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**Tiny Tusks Breastfeeding and Infant Support Internship**

Lacey Schroeder

University of Arkansas

## **Introduction**

Over the course of the 2019/2020 school year I was given the opportunity to be an intern for Tiny Tusks Breastfeeding and Infant Support. The mission behind Tiny Tusks is to promote the acceptance of breastfeeding in public spaces as well as provide a clean space for women to use while attending Razorback sporting events. There is a stigma around the topic of breastfeeding in our community, and as a team we hoped to eliminate that by helping women in our area to feel supported during their breastfeeding journey and educate any attendees that approach the Tiny Tusks venue. At Razorback sporting events, Tiny Tusks provides breastfeeding spaces complete with rocking chairs, bottled water, heaters or fans depending on the season, and a clean diaper changing station. Along with providing a space for mothers, we also provide education on breastfeeding topics and various tips for bettering their child's health. Throughout this paper, I will be reflecting and evaluating the experience I have had preparing and implementing Tiny Tusks with fellow nursing students and faculty members.

## **Background**

Even though breastfeeding is recommended as the primary source of nutrients for infants, society continues to have a biased view on the act of public breastfeeding. It is often seen as inappropriate because of the exposure of the breast. Researchers have attributed part of the stigma of breastfeeding to the sexualization of the breasts. Research has shown that breastfeeding women often feel anxious, self-conscious or intimidated when breastfeeding in public (Sheehan, A., Gribble, K., and Schmied, V., 2019). Even though there are laws protecting the rights of women who breastfeed publicly, onlookers continue to disapprove in communities worldwide. In the state of Arkansas, the law protects women from being charged with public indecency while breastfeeding and permits breastfeeding in all public or private areas (Johnson, T., Bradford, K.,

& Garcia, A., 2020). With legal support, it is assumed that breastfeeding rates would significantly increase, but the stigma continues to inhibit women from feeling comfortable breastfeeding in public areas. Because of this enigma, the resources provided by Tiny Tusks are much needed. Tiny Tusks' mission includes providing safe spaces for women to feel comfortable while breastfeeding, but more importantly we aim to inform the public in hopes of altering their perception on public breastfeeding.

Tiny Tusks is a program Dr. Allison Scott and Dr. Kelly Vowell-Johnson have been trying to implement for years. With athletic department approval and funding from the Women's Giving Circle, they were finally able to open Tiny Tusks in the fall of 2019. Before Tiny Tusks, there were no designated breastfeeding spaces at Ronald W. Reynolds Football Stadium, the only spaces available were family bathrooms. Tiny Tusks provided two breastfeeding spaces in the tent located on Level 1 in the Northeast corner as well as a converted family bathroom. All three of the spaces provided private and clean areas for women to breastfeed during the football games. In Bud Walton Basketball Arena, there are diaper changing stations located in all of the men's and women's restrooms, but still no breastfeeding space. At the men's Razorback basketball games, Tiny Tusks had a table near the south entrance and two private breastfeeding spaces. Tiny Tusks was also asked to be present at the Women's Empowerment Razorback gymnastics meet which has a large family attendance rate. At this event we were able to provide one private breastfeeding space.

### **Preparation**

Tiny Tusks is not solely about providing a clean breastfeeding space, it also focuses on education. We provided informational handouts and discussed the topic with all those who approached us. I dedicated many hours preparing for the opening of Tiny Tusks by gathering

educational topics, preparing lessons for the nursing students working the tent to be able to teach to the users, and assembling the tent materials. During the summer of 2019, I cooperated with nursing faculty and students to brainstorm a list of important educational topics that would be beneficial for mothers to learn in order to improve their own personal health along with their child's health. These topics included lessons on lactation with latching help, benefits of breastfeeding, and tips to start and maintain breastfeeding as the baby ages. The other lesson topics included nutrition, mastitis, pumping, and how to stay hydrated while breastfeeding.

At the beginning of the fall semester we unpacked, assembled and organized all of the needed materials for the Tiny Tusks tent in Ronald W. Reynolds Football Stadium. In preparation for the high attendance of the football games we needed to find volunteers to help operate the space. My mentor, Dr. Allison Scott, arranged with a fellow faculty member to have senior nursing students volunteer as a part of their Community Nursing course. During the spring semester, volunteers were also recruited through the Student Nurses Association as an opportunity to help the students achieve their participation requirement. With the help of these other nursing students we were able to effectively run and promote the space throughout the entirety of the events.

### **Implementation**

Once the fall semester began, I attended almost all of the home football games, basketball games, and the Women's Empowerment gymnastics meet. As an intern, I was responsible for arriving at the venue early, setting up the stations, directing volunteers, and interacting with all who approached the space. Many people who approached us were curious about the mission and as we explained the purpose behind Tiny Tusks we received resoundingly positive feedback. Several people expressed that they wished this resource was available for them while they were

breastfeeding or that they would tell their friends that are breastfeeding that this resource is available. At the table we provided engaging activities for young children including face painting, temporary tattoos, coloring sheets, and stickers. We believe this is a vital addition so parents with multiple children will have the chance to focus on feeding the baby knowing that their other child is safe and engaged in another activity.

