

Women, work and breastfeeding: Everybody benefits!

THE MOTHER-FRIENDLY
WORKPLACE
INITIATIVE ACTION FOLDER



This folder contains information on:

- Tips for successfully combining work and breastfeeding
- Why working women should breastfeed when they return to paid work
- Success stories of breastfeeding at the workplace
- Obstacles to breastfeeding in the workplace
- Steps to creating mother-friendly workplaces
- Action ideas and resources

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK, 1-7 August, offers an opportunity for people worldwide to join together in celebration and action in support of breastfeeding. In 1992, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) launched the first World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) on the theme of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. Over 70 countries recognised the importance of breastfeeding, and many have established baby-friendly hospitals.

This year World Breastfeeding Week focuses on enabling working women to breastfeed. According to the Innocenti Declaration, *optimal breastfeeding* means that 'all women should be enabled to practise exclusive breastfeeding and all infants should be fed exclusively on breastmilk from birth to four to six months of age. Thereafter, children should continue to be breastfed, while receiving appropriate and adequate complementary foods, for up to two years of age or beyond.'

Every mother is a working woman. It is a particular challenge to assist working women to practise optimal breastfeeding. The goals of WBW 1993 are to:

- Enable women to breastfeed with confidence by informing them of the benefits of optimal breastfeeding and of their maternity entitlements;
- Ensure that national legislation to protect the rights of working women to breastfeed is implemented in as many countries as possible;
- Increase public awareness of the benefits of combining work and breastfeeding to women, children, and society at large;
- Encourage unions and workers groups to advocate for maternity entitlements which support women workers who breastfeed;
- Foster the establishment of Mother-Friendly Workplaces everywhere; and
- Protect cultural practices which support the breastfeeding mother working at or away from home.

Make these *your* goals! Breastfeeding thrives in family-friendly cultures!

To make the changes necessary for long-term social transformation, we need a new way of thinking about work and families. In many societies, work is seen from a male perspective and valued only if it produces a cash income.

When much of women's work is home-based or for subsistence, it is under-reported, under-valued and under-

paid. However, when women also work for a cash income, their work seldom accommodates unpaid reproductive work, including pregnancy, breastfeeding and child-care. Most working women who want to breastfeed give up the ideal of optimal breastfeeding, and resort to partial, mixed, or token breastfeeding.

Can we create a woman-centred approach to work that values women's productive and reproductive work, and reduces the double burdens women carry? Such an approach would acknowledge pregnancy, breastfeeding and child-care as socially meaningful and productive work, and recognise the social support necessary for optimal breastfeeding. Men share the responsibility for providing this support in the home and the workplace.

With maternity leave, affordable child-care and access to infants during working hours, women can successfully integrate productive and reproductive work. Children, women, families and employers all benefit from this health promoting, inexpensive, nurturing approach to child-care.

