

# “Bfed” Texting Program and “Breastfeeding: A Smart Choice” Class: Using Cell Phones to Reach Gen Y Mothers

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*Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Nutrition Services and Women, Infants, and Children program in California are meeting the needs of Generation Y mothers through the first of its kind two-way texting program for breastfeeding peer counselor participants called “Bfed.” In addition, there is a prenatal breastfeeding class that has topics that use the phone with apps, video clips that include actual successful breastfeeding peers, and a YouTube site to view at a later time. Class participants actually use their cell phones during class instead of having to turn them off.*

**Keywords:** breastfeeding, peer counselor, WIC, Gen Y, texting, social media

AQ1

For the last 5 years, the breastfeeding coordinator for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program has been researching the learning needs of Generation Y (Gen Y) and how to meet them. Communicating with today’s WIC participants has changed. The Millennial or Gen Y is the new face of motherhood. Some basic facts about this cohort include the following:

- Gen Y have birth dates between 1980 and 1994 and go up to around 34 years old.
- They account for 76% of all births and 85% of first births.
- They trust peers, blogs, and Web communities.
- Texting is their favorite mode of communication.
- Ninety-nine percent of WIC new moms use electronic information resources.
- Ninety-three percent own a cell phone, 79% have unlimited texting, and 55% have a smartphone with Internet service.
- Gen Y mothers want instant gratification and personalization of services, they appreciate diversity, they want to be recognized as multidimensional people, and they want to have a voice (Western Region WIC Electronic Technology Project, 2011).

According to Wolynn (2012), “We spend millions of dollars to increase breastfeeding rates. Are we trying too hard or are we just not trying the right way?” Wolynn also states that Gen Y is wired, connected, and jacked in. They are on their computers, tablets, and smartphones

sometimes all at the same time. They do not trust traditional media and marketing and prefer social media. Their most trusted sources and resources are their friends in social media networks. Their most valuable information comes from within this network. According to the book *Emerging Theories in Health Promotion Practice and Research*, social network theory perfectly fits Gen Y members’ learning needs (DiClemente, Crosby, & Kegler, 2009, pp. 66–70). Social networks are the go-to channel for information and give the information value and importance. Social networks can be individualized or group-oriented.

Gen Y mothers tend to blend work with their personal life, prefer flexible schedules, relate well to groups, need lots of praise, are used to receiving lots of feedback, expect honesty and fairness, like to have fun, and appreciate explanations (Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Lancaster & Stillman, 2005; Tulgan, 2009). Our goal was to meet Gen Y mothers where they are using targeted social media via texting. We listened to the needs and desires of our participants and built our “participant-centered” program from there. Regarding incorporating cell phones in our health program, we noted the following:

- Use of cell phones and other devices is a current trend in health education.
- Computers are out and the cell phones (mobile devices) are in.
- Mobile devices are the number one consumer product in the world.

## Bfed Texting Program

In the spring of 2011, Santa Barbara County’s breastfeeding coordinator partnered with Educational

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Message Services (EMS) located in Ventura, California, to develop, implement, and evaluate a text messaging program for participants in our breastfeeding peer counselor (BPC) program. EMS is a social marketing and health information technology agency. Prenatal and postpartum text messages were developed by Leanna Moore Watson and translated into Spanish. The Bfed two-way text message program was developed to

- Meet the communication needs of Gen Y mothers via texting.
- Target social marketing of breastfeeding via texting.
- Increase WIC's local breastfeeding rate.

Automated text messages begin at 12 weeks prenatally, were sent biweekly, and continued weekly starting at Week 26. Occasionally, there were two texts per week. Postpartum mothers also receive two texts per week. Automated texting ends at 10 weeks postpartum.

EMS operates the texting platform. We have developed the *Bfed* name and short code 893. Participants have to sign up for the texting program and send back a code word to "opt in." This means that they agree to receive the texts from WIC's BPC Bfed texting program. EMS runs a private server, having 128-bit encryption that is Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act-compliant. The program also meets the requirements of the Online Privacy Protection Act, Federal Association of Short Codes, and all cell phone carriers. Texting platforms have stringent requirements and spam texts are against the law.

