

campaign: feel free to feed

An inherent sense of justice, some kindly words from a stranger and a strategically placed rock – here are the first three winners from our campaign



Thanks everyone who has entered the Feel Free To Feed campaign so far, we have had a fantastic response. It seems the campaign has hit a nerve as stories of triumph over breastfeeding adversity keep flooding in!

The Feel Free To Feed campaign is all about creating a supportive environment for mums to breastfeed their children.

My Child, along with partners Nursingwear and Mothers Direct, supports the Australian Breastfeeding Association in three initiatives: Breastfeeding Welcome Here, Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation and the Baby Friendly Health Initiative.

Go to mychildmagazine.com.au for more information. In the meantime, here are the three winning stories for Spring:



COMING OUT

I was a brand-new mum, 21 years old, and my baby girl was only a week old. I had absolutely no experience with babies and children, and was facing the bold new world of motherhood with all the courage I could muster.

I was in the local Centrelink office, wanting to ask all the basic new-mum questions. There

weren't many customers. My baby girl started to cry and it was almost my turn. I left the queue, but couldn't find signs to a parents' room, so I found a quiet corner, turned my back on the room and tended to my hungry child.

Two immature, male teenage youths started making comments about my action – not that anything could be seen. It was mid-winter and I had a shawl over my shoulder, covering my baby and everything else.

Rather than address the unruly behaviour of these youths, a female staff member approached me and suggested I come back another time.

I was shocked, distraught and felt alone and vulnerable as I looked around the room for a figure of support or advice. There was none.

But I wasn't about to be sent away – my baby was feeding. I was doing what I had to do. Why should I be sent away because of the disruptive behaviour of other customers?

I quickly changed the subject and told the staff member what my business was for the day, suggesting that I could be interviewed in a cubicle. After all, I had been next in line for service before my baby required feeding.

After a pause, the staff member realised I was not leaving until I'd finished my business and I could not be sent away.

I was motioned into a cubicle and left in peace to finish tending to my hungry child.

When my business was finished, I left the Centrelink office, armed with a new sense of confidence and the quiet knowledge that I was going to cope with my new role as a mum.

Thank you for reading my experience. I want other young mothers, unsure of their new world, to be encouraged to know their rights.

Rhonda Crowther, 35, mother of three, Laidley Heights, Qld



LIFE CHANGING

My little girl was a stressful baby with almost nil sleep and lots of vomiting and gagging.

My husband and I were a mess. We'd been to doctors and a sleep clinic, exhausted all the nurses in the area and ended up just riding it out. Our emotions were on the surface and we were sure the neighbours thought we were doing something horrible to our dear child.

I fed her too much, then I fed her too little. We never went out, so feeding in public was a non-issue. Until one day at a busy shopping centre, my husband got caught in the queue at the grocery store. I was waiting outside with our son when our baby started to scream. My natural reaction was to panic, hoping my husband would walk out those doors so we could go to the car and try to deal with her in private. To my horror, he didn't. I thought if I fed her just maybe she would calm down.

I had nothing to cover up with and was on surveillance from the time I sat down as I felt everyone was looking, judging me. I had my son stand close by and started to feed. Quiet, but for how long I didn't know. Long enough for my husband to get out, I was hoping.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and jumped two feet in the air when an old man appeared close beside me and said, 'Good on you love, your baby needs feeding and you should feed her when she needs it. It's very important!'

He told me the next thing I should do was teach my son to swim. 'Life's precious,' he said. Then he patted my shoulder, saying 'You're doing a good job, love, keep it up!'

ILLUSTRATIONS SANDRA ISAKSSON @ SANDRA ISAKSSON.COM. WITH THANKS TO KINDERGALLERY.COM

I will remember that man for the rest of my life and now have no problems with anything babies do in public – they are babies after all.

