

Breastfeeding Peer Counselors, Support Mothers Can Trust

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most highly effective preventive measures a mother can take to protect the health of her infant is to breastfeed. In the US, 81% of babies initiate breastfeeding, 22% are exclusively breastfed 6 months later. According to the CDC, peer support programs are effective in increasing initiation, duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding. The Flint water crisis left many mothers of all income levels with limited trust in outside resources. With the support of the Greater Flint Community Foundation, a peer counselor was hired support breastfeeding mothers. A peer counselor is a local mother representative of the community and has already developed trust within the community. This study looks at the effectiveness community foundation funded breastfeeding peer counselors, representative of their communities.

METHODS

The target audience was pregnant and breastfeeding women who reside in Flint, Michigan of all socioeconomic levels. The peer counselor provided education and support to increase initiation, duration and exclusivity. The peer counselor was funded by a grant through the Greater Flint Community Foundation. The peer counselor educated, supported and encouraged women to continue breastfeeding exclusively for 6 months and continue until at least one year of age. The peer counselor conducted home visits and was available during evenings and weekends. Additional contacts were provided through home visits, phone calls and FaceTime during the immediate postpartum period to support for initiation of breastfeeding.



RESULTS

- September 2018 to September 2019
- 50 Presentations on benefits of breastfeeding
 - 547 families reached
 - 103 mothers enrolled in program
 - 98% of those enrolled initiated breastfeeding
 - 76% still breastfeeding at 6 months
 - 4 focus groups

DISCUSSION

Home visiting peer counselors were effective in promoting breastfeeding success in mothers in Flint. Community Foundation funding allowed the peer counselor to serve all mothers in the community. Many participants mentioned the importance of the peer counselor being a trusted mother representative of their community

CONCLUSIONS

It is of utmost importance that peer counselors reflect the communities they serve. Peer counselors are able support breastfeeding mothers in a way that professionals cannot. Peer counselors are able to address the social and cultural barriers that mothers face on their breastfeeding journey. Community funding of peer counselors also allows peers to reach a broader audience. It is important to continue to seek diverse funding mechanisms to increase opportunities for breastfeeding support for all mothers.

REFERENCES

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