The Bfed Texting Program is a Web-to-text-based, via cell phone program. The computer Web program sends an automated message at predetermined intervals to the participants' cell phones—one-way communication. This texting program is unique in that it allows for *two-way* interactive communication. (Text4baby is only one way; the recipient cannot text back.) In our program, participants can actually text back to our two BPCs Sandra Aguilar Cano and Arely Pulido. The peer counselor can facilitate a dialogue, typing on their office-based computer to the participant who receives the message as a text. Participants like knowing that there is a person at the other end of the text. This helps the texting program feel more personable. Both peer counselors can be on the Web-based program at the same time responding to their own participants. Another advantage is that it is easier to type on a keyboard rather than a cell phone. Research indicates that people will say more in a text than on the phone (Evans, Davidson, &

Sicafuse, 2013). Productivity and accuracy are increased. This texting program allows us to collect data on the number of participants, number of texts received, and responses.

We think that the "Bfed" two-way automated breastfeeding texting program is possibly the first in the U.S. and the world. This is a highlight of our BPC program.

Are we reaching Gen Y? Our participants indicated the following:

- *I learned something new in almost all the messages.*
- *There is no need to go to the clinic; all I do is send a text.*
- *I feel very good and more confident about breastfeeding.*
- *When I had my baby, they congratulated me for becoming a mom.*
- *I feel supported because I knew nothing of breastfeeding.*
- *I like receiving the messages. They have great information.*
- *I feel confident and that I am important. Thank you.*
- *I like receiving them. It's a reminder of why breastfeeding is so important and teaches me things I didn't know about.*
- *I enjoy receiving message with information. Because I am a first-time mom, it's nice to know.*

Challenges and lessons learned included the following:

- Peer counselors texting too much and not talking to participants on the phone or in person
- Data that was lost when peer counselors were texting via cell phone and not texting on the computer
- Prepaid cell phone cards sometimes do not allow texts
- Finding funding for the program was difficult

Other WIC agencies attempting to use this program may encounter additional barriers. These include mothers not being allowed to have cell phones or not being allowed to text, the administration not buying into the importance of texting, and personnel who do not understanding the needs of Gen Y.

WIC is on the leading edge in participant-centered counseling. Texting provides personalized attention and increased credibility. The time to start using the capability of cell phones is now because cell phones and texting are here to stay.

### Box 1. Try the App

Take out your cell phone.

1. Type 898211 where you would put a phone number to text.
2. Text “DEMOEN” for English or “DEMOSP” for Spanish.
3. Press send. (You will receive three actual texts.)

From: Educational Message Services, Inc.,  
Ventura, CA [www.educationalmessageservices.com](http://www.educationalmessageservices.com)

Call (805) 653-6000 or text “MORE” to 898211.

### Breastfeeding Rates

Breastfeeding rates continue to increase within the BPC program. Data taken from the California Peer Counselor Data Base from October to December 2012 compared to July to September 2013 quarter data showed that peer counselor participants (a subset of WIC participants) had

- A 28.2% increase in fully breastfeeding rate at 1 month
- A 10% higher fully breastfeeding rate at 3 months
- A 19.6% higher fully breastfeeding rate at 6 months

BPC support, the Bfed texting program, and the early enrollment of infants into the WIC program at age younger than 1 month have helped increase our breastfeeding rates. Most BPC participants in our county are in the Bfed texting program. The peer counselors oversee 8%-10% of all prenatal and postpartum participants on WIC in Santa Barbara County.

### Breastfeeding: A Smart Choice Integrating Smartphone Technology Into a Prenatal Breastfeeding Class

We also decided to revise our prenatal breastfeeding class to reach Gen Y mothers, originally inspired to do so after reading an article about Apple founder Steve Jobs. We developed a poster board that looked like a smartphone and referred to the topics as “apps” (Figure 1). Participants would use their cell phones during class. We used Global Learning Partners’ dialogue-based education model and Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach trainings, along with an article called *35 Ways to Use an iPhone in a Workshop* (Hodgson, 2010;

Figure 1. Cell Phone Posters



Source: Keane Ideas Graphic Design and Web Development. (805) 451-4105. <http://www.keaneideas.net>; [Keaneroberts@gmail.com](mailto:Keaneroberts@gmail.com).

