

I am a 31 year old mother of two sons, Samuel 2 years and Joseph 9 months old. I married in 2005 and I fell pregnant with our first son straight away. I had only been in my new job for 3 months when I fell pregnant. My employer didn't have a paid maternity leave scheme and I was pretty broke after an expensive wedding and honeymoon. I made a couple of workplace suggestions, first I made a submission to my employer's work smart committee for paid maternity leave and used industry examples and research to support my suggestion; I also made a workplace suggestion for a breastfeeding room, with facilities such as locked door, bar fridge and breaks to express and provided a link to the Australian Breastfeeding Association's site regarding employer accreditation. Paid maternity leave wasn't introduced until after I went on maternity leave. Technically I wasn't even eligible for unpaid maternity leave having worked just under 12 months when my son Samuel was born, but my employer granted me unpaid maternity leave and wrote to me to say that they had introduced 8 weeks paid leave and that even though the introductory date was x, they would apply it retrospectively for me. From memory they paid me in a lump sum but I also had the option of it being paid as a salary. That payment and the baby bonus made what could have been such a stressful time just blissful, I was able to stay at home comfortably for 3 months and service my debts, plus it gave me the financial buffer to buy things like an expensive hospital grade breast pump. I returned to work at 12 weeks, 2 days a week, first a few hours, then half days. My employer let me start earlier and finish earlier, even letting me skip my lunch break to make my day shorter. They provided a breastfeeding room with a sign on the door I could change to occupied when I was in there, a little bar fridge and a couch. I expressed whenever I needed to and those breaks were paid. At 5 months I increased to 3 days, at 9 months 4 days. Throughout that time my son only drank breast milk, I breastfed at home and when I was at work he had expressed breast milk (ebm) in bottles. I fell pregnant again and my employer continued to be supportive, I started taking my lunch break and would use the room they had provided for me to express milk in to have a nap at lunch time (which allowed me to function well at work and to breastfeed my son through the night). My second son Joe was born 15 months after my first, I was able to breastfeed through my second pregnancy and again I had 8 weeks maternity leave paid. I used the pay to completely clear my debts personal debts. I'm now at home full time and have been since June 2007. I intend to return to work soonish. I am starting to feel a bit out of the loop and as a solicitor I do need to keep working to stay up to date. I am so grateful to my employer, they were so generous with me, if it wasn't for their flexibility and generosity I doubt the last 2 years would have been as happy and blissful as they have been. I was a rare thing among working mothers, a working mother who really felt happy and confident in her mothering - both my children are breastfed they are so healthy, and I have a wonderful bond with them. I was able to minimise my separations from my first son while I worked thanks to my employer allowing me flexibility (I started work early, my husband later he dropped our son off at day care, then I would finish earlier and pick him up earlier). Plus part of my job involved some interstate travel, my employer without me asking offered to do my trips in my place so as not to jeopardise my breastfeeding relationship.

Paid maternity leave and having a breastfeeding friendly workplace made my experience as a working mother wonderful and rewarding.

Hannah Cameron