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How to Build Partnerships with Workplaces

...The Best Start Experience

One of a series of
“How to...” resources developed by
Best Start: Community Action For Healthy Babies

The “How To” Series

The Best Start “How To” resources were developed to help you work with specific audiences. Participation from the audience you want to reach is critical in creating effective initiatives. Young mothers, small business owners, students, physicians and other community members have unique and important skills. However, they are often busy people and their time needs to be respected and input valued. There are many commonalities when working with different audiences. However there are also considerations and challenges specific to each. The “How To” series will help you involve different groups and individuals in your work.

October 2000

HOW TO . . . *Build Partnerships with Workplaces*

Why work with Workplaces?

Workplaces have a profound impact on the health and well being of employees. Although those who are employed are healthier than those who are not, we are becoming increasingly aware of the influence that work can have on our health. Stress, chemical hazards and the physical demands of the workplace have an immediate effect on employee health. We are also learning more about the range of strategies, from education to policies to environmental support, employers can implement to help promote the health of their employees.

Helping employers provide a healthy work environment and information on potential workplace hazards tells workers that their company cares about them. Research shows that when an employee feels respected and valued by the company, they are more likely to have decreased stress, increased job satisfaction, as well as increased morale and productivity.

Health promotion can enhance the health of the company and its most valuable asset - its employees. Working with workplaces can help them determine and address employee concerns. Over 80% of employees report some concern about their physical work environment. Through workplaces, the work environment and policies can be improved and individual health can be reinforced and maintained. Ultimately, health promotion in workplaces can create a culture which values health and employee wellness. This

booklet will provide you with stories and tips to help you successfully approach and partner with workplaces.

The Workplace Perspective

Most employers will want to know how proposed initiatives will affect their profit margin or bottom line. Workplaces exist to produce either services or products. Often, decision makers will need your help to see the long-term benefits of initiatives. While it is difficult to prove direct financial return to workplaces, research clearly shows that ignoring the benefits of workplace health promotion and a healthy work-family balance can become costly in the long run for employers. Finding the right person to contact in the organization, making it as easy as possible for the workplace to address these issues and taking a non-threatening approach are all key to developing a strong partnership with a workplace.

Best Start and Workplaces

Best Start wanted to improve the health of mothers before and during pregnancy by addressing workplace education, policies and practices. People affected by the issues, in this case workplaces, were involved in planning and implementing solutions. Workplaces were treated as a determinant of health, not just an opportunity to provide general information to the public. Through this approach, Best Start addressed specific information, policies and practices that impact reproductive health in the workplace.

Best Start focussed on two main areas: resource development and enhancing workplace practices and policies.

Although policy change can have a big impact on the health of employees, many workplaces were not ready for or receptive to this type of work. There was also a surprising lack of resources on workplace reproductive health to guide workplaces and working pregnant women. As a result Best Start designed many resources for employers and employees, including posters, displays, newsletters and booklets. All resources were focus tested and evaluated extensively during development and have since been well received around the province. These workplace reproductive health resources are used by many health promotion organizations as part of an integrated approach to workplace health.

Some communities had workplaces that were ready to make changes. In these workplaces, Best Start used an approach that addressed how they worked, by changing policies and practices within individual workplaces. Employee needs were assessed and internal workplace committees responded, based on the survey results. Pregnancy can be considered a narrow focus from an employer's perspective, yet many policies impact directly and indirectly on reproductive health. These committees took a broad approach that went beyond reproductive health in changing existing policies and practices.



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THE BEST START EXPERIENCE

The following section is a series of stories about how Best Start worked with workplaces. While Best Start partnered with many different businesses on a variety of initiatives, these stories describe initiatives that impacted on workplace reproductive health. The insights gleaned from each story are highlighted and have much in common with working with workplaces on other issues.

A SURVEY OF WORKPLACES

Determining the Risks

A small group met to discuss forming a committee to undertake workplace health initiatives. We decided that it would be difficult to determine a direction without input from workplaces. In particular, we felt that we needed to know where women in their reproductive years worked, what type of risks they encountered at work and the types of initiatives that interested workplaces.

The committee decided that our first task should be to survey workplaces. We thought that most women in the community worked in smaller businesses, in jobs that involved sitting and standing, for example secretarial work and working at a cash register. We anticipated that the focus of our work would be providing information to small businesses.

