

Judy Voisey

Breastfeeding Support Champion

One of the best ways to give an infant the best start in life is simple and natural. Breastfeeding establishes a bond between a mother and child that provides the nourishment so vital to life itself.

In spite of its benefits, it might be surprising to learn that Newfoundland and Labrador, at 63 per cent, has the lowest rate of breastfeeding among mothers in Canada. Among health professionals, there is a desire to encourage more mothers to provide their babies with breastmilk.

It's not an easy task, given the varied obstacles that result in mothers resorting to nourishing their babies with formula. But there are indications that success can be achieved with a lot of effort and love. In Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Judy Voisey is the Resource Mother at the Aboriginal Family Centre. She takes it upon herself to work closely with mothers-to-be and help them understand what is involved in breastfeeding their newborn. She has been doing the job for past year and a half and in that time, the Healthy Baby Club has grown.

Dee Dee Voisey says that is a remarkable achievement. As a Breastfeeding Consultant with Labrador-Grenfell Health and a member of the Regional Breastfeeding Network, she notes that mothers who are part of the Healthy Baby Club have limited supports in most cases.

"It's very exceptional what Judy has been doing," says Dee Dee Voisey. "Her approach works. In a sense, she's like a big sister who knows how to reach these young mothers."

Judy is humbled by the praise. She says her approach isn't special or extraordinary. It is rooted in creating an environment that is realistic and educational.

"I'm really proud of what we're doing," she says of the new mothers who have accepted her encouragement. "We get good feedback. We know what we're doing is effective and we spend a lot of time with mothers providing a wide range of supports."

Perhaps more important for Judy is her revelation that new mothers have helped each other without actually realizing it. She beams with pride when she talks about the mentoring that goes on.

"It's fine to hear it from me, but when a young mother hears it from someone just like them – the challenges that they face – they learn and understand that they have made a positive decision to breastfeed their child."

Judy illustrates her point by referring to a billboard she once saw in a big city. "It said 'Bloom where you are planted' and that is so true. We treat everyone the same. We never make anyone unwelcome."

The Regional Breastfeeding Network and the provincial umbrella group were so impressed with the strides that Judy Voisey was making that they named her a 'Breastfeeding Support Champion'. The award, a new initiative which is destined to be an annual event, was presented to her last fall during the annual breastfeeding challenge in Central Labrador. Dee Dee Voisey says it's important to promote and recognize people who advance the cause of breastfeeding.

Judy, however, says it's the mothers who should be praised. "I don't feel that I have done anything that any other Resource Mother wouldn't have done, but I accept the award with pride," says Judy.

Judy Voisey says she loves her job because the rewards are so enriching. "Breastfeeding is that immediate bond that a mother has with a child...it's the start of everything."



Judy Voisey, a Resource Mother with the Healthy Baby Club at the Aboriginal Family Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, enjoys spending time with her son, Owen.