The Challenge: Breastfeeding exclusively for three to four months is related to significant decreases in infections, allergies, obesity, respiratory tract infections and many other health problems including a 50 percent decrease in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Increased breastfeeding rates are associated with lower health care costs and improved infant survival. However, breastfeeding rates fall far below medical recommendations and the issue is most pertinent for African Americans whose breastfeeding rates are two and one-half times less than white mothers. Fifty-two percent of African American mothers initiate breastfeeding in the hospital, but only nine percent are exclusively breastfeeding at three months, and four percent are exclusively breastfeeding at six months.

Project Goal: The project aimed to increase knowledge of the value of breast milk and breastfeeding; increase breastfeeding initiation in the hospital; increase family support, especially among fathers; and build community capacity to better understand breastfeeding disparities as a public health issue. The goal was to reach 120 pregnant mothers and an additional 100 support individuals from their families. The project took place in Milwaukee with in-home lactation support for first-time breastfeeding mothers; Community Breastfeeding Gatherings (CBGs), which included educational sessions; presentations from family- and child-service organizations; and training Father Peer Advocates.

Results: This project gained local and national media coverage to help convey breastfeeding disparities, and the work was presented at a national maternal and child health conference.

Other project successes included:

- 113 pregnant mothers attended at least one CBG, just seven short of the targeted goal of 120.
- The project reached a total of 83 support persons. Encouragement from these individuals is necessary for sustainability of breastfeeding, a learned behavior. These supporters included 34 fathers who also received referrals to community resources and the chance to ask questions about pregnancy and parenting.
- The project’s attendance at community events and health fairs increased awareness of the project and the benefits of breastfeeding.
- The project resulted in formation of new partnerships and an increase in referrals from hospitals, providers, WIC sites and prenatal care coordination organizations.
- The organization received funding from United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County to continue CBGs.