

Mums the Word Project



Introduction

In Tasmania, around 80% of women leave hospital breastfeeding. While the initiation (start up) rates are quite good too many women stop breastfeeding in the period shortly after discharge from hospital. The number of women breastfeeding (exclusive and partial) drops from 78% to 63% within 3 months. Statistics indicate Tasmania has one of the poorest rates of breastfeeding at 6 months of age compared to other states in Australia and well below the recommended rate of 80% (exclusive and partial) or 60% exclusive (1).

Research has also revealed that young women, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds and/or rural communities are concerned with negative attitudes in the community towards women who breastfeed in public (2). There are a range of factors that act as barriers to breastfeeding in society, including the level of social support and public perception.

Mum's the Word was a three year Peer Education Project for the North West & West coasts of Tasmania, which was designed to help overcome negative breastfeeding trends. The project aimed to increase over time, the initiation and duration rates of breastfeeding especially in young women, isolated women and women from low socioeconomic backgrounds in these geographical areas. An expected outcome was also to increase the confidence to breastfeed of women in these areas.

The project was funded through the Commonwealth Child Nutrition Program for a three year period between June 2001 – June 2004. The project was a partnership between the Australian Breastfeeding Association* (Tasmania Branch) and the Women's Health Access Program and Community Nutrition Unit (both Department of Health and Human Services DHHS).



* formerly Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia

What were the project objectives and strategies?

Project Goal: To increase the breastfeeding initiation and duration rates on the West and North West coast by the end of the 3 years project.

Objective 1: To increase the breastfeeding support knowledge and skills of volunteer peer educators on the North West and West coast of Tasmania

Strategies

1. Consultation through focus groups regarding recruitment and training options
2. Recruitment strategy
3. Develop training program
4. Training implementation and evaluation



Objective 2: To increase the confidence of women on the North West and West coast of Tasmania with their ability to breastfeed.

Strategies

1. Establish home visiting program by peer educators
2. Establish telephone support services by peer educators.
3. Peer educators to participate in antenatal classes.
4. Referrals to peer educators by other maternity and child health services
5. Develop simple survey levels in community women tool to assess confidence.
6. Administer at beginning and end of contract with peer educator.

Objective 3: To sustain the support and referral mechanism for volunteer peer educators

Strategies

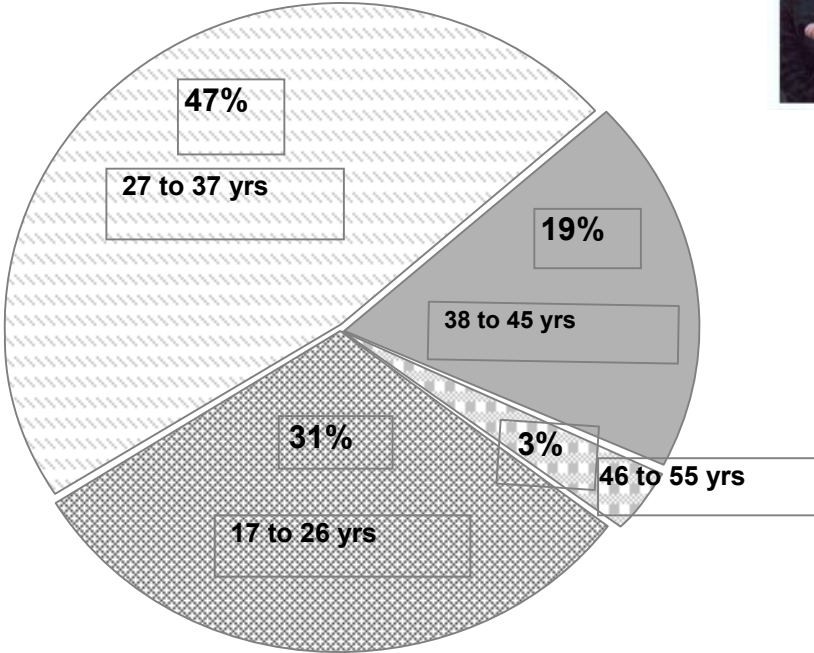
1. Fieldwork supervision and support for each peer group educator.
2. *Mum's the Word* newsletter for peer educators.
3. Post program reunion and evaluation
4. Establish a monitoring mechanism for number of community and individual activities provided by peer educators.
5. To investigate and compare the best way to integrate the peer educators into the ABA volunteer stream

Highlights of the project?

