



## Event/Art Review

# En'owkin Centre Breastfeeding Art Expo

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All three authors breastfed their babies and are passionate about promoting improved care and support for breastfeeding mothers.

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## Introduction

Breastfeeding, a traditional Indigenous practice, creates a strong bond between mother and baby. The health benefits to mother and baby are significant; they include reduced incidence of ear infections; enhanced brain development in baby; and reduced risk of type 2 diabetes in mothers. Mother Earth benefits too, since breastmilk requires no packaging, and families also benefit because breastfeeding is free. When family members support the mother, everyone is part of the breastfeeding journey that ultimately strengthens community.



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### *What is the Breastfeeding Art Expo?*

The “Breastfeeding Art Expo” (Expo)<sup>1</sup> is a one-of-a-kind exhibition of 15 large community art projects and 65 independent artworks by citizens of central British Columbia that celebrate the benefits of breastfeeding. The Expo took place from June 2017 to June 2018. This provocative and educational art show also included 20 short videos<sup>2</sup> that tell art and health stories. Also, the *Teacher’s Guide*<sup>3</sup> offered curriculum-linked, grade-specific activities for students to complete before and after going on a guided or online tour of the Expo. The *Teacher’s Guide* includes an Indigenous Focus section. The Expo project was a partnership between Interior Health<sup>4</sup> and the non-profit social service organization KCR-Community Resources<sup>5</sup> as well as 35 community partners. It was led by a ten-member Steering Committee, including two Indigenous members. Twelve of the community partners are Indigenous-based, and the First Nations Health Authority was one of six funders.

### *What are the Expo goals?*

The Breastfeeding Art Expo aimed to increase awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding, especially for youth; to facilitate understanding and support for breastfeeding between and within cultures, families, ages and genders; and to offer unique opportunities for artists and community participants. Some long-term goals of the project were: to renew traditional practices of breastfeeding and shift cultural norms; to reduce food insecurity among infants and children through breastfeeding; to reduce the ecological footprint by shifting from bottle feeding to breastfeeding; and to strengthen supports for breastfeeding women. Overall, the concept promoted was that when women are well supported in hospital with best practices, breastfeeding is often easier and women breastfeed longer. The many benefits of breastfeeding are then passed on to mothers, babies and families.



<sup>1</sup> [www.breastfeedingartexpo.ca](http://www.breastfeedingartexpo.ca)

<sup>2</sup> Videos can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8Sy0ZmOFXZdQ7iZm3xR2wg>

<sup>3</sup> Teacher’s Guide: <http://breastfeedingartexpo.ca/teachers-guide>

<sup>4</sup> British Columbia Interior Health: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> KCR Community Resources, Kelowna, BC: <https://kcr.ca/>

Art is recognized as an important tool in Indigenous culture to support health and healing.<sup>6</sup> The Expo had a proud and important Indigenous component. During 2017 and 2018, the Expo travelled to six locations in the Interior of British Columbia, including the En’owkin Centre, which is a nationally-recognized Indigenous arts and training centre. At this location, Indigenous art pieces from the larger Expo were selected and featured.

“En’owkin Center Expo” ran from October 5 to November 9, 2017. During the “En’owkin Expo,” students and the public from Penticton Indian Band and surrounding towns and cities came to view the art. Events included a Sharing Circle and traditional foods for the Opening Night, Quintessence Latch-On event, and a Human Milk Drive. Students from grades 5 and 6



received an education session on breastfeeding at Outma Squilxw Cultural School (Penticton Indian Band) and Sənsisyustən House of Learning (Westbank First Nation). The students’ breastfeeding-inspired painted rocks were displayed.<sup>7</sup>

Below are highlights from six of the Community Art Projects at the “En’owkin Expo.” The short videos online tell the inspiring stories behind the art. In addition, three of the independent artworks by Indigenous artists are listed. More information about the artists, their art, and the art development processes is available through the Art Catalogue.<sup>8</sup>

## Community projects

***Baring our Breasts***, led by Safire Jones from Nelson, British Columbia, included seven unique plaster cast busts of women, based on women’s stories and interpreted by community artists. One of the busts, entitled “Source,” was created by Rebecca Bessette and was inspired by her Indigenous heritage and her vital and close breastfeeding experience with her two children. Rebecca’s great-grandmother, an Algonquin Cree woman who was a businessperson and leader, owned a trading post in Peace River, Alberta in the early 1900s and later moved her family to British Columbia. Rebecca says, “This piece shows how everything is connected: the water that

<sup>6</sup> [https://artshealthnetwork.ca/ahnc/art\\_wellness\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://artshealthnetwork.ca/ahnc/art_wellness_en_web.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Pictures from these events are displayed at <http://breastfeedingartexpo.ca/>

<sup>8</sup> Art Catalogue: [www.breastfeedingartexpo.ca/art-catalogue/](http://www.breastfeedingartexpo.ca/art-catalogue/)

cleanses, the breast that nourishes, and the home that keeps us connected. Breastfeeding completes the circle.”



