

Showcasing Creative Workplace Solutions

Here are some examples of how maternity protection conditions can be improved through workplace policies and outreach to employers.

1. Canada – Commitment to workplace support

“Peterborough workplaces rise to the challenge! Twenty-four local employers acknowledged their support for breastfeeding, and made a commitment to provide supportive workplace practices to help women to continue breastfeeding upon their return to work.

During July and August (2001), the Peterborough Breastfeeding Coalition challenged local workplaces to support breastfeeding by providing a private, clean location for breastfeeding, or pumping breastmilk, and by being willing to discuss a woman's plans for breastfeeding upon her return to work. Workplaces shared the practices that they offer employees. The most important practices are: a willingness to discuss a woman's infant feeding plan prior to her maternity leave; and determining ways to accommodate her plan once she returns to work. Accommodation may include: flexible hours, job sharing, part-time hours, a private, clean and comfortable location for breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk; and an extended lunch or breaks which can be made up at other times.”

Source: Family-Friendly Workplaces Newsletter, Vol. 1 No. 1, Fall 2001. Child Health Programme of the Peterborough County-City Health Unit of Ontario, Canada

<http://pcchu.peterborough.on.ca/familyfriendlynewsfall01.pdf>

2. Mexico – Worksite breastfeeding programme

Mexican labour laws provide mothers with two 30-minute nursing breaks per day after they return to work. Maternity leave is twelve weeks, but six weeks must be taken before the baby's due date, leaving only a short six weeks for mother to rest and establish a good breastfeeding routine with her baby.

Lactation consultant Roberta Graham de Escobedo found that many women in her province of Yucatán were not aware of their right to breastfeeding breaks. She visited a factory owner to propose setting up a worksite breastfeeding programme, which would support the workers while at the same time help the employer to comply with the national law. Once he had agreed, Roberta trained the supervisors and managers on the new programme. A manager told Roberta how happy he was for her help. “Before this, when women first came back to work after maternity leave, they used to sit at their sewing machines weeping, with milk soaking their blouses. I felt so sorry for them.”

Under the “corporate lactation” programme she has developed, Roberta visits the factory every few months to tell each new group of pregnant workers how they will be able to continue breastfeeding when they return to work. The company provides breast pumps and a place for expressing milk; Roberta provides support. When the programme had its first anniversary, Roberta asked the boss to hold a celebration and invite all the women who had participated in the programme, plus all their supervisors. In this way, the management got recognition for their support, and people from the different departments of the factory could see that they were not alone.

The university, the mayor's office, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the province and many factories in Yucatán are now mother-friendly workplaces that provide lactation support.

Source: Roberta Graham de Escobedo, personal communication.

3. New Zealand - Work-life balance

In New Zealand, employment conditions for breastfeeding women have been treated as a fair employment issue. The Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, a not-for-profit organisation, provides information and tools to explain equal employment to employers and to raise their awareness of diversity issues in the workplace. Its yearly awards programme recognizes employers who implement good parent- and mother-friendly policies at the workplace. Profiles of some winners include the following stories:

“Ford Motor Company of New Zealand work and life policies were initiated... by the need to retain a pregnant woman staff member. Now all salaried employees are eligible for flexible part-time work upon the birth or adoption of a child, as well as if a direct family member requires care. There is also the option of work from home (telecommuting)...”

“Manaaki Whenua (Landcare Research) is one of the first organisations to provide paid parental leave... Their staff with newborn children receive financial support (six weeks paid maternity leave and two weeks paid parental leave)... thus easing the pressure to return to work. They also operate a flexible leave scheme that allows staff to buy additional leave, or take it without pay.”

At HortResearch, “... staff on parental leave now accrue annual and sick leave, effectively giving an additional three to four weeks paid leave to those taking twelve months parental leave. HortResearch also provides a dependent care allowance to cover any child, dependent family or elder care costs if staff need to

travel ... There is also a nanny network... The charges ...are reimbursed through a claim form.”