The survey results surprised the committee. Most women in their reproductive years worked in a large business. A large proportion of the women were doing heavy manual labour, for example, shovelling ore or using a chain saw. The survey results had important implications for the committee. The major focus should be larger workplaces. Women needed information about a wide range of workplace reproductive hazards. Workplaces said they were interested in information, displays and a newsletter on reproductive health.

By starting with the awareness initiatives that the workplaces requested, we took a non-threatening approach to workplaces. As the relationships grew, we received calls for further assistance. Workplaces wanted help to set up an employee assistance program,

and to conduct an employee survey prior to union negotiations. The gentle approach opened the door for Best Start to work on policies and practices in workplaces.

Insight

It is important to know as much as possible about your audience of interest, where they work and what type of work they do. If the community is large, you may have to survey a sample of workplaces to get this information. Find out what type of initiatives interest workplaces. As you respond to current workplace needs you build relationships that can help you later address the larger issues.

DEVELOPING A POSTER

Important Feedback from Workers

Best Start wanted to design a poster on work and pregnancy for women in their reproductive years. We needed input from women in the workforce and decided to test possible designs for the poster at two local workplaces, a day care centre and a plywood factory. Both workplaces had previous contact with Best Start and their staff participated on various committees. The two workplaces were happy to help.

Tabletop test stations were set up for one week in the lunchroom of each workplace. The stations displayed the two draft designs of the poster and supplied comment cards for feedback. When we collected the stations we noticed a difference in the responses between the workplaces. The day care staff completed several comment cards but the answers were

brief and in most cases only the yes/no boxes were checked. Staff at the plywood factory, on the other hand, provided a wealth of feedback, their comments often extended to the back of the cards. When we talked with our contacts at each workplace, we discovered that the day care staff had not been informed about the testing whereas employees at the plywood factory were encouraged to take the time to provide feedback.

The comments were varied. There were suggestions about colour, the text and layout. Most significantly, the participants stressed the importance of showing a woman dressed in work clothes on the poster. The suggestions from women in the workforce resulted in major changes to the poster design.

Insight

When designing resources, input from the audience of interest is important. When developing workplace resources or initiatives, involve workplaces that you have previously contacted. Encourage the workplaces to let their employees know in advance about the testing. Make it easy for workplaces by assuming complete responsibility for set up, monitoring and take down of test stations. By being a "good guest" you leave the door open for future partnerships. The feedback from these two workplaces was critical in creating a resource that attracted interest and gave helpful suggestions about work and pregnancy.

WORK AND PREGNANCY BOOKLET

Meeting a Need

A work and pregnancy committee, made up of Best Start, occupational health nurses, human resource managers, public health nurses and a volunteer, was surprised to find that a guide for pregnant workers had yet to be developed. We decided to fill this gap by developing a health and safety booklet for workers who were pregnant. The booklet would have to be preventative in nature, user friendly, and accurate. It needed to be viewed by workplaces as an inexpensive tool for promoting the health and safety of workers.

We wanted to find out what information women wanted and how they wanted to receive it. We talked to pregnant workers and



researched current information on workplace reproductive hazards. An editor and graphic designer helped bring the information together in an easy to use format. The health unit and physicians read the drafts to ensure accuracy.

The draft booklet was then focus tested with pregnant workers. The women stressed that it contained too much information. We had to decide what to take out, what to leave in

and how to provide information without causing undue stress and worry. Finding this delicate balance was difficult. Finally, the booklet was ready for print and was translated into French. This resource started

out as a booklet for local workplaces and now is used by workplaces across the province of Ontario.

Insight

As workers and employers were not aware of workplace reproductive hazards and what they could do about them, increased awareness, rather than policy development, was an appropriate place to start. By taking the time to create a quality resource for pregnant workers and their employers, Best Start was able to fill a need, both locally and provincially. Look for gaps and talk to workplaces about what would be helpful to them. Take the time to have the resource reviewed by different groups. Let others know about your resource and provide them with an opportunity to use or adapt it.

WORKPLACE PRIORITIES

Strategies for Getting in the Door

Following training from Health Canada on the implementation of their Workplace Health System, Best Start had an opportunity to spend time with a Manager of an auto parts manufacturing facility. This gave us an opening to learn about workplace priorities and their perspectives. We used different strategies to interest the Manager in the concept of workplace health. The Manager was unreceptive to initiatives in his workplace that did not directly impact on productivity or the bottom line.

