

Promoting Lactation Equity Through Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplaces:

A Public Health Internship with Breastfeed Durham

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Scientific Report

Abstract

This field placement focused on promoting lactation equity by supporting a community-based initiative that encourages businesses to create breastfeeding-friendly environments. As the recruitment coordinator, I led outreach to local businesses, supported award tracking and application processes, and helped develop tools to improve program coordination. I also engaged directly with community members at events to raise awareness and encourage participation. ZIP code data was used to guide outreach by region, and feedback from families helped shape more inclusive messaging. Through this work, I strengthened key public health skills in data analysis, communication, health equity, and community partnership. The experience offered insight into how local systems can support or hinder breastfeeding families and highlighted the value of working in true partnership with the community.

Introduction

Breastfeed Durham is a collaborative, community-driven organization that works to ensure that all families feel supported, protected, and welcomed throughout their infant feeding journeys in North Carolina. Breastfeed Durham is the pilot project of the Breastfeeding Family Friendly Communities (BFFC), the organization is committed to transforming systems and institutions to create a coordinated lactation support infrastructure across hospitals, clinics, child care centers, businesses, and public spaces. Guided by the Ten Steps to a Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community, Breastfeed Durham partners with families, health professionals, and organizations to normalize breastfeeding and chestfeeding as both a public health priority and a cultural norm. My field placement focused on Step 6, which emphasizes that "families experience breastfeeding support at every place they visit." In alignment with this vision, I supported the Breastfeeding-Friendly Business Awards Program, which recognizes businesses, workplaces, and community

organizations that commit to being visibly welcoming and supportive of breastfeeding and lactating families. This recognition not only encourages individual businesses to act but also advances the broader goal of making Durham a community where breastfeeding is celebrated, accommodated, and protected in all settings.

During my placement, I served as the recruitment coordinator with responsibilities including conducting outreach to local businesses, supporting application completion and review, and streamlining internal systems to manage award distribution and tracking. I also created engagement materials and assisted with organizing community-facing events. In addition to backend coordination, I had the opportunity to represent Breastfeed Durham at public events such as the Take No Bull Women's Conference and the Rainbow Collective for Change's Annual Manifest RCC Event. At these gatherings, I spoke directly with community members and business owners about the importance of creating breastfeeding-friendly spaces and encouraged them to join the growing network of award recipients across Durham. Through this work, I supported the continued growth and sustainability of the program and deepened my understanding of what it means to practice public health in partnership with the community.

Methodology

During my time with Breastfeed Durham, I applied and strengthened five public health competencies across Domains 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8 through my work in community engagement, business recruitment, systems development, and strategic communications. Each competency was addressed through specific activities and deliverables that contributed to advancing Durham's efforts to become a Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community.

Domain 1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills

Competency 1.2: Accesses existing quantitative and qualitative data

I maintained a Google Form and corresponding spreadsheet to track outreach, recruitment, and award application status for over 200 local businesses (see Appendix A). This tool allowed the team to monitor engagement patterns, track follow-ups with more than 100 additional businesses, and assess where recruitment efforts were most successful. This work involved compiling both quantitative data (application and contact metrics) and qualitative observations from direct outreach and community events. The system also supported internal analysis of gaps in award representation across neighborhoods through ZIP code cluster identification and across different business sectors.

Domain 3: Communication Skills

Competency 3.2: Communicates with internal and external audiences

Throughout the placement, I helped maintain a variety of materials to support external communication and community visibility. I authored two blog articles highlighting Breastfeed Durham's presence at the Rainbow Collective for Change's Annual Manifest RCC Event and the Take No Bull Women's Conference (see Appendix B). I also contributed to the promotional materials for the Durham Chamber of Commerce's New Business Welcome Boxes, which included custom envelopes with Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community postcards and "Wonder Women Breastfeed" clings, encouraging new businesses to apply for the award (see Appendix C). In addition, I participated in door-to-door outreach, using printed flyers and sign-in sheets to engage directly with managers, staff members, and frontline employees while gathering interest in the award designation (see Appendix D).

Domain 4: Health Equity Skills

Competency 4.4: Reduces systemic and structural barriers that perpetuate health inequities

My role as recruitment coordinator supported Breastfeed Durham’s mission to normalize and support breastfeeding and chestfeeding across diverse communities, with particular attention to families who have been historically underserved or excluded. Through the Breastfeed Durham Community Partner Awards, we aimed to reduce environmental and institutional barriers by encouraging businesses to adopt lactation-friendly practices and visibly demonstrate their support. For example, many participating businesses displayed breastfeeding welcome clings and shared printed educational resources with staff and customers. This work was especially important during community events such as Manifest RCC, where we engaged LGBTQ families and emphasized the need for inclusive lactation care that affirms and supports all identities.

Domain 5: Community Partnership Skills

Competency 5.2: Establishes relationships to improve community health and resilience

Building and sustaining partnerships was a key part of my role as recruitment coordinator. I initiated outreach businesses across Durham, followed up with interested applicants, and supported their recognition process. I also contributed to community engagement efforts by representing Breastfeed Durham at in-person events and by coordinating award distribution logistics.

