

Media Release

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Spreading the word that breast is best

Bay of Plenty mums will get a new level of support from six new *breastfeeding peer counsellors*, based around the region.

Peer counsellor and mother of five Karen Nicholas believes that breastfeeding is fundamental to a baby's health and wellbeing.

"Mothers instinctively have the gift of breastfeeding. It's the most natural way to give your baby the best start in life," says Karen.

The aim is for the six mums to take their message to mother and baby groups and parenting groups, as well as antenatal classes.

"It's important to talk to mums-to-be before they have their baby, as many will decide whether they are going to breastfeed or not whilst they are pregnant," says Karen. "If we can talk to them about the positives of breastfeeding early on, hopefully we can influence their decision."

Each counsellor has taken up the role voluntarily and is linked to a clinic or Hauora. They are available to any mums but in particular those who may be having trouble breastfeeding.

Karen, who is also a Well Child coordinator at Pirirakau Haoura in Te Puna, breastfed all of her five children but admits that it wasn't easy.

"I had problems at first. Every mum has problems, some worse than others. But I had a very supportive midwife and it was something I really wanted to do for my children," she

says. “Every woman has the right to breastfeed, we want to make sure they have the opportunity, and that they know where to turn to for help.”

The programme will be introduced to mums either when they’re in hospital, or via midwives and counsellors in the community.

“We want new mums to have a name and phone number to hand as soon as they leave hospital – this is the time when most mums stop breastfeeding,” says programme leader Chrissie Rolleston from Te Kupenga Hauora o Tauranga Moana.

The peer counselling programme is coordinated through La Leche League and funded by the Bay of Plenty District Health Board (BOPDHB). Chrissie says that the ‘normality’ of breastfeeding has become lost.

“This programme is about making breastfeeding normal again and ensuring that women are supported by others who have been through similar experiences,” she says.



It is hoped that the peer counselling programme will encourage more mums throughout the Tauranga region to breastfeed for at least six months and ideally up to two years as supplementary feeds whilst introducing solids. From left to right, standing; peer counsellor Paretapu Clarke from Te Kupenga Hauora o Tauranga Moana, programme leader Chrissie Rolleston from Te Kupenga Hauora o Tauranga Moana, seated; peer counsellor Kate Atutahi from Ngapeke Kohanga Reo, peer counsellor and Well Child coordinator Karen Nicholas from Pirirakau Haoura in Te Puna and peer counsellor Betty Brown from Ngati Kahu Hauora.

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