*Breastfeeding in Focus* was led by photographer Renée Leveille, who was inspired by her father to discover her own Métis heritage. As part of her project, Renée collaborated with the Vernon First Nation Friendship Centre and mentored mothers to develop the confidence to take pictures of each other breastfeeding.



*First Moments* was led by Métis labour and delivery nurse and photographer, April Mazzelli. It follows an Indigenous mother and her family in their traditional breastfeeding journey. The four photographs in the piece were chosen from hundreds. They show skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby immediately after birth, and the importance of family during birth and breastfeeding.

Image 1 of 2



Image 2 of 2

*Nurturing Community* was led by photographer Paulina Otylia Niechcial, a doula and a Nurse in Charge at a northern BC First Nation nursing station. She worked closely with Okanagan Indian Band and showcased photographs of three breastfeeding women surrounded by the people who supported and encouraged them along the way.



*The Fabric Of Motherhood* was led by Quilting Artist and Certified Lactation Educator Karen Irvine of the Cariboo Friendship Centre in Williams Lake. Five breastfeeding women were mentored to create quilts or chalk drawings from a sketch image modified from their own breastfeeding photograph.

*Traditional Spirit* was led by well-known First Nation Artist and Curator Tania Willard. Tania used digital illustrations with archival photographs to create linocut blocks with community members from three First Nation communities. The artist and participants explored the topic of breastfeeding and its importance within the BC Secwepemc culture. They talked about the cultural loss caused by residential schools and the looting of Indigenous cultural artifacts. Then, through art they transformed this into positive attitudes, visibility and options for breastfeeding in families.



### Independent artworks

*Baby's Gratitude* by Carlene George of Penticton Indian Band captured a cell phone photo of her son's hand on her chest as she was breastfeeding. Carlene had early difficulties breastfeeding, and her son's simple but powerful gesture told her to not give up. She went on to breastfeed her son to 13½ months and she is now breastfeeding her second son.



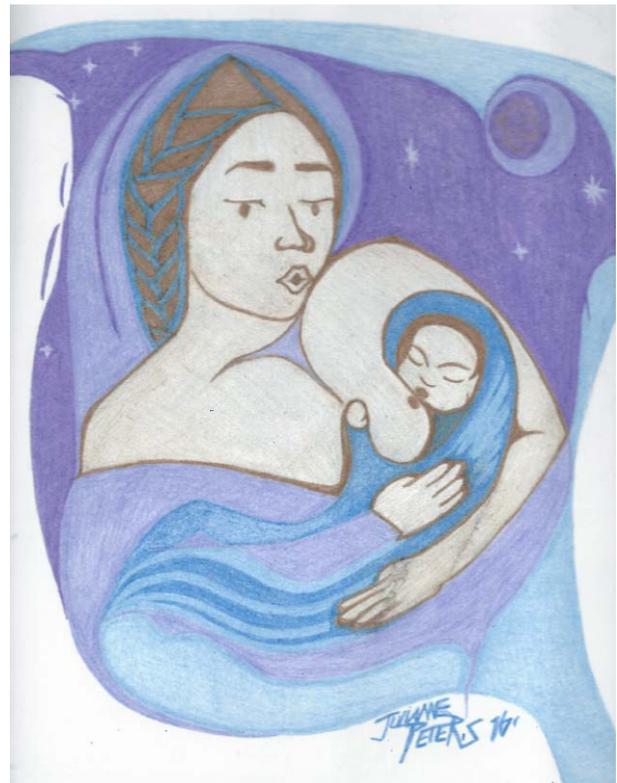
***Generation To Generation*** by Pat Raphael Derrickson, of Westbank First Nation, was a stunning acrylic painting on canvas using bold colour and simple lines to relay her message of the connection between mother and child that existed for generations around the world. She says: “The feeding of a baby that is nestled in your arms creates a teaching of safety and reassurance”.



***Ren Ki7ce, Ren Tmicw*** (My Mother, My Home) by Julianne Peters, a Secwepemc First Nation woman from Tsq’escen, Canim Lake, invites the viewer into her story with a pencil crayon drawing on acid free paper. Julianne says: “Mothers, our first caregivers, carry us within while our spirits grow into the universe. We slowly manifest into being as she protects our souls.”

## Conclusion

Through the celebration of art, “The En’owkin Breastfeeding Art Expo” brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, health care professionals, teachers, grade school students, and leaders. This created an important opportunity to learn about breastfeeding, to share stories, and to talk about how we can improve the environment and services for mothers to successfully breastfeed. The community art projects will be donated into



the Interior BC community at the end of the Art Expo, primarily to hospitals, clinics and community centres.

As a result of this project, an initiative to develop several one-page client breastfeeding handouts for the Snxastwilxtn Centre at Penticton Indian Band is now in its early phase. Due to the interest generated through the Expo, a local First Nation health centre is exploring opportunities to become breastfeeding accredited through the Baby-Friendly Initiative, a national accreditation process. It would be the first First Nation health centre in British Columbia to become accredited, and the second in Canada.

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