



La Leche League Canada: Who We Are... and What We Do

Adapted from "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About La Leche League Canada (But didn't know who to ask...)" by Nicola Aquino, Professional Liaison Administrator, originally printed in the Summer 2010 issue of Keeping In The LLLoop.

What do you know about La Leche League Canada (LLLC)? Perhaps you have heard about us from a friend, attended one of our Health Professional Seminars; maybe you have referred a mother to your local LLLC Group, or possibly the local Leader sits across the table at a breastfeeding committee meeting. Maybe you are a mother-to-be or new mother looking for more information about the organization or someone wondering what happens at a LLLC meeting. Whatever your reason for opening this document, we hope you find what you are looking for.

An International Movement, with Humble Beginnings

La Leche League is the original mother-to-mother breastfeeding support organization. The vast majority of the literature written on the importance of peer support comes from studies of La Leche League. The organization was founded in 1956 by a group of seven women, who have come to be known as "The Founders", when they were unable to find support for their decisions to breastfeed their children. They first met at a picnic in Schaumburg, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago) and began meeting regularly to offer support to each other and their friends. La Leche League Canada came into being four years later, in 1960. In some ways La Leche League has changed significantly over the years – it is now an international organization with Groups in almost 70 countries – but what we do has remained consistent: we still offer mother-to-mother support in meetings and one-on-one: in person, via telephone and by e-mail.

La Leche League Canada is a registered charity, providing breastfeeding support all across Canada thanks to the dedication of our internationally accredited volunteer Leaders. All Leaders have direct, personal breastfeeding experience. More information on how to become a Leader can be found later in this document.

Quick Facts

- There are over 400 Leaders and 150 Groups in communities across Canada.
- LLLC Leaders provide > 35,000 hours of mother support each year.
- LLLC is governed by an elected volunteer Board of Directors.
- LLLC is divided into 6 service regions referred to as Administrative Areas. The Areas (from west to east) are: British Columbia / Yukon, Alberta / Northwest Territories (includes Nunavut), Manitoba / Saskatchewan, Central and Southern Ontario, Quebec (English speaking) and Eastern Ontario, Atlantic Canada.
- Day-to-day operations of LLLC are managed by a small Administrative Team of paid staff and volunteers. LLLC maximizes the funds it receives with the ongoing help of dedicated volunteers at all levels of the organization.
- Donations are essential for LLLC to continue its support of breastfeeding families. In fact donations are needed to cover most of our operational costs.
- The support and information provided by La Leche League is grounded in the ten Philosophy statements (see side bar page 3).

Breastfeeding Support (What happens when a mother contacts LLLC?)

A mother can access the support of a Leader by phoning central LLLC lines (in large centres – see sidebar), checking <http://www.lllc.ca/find-group> or calling the National Referral number at 1-800-665-4324. In many Areas, Leaders post information in public locations or at healthcare facilities.

When a Leader receives a call from a mother, she will:

- Listen to the mother empathetically
- Help the mother determine what her priority is
- Provide information about what to expect from a breastfeeding baby (e.g. diaper counts, weight gain)
- Offer ideas for improving breastfeeding management
- Consult with the Area Professional Liaison (APL), her resource Leader, if the question or concern is more complex, or of a medical or legal nature
- Read medical information to the mother *verbatim*; a Leader does not interpret the information, nor does a Leader offer alternative therapies or treatment options – she is not qualified to diagnose or prescribe
- Recommend that a mother contact an IBCLC or other health professional for an assessment, when appropriate
- Encourage a mother to maintain open lines of communication with the healthcare professionals who are following her and the baby

Leaders also answer questions via e-mail, using a similar process to that which they would use when talking on the phone.

