



County-Wide Movement Toward Breastfeeding-Friendly Practices

“Breastfeeding is both rewarding and difficult,” says local mother, Kristie Rathmanner. “I want to do everything I can to make sure my child can be as healthy as possible, but that doesn't make it easy.”

Breastfeeding, as evidence shows, is the ideal way to ensure that babies receive optimal nutrition during the first years of life. However, the policies, systems, and environments surrounding families often make breastfeeding challenging.

In 2013, Wright County Public Health (WCPH), with the support of the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), began training childcare providers on how to support families wanting to continue to breastfeed when mom returned to work. In 2018 alone, four local trainings were held, reaching 29 providers.

Three years later, in 2016, Wright County partnered with Allina-Buffalo Hospital to implement the area's first Baby Café. Since then, this group has provided a space for more than 200 breastfeeding moms and babies to receive support from their peers and Certified Lactation Counselors.

The success of Baby Café and childcare provider trainings have built momentum around breastfeeding support at the local health department, workplaces, and childcares.

In 2018, after three years of work, WCPH was recognized as a gold level Breastfeeding Friendly Health Department by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Part of the work done to become a Breastfeeding Friendly Health Department included assisting local employers in achieving Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace designation through MDH. St. Michael-Albertville School District, Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted School District, and Wright County have been officially recognized, and Monticello School District is in the process of applying. Added together, these workplaces employ approximately 820 women of childbearing age.

“An overwhelming population of our staff indicated a need for policy and support regarding breastfeeding during a recent STMA employee survey,” stated Emily Nordmann, Benefits Coordinator with St. Michael-Albertville Schools. “The District feels that creating this policy and having resources available for our employees returning from maternity leave aligns with the Strategic Plan to increase overall staff satisfaction.”

Breastfeeding Friendly Childcare designation was also given to several local childcares in 2017 and 2018. The following locations were recognized: Tri-Valley Migrant Head Start in Monticello; Early Childhood Family Education in Monticello; Big Woods Childcare in Delano; Kid's Haven in Buffalo; and three home-based childcares in Rockford, Delano, and Otsego. All together, these locations can impact 832 children birth to age five.

Rathmanner adds, “Receiving support not only in my home, but also within the community, potential childcares, and at work is immeasurably helpful in ensuring I can give my child the best possible start to life.”