

2009 “Baby Bootie” Business and Industry Award:

This award is presented in recognition of the important role that business provides in efforts to improve the health status of North Carolina mothers and babies. The 2009 Business and Industry Award this year goes to **BELLAS (Breastfeeding Encouragement Learning Liaison and Support)**.

Established in Charlotte, NC, BELLAS is a non-profit organization that helps new mothers provide their babies with a healthy start to life. Since 1992, BELLAS has provided breastfeeding support to low-income, minority, and teen-age mothers free of charge. Mothers often lack the resources to obtain lactation assistance, and BELLAS offers them support throughout the duration of breastfeeding so that their babies can gain the most from breast milk.

One of the cornerstones of BELLAS success has been the experience and empathy of their counselors, who are culturally diverse and include Lactation Consultants certified by the International Board of Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC) and La Leche League Leaders with as much as 20 years of experience in breastfeeding instruction. *Peer Counselors provide ongoing telephone support for the first six months of breastfeeding home visits, office visits, classes, used clothing boutique, warmline, celebrations of 6 weeks of nursing.

The vision of the organization is to provide breastfeeding peer counseling to a higher percentage of low-income, minority, and adolescent mothers, particularly in Mecklenburg County’s growing Hispanic community, and raise the incidence and duration of breastfeeding among our clients to meet the U.S. Healthy People 2010 goals of 75% of mothers initiating breastfeeding, and 50% continuing to breastfeed at six months. Currently,

- **95%** of BELLAS Postpartum clients initiate breastfeeding.
- **67%** of these mothers who maintain peer support breastfeed for at least 6 weeks.
- **50%** of BELLAS clients are now Hispanic (only 1 hospital in the entire Charlotte Metro region has lactation help in Spanish).
- **8** BELLAS counselors are bilingual and reach 800 Latino families each year.
- BELLAS hires the breastfeeding moms they’ve served to become peer counselors themselves.
- **6** peer counselors have continued on to become International Board Certified Lactation Consultants through the experience hours they gained as a BELLAS counselor.