

feeding support groups and accredited leaders all over the world. It was founded by seven mothers at a church picnic with the first group meeting held in one of their homes in Franklin Park, Ill. in 1956, at a time when U.S. breastfeeding rates were at an all-time low—fewer than 20 percent of women breastfed at that time. LLL grew quickly, becoming not only a leader in parent support but an internationally respected authority on breastfeeding.

LLL leadership accreditation trains mothers who have successfully breastfed at least one child to provide volunteer mother-to-mother support. Accreditation is not a quick process, especially for mothers who must fit in time to read textbooks and practice providing breastfeeding education through role-playing. In addition, the educational material is rigorous enough to provide women a pathway to becoming an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant without the need for a medical degree, if they were to so choose. But LLL leadership is about more than providing breastfeeding education to mothers—it's about offering peer support.

"Being able to talk with other mothers who have been through similar experiences and hearing what worked for their families is such a powerful means of support when you are new to breastfeeding and mothering," Nelson said. "You feel less alone and see that someone else has been through the same thing and has made it through to the other side."

Nelson received her accreditation in 2002, shortly before her second child, son Cole, was born. They were living in Mitchell at the time, waiting to move back to Yankton, so instead of starting a LLL group there, she began providing online support to mothers through the LLL International website.

The Vermillion LLL group disbanded at about the time that Nelson moved back to Yankton, so Nelson started the Yankton LLL group in 2003 and led the group until 2008 when she disbanded it due to lack of interest, finding that she could provide support to more mothers online and over the telephone, which she continues to do so today.

"I loved being a part of these mothers' lives during the time they attended meetings," Nelson said. "There were some mothers who would start attending meetings with their first child,

stop once their child had weaned, and return when their second baby was born. It was such a joy for me to see how confident and comfortable they were as mothers and how they were now reaching out to the new and expectant mothers and sharing their experiences. I've stayed in touch with several of these mothers and am so happy to watch their families grow and thrive."

Over the years, Nelson has volunteered in additional roles through LLL on both area and regional levels in leader accreditation. She is now serving as a District Advisor in the Leader Department of LLL of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

"Because there are no local groups or even many nearby groups, working with the different departments allows me to stay connected with other leaders," Nelson said. "Most of my work with LLL is accomplished online and it's easy to feel isolated. When I'm involved with different areas of LLL, I definitely feel more connected with fellow leaders and with LLL in general."

### *Mother-to-Mother Support Evolving*

Many people wonder if local parenting groups are becoming obsolete with online forums and information just a click away on the Internet, but Nelson upholds that in-person support is as relevant today as it was half a century ago.

"Breastfeeding mothers need information and support," she said. "When they have proper information and support, they're much more likely to be successful breastfeeding and to successfully breastfeed for longer periods of time. La Leche League has always strived to meet and support mothers where mothers are in their breastfeeding relationship, and that will never change."

What is changing is how breastfeeding is viewed in the public dialogue. Hospitals are increasingly making changes to become breastfeeding promoters. Federal law through the Fair Labor Standards Act now states that workplaces must provide breastfeeding women reasonable break time and a private, non-bathroom location to express breast milk during the day. And legislation through the Affordable Care Act is now allowing women access to breastfeeding supplies and support not previously included in insurance plans.

"Today's breastfeeding mothers usually have more questions about breastfeeding and working outside of the home," Nelson said. "They wonder about how to make the transition from

MOM continued on page 16

## Dental Excellence for Children & Adults

*We provide thorough yet gentle care for patients of all ages. Even if you haven't been to a dentist in years, we will get you back on track. With affordable, professional dental care.*



- One Appointment Porcelain Crowns • Implants
- Veneers • Braces for Adults & Children
- Whitening Options • Gum Disease Treatments
- Root Canal Treatment • Invisalign
- Gentle Dental Cleanings • Emergency Care Available

### **Knutson Family Dentistry**

*New Patients Welcome*

*Professional, Friendly & Caring Staff*

**605.624.6291** 1714 E. Cherry St., Vermillion