Being Mum and UNICEF’s The Baby Friendly Initiative

As a service provided by an independent charity, rather than a Trust, the Being Mum programme is unable to formally gain the UNICEF The Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation award. However, the programme sessions are delivered in line with The Baby Friendly standards. The standards provide a roadmap for Home-Start East Sussex to offer a quality programme, enabling the service to support mothers with feeding and to help parents to build a close and loving relationship with their baby, ensuring the best outcomes for mothers and babies in the UK.

Exclusively breastfeeding babies until the age of six months, and then combining breastfeeding with appropriate foods until the age of two years, is the feeding method recommended by the World Health Organisation, and by Unicef’s Baby Friendly Initiative. To promote this recommendation, the cost-saving nature of having a self-sufficient food source, and the wealth of evidence that breastfeeding prevents health problems, life-threatening diseases and mental ill-health, Home-Start East Sussex designed their Being Mum programme to promote breastfeeding over formula milk.

We are aware that around 80% of mothers in the UK stop breastfeeding earlier than they would like; often because they may struggle to breastfeed, an issue which can be exacerbated by inconsistent or unavailable support with breastfeeding. Although it is very common for families to not succeed in breastfeeding after trying for a long time, the decision to stop breastfeeding altogether can seem particularly challenging and some parents may feel that they have not done the best for their child. The mental trauma associated with this can prevent professionals from feeling able to advocate for breast milk, but this fear can be alleviated with a shift in societal attitudes - we need to realise that the fault of the UK’s comparatively low breastfeeding continuation rates is not the fault of individual mothers.

Advertisements for breastmilk substitutes within the UK can be misleading, and the content of adverts themselves is poorly regulated. This means that the information available to parents is vague and presents formula milk as the norm, which may explain the consensus within the UK that formula milk is ‘a close second best’ to breast milk. Whilst formula milk is created to provide babies with all the nutrients they need, the antibodies passed from a mother to a baby in breastfeeding allow infants’ immune systems to grow much stronger than if they were fed formula milk alone. The public tend to see breastfeeding as unnecessary due to the perceived efficacy of formula milk, and the resulting decline in UK breastfeeding continuation rates is negatively impacting the health of babies and mothers alike. This misleading of the public by the media is a major public health issue – and the return to a clearer promotion for breast milk over formula milk may increase the number of mothers who continue to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of their child’s life. To achieve this, messages from the government, healthcare providers and community settings all need to align with one another on their stance towards breast milk – including services like ours within the charity sector. Home-Start East Sussex is therefore promoting the use of breast milk within its Being Mum programme whilst educating mothers on the true discrepancies between breast milk and formula milk, and showing appreciation for the fact that in some circumstances, using formula milk is the best choice for the individual family.

Home-Start East Sussex aims to raise standards of care for all babies involved in the Being Mum service, regardless of how they are fed. For example, all mothers attending our service will be supported to respond to their baby’s needs for love, care and comfort in a way which promotes close parent-infant relationships and supports the mental health of both baby and mother.

Referrers to the service can be assured that Home-Start East Sussex is actively working towards the following standards:

* Being Mum internal policies and procedures will adhere to all the relevant Baby Friendly Initiative standards.
* Being Mum staff will implement the standards according to their role.
* Home-Start East Sussex staff who plan and deliver Being Mum will receive training on infant feeding, the importance of early relationships to childhood development and how to deliver effective training.
* The CEO will ensure there are processes in place for implementing, auditing and evaluating the standards.
* Being Mum staff will ensure that there is no promotion of breastmilk substitutes, bottles, teats or dummies in any part of the service.
* HSES staff will ensure that mothers are made aware of the additional support available in the local area for breastfeeding challenges, if and when they need this information.
* Home-Start East Sussex staff will support mothers to have a close and loving relationship with their baby. The programme will also cover the important role that fathers and partners can play in children’s learning & development.