

Revelation's story



Photo credit, Steph Hague <https://www.facebook.com/stefphotography1/>

Revelation is one of the mothers who took part in the #FeedOn campaign with the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers and RAN Studio - a brilliant collection of photos of breastfeeding mums, along with a documentary film, all aimed at normalising breastfeeding.

<https://abm.me.uk/feedon-campaign/>

Here's her story:

“My name is Revelation, I'm 25 years old and I'm a black mum of two beautiful babies, my eldest is three years old, and my youngest is nine months old. I live in Greater Manchester.

I'm celebrating Black Breastfeeding Week because it's important to me. It's important because of the stigma attached to black women breastfeeding, because of the lack of diversity in images of breastfeeding, because of the importance of babies receiving their perfect food. I am a black woman with black children both of whom I breastfeed; and as such I'm a minority in a minority. In this country we have one of the worst rates of breastfeeding globally, so it's important for me to raise awareness of breastfeeding within my own community and provide as much help as I possibly can. It's so important to me and it's really become a passion of mine. Upon returning to my studies, I actually chose the importance of Black Breastfeeding Week for my dissertation and earned a great mark.

I feel like during my son's birth especially, I was treated unfairly and not listened to. I've experienced racism in different aspects of my life and when someone sees me as less than. Throughout my life I have always been the black girl in the room and that was no different to when I gave birth. It is hard to explain and put it into words to go into an atmosphere where you feel an unease and such a tension based solely on the colour of your skin.

With my son I had a traumatic birth and wasn't able to breastfeed him until the day after he was born. I was shown by a midwife how to express for my son as he was poorly and in the NNU so he might not have been strong enough to feed from the breast. But when I got to where he was ready to learn, as was I. I met with a breastfeeding supporter where my son was who tried to help me latch my son on. He did well and barely lost any weight during those first few days. But being an overwhelmed new mum who'd just had a pretty traumatic experience, I was struggling with tiredness, fatigue, pain. I had another breastfeeding counsellor come out and see me and help with positioning my son to feed. If these women hadn't come out to help, I would not have been successful in initiating feeding with my son.

In preparation for having my son, my mum advised me to buy bottles, which I did. When she saw how I was struggling in those early days, she came home with some ready made formula (against my wishes). I felt guilty when I gave him a few bottles, but I didn't know how powerful and amazing my body was. My son was born small and is now big for his age and that is because he had the most perfect food that my body creates for him. We came along some more struggles, mostly due to the lack of knowledge by healthcare providers, but we overcame those. From as early as 4 months, I had been told to wean my son off breastmilk by GPs all the way until now, I'm still being told to wean him. It is something I just can't understand.

Another important aspect of my breastfeeding journey was having the online community support in the middle of the night. It's actually because of such groups that I was able to know that my GPs were wrong about what medications I could take. They were giving out harmful advice and because of the trained admins and moderators on the online groups I joined I have been able to continue my breastfeeding journey.

I wouldn't have seen that breastfeeding past infancy is normal because as a British diasporic African it is not something that I have seen. My mum did not breastfeed past infancy and she gave formula and I sure would have done the same as her had I not found these groups online and seen the images they share.

When my youngest was a month old I applied to donate milk to a milk bank. I also went against guidelines of expressing before my milk supply was established and suffered the

consequences of pumping early and wound up with mastitis. Because of that I wasn't able to start donating until she was three months old but have been doing that ever since, alongside breastfeeding both of my children. It is one of the best, most fulfilling things I have done.

During my time breastfeeding I have taken part in a few breastfeeding campaigns, such as the #FeedOn campaign. I think it's important to take part in these things because it's so important for the diversity in feeding to be shown. Like many areas, breastfeeding was shown as a thing that mainly white women do but that narrative is changing. It's showing that it was more than just that, I am a black woman, tandem feeding two different aged ba-



RAN studio #FeedOn

bies and that is a completely normal thing and should be viewed as such. I shouldn't have to hide away in fear of someone saying something to negative to me.

And like many women, I've had a negative response from public when breastfeeding. I took my then nearly three month old daughter swimming for the first time and because it was a new environment for her she wasn't the most comfortable. So I breastfed her in the pool and was told by a lifeguard to get out of the pool to feed her. Instead of getting defensive about it, I explained to her why I wouldn't be doing that and educated both her and her

manager on the law and the illegalities of their policies. In turn they have changed their policies to abide with the law which means that's one less place where breastfeeding mothers have to worry about being treated fairly.

My next goal is to become a breastfeeding peer supporter. When I went to the nearest breastfeeding group when I had my daughter, I was the only "young" and black woman there, and I had to travel much further than I would have liked. I would love to support women of all ethnicities and ages and different backgrounds to continue on their journey of feeding their babies. Importantly, I'd love for people of different ethnicities to not feel like the only BME person in the room who'll probably get seen last to if at all.

I'd love for it to come a time when Black Breastfeeding Week's importance is not questioned, and seen as though it is something racist to point out that a particular group of women face things no other women would dream of facing when it comes to their breastfeeding journeys. We already have to live through institutionalised and covert racism, so support from the sisterhood is greatly appreciated!"

Thank you Revelation for sharing your story.

#blackbreastfeedingweek2019
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Photo credits:

First photo; Steph Hague @Stefphotography1

Second photo; **RÅN** studio with ABM #FeedOn Campaign