
The Story of Apple Dumplings

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For the last six months I have been involved in a breastfeeding promotional project that has captured the attention of many, has been hard work, fun to do but is still in desperate need of further help and dedication. I thought I would write about it in the hope that the word will spread and a world wide Utube viral about breastfeeding will be produced to highlight this very important public health issue.

I am a mother of four, a midwife and breast feeding enthusiast. I fed all four of my own babies in the normal way despite being a 17 year old hard up mother with my first. I had no problems or issues about it and have always wondered why so many women choose not to breastfeed or indeed have problems and give up. Although the answer is multi factual, one reason is that is that breastfeeding is not regarded as the normal thing to do in our culture and consequently rates in the UK are among the lowest worldwide (Spencer 2007).

Changing Women's Attitudes

I believe most woman want to breastfeed, a fact that is evidenced by the numbers of women who initiate it compared with drop off rates and the amount that continue past the early days and weeks post natal, (Taveras 2003). It may be that for some women social instinct dominates biological instinct or they may encounter problems yet support is not available and eventually they resort to using bottles and formula. There are studies that suggest more educational work needs to be done, that low income women are at high risk of not breastfeeding and could therefore be targeted, (Mitra 2004). Certainly I have noticed that there is a certain type of women that one can almost predict will not breastfeed but that even those women with some dedicated help and education can and will breastfeed.

Louise was a young mother of two, poorly educated and on benefits yet for baby number three and four I sold her the notion of a homebirth and breastfeeding. Both baby three and four were born at home and baby number four was totally breastfed for three months and continued to be breastfed at night following that. All it took was some time for talking and on my part "selling" it as an attractive option. I know time is an issue for most midwives in the current working climate but I also think "choice" is used as a cop out to let the *status quo* continue.

Most mothers during discussions in pregnancy will talk about "trying to breastfeeding" as if it is an elusive and only sometimes achievable choice, while knowing that if it does not work for them then it is perfectly ok to formula feed. Women are used to discussions around risk throughout pregnancy but

are they informed about risks for baby if they are fed sub standard food? Are the risks to themselves ever mentioned? Is the protection for them against breast cancer ever discussed? Formula milk is an adequate substitute for human milk if there is no alternative but despite being regarded as normal in our society it is in fact junk food in comparison to human milk if human milk is available.

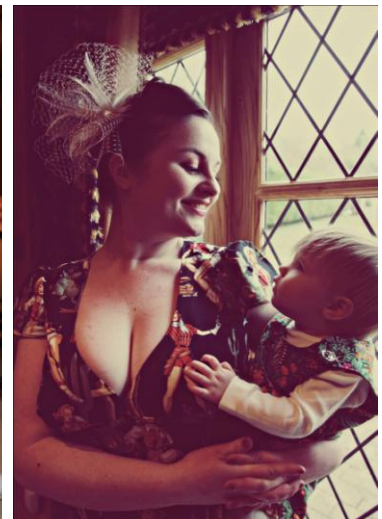
Changing Professional Attitudes

As a midwife I regard myself as the protector of normality and my role extends to 28 days post natal so clearly the role of the midwife is to protect normal feeding. Sadly however I recently heard a midwife say "women do not always want a baby hanging off them". And a midwifery tutor "it doesn't bother me how a woman feeds". Is that not the same as a surgeon not caring if he repairs the hernia or not? What hope do women and babies have if this attitude exists amongst professionals and how futile the battle to change the *status quo* for the many who are so dedicated to doing just that?

My breastfeeding project has demonstrated that there are a lot of very proud of themselves mothers out there who by speaking out want to improve breastfeeding rates and hence the health of our nations next generation yet without serious investment and input from a higher level the battle may be futile.

Normalising Breastfeeding

Following 35 years of dedication to breastfeeding I have come to the conclusion that main stream and certainly young women regard it as a behaviour which is for the upper classes, older women, somewhat elitist or hippie like and while there are many ways to reverse opinion, my attempt to do that is to try and normalise breastfeeding by making it attractive to women. What better way to appeal to young women and get their attention than to make feeding the normal way attractive, trendy, fun and to tap in to the celebrity glamorous culture?



My idea began to take shape and the message became:

Normal milk for normal babies and normal feeding for normal woman

I needed a glamorous theme, a celebrity or two who young people would want to see or connect with and some humor. My idea was to write a catchy song and make a video that would want those watching want to see it again and again in the hope it would go viral and spread the message world wide. If that could be achieved maybe it would give a message to the UK Government that a national campaign to highlight this very important public health issue is needed. Scotland can do it, why can't the rest of the UK? It worked for seatbelts and it is working for smoking! I wrote to my MP who directed me to Anne Milton MP who in turn directed me to the Government appointed infant feeding coordinator who informed me her role is a target for Government cuts so full circle has led me back to my MP to request involvement. A final letter from Anne Milton left me without hope of any serious commitment from the Government in regards to improving breastfeeding rates.