After many unsuccessful approaches, discussion about the increased morale that can result from improved workplace health caught his attention. He agreed that other benefits of improved workplace health made

sense, but they were not important to him. He said that increased morale was something that meant a lot to him personally. He worked his way up through the ranks of the

organization. Many of the people who he now supervised were people he knew. Increased morale inferred a better place to work and more productive staff.

Insight:

Depending on the workplace, different approaches may be needed. Economic climate, management style, labour relationships and attitude of the decision maker need to be considered. Try an initial approach that emphasizes useful resources that you can provide. Let them know that you can offer them a range of support and services when they are ready for them. Talk about all the benefits of an initiative or resource and expand on the ones where interest is shown. Health initiatives may have an impact on productivity, absenteeism and worker turn over. If you are not successful with your first approach, it may mean that the workplace is not ready for you. Encourage the workplace to contact you if their situation changes and your services or resources are needed.

AN EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Determining Worker Concerns

Best Start worked with a local community college that employed approximately 500 full time staff. We introduced Health Canada's Workplace Health System to the Vice President of Human Resources. This program assesses employee health needs and provides a framework for planning policies to support and enhance the health of employees.

The Vice President of Human Resources was very supportive and arranged for us to speak to management of the outlying campuses. We talked with them about the program and all expressed an interest in implementing the program. A meeting was set up with the labour groups. A college representative introduced the concept to the group and expressed the hope that the program would "improve productivity and decrease absenteeism". Best Start explained that the program promoted the health and wellness of employees. If, as a result of the program,

productivity increased and absenteeism decreased, it was an additional benefit. After the presentation, the unions offered their support to the initiative. Not long after this, the college experienced a series of funding cuts and a major restructuring process. In spite of a commitment to proceed, the program was postponed.

Two years later Best Start received a call from the college inviting us to meet with the newly assembled wellness team. The group worked quickly and diligently to implement an employee survey and responded to the results. Many positive changes in practices and policies resulted. For example, flextime and job sharing policies were implemented and were well received by staff. Several training initiatives focussed on the important role that management plays in the health of employees. The framework for health policy development remains to this day.

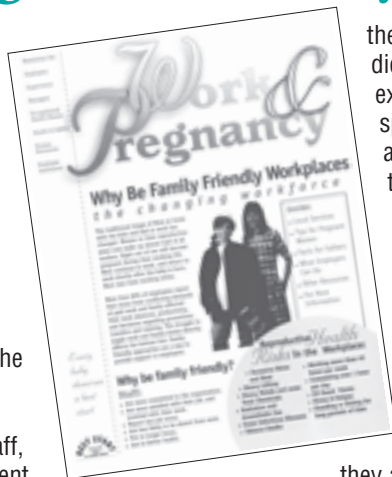
Insight:

Assessing employee needs will help you establish priorities, bring concerns to the attention of the employers and improve workplace health. It is important to gain the support of all key players, in this case both management and labour. It is also critical to be clear about what can be achieved. We learned not to be discouraged by changes in priorities. Workplaces need to respond to the most urgent situations first. Initiatives based on the results of the needs assessment were well received by staff. Assessment of workplace risks can also be helpful.

DEVELOPING POLICY

Addressing Causes not Symptoms

The results of a college needs assessment showed that employees were experiencing high stress levels. While most of the pressure was directly attributable to major funding cutbacks, the survey showed that employees felt there was too much work and very little time to do it. Initially the workplace felt the issues could be addressed with a series of workshops for staff, such as a stress management seminar. Best Start encouraged the workplace to think of long-term solutions that would put the onus for change on the workplace rather than the employees.



they were doing things that did not make sense. For example, employees would spend more time traveling across the campus to do a task than they would actually spend doing it. To address this problem, work was reallocated to others in the organization, based on their geographic location in the workplace. The workplace was not able to increase the budget or hire more staff, nor were they able to decrease the total amount of work that had to be completed. However, they were able to decrease individual workloads and stress by looking at the way work was done.

One of the survey questions was an analysis of each job function. Employees felt that

The workplace also developed a philosophy to address employee health from a policy

and practice standpoint. An organization is more successful if it responds to the issues that are causing stress, rather than teaching staff to manage stress.

Insight:

While providing lunch time sessions on stress management can be helpful, changing the way a workplace works will have a more lasting effect on the health and well being of employees. The development of policies can be a clear statement of commitment and direction for an organization. Encourage workplaces to look beyond short-term solutions that put the responsibility for health on the employees. Although it may take more time, address the causes of the problem, rather than the symptoms. When causes are not addressed, the symptoms usually reoccur.

