 20 workers—18 are doulas—who focus on health and wellness in immigrant and low-income populations providing support in 10 languages. They were following 100 pregnant women in 2012. Their Baby Café is staffed by a Nepali translator.

The key service organization providing family services in Erie County for the Native American population living outside the reservation established a Baby Café. They used their community room for the Baby Café. Their café is staffed by a Burmese and French translator.

One Baby Café in downtown Buffalo is located in a faith-based soup kitchen with a Head Start program and a community garden just for breastfeeding mothers. Quite

often, the café was able to educate expectant mothers about the benefits of breastfeeding. They have many success stories of young moms and homeless moms who felt that the Baby Café provided them with support and valuable information that gave them the confidence to breastfeed their babies.

Discussion

The Baby Café Charitable Trust, UK, “a name synonymous with providing high quality, professional, evidence-based breastfeeding support in the community,” is the overseeing organization for Baby Cafés worldwide,⁸ whereas Baby Café USA, Inc is the contact organization in the United States.⁹ The Baby Café model laid a strong foundation to start breastfeeding support groups in Erie County by using a national organization with an established care model.

Facilitators for Implementing Baby Cafés in Erie County, NY

To operate successful breastfeeding support groups, an organization needs to identify the target audience and select a convenient location. Marketing the support groups is crucial to starting and sustaining groups as well as having a funding plan. An organization should schedule the hours of operation to match the available times for their target audience and conduct community outreach to recruit their target audience.³

The Coalition helped organizations apply the principles of successful breastfeeding support groups. They functioned as the key to the success of the Baby Cafés in Erie County by building a network of community partners and conducting strategic planning among all partners and Coalition members to address gaps and link mothers and their families to care. They engaged the community partners to find appropriate spaces, synchronize the days and hours of operation with all the community organizations, explore options for future funding support, and publicize the opening of each Baby Café. The Coalition worked with 1 health care system to create joint materials promoting all Baby Cafés.

As part of this project, the Coalition expanded the number of organizations engaged in supporting breastfeeding. Enhancing the existing Coalition was essential to ensuring that breastfeeding women are systematically connected to resources within their community.

Conclusion

As of July 2015, 15 states including NY have 57 operating Baby Cafés. New York currently has 11 Baby Cafés.¹⁰ The New York State Department of Health and the Coalition exceeded the goal to build a new continuum of care so that mothers and babies now have more support to continue

breastfeeding after hospital discharge. Future evaluation is needed to determine whether the establishment of Baby Cafés will improve breastfeeding outcomes in Erie County.

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