Meetings (what to expect)

Mothers can find information about times and locations of local meetings, drop-ins or gatherings from either www.LLLC.ca or by contacting local Leaders. Meetings:

- Are held at least monthly (some Groups hold them more often)
- Are informal, facilitated discussions, which take into account the questions and experiences of those in attendance
- Are respectful of a mother's choices wherever she is on the continuum from exclusive breastfeeding to weaning
- Are open to all women who are interested in breastfeeding information and support; women are encouraged to attend during pregnancy and babies are always welcome at meetings
- Usually follow a set of four topics: "The Importance of Breastfeeding"; "The Family and the Breastfed Baby"; "Preventing and Overcoming Difficulties"; "Nutrition and Weaning"
- Sometimes welcome male partners to regular meetings; other Groups hold separate Couples Meetings
- Provide access to the Group's lending library from which attendees can borrow books on a wide variety of breastfeeding and parenting topics

Central Telephone Numbers

Victoria	250-727-4384
Vancouver	604-520-4623
Calgary	403-242-0277
Edmonton	780-478-0507
Regina	306-584-5600
Winnipeg	204-257-3509
Toronto	416-483-3368
Ottawa	613-238-5919
Montreal (English; office hours)	514-842-4781
Halifax	902-470-7029

Montreal (French)
1-866-ALLAITEZ (255-2483)

Full list at:
<http://www.lllc.ca/find-group>

If you would like more information about what happens at a meeting, you can view the *Mothering through Breastfeeding* video prepared by the LLLC-Halifax Chapter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVpRGefDnnI>

(also embedded on the About LLLC page : <http://www.lllc.ca/about-lllc-0>)

Or you can watch the National Awareness Campaign videos (found at

<http://www.lllc.ca/national-awareness-campaign>):

- Download the 30 second Public Service Announcement:
s3.amazonaws.com/lllc_bucket4anonymous/LLLC_Sitara_Hewitt_PSA30.mv4
- Download the 60 second Public Service Announcement:
s3.amazonaws.com/lllc_bucket4anonymous/LLLC_Sitara_Hewitt_PSA60.mv4
- Download the 11 minute short film *Breastfeeding Mothers*:
s3.amazonaws.com/lllc_bucket4anonymous/LLLC_Breastfeeding_Mothers.mv4

The 11 minute movie is a 300MB file. It will take a couple of minutes to download via a high-speed connection.

Leader Training

The application period for a La Leche League Leader, which often takes 6-15 months to complete, is part apprenticeship and part self-directed learning. To apply to become a Leader one must:

- Have breastfed for about 1 year
- Believe that the LLL philosophy concepts (see sidebar) are a good fit with one's breastfeeding and parenting experience
- Meet a set of personal and organizational prerequisites
- Have the support of a La Leche League Leader

During the application the Leader Applicant:

- Works with an accredited Leader and a representative of the Leader Accreditation Department (LAD)
- Learns about the normal course of breastfeeding, how to help mothers with common concerns, and how to assess when more help is needed
- Explores the resources available to her, including *The Womanly Art of*

Philosophy Statements

- Mothering through breastfeeding is the most natural and effective way of understanding and satisfying the needs of the baby.
- Mother and baby need to be together early and often to establish a satisfying relationship and an adequate milk supply.
- In the early years the baby has an intense need to be with his mother which is as basic as his need for food.
- Human milk is the natural food for babies, uniquely meeting their changing needs.
- For the healthy, full term baby breast milk is the only food necessary until baby shows signs of needing solids, about the middle of the first year after birth.
- Ideally, the breastfeeding relationship will continue until the baby outgrows the need.
- Alert, active participation by the mother in childbirth is a help in getting breastfeeding off to a good start.
- Breastfeeding is enhanced and the nursing couple sustained by the loving support, help, and companionship of the baby's father. A father's unique relationship with his baby is an important element in the child's development from early infancy.
- Good nutrition means eating a well-balanced and varied diet of foods in as close to their natural state as possible.
- From infancy on, children need loving guidance which reflects acceptance of their capabilities and sensitivity to their feelings.