Vella, 2008). The class is designed to address all types of learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

The topics, or apps, were developed from the top questions encountered in Santa Barbara WIC. Gen Y trusts their peers, blogs, or the Web. Ninety-three percent of mothers own a cell phone, 79% have unlimited texting, and 55% have a smartphone with Internet service. The title of the course itself—A Smart Choice—symbolizes that breastfeeding is a smart choice, just like having a smartphone.

This class includes the following:

- The WIC receptionist and teacher instructs participants to take out their cell phones, if they have one, because they will be using them during the class.
- The warm-up activity involves sharing with the person next to them a picture on their phone of their children, an ultrasound photo, a pet, or something else that interests them. If the participant does not have a phone, they are invited to share a picture that is in their wallet or a story about their pregnancy or kids.
- The environment is learner-centered; participants choose what topics, or apps, they want to cover. In a typical class, four to five topics can be covered.
- Because Gen Y mothers tend to trust their peers, two of the apps start with a video of successful

Figure 2. QR Code



Gen Y WIC participants who breastfed for a year or who successfully transitioned back to work or school while breastfeeding.

- Our Gen Y BPCs cover the “Top 10 Ways to Have a Great Milk Supply.”
- Celebrities who successfully breastfed are highlighted. These people are important to Gen Y mothers.
- Some of the apps have participants text themselves if they hear something they want to remember later.
- A popular breastfeeding website is shown. The class also watches a video clip and then practices hand expression.
- For those participants who want to watch the video clips again at a later time, a QR code is provided that takes them directly to the WIC YouTube account, where all the clips are available in English and Spanish (Figure 2). The link for this is <http://www.youtube.com/user/WICBreastfeeding/videos?view=pl>. Participants can access this if they have a smartphone, computer, or at the local library if they do not have a computer.
- The wrap-up includes a review of what they found to be interesting or exciting and how their cell phones can be used to help them breastfeed.

We were unable to determine if there was an increase in participants attending these prenatal classes since implementing this program. Participants are encouraged to attend one prenatal breastfeeding class during the second trimester of pregnancy. But overall breastfeeding rates for all WIC participants at the four main sites have

Table 1. Breastfeeding Rates for Women, Infants, and Children Participants

October–December 2011	January–March 2014	% Increase
Fully BF rate at 1 month = 72.36%	84.08%	11.72
Fully BF rate at 3 months = 34.80%	36.29%	1.49
Fully BF rate at 6 months = 24.23%	26.00%	1.77

BF = breastfeeding.

increased using California WIX data reporting. (*Fully breastfeeding* is defined for the present article as “formula was not provided at WIC.”) The rates are listed in Table 1.

In summary, it is time to provide learner-centered breastfeeding education and reach the needs of Gen Y mothers. The cell phone is here to stay, so it should be incorporated into classes and trainings.

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AQ3



Meg Beard, MPH, MCHES, RD, IBCLC, has been the breastfeeding coordinator for Santa Barbara County Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in California for the last 16 years and chairs and writes grants for the Santa Barbara County Breastfeeding Coalition. Santa Barbara County WIC has some of the highest breastfeeding rates in the state of California. WIC's caseload is 19,000 with 7 International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs), 22 lactation educators, and 2 full-time breastfeeding peer counselors. Santa Barbara County was one of the first agencies to generate new revenue for IBCLC visits and the recipient of the California state WIC "Best Practice Award" in 2003 and 2009. Santa Barbara County Public Health Department in June 2013 was the recipient of the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners and International Lactation Consultant Association community award for excellence and innovation in lactation care. Breastfeeding is a public health and social justice issue. Meg Beard resides in Santa Barbara with her husband and two children who were both breastfed for 3 years.

QUERIES:

AQ1: As per the “Call for Papers” section of the previous issue, articles must have three to four key-words; please reconcile.

AQ2: The sentence “The computer Web . . . one-way communication” seems incomplete; please add or remove word(s) as necessary to complete sentence thought.>

AQ3: Please supply publisher location and name or the retrieval information (i.e., URL), whichever is applicable.

PE1: Please confirm if the use of abbreviation in the table title is acceptable.