SUPPORTIVE MANAGERS

Bringing Policy into Practice

Managers have a profound influence on employee health. Employees in the same workplace will have different perceptions about workplace policies, based on the management style of their supervisor. Supportive managers that help their staff balance the demands of work and family, have staff who are more satisfied with their job and more productive.

A workplace survey showed that staff felt managers were insensitive to their needs. Because of the importance of managers in the health of their staff, Best Start felt this area of the survey results was a priority. We encouraged the workplace



to address the problem by providing training to managers. The workplace was also interested in improving employee manager relationships.

We made arrangements for a prominent speaker to provide an in-service to managers. The focus of the day was “Supportive Managers”. The workshop included information on work and family in the 90’s, family friendly practices and the bottom line, the impact of different work schedules, the role of the supervisor and what employers can do.

The workplace recognized that one workshop, although well received, would not have a long-term impact on

the way managers worked with their staff. The skills would need to be reinforced through periodic training and development. The message to managers was also reflected in the philosophy of the workplace.

Insight:

Policy must come into practice in order to be effective. Workplaces need to ensure that managers understand why a policy was developed. Managers need to act sensitively on the intent of policy. To help policy become practice, provide the support that managers need to respond sensitively to employee needs and concerns. Let them know how important they are to employee wellness and the impact they can have on employees and their work.

HOW TO PARTNER WITH WORKPLACES

Large Versus Small Workplaces

Partnering with large and small workplaces is very different. The needs, risks, approaches and suitable initiatives vary with the size of the workplace. Larger workplaces are more likely to have policies in place, specialized staff such as a health nurse, health and safety training for staff and the equipment and information to help staff work safely. Large businesses are a good way to reach a substantial number of women with each intervention and are often more ready for progressive initiatives.

In Canada, more than one third of the workforce is employed in a workplace with less than 50 employees. Smaller workplaces have higher rates of injury and ill health than larger workplaces. They are more likely to be a high hazard industry and to have health and safety concerns. Workers are often young and inexperienced. Determining the health needs of this diverse group can be a challenge. The number of workplaces

and the small number of employees at each location makes small workplaces difficult to serve. On-site interventions are not often practical, and the cost of mailing resources to small businesses in a community can be high. You may need to think of creative ways to cost effectively include small businesses in your workplace initiatives. For example you can use the local media, present to a business association or supply a business publication with an article or insert for their newsletter.

First Contacts

When determining which workplace to contact first, consider which one would be most receptive. Are there workplaces you have connected with before? Has your agency previously worked with any workplaces? Which workplaces represent the audience you are interested in, or present the risks you are concerned about? Large businesses are often a good choice for first contacts. Once you have worked successfully

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QUICK TIPS

- Emphasize the benefits to the workplace
- Start small
- Learn about the culture of the workplace
- Find out about what employees want and need
- Involve employees in the planning and implementation
- Be adaptable
- Remember each workplace is different
- Develop a team approach
- Address the determinants of health
- Look for windows of opportunity
- Use a non-threatening approach
- Involve both management and labour
- Start where they are

HOW TO . . . *Build Partnerships with Workplaces*

with one workplace, the information and credibility you gain will help you partner with other workplaces.

Workplace Contacts

When you have determined the workplaces you want to contact, you will need to find out the best person to contact. Each workplace is different and partnerships develop at many different levels. The people most likely to be receptive to your work are occupational health nurses, human resources staff, health and safety committee members and management. If possible, talk first with people who know the workplace. They may be able to refer you to an appropriate contact and to give you insight into the corporate culture of the workplace.

Building a Relationship

Workplaces may be unreceptive to your health promotion efforts if you want to immediately address issues such as management practices and policies. On the other hand, simple changes are more likely to be well received. Start small and use a low-key, non-threatening approach.

Most workplaces within the private sector are focused on profit and productivity. Make the case for a partnership by emphasizing the positive return an initiative will create. Ask what would be helpful to them and involve the workplace in adapting approaches to their workplace. Whenever possible, work toward changes that will have a lasting impact on the workplace.

Workplace Surveys

Workplace surveys, either across workplaces in a community or within a specific workplace, can help direct your work. Surveying a sample of workplaces in your community can help you narrow down your focus. It will tell you where your audience of interest is most likely to work and about workplace risks and initiatives to

which workplaces may be receptive. By surveying within a workplace, you can respond to actual needs in the workplace. Surveys do take time. However, a carefully drafted survey can save you time and money in implementation and will increase the likelihood that your initiatives will be well received and successful.

