



History of the Expression of Care Program

More than 200,000 women are incarcerated in state and federal prisons. The female prison population is disproportionately made up of women of color, women in poverty, and women who have history of experiencing trauma and abuse. It is estimated that 80% of women in prison are mothers and 10% are pregnant at the time of incarceration. Prison populations in Oregon have seen an increase in the rate of incarceration for women, particularly those of childbearing age. Adults in custody who are pregnant and will deliver their infant during their period of incarceration can enroll in the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility's Breastfeeding Program (Oregon Department of Corrections, #P-F-05.2).

In 2018, NWMMB began working with [The Family Preservation Project](#) and a group of Portland State University from the Department of Public Health students as part of a breastfeeding-centered capstone project, to explore barriers experienced by incarcerated women. Our team was allowed the opportunity to talk with CCCF staff and adults in custody that had been previously enrolled in the breastfeeding program. We heard their stories, and uncovered challenges they faced while pumping breastmilk in prison. Mothers shared that having the opportunity to pump their milk helped them to feel closer to their baby and they felt they were playing a key role in the health of their infant. We learned that the responsibility of having to provide milk collection containers and arranging transportation of pumped milk presented the most significant barriers to breastfeeding success. Adults in custody come from all geographic regions in Oregon and relying on families to make weekly trips to the facility presented many financial and logistical hardships.

Through conversations, the students also discovered that the staff at the Department of Human Services (DHS), who play a role in arranging custody for the infants of incarcerated mothers have a need for educational materials and training services to support caregivers about the importance of breastmilk, milk storage, and guidelines for feeding breastmilk to infants in their care.

NWMMB believes that all babies deserve access to human milk to have the best possible start in life. A mother's own milk is the best nutrition for her infant. Rich in antibodies, proteins and fats, human milk protects an infant from disease and establishes a healthy microbiome, forever connecting mother and child. Although providing a safe source of pasteurized donor milk to fragile infants is our organization's primary mission, the support of breastfeeding and increasing breastfeeding rates are the cornerstone of the work that we do. NWMMB is in a unique position to remove barriers faced by women enrolled in the CCCF breastfeeding program by utilizing systems that are already in place and easing the burden for those who wish to provide breastmilk for their infant.