Professional Expertise

I needed help from people with expertise in film and music and support from recognised childbirth groups, so approached The National Childbirth Trust, (NCT) and The Association for Improvements in Maternity Services (AIMS) and of course like all projects I needed money. Two out of three isn't bad I suppose for although I received the help and support no-one in these difficult times had any money to give and I failed to find a sponsor or any funding. However I was determined even if I had to fully fund it myself so went ahead with my plan. I was delighted when further down the line into the project small attempts at fund raising proved fruitful and I managed to secure donations amounting to around 20% of what the whole project has cost me so far. *(If anyone wants to donate an amount however small please do.)*

Inspiration and Creativity

I am no song writer but my son had a friend, John, who could write music and had also found a website that published a huge number of words



that are used instead of the word breasts. I thought what a fantastic idea to use all those words to make a funny song. So John got busy with the melody while I got busy writing the lyrics, something that luckily comes easy to me. I needed a good singer and found one, courtesy of a client, the lovely Hazel who sings in a band called Cajun Roosters and a well known performer on children's TV. When I finally heard the finished song I was very excited, it is a catchy tune and the words very funny. I named it "Apple Dumplings".

I wanted to copy the Bob Dillon idea of having the words written on cards, held up for the viewer to read and thrown down as they were sung. Who else would be perfect for doing just that than a celebrity from the popular TV series Big Brother, 2007 winner Brian Belo for there appeared a clear connection between the words of the song and Brian, for he once had a task in the diary room to name as many words for breasts as he could. He made a hash up of his task but he was hilariously funny, inoffensive and popular with viewers. He would be the perfect one to hold the cards.

Meanwhile I was approached by a lovely young mum whose passion, other than her lovely baby daughter, was burlesque dancing. She thought this may be a good theme being popular at the moment and I agreed with her. Burlesque is about being a glamorous woman no matter your shape or size however it also has a quite a risqué connotation and I did not want to offend anyone so we agreed to tone it down and make it comical and so "Sexy" became very tongue in cheek.

Finding the Performers

We now needed some young mothers who were willing to form a dance group and a whole lot more mums and babies who were willing to breastfeed on camera and take part in the filming. For that part I was delighted to find we were inundated and I had to pick a few from 100's that applied and I did so by picking them from a hat! We also needed another celebrity. Rightly or wrongly young women are influenced by a celebrity culture, (Hutton 2010) so a breastfeeding celebrity mum would be a great publicity pull. That proved very difficult and despite 100's of letters written it was proving futile until



breastfeeding mother of twins and very beautiful model. She agreed to promote the video and so we were all set.

Practical Help

So many people came forward with ideas and ways of giving practical help. We had a wonderful woman set up a web site, <http://www.sexy-sassy-breastfeeding-women.co.uk/> dedicated to the project, where we could get donations paid to and we were able to put a snippet of the song on. We had clothes companies loan us costumes for the shoot, we had make up artist, hair dressers and an amazing photographer who took over 2000 pictures on the day. We had good luck messages from around the world, (thanks to Facebook), from famous names in the world of childbirth.



The Video

The plan for the video was that there was a main group of young dancing mothers, a second larger group of breastfeeding mums and babies with ages ranging from newborn to 3 years, Brian Belo showing and throwing the words, Nancy Sorrell looking amazing and encouraging everyone and even Daisy the cow telling us her milk is not good enough for human babies, (filming her at her smelly farm was a story in



The dance routine tells a story of breastfeeding motherhood. The dance group are dancing a burlesque routine but are hindered by baby paraphernalia....they find bibs in their gloves and muslins down their cleavage, one almost misses dance practice due to having to feed baby and finds herself missing her shoe! Cabbage leaves are seen peeking from glamorous corsets and the young women demonstrate though dance how any size breast will do using lemons grapefruits and very large melons!



The day of filming was absolutely amazing. We were loaned a huge country house by yet another dedicated breastfeeding mother of two, mums from far and wide turned up on time and all played their part. We filmed all the planned shots and laughed till our sides split at Brian Belo while he strutted his stuff to the song as if it was a number one hit (now that really would be a dream come true) and at Andrea the house owner who dressed up in the full burlesque costume and went to a local supermarket to request free lunch for all the mothers and babies. Thank you Sainsbury at Sevenoaks and sorry for the shock!

We are now ready to launch and from 14th June Apple Dumplings can be viewed (again and again please) at

<http://www.youtube.com/user/MissAppleDumplings?feature=mhee>



Hutton W, July 4th 2010 The Observer

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