

## ***MOVE* Missoula Rationale for Breastfeeding Project**

Breastfeeding of infants is an essential health and medical decision for both the mother and her baby. Breastfeeding results in significant health gain, obesity reduction and cost savings to society.

Research has repeatedly shown that human milk and breastfeeding of children provide advantages with regard to general health, growth, and development, while significantly decreasing the risk for a large number of acute and chronic diseases including diarrhea, ear infections, asthma, respiratory infections, botulism, urinary tract infections, leukemia, autoimmune thyroid disease, and multiple sclerosis. In addition, a number of studies show a possible protective effect of human milk feeding against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, lymphoma, allergic disease, and other chronic digestive diseases. Breast feeding has been shown to increase school performance and decrease the incidence of childhood and adult obesity. Breast milk is the ideal nutrition for infants and breast milk alone is the only food infants need for growth and development for the first six months of life.

In addition to the benefits to babies, breastfeeding benefits the mother as well. It can help some mothers lose weight faster. It can reduce the risk of osteoporosis and some forms of breast and ovarian cancer, and can help the uterus return to its normal size more quickly. This results in significant reduction in health care costs for society.

Women with infants and children below age three are the fastest growing segment of today's labor force. At least 50% of women who are employed when they become pregnant return to the labor force by the time their child is three months old. Employers' policies and practices that support nursing mothers can make the difference between continued successful breastfeeding and premature or unwanted weaning.