Health education is a role that I am very passionate about and Tiny Tusks gave me the opportunity to do so at each event. There are multiple controversial health topics that I believe need to be more widely discussed and accepted in society, one of those is breastfeeding. I was able to present educational materials to all who approached as well as startup educational discussions regarding the stigma around public breastfeeding. College students and other attendees approached the booth out of pure curiosity giving me the opportunity to educate more than just breastfeeding women and promoted change on a larger scale. These discussions helped me to view the topic of breastfeeding from multiple perspectives, which I used to better educate those that I interacted with.

In order to provide the most up to date and reliable education, I completed many continuing education modules online pertaining to the topic of breastfeeding. These modules discussed breastfeeding, the contents of breastmilk, how to breastfeed effectively, breastfeeding complications, and cultural views on breastfeeding. These modules not only furthered my ability to educate the public about breastfeeding but aided in my clinical practice as I complete my Maternal and Infant Health course. Because of my experience with Tiny Tusks, I asked if I could follow a lactation consultant during my postpartum rotation. During this time, I was able to take knowledge I had learned from modules and my mentors to help educate patients who were just beginning their breastfeeding journey in the local hospital.

**Reflection**

Overall, working with Tiny Tusks has been a wonderful experience. I have learned more about the topic of breastfeeding than I had ever thought possible. Not only that, but I have also been able to practice and improve my community nursing and community health education skills. This program is built on an incredible foundation of the lactation experience of Dr. Allison Scott, and she has worked very hard with other faculty members to implement this program. This program is promoting breastfeeding in a community that greatly needs it. In the state of Arkansas, studies have shown that only 45.2% of infants are still breastfeeding at six months age even though it is recommended that babies receive exclusively breast milk until they are at least six months old (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). This statistic shows how vital it is that the community be educated on the importance of breastfeeding and promote public breastfeeding by providing the public with resources.

Before this internship, I was unaware of how few resources are available to breastfeeding women on campus and in many other public spaces. With this new realization, I now know just how important it is to advocate for community resources. Without people advocating for change, it will never happen. Advocating for patients is a vital part of my future career in nursing. My newfound appreciation for advocacy has helped guide me in my decision to become a public health nurse. I have always believed that there needs to be more emphasis placed on public health nursing in order to decrease the number of people who require hospitalization. My goal for my nursing career is to provide vulnerable communities and populations with resources so that they are able to take strides toward bettering their own health no matter their socioeconomic status. Tiny Tusks has allowed me to gain experience in implementing a community health program. I have seen the process of getting funding and how to make a new program known

throughout a community. I will take the information I have learned during this internship to guide the way I conduct community engagement events and how I can equip my community to make a change.

While my overall experience as a Tiny Tusks intern was positive, there are a few changes that I think could improve the impact of the program. I know that funding is difficult and that all changes must also be approved by the Razorbacks Athletic Department; but if these changes can be approved, they will allow Tiny Tusks to have a greater impact on the community. My ideas for change include increasing our social media presence. At this point, Tiny Tusks only has a Facebook page. There was discussion over this past year about creating an Instagram account for Tiny Tusks. If we were on Instagram, then we would be able to reach a larger portion of our community. By creating an Instagram account, we would be better able to post stories and pictures from the games and increase our overall interaction through the platform.

Secondly, I believe it would be beneficial to advertise with the Athletics Department. I am not sure of the logistics behind getting a space to advertise, but if during the games the Tiny Tusks logo was on the screens or our presence was announced, the entire stadium would know that we are there. These announcements could help mothers who are from the opposing team be able to use our resources. Lastly, I believe as Tiny Tusks grows and funding expands it could greatly benefit the community if we were able to provide spaces at a variety of community events. These events could include Bikes, Blues, and BBQ, the Fayetteville Farmers Market, and the Washington County Fair. If we could provide safe and clean spaces for women to breastfeed and change their child's diapers at these events, I believe we would be able to reach a broader and more diverse population. These events are attended by people from all over the Northwest



Arkansas region and even other states. By securing spots at these events, we could reach more people who could be in great need of the education we can provide.

### **Conclusion**

Interning for Tiny Tusks has been a wonderful experience full of growth and learning. I have gained knowledge of not only breastfeeding but also developing a new community health program. I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity and I believe that it has shaped me into the nurse that I want to be. I will be able to use the skills I have gained to progress my career and achieve the challenging goals I have set before myself. Being able to participate in implementing this project has helped me to understand the difficulty behind community health outreach but has also shown me just how much of a necessity it is. Tiny Tusks is a much needed resource in this community, and I believe overtime it will be able to change the way that public breastfeeding is viewed in this area.

**Resources:**

Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). Breastfeeding report card. Retrieved from

<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm>

Johnson, T., Bradford, K., & Garcia, A. (2020). Breastfeeding state laws. Retrieved from

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/breastfeeding-state-laws.aspx>

Sheehan, A., Gribble, K., and Schmied, V. (2019). It's okay to breastfeed in public but.

*International Breastfeeding Journal* 14 (24). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13006-019-0216-y>