Team Approach

Many groups want the attention of workplaces. By working together, you can improve the response from workplaces. For example, consider combining surveys or newsletters, or offer a health fair instead of a single display. Develop a menu of programs and services you offer to workplaces. Become familiar with other services in your agency and community.

Keep a common file about each workplace. Each person contacting the workplace can record information on a form for the specific workplace. Before contacting a workplace, staff can check the form to see if there is new information they should know. Share information about things that went well as well as the things that did not go as well. Above all, whenever possible present a united and coordinated front to workplaces.

Building Awareness

If workers and workplaces do not understand the issue you are concerned about, increasing their awareness is a good place to start. Do not feel you should rush to policy if they do not have a good understanding of the issues and facts. You can increase awareness by providing brochures and posters and by speaking with workplaces. When giving resources to a workplace, you are providing them with an opportunity to increase health and morale. If the necessary resources are not available, you may have to partner with workplaces to develop them. Building awareness creates a readiness and interest in bigger initiatives.

Developing Policy

Once workplaces are aware of the issues, they may be interested in establishing a supportive policy. Provide draft policies or sample policies from other workplaces. Expect the workplace to make some changes as the policy will need to fit the way the business works and its corporate culture and style. They may only be interested in policy change at their regularly scheduled policy review. The workplace, for reasons of confidentiality, may not be able to show you their personnel policies. Be flexible and recognize that policy change is a process. They may want to change policy a bit at a time, rather than making comprehensive changes all at once.

Improving Practice

Only when policy comes into practice, does it impact on the health of workers. Managers and staff need to understand the intent of the policy in order to fully support it. Managers who are supportive and use effective communication skills are key to good workplace practices.

STEPS TO A WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP

- Choose a workplace that might be receptive
- Select a contact in the workplace
- Talk to them about your work
- Ask what would be helpful to them
- Determine the stage of the workplace
- Suggest some initiatives
- Choose an initiative and make any necessary adaptations
- Work together on an initiative
- Evaluate the initiative
- Look for opportunities to move to more progressive work

Visit our web site at: www.beststart.org

WORKPLACE READINESS

Each workplace is at a different level of readiness. Some need to build awareness, a few may be ready to move right to policy, and others may not be interested in making any changes. Recognizing how receptive a workplace is can help you choose appropriate actions. Respect where the workplace is right now and encourage them to consider another step forward. Suggested activities for the various levels of readiness are listed below. Some workplaces may be interested in activities that relate to more than one stage.

Not interested right now

- Make sure they understand how the initiative will help them
- Encourage them to contact you when they are ready
- Leave them with a list of services you offer
- Send them a newsletter
- Ask if there is another area they may want help with
- Use the public media to continue to raise awareness around your concern
- Do short presentations for business groups
- Mention other workplaces they can talk to who have made some changes
- Offer to organize a fun activity for staff or family events
- Call back periodically

Want information for management

- Do a presentation for management and labour
- Speak with the occupational health nurse, human resources or health and safety committee
- Provide information such as fact sheets and current research
- Ask what would be helpful
- Encourage them to call you if they have any questions or concerns

Want to provide information to staff

- Provide them with brochures
- Give them posters
- Develop inserts for pay stubs
- Ask if they can use articles in their newsletter
- Offer to put up a display or arrange for a group or series of displays
- Ask if they are interested in a short presentation for staff

Want to know what services are available

- Develop a resource that lists your services
- Make a community service guide
- Work as a team and offer a package of programs to workplaces
- Put together a binder that shows pictures of the displays you offer
- Ask if there is something else they are interested in

Interested in determining employee needs and concerns

- Show them survey questions and results from other workplaces
- Help the workplace develop a list of questions
- Help the workplace develop a plan for distributing survey forms
- Assist the workplace in analyzing the survey results
- Work with the workplace on developing a plan of action based on the results

Interested in specific programs

- Talk to them about what would be most helpful
- Discuss programs you have worked on in the past
- Work on any necessary adaptations for the workplace
- Talk about what you can do for them later on
- Refer the workplace to other community programs if necessary

Ready to change policy

- Show them policies used in other workplaces
- Show them a sample policy that you have drawn up
- If possible, look at their policies and make suggestions
- Look ahead to windows of opportunity such as annual policy reviews