I eventually phoned the ABA and realised she was only getting the watery fore milk and not the nutritious hind milk she needed. Once I changed the way I fed her to two small feeds on the same breast she responded, we became the people we used to be and our daughter was a pleasure. I phoned the ABA several times to make sure we were going well and had check-ups to monitor her weight (gaining, finally).

In no time we felt we could leave the house without causing a scene. It was magic. We could enjoy our little girl and our lives again.

Samantha Birch, mother of two, almost three, by email



IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE

It's hard to get a let-down happening when you are expressing breast milk in the bush, 1,300m above sea level, and there are March flies dive-bombing your abdomen. Thankfully, the passing bush walkers could not spot me, as I could hide discreetly behind a large rock.

I started a full-time PhD in botany just four months after the birth of my son, Luka. Not long after starting my studies, I started doing fieldwork several hours from Melbourne where we live. As Luka was so young, I began expressing breast milk while we were apart. It was this fieldwork that saw me tucked behind the rock, doing my best to keep the March flies away while maintaining a hold on the funnels.

One of my expressing times always occurred

during the drive back to Melbourne. This was only a problem for me when my male supervisor would come and help me out. I had no choice but to express in the back seat while he drove the car. Despite having no children of his own, he seemed very understanding of this, and I never noticed any blushing when the noise of the electric breast pump filled the car.

Expressing in the bush wasn't so bad, it was finding a suitable place at university I found most difficult. Either I had to walk across the campus to the parent's room, wait for a security guard to unlock the door and then hope that nobody else needed the room, or use the women's toilets in the department. As hard as it is to relax while a March fly's biting your stomach, it is even harder to promote a let-down while the person in the next toilet deposits last night's curry. I began sneakily expressing in my laboratory, which I'm sure would have been against all the university's safety guidelines. When I expressed in the lab, I'd put a coded note on the door for my male colleagues, make sure the workbench was free from any chemicals and express as quickly as possible.

At the end of a long day apart, breastfeeding Luka was the perfect way to reconnect, put my feet up and marvel at my little boy. He seemed to relish this time together too, and fed frequently during the evenings and weekends. I guess he was making up for lost time and trying to boost my supply for the week ahead.

Despite regular pumping, I began to find it difficult to express enough for a full feed and began supplementing Luka's day feeds with artificial breast milk when he was eight months.

When Luka reached 11 months, I stopped expressing altogether. He started drinking cow's milk while we were apart, but continued to breastfeed while we were together. I was extremely relieved to stop expressing, but also very proud of myself for continuing to do so for so long despite the adverse places. Luka is now 25 months old and despite being 20 weeks pregnant I'm patiently waiting for him to wean.

Rowan Brookes, 29, mother of one, Carlton, Vic

Go to mychildmagazine.com.au for more letters from the Feel Free To Feed campaign.



HAVE YOUR SAY & WIN

These mums each win a fantastic prize pack valued at more than \$450, which includes a Kyrawear Sleep Bra, Corsierre breastfeeding top, \$150 Nursingwear voucher, \$150 Mothers Direct voucher and a two-year My Child subscription.

The Feel Free To Feed campaign is a joint initiative with My Child, the Australian Breastfeeding Association (breastfeeding.asn.au), Nursingwear (nursingwear.com.au) and Mothers Direct (mothersdirect.com.au). It runs until August 2008 and three more entries will be published in each of our Autumn 08 and Winter 08 issues, with the overall winner to be announced in our Spring 08 issue.

BREASTFEEDING STORY OF THE YEAR WINNER

The best story from all those published in My Child will win a fantastic prize valued at up to \$3,640, including a My Child makeover and photo shoot in Sydney, Nursingwear and Mothers Direct vouchers, Nursingwear breastfeeding wear and much more! Visit mychildmagazine.com.au for all the details and full terms and conditions.

TO ENTER Log on to mychildmagazine.com.au or write to Feel Free To Feed, My Child, PO Box 1779, Rozelle NSW 2039.