

## Insights

# Parent Partner Advice: Get Involved in Any Way That You Can!

Andrea Thompson is a parent partner on the quality improvement team for the Kingwood Medical Center in Kingwood, TX, about 25 miles northeast of Houston. The hospital is participating in the [Texas Ten Step Star Achiever Breastfeeding Learning Collaborative](#), which seeks to help hospitals improve their maternity care practices to better support mothers who choose to breastfeed. Thompson has been extremely active with Kingwood's breastfeeding support group, as well as its social media efforts to engage mothers. We recently sat down with the mother of a 3-year-old boy, Troy, to find out more about her role as a parent partner.

### **Why did you want to get involved in the collaborative?**

I am a big believer in pay it forward. The breastfeeding support group at the hospital was such a valuable resource for me as a new mom, even though my nursing struggles were very minor compared to many, and participating in the collaborative seemed like a great way to continue to improve the support, knowledge and resources for new moms.

### **Tell us about your involvement in the breastfeeding support group.**

The "Kingwood Boob Group" meets in a classroom at the women's center of the hospital every Monday and every first Saturday of the month. Initially I was just a new mom who came for some social interaction and to hear that everything that was happening with my baby was "normal." But, I hung around so long and got so interested in becoming more educated in lactation help that they invited me to become one of the volunteer helpers/group leaders.

### **How active is the support group?**

When it was started about six years ago by the hospital's two lactation consultants as a way for moms to get free help after they are discharged, attendance was very low. Now, thanks to increased breastfeeding awareness and social media, the group has a very large online following and in person attendance is booming.

### **Tell us more about the social media following.**

We have A LOT of traffic on our Facebook page. We have nearly 1,800 members. The posts are typically “Is this normal?” type questions and not all related to nursing. Quite often we help provide online resources for latching help and those kinds of things. Of course our recommendation is to seek in-person help, but it's nice for new moms, who may not be able to get out of the house or aren't even necessarily local, to have a safe place to ask questions.

**Would you recommend the role of parent partner in a collaborative to others?**

Yes! My advice to parents is to get involved in any way that you can. Don't be shy just because you don't understand the hospital jargon or because many of the things that might be discussed in meetings don't necessarily apply to you. Bring that outside voice. Remind the members of the team that do work at the hospital what you as a customer or patient, saw, got, want or need. They need that. Be an advocate for that different perspective. Hospitals can't change if they don't know where they are providing less than adequate support or care. You have a lot of power as a mother representative—don't be scared to use it!