Domain 8: Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills

Competency 8.2: Implements a vision for a healthy community

During my field placement opportunity, I supported Step 6 of Durham’s Ten Steps to a Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community, which encourages public spaces and businesses to welcome and support breastfeeding families. Through organizing recruitment strategies, streamlining tracking systems, and contributing to promotional efforts, I helped implement a piece of this broader vision. By developing tools and outreach workflows that can be sustained

beyond my time, I contributed to the foundation of a more responsive, community-driven program that supports families in Durham.

Findings

During my field placement with Breastfeed Durham, I identified both quantitative and qualitative insights that informed refined approaches:

- The visibility of lactation-supportive signage (e.g., “Wonder Women Breastfeed” clings) significantly increased interest and follow-through.
- ZIP code data helped guide outreach by making it easier to group visits by region, plan efficiently, and build a stronger presence across different parts of the community.
- In-person engagement, especially at events like Manifest RCC and the Take No Bull Women’s Conference, yielded higher conversion rates than email or phone-based outreach alone.
- LGBTQ+ families emphasized the need for inclusive language and signage; their feedback highlighted a lack of affirming resources across many public-facing businesses.

These findings are important because they highlight how intentional outreach, inclusive language, and community representation influence the success of public health initiatives, particularly those focused on historically marginalized groups. The lessons learned will help guide future iterations of this work and can serve as a model for similar efforts in other communities.

Conclusions

This field placement meaningfully contributed to broader efforts to promote equitable lactation support by engaging businesses and encouraging the creation of visibly welcoming environments for breastfeeding and chestfeeding families. The tools and systems developed during this

experience provide a solid foundation for ongoing community outreach, coordination, and impact tracking. By using ZIP code data across city regions to better understand the geographic landscape of participation, and by incorporating community feedback to shape inclusive messaging, this work highlighted the importance of engagement that is both responsive and affirming. Overall, this experience was a powerful reminder that meaningful public health work happens through real relationships, thoughtful communication, and a deep commitment to showing up for communities in ways that reflect their needs and values.

Discussions

As I enter my second year in the Master of Public Health program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, my field placement with Breastfeed Durham has been one of the most meaningful parts of my graduate education. Studying Maternal, Child, and Family Health has shaped my excitement about working directly with families, community leaders, and local businesses to help make Durham a more breastfeeding-friendly community. I have always known I wanted to work at the intersection of maternal health and community systems, but this placement helped me see what that looks like in practice.

Participating in the Pathways to Practice Scholars Field Placement Program through the Region IV Public Health Training Center helped me connect classroom learning to real experiences in the community. It reminded me why I chose public health and showed me how much impact comes from showing up, listening, and building trust.

One of the most powerful moments of my placement was attending the Rainbow Collective for Change's Annual Manifest RCC Event at Falls Lake. Breastfeed Durham was invited to table at the event, where I connected with families from a wide range of backgrounds. Many shared personal stories about their infant feeding journeys. I was especially moved by conversations

with transgender and non-binary parents who spoke candidly about barriers they have faced in accessing affirming lactation care and how powerful it was to see an organization like Breastfeed Durham present in that space. Before this, I had limited exposure to the specific challenges this population faces. Hearing their stories expanded my understanding and reminded me that inclusivity in public health must be practiced through our presence, programs, and relationships.

At the same time, I reflected on the deep challenges that still exist, especially the lack of stable funding and political support for LGBTQ families. These structural gaps raise important questions about the long-term sustainability of resources designed to meet their needs. Even so, I was struck by the strength and resilience of the families I met. Their stories reminded me that community power is real and that public health organizations have a responsibility to show up with care, consistency, and commitment. This experience challenged me to think more deeply about how we design systems that reflect the needs of all families, not just those historically centered in maternal and child health work.

I also had the opportunity to represent Breastfeed Durham at the Take No Bull Women's Conference, where I shared information about the Breastfeeding-Friendly Business Awards and spoke with attendees about how their workplaces could better support lactating employees and patrons. Some businesses even completed the application during the event. Those conversations showed me how effective in-person outreach can be, not only for raising awareness but also for motivating real change. Supporting the Breastfeeding-Friendly Business Awards was a central part of my placement. It felt meaningful to uplift businesses by taking intentional steps to support families and reminded me that public health progress often happens through steady, relationship-based community efforts.

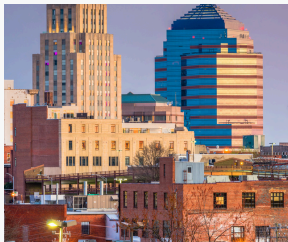
Throughout the placement, I have grown in my confidence as a future public health practitioner. I strengthened my outreach and communication skills, deepened my understanding of how local systems affect families, and learned how to center equity in everyday work. Most importantly, this experience confirmed my desire to pursue a career focused on maternal and child health and gave me clarity about the kind of work I want to do. I am most fulfilled when my work is community-driven, equity-focused, and grounded in love for families. One unexpected and exciting part of this experience was the opportunity to explore program design more deeply. Having been more familiar with implementation, I appreciated the chance to think strategically about how to organize and engage community businesses. This allowed me to stretch my skills and contribute to the foundation of a program that felt responsive and aligned with community needs.

