

Watsonville mothers promote the 'healthiest start to life'

By DONNA JONES

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WATSONVILLE - Even as a teen expecting her first child, Perla Pineda knew she'd give son Eli a better start to life by breast-feeding, providing good nutrition and passing on immunity from disease through her milk.

Six years later, she's still believes it's for the best, and she continues to breast-feed 28-month-old Aryanna.

"I know I've given them a great great benefit," said Pineda, a peer counselor in the Women, Infants and Children breast-feeding program run by nonprofit Community Bridges.

Friday, Pineda joined other mothers, their babies and more than a few dads and grandparents in a celebration of breast-feeding at the City Plaza.

According to advocates, breast-fed babies are less likely to be obese children and adults, and they're not as prone to allergies, diarrhea and ear and urinary tract infections. Breast-feeding also encourages the bond between mother and child.

While Pineda said she had the example of her mother and grandmother, both of whom breast-fed all their children, many new mothers are influenced by a "bottle-fed society," she said. Others, especially farmworkers, think their jobs form too much of a barrier.

Robbie Gonzalez-Dow, a program liaison, said it's about getting the word out to not just mothers but employers. Most recently the program's been targeting agricultural companies,

helping them figure out a way to support mothers in the fields where there's rarely a private place to pump while away from their babies. Mothers, working as much as 12 hours of day, must pump while away from their babies to keep their milk flowing. Pop-up tents, the cabs of delivery trucks or private cars might be the solution, she said.

"Mothers want to breast-feed," Gonzalez-Dow said. "Women just need to be supported by the community."

Dana Wagner, assistant director of Women, Infants and Children, said the program can help, providing pumps and advice.

"Breast-feeding is the healthiest start to life," she said.

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