Breastfeeding, Breastfeeding Answers Made Simple and LLLC Information Sheets, and becomes familiar with both the Canadian and International La Leche League websites

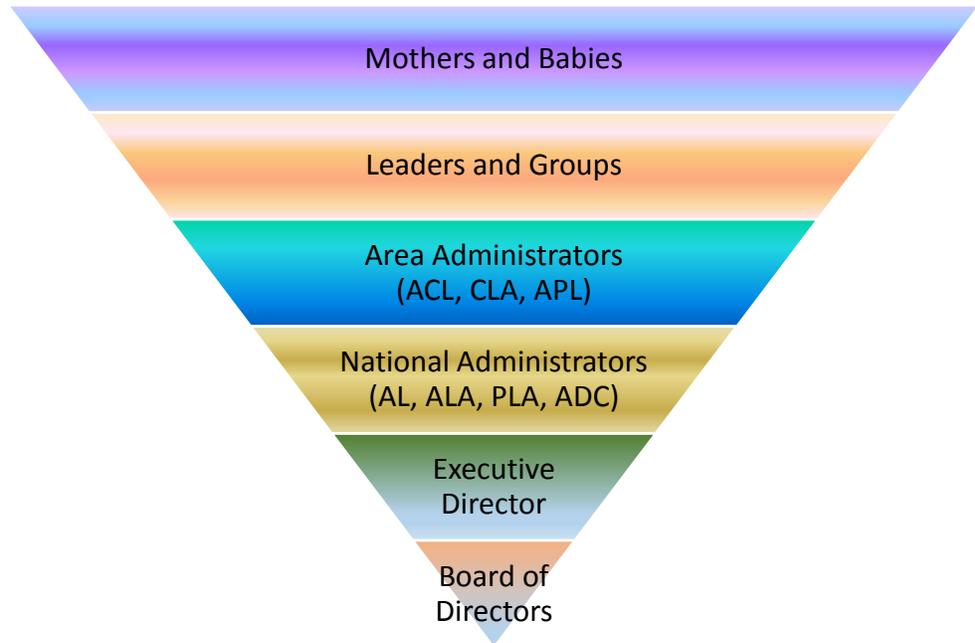
- Learns and practices communication techniques designed to improve active listening skills and teach the Applicant how to share information and NOT give advice.
- Examines her personal experiences and biases to learn how to use the experiences judiciously, and to provide judgment-free support that meets the mothers' needs and goals

Anyone interested in learning more about becoming a La Leche League Leader can contact a local Leader or the Administrator of the Leader Accreditation Department at leaderaccreditation@lllc.ca to receive more information about the prerequisites and the application process.

Leader Accreditation is administered at the National level by the Administrator of Leader Accreditation (ALA) and at the Area level by the Coordinator of Leader Accreditation (CLA).

The Leader Department

An accredited Leader is supported and receives on-going professional development from a team of experienced Leaders. One of the basic Leader Responsibilities is to stay up-to-date; the Leader Department provides opportunities for Leaders (and Leader Applicants) to get together for workshops to network and learn. In conjunction with the Professional Liaison Department (see next section), the Leader Department also provides continuing education on changing practices in the field of lactation.



Administration: National – Administrator of Leaders (LA); Area – Area Coordinator of Leaders (ACL).

The Professional Liaison Department:

Professional Liaison Leaders are LLL Leaders with special interest or training in the more technical aspects of breastfeeding management. They:

- Have access to additional written resources such as *Medication and Mothers' Milk* by Thomas Hale and *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation* by Jan Riordan (accepted texts within the lactation field)

- Ensure Leaders are kept up to date on advances in the field of lactation
- Assist Leaders who are making presentations to healthcare professionals
- Work with LLLC staff and volunteers to organize the Health Professional Seminar series each year

Administration: National – Professional Liaison Administrator (PLA); Area – Area Professional Liaison (APL).

In the side-bars you will find some statistics about LLLC, a graphic of our organizational structure, the ten concepts on which our organization is based and the central phone numbers in major cities across Canada. If you would like more information, you can contact the Administration and Donations Coordinator (ADC) at adc@lllc.ca or find other contact information at <http://www.lllc.ca/contact>. For details about the history of La Leche League, have a look at <http://www.lllc.ca/history>. We hope that this brief overview has provided you with information that will be useful as you continue to support breastfeeding mothers throughout the country.