Appendix C: Chamber of Commerce Welcome Box Materials

Samples of custom-designed materials included in the Durham Chamber of Commerce's New Business Welcome Boxes. These materials featured Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community postcards and "Wonder Women Breastfeed" clings, used to encourage new business participation.



Welcome to Appendix C Durham



WE ARE A BREASTFEEDING FAMILY FRIENDLY COMMUNITY!

At Breastfeed Durham, we believe that every family deserves a supportive environment to nourish and care for their children. As part of our ongoing efforts, we've partnered with local restaurants, retailers, parks, and public spaces to make Durham a breastfeeding-friendly community for all.

PARKS AND OUTDOOR SPACES

Durham's parks are perfect for outdoor adventures, complete with seating areas where you can take a break and feed your baby. We've worked with the city to install "Welcome" signs at several family-friendly parks to ensure you always have a spot to rest and recharge.



RESTAURANTS

Enjoy a meal at one of Durham's many breastfeeding-friendly restaurants, where you can relax and feed your baby comfortably and confidently. Look for the "Breastfeeding Welcome" signs and know you are welcome to breastfeed anytime, anywhere.



RETAILERS

Shopping with little ones just got easier! Our community-minded retailers have embraced family-friendly policies that ensure you can breastfeed in comfort.



Support the movement by visiting breastfeeding-friendly businesses. Together, we can create an even more welcoming environment, whether you're a local or just visiting.



 <https://breastfeddurham.org>

 info@breastfeddurham.org



Appendix D: Outreach Materials and Field Engagement Tools

Includes printed flyers, sign-in sheets, and other physical materials used during door-to-door outreach to engage business managers, staff, and employees. These tools supported interest tracking and award recruitment conversations during in-person visits.

BECOME OUR PARTNER TODAY!



If you qualify, we'll deliver a window cling, advertise your business in our newsletter and on our website.

The application takes less than 5 minutes.



**Apply at tinyurl.com/DurhamBfBus
BreastfeedDurham.org**

Breastfeeding
Welcome
Aquí
Apoyamos
La Lactancia



BreastfeedDurham.org

WHY APPLY?

Breastfeeding is good for babies and for families - and for your business!

Supporting breastfeeding:

- Improves employee retention
- Reduces healthcare costs
- Reduces sick days
- Makes customers feel safe and supported
- Makes people more likely to come to your business

Please let us know if you have any questions. We can help review or create policies, find space in your business for employees to pump, or whatever you need!

**info@BreastfeedDurham.org
Or text: 919-622-8787**

BECOME OUR PARTNER TODAY!

Breastfeed Durham recognizes local companies, organizations, and community partners that support breastfeeding/lactating families. Breastfeeding Friendly Businesses and Community Partners are those that welcome breastfeeding/lactating families and support breastfeeding/lactating employees.

Your Name:

Name of Organization/Business:

Organization/Business URL:

Email:

Phone number:

Mailing Address:

Community Partner Affirmations: Support of Breastfeeding Families. (Check all that apply)

- ☐ **Required:** Our business/organization does not advertise infant formula or related products directly to families.
- ☐ **Required:** Breastfeeding families are always welcome and respected. They will never be treated poorly, asked to stop nursing, or asked to cover up or move.
- ☐ **Required:** We support all breastfeeding, chestfeeding, and human milk feeding families inclusive of their race, ethnicity, immigration status, nationality, creed, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, family structure, primary language, ability, or class.

Employer Affirmations: Support of Breastfeeding/Lactating Employees. (Check all that apply)

- ☐ **Required:** All lactating employees are allowed breaks to express milk or nurse their children.
- ☐ **Required:** All lactating employees are allowed access to a private space which is shielded from view for expressing milk and includes an electrical outlet. The space is not a bathroom.
- ☐ **Required:** The lactation space has hand hygiene available (hand sanitizer or sink nearby).
- ☐ **Recommended:** The lactation space is lockable.
- ☐ **Recommended:** Supervisors are encouraged to work with lactating employees in making reasonable accommodations to help them reach their goals.
- ☐ **Recommended:** We have a written lactation support policy, and we share it with our staff to ensure awareness of worksite support.

Sector-Specific Commitments. (Check all that apply).

- ☐ **Required for Healthcare Service Providers:** Healthcare personnel involved in the care of families with babies are trained in the skills necessary to support optimal breastfeeding, chestfeeding, lactation and providing human milk.
- ☐ **Required for Educational Institutions:** Our [childcare program, K-12 program, college, or university] provides books and/or images that illustrate breastfeeding as the norm.

If you have questions, please email info@BreastfeedDurham.org or call 919-622- 8787.

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