Interested in changing the way they work

- Help the workplace look at ways to move policy into practice
- Look at ways to make organizational change
- Suggest training sessions on communication and being supportive
- Help them plan the process of change
- Invite them to send representatives to a workshop

Workplace has made progress

- Congratulate them for the specific change
- Give them an award
- Feature them in the paper
- Ask if you can tell other workplaces about what they have done

FINAL COMMENTS

Because workplaces have such a strong impact on employee health, they continue to be an important venue for maternal newborn health promotion activities. This booklet highlights what Best Start learned about workplace education, policies and practices. Best Start partnered with workplaces to improve reproductive health. However the process and strategies involved apply to other types of workplace partnerships. Keep in mind, that for successful workplace resources and initiatives, workplaces need to be involved and respected.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Best Start resources

Here is a list of Best Start resources which may be of interest to you. Some are available in french. To order these resources or to find out about other Best Start services, call 1-800-397-9567 or visit our website www.beststart.org

Camera Ready Ads for Workplace Newsletter

Folic Acid Physicians Desk Reference

Folic Acid Poster

Folic Acid Tear Off Sheets

Preterm Labour Booklet

Preterm Labour Video

Work and Pregnancy Newsletter

Work and Pregnancy Do Mix Booklet

Work and Pregnancy Do Mix Poster

Work and Pregnancy Fact Sheet

Work and Pregnancy Poster

Workplace Health Information Package

How to be a Pregnancy Friendly Workplace Booklet

Other relevant sources of information

Association for Worksite Health Promotion: www.awhp.org

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: www.ccohs.ca

Canadian Health Network: www.canadianhealthnetwork.com

College of Family Physicians of Canada Tel. 905-629-0900
website: www.cfpc.ca

Family Work Institute
website: www.igc.apc.org/fwi/pubs/D98-04.html

Health Canada website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Health Canada, Workplace Health Directorate:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/ahi/workplace

Health Promotion Online:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/healthpromotion

Institute for Work & Health: www.iwh.on.ca

Material Safety Data Sheets: www.msdsonline.com

Motherisk: www.motherisk.org

Motherisk - *Pregnancy Wallet Card* Tel. 416-813-6780
website: www.motherisk.org

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers
website: www.ohcow.on.ca

The Ontario College of Family Physicians Tel. 416-867-9646
website: www.cfpc.ca/ocfp

Ontario Human Rights Commission, Pregnancy: Know Your Rights:
www.ohrc.on.ca

Ontario Medical Association website: www.oma.org

Ontario Ministry of Labour – Pregnancy Leave:
www.gov.on.ca/lab/es/pregnane.htm

Saskatchewan Report by Dr. Linda Duxbury, Dr. Christopher Higgins:
www.business.carleton.ca.sask.98/

Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada
website: www.sogc.com

University of Guelph, Centre for Family, Work and Wellbeing
website: www.uoguelph.ca/cfww/

Voices for Children, fact sheet on family and work see their
website: www.voices4children.org/factsheet/background2-3.htm

Wellington Dufferin Guelph Health Unit - *Reaching Health Care Professionals in Wellington and Dufferin Counties* Tel. 519-621-2370

The Workers Health and Safety Centre: www.whsc.on.ca

Please feel free to copy all or part of this brochure.

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and supported by OPC.*

How to contact Best Start

The Best Start Resource Centre
c/o OPC
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Fax: 1-416-408-2122
www.beststart.org



Notes...



Best Start: Community Action for Healthy Babies is a unique health promotion project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. It is a comprehensive population-based model for improving maternal newborn health through community development. Two locations, Algoma and Barrie, were selected by the Ministry to develop and demonstrate the Best Start model. From 1992 to 1998 the two sites worked with their communities on areas of concern to maternal newborn health. They were supported and guided by the Best Start Resource Centre in Toronto.

Best Start addressed a wide range of factors that contribute to the birth of low birth weight babies. Low birth weight as a health indicator lends itself to a community wide approach and Best Start initiatives were directed at the entire child bearing population. Poverty, smoking, substance abuse, violence, nutrition, stress and workplaces, all have a significant effect on the health of an unborn child and were a focus of Best Start's work. Best Start brought together agencies, services and individuals to form working groups on local concerns. The community groups were involved in selecting, designing, implementing and sustaining initiatives that increased awareness, provided support and addressed policy.

The Best Start Resource Centre continues to offer support to individuals and groups working on maternal newborn health in Ontario. Best Start services include on-site consultations, training, facilitation of planning, telephone support, information, resources, and a web site.