

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Schools to teach why breastfeeding is best

There are two indisputable reasons why breastfeeding is best. One, it comes free in a regime of skyrocketing prices. And two, it makes for brainy and talented children. A 16 year old valedictorian and summa cum laude of UP Batch 2007, a soprano of the world-renowned UP Singing Ambassadors, and musical phenomenon Tagala Brothers proved just that.

Mikaela Fudolig entered college at the age of 11, and graduated at 16 with a degree of B.S. in Physics, with a near perfect grade of 1.095 (1.000 is perfect) making her the Overall Valedictorian of the entire batch of 2007 of the University of the Philippines. She was breastfed by her mother for two years.

Sierra Isabelle A. Castillo, a UP college scholar and a UP Singing Ambassadors' soprano was breastfed for 2½ years by her mother and grandmother. The five Tagala Brothers – Jonathan, David, Jimmy Junior, Daniel and Samuel who play the violin, viola, cello, flute, saxophone, piano and guitar; sing and compose songs – known collectively as Vegetarian Voices and Violins, were all breastfed from birth.

They are joined as role models by Susann Roth, born a German who chose the Philippines as her home country, who at 32, is a Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy. She is soon to earn her Master in Public Health, with accreditation in Emergency Medicine and Medical Acupuncture. Roth breastfeeds her two children (Joelle Sophie 2 years old and Lillian Julie 4 months old) in tandem from birth to present.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus and Dr. Elvira L. Henares-Esguerra, Director of Children for Breastfeeding, Inc., (CfB), a non-government organization, recently inked an agreement to affirm their roles in pushing the National Plan of Action on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), which includes breastfeeding. This will culminate in 2010.

“Breastfeeding must be taken seriously because it addresses many societal issues such as food security, preventive medicine, ecology, economy, women empowerment, love and faith,” said Lapus.

On her part, Dr. Elvira L. Henares-Esguerra says that her NGO is promoting a campaign for “The Seven Acts of Kindness” to instill social consciousness and responsibility on the part of young children to provide family support to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

DepEd intends to integrate IYCF practices as part of the curriculum of every health-related subject in pre-school, grade school, high school and alternative learning system.

PRESS RELEASE

Numerous studies have found that human breast milk helps brain development and improves cognitive development in ways milk formula cannot. One study has found that the average I.Q. of 7 and 8 years old children who had been breastfed as babies was 10 points higher than their bottle fed peers.

Philippine Customs statistics indicated that \$400 million of milk is imported a year, enough to finance 22 million classrooms, or 110 million textbooks, or the salaries of 18 million teachers, or 880,000 housing units every single year.

According to Lapus, DepEd is ready to implement the government's breastfeeding policy as part of President Arroyo's Hunger Mitigation Campaign because breastfeeding is the most far-reaching and cheapest strategy for the alleviation of poverty. Moreover, breastmilk is the most ideal food for infants and young children, far better than formula milk. Breastmilk, studies confirmed, ensures the life-long health and well-being, emotional stability and intellectual development of future generations.

"We will also mobilize our school health and nutrition personnel in communicating the importance of IYCF and breastfeeding to students, teachers and parents," Lapus stressed.

Meanwhile, in collaboration with DepEd, CfB will be conducting advocacy seminars for teachers this summer. It will prepare supporting instructional materials, which will be used for the next school year.

CfB, the most celebrated Breastfeeding advocacy group in the country, broke three Guinness World Records on Breastfeeding and Tree Planting, and convinced SM Supermalls to install Breastfeeding clinics in all its 32 malls.

To drum up public interest to the cause of breastfeeding, CfB and DepEd have chosen as role models, Mikaela Fudolig and Sierra Isabelle A. Castillo each as Breastfed Princess of the Philippines: the Tagala brothers, individually as the Breastfed Prince of the Philippines; and Susann Roth as the Breastfeeding Queen of the Philippines.

The DepEd and CfB will also celebrate the National Breastfeeding Awareness Month every August and World Breastfeeding Week on August 1-7 annually in all public schools, as per Presidential Proclamation 1113.

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