“Clear Communications, winner of an EEO Trust work and life award in 2001, estimated a savings of \$75,000 per high performing employee as a consequence of their breastfeeding friendly policy. Further, all 10 Clear Communications employees in one year returned after the birth of a child (100% return rate) which saved \$750,000 in recruitment and training costs. In a recent survey conducted by Women's Health Action, the businesses surveyed that employed women lawyers & accountants gave the most positive comments of how breastfeeding friendly their workplace was.”

A number of resources for employers can be found on line by starting at <http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/toolkits/breastfeeding.cfm?cache=455701/>.

In 2003, Women's Health Action, a charitable trust with a mission to provide information and education about women's health, did a telephone survey of 117 employers in Auckland. 88% said that employees could continue breastfeeding when they came back to work, and 86% said breastfeeding breaks were no problem, but no workplace addressed breastfeeding specifically in a policy. The authors concluded that, without a policy that is routinely communicated to all workers, “few employees raise the issue with their employers and [they] interpret the lack of communication as a lack of support and an unwillingness to accommodate breastfeeding at work. The majority of employers surveyed acknowledged that there wasn't anyone returning to work still breastfeeding.”

“Our campaign aims to encourage people to talk about this issue, work together to write breastfeeding policies and to make these part of a family friendly employment package. Ideally we would like to encourage businesses to work with staff to make a suitable room available so that staff know they are supported and feel comfortable using it.”

<http://www.womens-health.org.nz/publications/WHW/whwnov03.htm#how>

4. The Philippines - Crèche at the workplace

Arugaan is a Filipino NGO involved in breastfeeding protection, promotion, and support. In the Filipino language, “Arugaan” means “to nurture fully and with commitment”. Arugaan's ten-hour crèche/day care programme at PIA (Philippine Information Agency) serves as a support system for working mothers with infants and toddlers.

How maternity protection was translated into an Arugaan crèche at the PIA workplace

The government employees' union petitioned the PIA management for day-care at the workplace. They attributed problems of interrupted work and low productivity to lack of childcare support for workers.

PIA management called in Arugaan, and a number of consultative meetings were held, during which department directors, parents and employees discussed a crèche programme. A crèche for twelve infants and toddlers was outfitted through cooperation between PIA management and the parents. A few office departments contributed supplies like crayons, coloured pens, and paper.

Since the beginning of the programme, the Human Resources Development office has served as the liaison with Arugaan. Money from gender and development funds covers 75% of the crèche fees, and the parents contribute 25%. Arugaan provides the programme and services, including staff and trained caregivers. There is no management fee, but in order to cover expenses, Arugaan accepts a few children from outside of PIA.

Going beyond maternity protection at the workplace crèche

Mothers visit the crèche during breastfeeding breaks. Some mothers express their milk and send it to the crèche for cup feeding when their work takes them outside the home office.

Breastfeeding women support each other at the crèche, where informal breastfeeding counselling is the norm.

The crèche is a showcase for appropriate feeding practices; indigenous foods are given as complementary foods to babies over six months and to toddlers, thus developing good eating habits. The crèche serves as a forum where parents discuss topics such as reproductive health rights, parental leave, parenting skills, and the need to extend the Philippines' eight weeks' paid maternity leave to fourteen weeks.

The crèche also has become a training centre for women who wish to develop skills as caregivers or childcare specialists. The Department of Social Welfare and Development, which is in charge of institutional pre-school day care programmes, has sent their staff for skills upgrading at Arugaan. Many former trainees now have their own businesses or run community-based crèches and day care centres.

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5. U.S.A. – Federal government facilitates outreach to employers

In 2008, the Maternal Child Health Bureau (MCHB), a branch of the U.S.A. federal Department of Health and Human Services, published *The Business Case for Breastfeeding*. This kit is designed to help breastfeeding advocates reach out to employers with information about setting up a breastfeeding-friendly workplace. Targeted pamphlets are provided for the executive, the employed mother, and the human resources manager, who is usually the staff person responsible for a breastfeeding support programme. The kit includes a CD-ROM of materials, including posters and fliers, stories for a company newsletter, needs assessment and programme evaluation forms, a sample policy, and stories to spotlight employers who have found effective solutions. To maximize the effect of the kit, the MCHB started a three-year programme to train teams from the state breastfeeding coalitions on how to use the kit.

Single copies are free. Go to www.askhrsa.gov and search for item #MCH00254.

