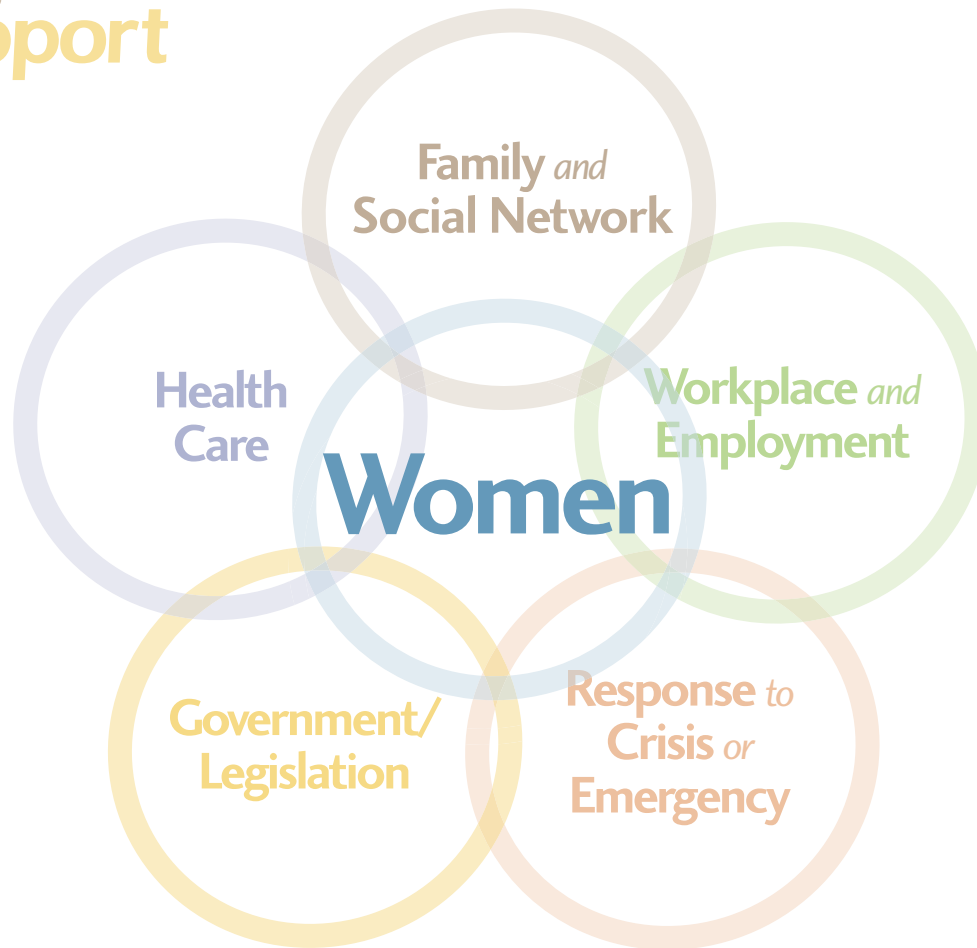




## Circles of Support



**Jill Tyson**, LLL Leader, Tennessee, USA

Women helping other women – women educating themselves, asking questions and seeking more information – women who are not accepting the mainstream status quo without inquiry: These are foundational components of La Leche League International (LLLI). The seven women who started LLLI in 1956 were questioning, inquisitive and independent thinkers, who not only found information and support, but also shared it.

Humankind is both instinctual and free willed. Humans are created from birth to cry and seek nourishment to survive. Humans also have reasoning skills that allow them to question the norms of culture or environment. Although the level of potential will vary, depending on the particular culture, country or even situation, all women want the best

for their baby. With information and support, women are able to make decisions for their baby and their families.

Jane Tuttle, Chairman of the LLLI Board of Directors, said recently “Through mother-to-mother support, La Leche League (LLL) Leaders\*\*\* offer an informal support system that positively reinforces a mother’s sense of accomplishment. LLL Leaders empower mothers to challenge cultural practices that inhibit breastfeeding. LLL Leaders help mothers to learn more, to be independent in their thought and to be reflective about their mothering.”

By tapping into natural human energy and reasoning during childbearing years, women can find answers to their questions. As time passes, their confidence grows and women find opportunities to help other women become independent and resourceful.

My personal example demonstrates these points. Almost 20 years ago when I was pregnant with my first child, I began to read about breastfeeding and its benefits. I didn't have a mentor or another breastfeeding woman I could look to for guidance. Yet, something inside of me pushed .... I read *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, a book published by LLLI, with zeal. For nine months I studied intently. Looking back I cannot explain why I was so passionate and determined, other than the fact that the power of human reason came to the forefront as I sought to do the best for our growing family and our first child.

After my son's birth, my newfound knowledge was put to the test. I was bombarded by advice, and since I was a novice, I tried to listen. Nine months of preparation helped me to handle the many well-wishers and professionals who tried to get me to supplement, watch the "time" my baby was at the breast, get back to a "normal" schedule, and more. I attended my first La Leche League meeting after the birth of my son. After the meeting, I knew exactly where to go and who to call for answers. This group of experienced mothers had years of wisdom behind them and were living proof in my own "neighborhood" that babies can and do grow on breast milk alone. They stood against societal pressures, and I knew that I had found a common purpose and universal connection.

This group of mothers helped me understand that we were united in this universal act of goodness. I was strengthened by understanding that I stood with women throughout world history. Mother's milk wasn't just for ancient

primitive people, or our grandmother's generation *before* modern medicine and concocted formulas became popular.

In personal experience with my own 6 children, I have experienced challenges. I have been told that my daughter was allergic to my milk, that I would need to wean my baby before surgery (I didn't), that I should give solids early, and more.

My personal story provides evidence for the statement that women are not passive bystanders in the arena of breastfeeding support. Although there are situations when experts in a particular topic or area are needed, it isn't necessary to be an expert for mothers to encourage one another in mothering through breastfeeding. If women are willing to offer their own experience and support, and reclaim the right to share mother-to-mother as common human history teaches, it will make a huge difference to new mothers.

The tradition of mother-to-mother support needs to be remembered, encouraged and continued. Women helping women contributes to the well being of families worldwide. Women and mothers can and do make a difference!

*\*\*\*A La Leche League Leader is a mother who has breastfed her own baby for about a year or longer and who has done additional reading and training to be accredited by La Leche League. She draws not only on her own experience but on the wealth of information and evidence in her LLL resources.*



Special thanks to the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action for assisting in the printing and distribution of this publication.



## The LLLI Mission

To help mothers worldwide to breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information and education, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother.

La Leche League International is a globally recognized, not-for-profit organization that maintains a presence in more than 68 countries. Since 1956, over 43,000 women have become accredited Leaders who assist other women who want to breastfeed their babies. For breastfeeding information, to find a LLL Leader or LLL Group in your area, or to order materials, visit <http://www.llli.org> or call 800-LALECHE.