



## Circles of Support



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In the 1940's, during the infant formula "boom" and the technological revolution, breastfeeding rates decreased. The use of formula impacted the medical world, as physicians began to promote this new form of feeding infants and young children.

When La Leche League International (LLLI) was founded in 1956, the seven Founders knew they needed the support of the medical community. Fortunately, they had the support and counsel of two physicians - one a Founder's husband and the other a close friend.

Since its founding, LLLI has worked closely with and counted on the support of physicians from all specialties: pediatricians, obstetricians, family practice, etc. LLLI works with physicians on the Health Advisory Council who are consulted when advice is required, such as with

the review of articles to be published. LLLI also organizes Physician Seminars, cooperating with medical organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and sponsors the Medical Associates Program (MA). La Leche League (LLL) Leaders\*\*\* identify and invite physicians to become MA members. LLLI workshop and conference programs include presentations by health professionals.

The role of LLL, through its mother-to-mother (MtM) support groups, is fundamental to realizing an increase in the numbers of breastfeeding women. Leaders, in the monthly MtM meetings discuss the importance of getting breastfeeding off to a good start, discuss the bond that forms between mother and child, and the importance of "rooming in" at the hospital for the establishment of milk production.

When a mother asks for breastfeeding information related to a medical issue, the Leader calls on the LLL Professional Liaison Leader (PL). The PL accesses a network of medical professionals who serve as resources to La Leche League.

As a result, the mother receives information to share with her physician and a course of action can be taken that takes into account her desire to breastfeed as well as the medical diagnosis. The Leader also supports the mother in deciding what questions she should ask, as well as sharing contacts and resources that are helpful in her interactions with her physician.

Positive changes have been seen as a result of the collaboration of LLL and the medical community in the countries where LLLI is present. In Latin America, for example, Leaders in several countries actively work with the medical community to support mothers. In Mexico, LLL has participated in Pediatric Congresses and shares up-to-date breastfeeding information through pamphlets and magazines with physicians that they in turn, share with mothers.

In Colombia, LLL has published articles related to breastfeeding in a variety of communication venues, including the journal of the Colombian Pediatric Society and the newspaper El Tiempo. LLL Colombia also publishes “Nuevo Comienzo” (New Beginnings) a magazine dedicated to breastfeeding mothers, which is read by health professionals and mothers.

In São Paulo, Brazil, LLL Argentina is working with the Center for the Initiative and Support of Breastfeeding and Human Milk Bank of São Paulo (CIAAM), part of the Paulista School of Medicine of the National University of Sao Pablo (UNIFESP). This work group is made up of health professionals from the São Paulo Hospital who are dedicated to the training of students and graduates in human lactation. In the state of Alagoas, Brazil, a LLL Leader, who is also a Nutrition professor in the Federal University, provides an elective course on human lactation for medical students.

In Ecuador, Leaders provide human lactation courses for physicians and nurses in the Andina Simón Bolívar University and also work with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Ministry of Health, and others in a national breastfeeding promotion campaign. In Quito, LLL was invited to participate in a Human Milk Banking international seminar.

In Uruguay, LLL works with the National Lactation Committee and other NGOs, and with international organizations such as UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, to promote breastfeeding.

In Venezuela, results are positive for breastfeeding since the passing of the Law for the Promotion and Protection of Breastfeeding. Hospitals are changing their policies to comply with the law, training their personnel in human lactation, informing mothers of the importance of breastfeeding and creating breastfeeding centers. Local Leaders and the MtM groups support these changes.

Thanks to the efforts of LLL Leaders, health professionals and other sectors of society, great strides have been made in many countries for breastfeeding. LLLI recognizes that there is still work to be done for breastfeeding to become the norm. LLLI will continue efforts to protect, encourage and promote breastfeeding, and recognizes that mutual, respectful collaboration with health professionals will positively impact breastfeeding.

*\*\*\*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.*



### 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.



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