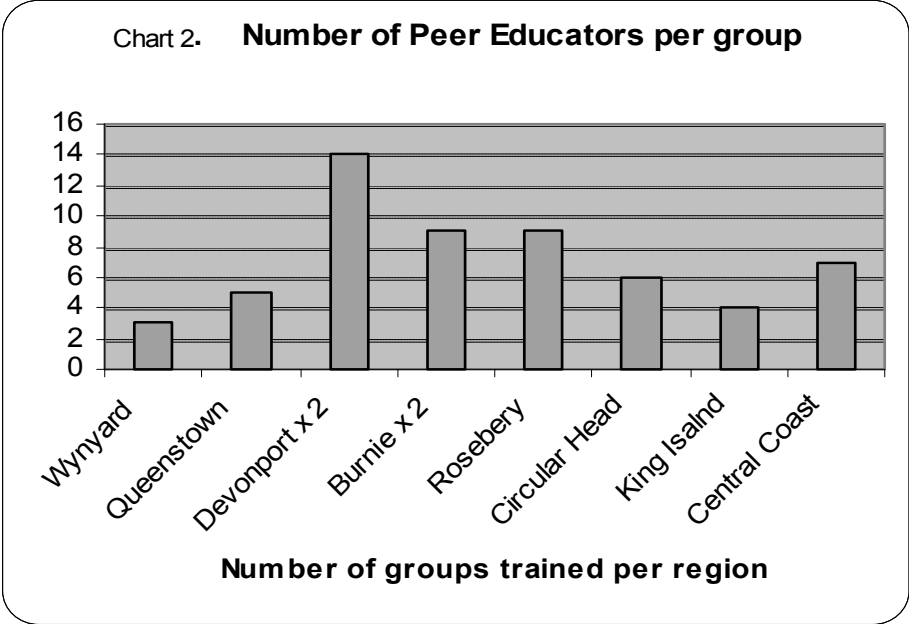
- 68 volunteer breastfeeding peer educators trained
- 1 peer group training manual developed and then used to deliver 11 breastfeeding peer training programs
- 2 additional DHHS health promotion grants were gained for extra project resources and for a photography project (of young women breastfeeding)
- 200 peer support activities documented (many more provided but not documented)
- 389 community contacts were made at local rural shows through educational questionnaire competition
- 748 community contacts were made through an educational questionnaire competition at Agfest 2004
- 18 presentations made at conferences and to community groups
- 24 newspaper articles and media promotions were instigated
- Mum's the Word name was established in the community
- 23 steering committee meetings held
- 17 professional development training sessions attend by project officer
- 5 formal referrals were received
- 5 self-referrals were received
- 5 peer newsletters were produced and circulated to peers
- 1 peer training brochure developed and marketed
- 1 peer service brochure developed and marketed
- 1 breastfeeding confidence survey developed
- 9 recall days held

Who were our peer educators

Chart 1.
Number & percentage of Peer Educators per age group



Queenstown Group



Was the Mums the Word project successful?

The Mums the Word project was successful in being able to recruit and engage young women, and women living on lower incomes, to become breastfeeding peer educators. The extent of their activity into the community is significant and indicates an effective reach into these target groups.

Anecdotally, women who had contact with *Mum's the Word* peers have:

- 1) initiated breastfeeding when they otherwise expressed they would not have (including begun to feed a second child when they did not attempt it with their first) and
- 2) with peer support and sometimes additional referral support, continued to breastfeed where otherwise they may have given up.

Unfortunately breastfeeding statistics collected by FCYHS were not able to be provided in time for inclusion in this report.

It is difficult to measure the long-term effects of the program but it is expected that perhaps the 'real' evidence for the success of the program will come long after the official project is over and that this will be seen in the breastfeeding statistics collected by the FCYHS both in terms of number and duration of North West women breastfeeding.

Key recommendations

Recommendation 1: Any future funding for *Mum's the Word* needs to allow for a project officer and an administrative worker.

Recommendation 2: If no further funding is obtained, then ABA (Tasmania Branch) is to create a volunteer *Mum's the Word* Coordinator position in the North West region to be responsible for the ongoing support of current peers and potential training of new peers. Functions would include peer newsletters, phone/face-to-face support. (i.e frequency of recall days and training of new peers will be diminished compared with having access to a paid project officer)

Recommendation 3: The *Mum's the Word* peer educator title be retained for current peers and that consideration be given to continuing to use the term if peer programs were expanded more widely in the future.

Recommendation 4: If ABA explores peer support programs nationally in the future, that this project be used as a base framework and that its inclusion as part of ABA's wider training program (currently breastfeeding counselors and community educators) be investigated.

REFERENCES

1. Donath S and Amir, LH. 2000. Rates of breastfeeding in Australia by State and socio-economic status: Evidence from the 1995 National Health Survey. *J. Paediatrics. Child Health.* 36, 164-168.
2. Kennedy L January 2001, 'Breaking Down The Barriers Report' Tasmanian Breastfeeding Coalition and Australian Breastfeeding Association.

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