The Breastfeeding Friendly Worksites Initiative of the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program

Imashi Fernando
Montana State University and Gallatin City-County Health Department

August, 2016

Research Question

How can the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program use existing research to collaborate with local businesses to increase the quantity and quality of breastfeeding friendly worksites in Bozeman?

Introduction

To increase the quantity and quality of breastfeeding friendly worksites in Bozeman, the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program, in collaboration with the Gallatin Breastfeeding Coalition, proposed a Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite Initiative in January 2016. This was inspired by similar projects carried out successfully on a larger, statewide scale in Texas and Missouri, where local employers were encouraged to develop breastfeeding policies that supported their employees’ needs in exchange for an award of recognition. This recognition is intended to endorse the idea of breastfeeding within the community, which has been shown in Texas to lead to more businesses being willing to provide worksite breastfeeding support to employees.

This poster explores part of phase I (of 3 phases) of development and implementation of the “Healthy Gallatin Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite Award.” In this part, approximately 20 businesses were approached and encouraged to become recognized as Breastfeeding Friendly Worksites. These businesses were from various industries and included both local businesses and corporations.

My research discusses employer responses to the initiative, both positive and negative, and how the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program can use this feedback to further develop the program in order to approach more businesses in the community with success.

Initiative Overview

- As part of my project, I approached each employer and asked them to fill out an application form that asks for basic information about the business.
- Once the application form is submitted, the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program will conduct a site visit to evaluate the breastfeeding friendly worksite accommodations.
- Employers must not discriminate against breastfeeding employees who would have the need to express breast milk at work in the foreseeable future.
- The “Healthy Gallatin Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite Award” is currently in its second phase of development.
- The Gallatin City-County Health Department and the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program Coordinator for sharing their knowledge and resources, and for guiding me to success.

Fig. 1: Window cling employers will receive in recognition of their efforts to support breastfeeding employees. (Designed by the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program)

Benefits of Breastfeeding

- Both Montana state law and federal law require employers to encourage and accommodate breastfeeding by providing daily unpaid break times and a private location, other than a toilet stall, in close proximity to the work place for a mother to express breast milk. Employers must also not discriminate against breastfeeding mothers.
- Supporting employees who breastfeed is the law! Therefore, getting recognition as a Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite should be fairly easy and inexpensive!

Methods

- Review the Texas Mother Friendly Worksite Program, its evaluation by the Disease Control and Prevention-funded for Training and Research Translation (Center TRT), the Missouri Breastfeeding Friendly Worksites Program, and academic research on factors that promote and affect breastfeeding in the workplace.
- Approach approximately 20 businesses in Bozeman with information on this initiative and encourage each business to become recognized as a breastfeeding friendly worksite.
- Assess how willing each business is to apply for the award and determine what can be done differently, if necessary, to better encourage businesses.

Findings

- These are a few of the important common themes identified:
  - 90% of businesses approached already support employees who have the need to express breast milk in the workplace.
  - 75% of businesses approached were not aware that the private location designated for expressing breast milk need not be a permanent space.
  - There was considerable confusion among employers as to whether this initiative supports customers or employees (55% of businesses approached).
  - 2 businesses did not want to participate in this initiative because they have few to no employees who would have the need to express breast milk at work in the foreseeable future; therefore time and effort would be wasted in applying for this award.
  - Businesses that are part of corporations (55% of businesses approached) were willing but unable to commit to the initiative immediately as they needed approval from the corporate division. A few businesses asked me to contact the corporate division via email, which was unsuccessful as I have received no replies.

How best to approach a business:

- A phone call followed by a brief face-to-face meeting.
- To contact business owners and heads of HR: Email.
- To get the word out about this initiative: Drop in at a business and ask to speak to the store manager (this approach did not yield any definite responses, but store managers were willing to pass on the information to their superiors).

Percentage of Infant Illnesses Requiring 1-Day Maternal Absence from Work

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<tr>
<th>Mothers of Breastfed Infants</th>
<th>Mothers of Formula Fed Infants</th>
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<td>75%</td>
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Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number P20GM103474. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

I would also like to thank:
- The Gallatin City-County Health Department and the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program Coordinator for sharing their knowledge and resources, and for taking time off their busy schedules to support me.
- The Montana INBRE and the Montana INBRE Program Communication Specialist for providing me with a great opportunity to gain invaluable experience, and for guiding me to success.

Discussion

Challenges encountered:

- Approaching the figure of authority.
- When contacted, most businesses were unaware of who had the authority to approve or disapprove of this initiative, which shows this is a subject that is not talked about often.
- Uncertainty of information reaching appropriate person.
- Many successful businesses stated that they already support breastfeeding employees.
- The Healthy Gallatin Lactation Program Coordinator disclosed that she has worked with clients who are employed by these businesses and are not getting the proper support they need.

Suggestions to overcome challenges:

- Follow-up phone call/email/visit 2 weeks after business is approached and information regarding the initiative is given.
- Approach businesses more formally, with just an information packet and email, which was unsuccessful as I have received no replies.
- Create an online information packet, and email this to businesses that can only be approached via email, such as corporate divisions and Heads of HR.
- Encourage and support breastfeeding employees to approach their employers, if they are comfortable doing so.
- The Texas program found that organizing “Lunch and Learn” events were a great way to bring many business owners together to present this initiative – even the busiest employers needed a lunch break!

Future Work

In the immediate future, the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program will conduct site visits and award recognition to breastfeeding friendly worksites that submit applications.

Currently, there are no statistics or reports on breastfeeding friendly worksites in Bozeman (or Montana), so the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program will begin compiling information on the number of breastfeeding friendly worksites and their breastfeeding policies, etc. The application forms businesses submit will be useful in collecting this information.

Phase II of this initiative may include taking place in 5 years, when the Healthy Gallatin Lactation Education Program will contact the businesses that participated in this initiative to assess and evaluate the impact on supporting breastfeeding in the workplace and of being recognized as a Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite in the community.

Conclusion

The “Healthy Gallatin Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite Award” is currently in its early stages of implementation. My project involved approaching different types of businesses in Bozeman, and assessing how better to approach businesses based on what I learned and observed. Effectively approaching businesses is critical to the successful implementation of this initiative.

My hope is that the successful implementation of this initiative will encourage more communication on the topic of breastfeeding in our community, protect breastfeeding mothers from harassment in and out of the workplace, and help our community view breastfeeding with a more positive attitude.

Acknowledgments

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