

# My Experience: A stay in Mothercraft

## Kate Ryan kindly shares her recent experience of a stay at Mothercraft in Hamilton

I arrived at Mothercraft on Monday morning, stressed tired and anxious after having had a tough night and hard morning with my 15 week old boys. We were all exhausted - my babies had been struggling with reflux since birth and we had had weeks upon weeks of daytime naps that lasted 20 minutes at most, three (very occasionally four) hour sleeps overnight, and grizzly grumpy babies in the wakeful hours in between. We had been referred in by our Plunket nurse after I asked her for advice on normal daytime sleeping habits and how much sleep my babies should be getting. She suggested Mothercraft but mentioned there could be a two month waiting list before being accepted in. I reluctantly agreed to a referral thinking that I could always cancel if I changed my mind.

I had not heard much about Mothercraft, and I was worried about spending a week looking after my twins on my own 24/7 (I barely had time to eat and go to the loo as it was!) and being forced into leaving them to cry it out, which is just not something that sits well with me. Much to my surprise, three days after the referral



**KATE AND A MOTHERCRAFT NURSE BATHING GEORGE AND THOMAS**

was made I had a call from Mothercraft booking us in for the very next week. A strange combination of panic and relief set in - I knew we couldn't carry on as we were, there was no better choice but to accept the referral, pack our bags and head over the hill to Hamilton.

At Mothercraft you stay in their residential facility on the Waikato Hospital campus for four nights, Monday-Thursday. It's a homely lockwood building with space for about 10 mums and babies, fully equipped with lounge, kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities.

As much as it can be, considering it's a high-use hospital unit, it is a home away from home. When you arrive you're allocated nursing staff to take care of you and your babies during the day, evening and overnight. These staff work with you to understand what issues you're having with feeding and sleeping (which usually go hand in hand) and work using the Mothercraft method of controlled comforting to start to teach your baby/ies how to self settle and get into an appropriate eating and sleeping pattern.

One of the lovely nurses Shona, welcomed us at the door when we arrived an hour and a half late. From experience she could see how anxious and tired I was and immediately put some of my fears to rest by explaining that we would get my babies weighed and fed first and would get into the details after my boys were settled. She got me a glass of water and soothed one of my babies while I breast fed the other. Before I topped them up with formula, as per our usual feed routine, we re-weighed them both to determine just how much they were taking from me. Thomas had only had

30mls and George an even more measly 20mls. I was devastated - I had been sure that my supply had significantly increased from those first frustrating weeks of learning to latch, suckle and spending hours pumping day and night. Shona assured me that it was all ok and we planned to continue the test weights for 24 hours to get a full picture of what my babies were getting. After getting my boys fed we wrapped them and put them to bed - their first time in their own cots in separate rooms. I expected that they would do their best to prove me wrong by going to sleep straight away, which they did! I was kept busy for a bit with a tour of the unit and meeting the other mums. The nurses assured me that they would keep an eye on my babies and resettle them if needed, while I had lunch and a hot drink (that was still hot when I drank it!)

Mothercraft provides assistance and help for babies with issues feeding, sleeping, weight gain, as well as colic and reflux, and also helps the primary caregiver (which is not always mum) with postnatal depression, exhaustion and community support. An important part of the first days in the unit is taking a detailed history of each baby and caregiver, including screening for postnatal depression, in order to develop a plan to continue with

when you get home.

After our 24 hour observation and having gone through our history it was clear that I still wasn't producing enough milk to feed my babies (although the tiny amounts they had been taking could be put down to stress and fatigue). Breastfeeding was still important to me, so we eventually decided on maintaining two or three breastfeeds a day, expressing and increasing the amount of formula top ups to ensure my boys were getting enough to last longer between feeds. Sharon, one of the other wonderful nurses that looked after us, taught me about the importance of wrapping the boys for sleep, showed me how to keep them snugly swaddled and drilled in the importance of teaching them how to self settle and how to maintain consistency in our approach.

The first evening in the unit was loud, really loud. All the babies were going through a period of transition into learning how to settle themselves to sleep. While there was a lot of crying, it wasn't a case of closing the door and ignoring your children (as I had feared!), rather we had a number of settling techniques to use to help our babies settle to sleep: snug wrapping, leaving for a small period to settle, cot jiggling, pram

rocking, and dummies if needed. The nurses took over the settling and resettling too, giving us a chance to take a much needed break. Being a mum of twins, I think I was more used to the crying than the mums of singletons were, but it was still challenging to distract ourselves while the nurses checked and settled our babies. Heading to bed that first night was strange - my boys were placed in separate rooms, away from where I could hear them. The amazing overnight nurse, Deb, would come to wake me for their next feed but would settle them if they woke too soon. Having a reasonable stretch of uninterrupted sleep was marvelous!

In the days that followed, I had a lot of help with my babies. Shona, Sharon, Deb, Katie and student nurse Erna all actively helped me to feed, change and bathe the boys and ensured that any questions and concerns I had were addressed. I was worried at first that with all the assistance I was getting with feed time would mean that I wasn't able to sustain our plan when we returned home. They encouraged me when I was feeling anxious and unsure about my ability to stay the course and of course helped me out when I needed extra hands.

While we were the only twin family in the unit, the team at Mothercraft is experienced with caring for families with multiples, seeing twins somewhat frequently and work with families with triplets too. One of the nurses is even a mum of twins herself.

There is a focus on educating parents not just on what to do to help your babies learn to self settle and feed better, but also how to read your babies and understand what they need from you. With lots of resources available as well as the wealth of knowledge as well nurses, there is plenty to keep you occupied while you and your babies settle into your new routine and habits.

By day three my boys had started to show their true sleeping habits and even presented a challenge to the nurses for resettling in the early hours of the morning and in the mid afternoon. These were some of the issues I was having trouble with and the nurses were able to identify that my boys were habit of waking themselves up with their insistent wriggling, breaking out of their wraps and were unable to settle to sleep again. We introduced safe-t-sleep wraps into their cots we found that they were less able to flail and wriggle themselves awake, and if they needed it, we'd

put them in prams to rock until they settled back down to sleep. Although the daytime sleeps were challenging, I was being equipped with more skills and knowledge about what to do and we were starting to encourage some new sleeping habits. By the end of the week I was starting to see my boys change before my eyes - they were getting the sleep that they so desperately needed, were happier and less demanding during their wake times and were starting to go

down for their sleeps much more readily. I was much more rested, my milk supply was increasing with every expressing session and I was feeling much, much more confident!

It's been eight weeks now since we left the Mothercraft unit and while it certainly hasn't been smooth sailing (it's taken me this long to actually put this piece together), I use the techniques and knowledge I gained during our stay on a daily

basis. In all honesty we don't stick to the exact routine that we used at Mothercraft but have adapted it to suit our family life. My boys still struggle with napping in the mid afternoon, but now they sleep for 2.5-3 hours at a time during the day, and we get 4-6 hour stretches over night! They snack less, have more substantial feeds, their awake time is much more relaxed and enjoyable and we actually get a chance to play and cuddle! As a family we are much more rested

and better equipped to deal with the challenges of teething, growth spurts, and general twin awesomeness. The connections I made with the other mums in the unit are great - we still stay in touch and are able to support each other through the challenges of applying our new found and rediscovered skills in our day to day family lives.

Would I recommend Mothercraft to other families with multiples? If you are having issues with sleeping, feeding or are struggling with feeling overwhelmed, absolutely! It is without a doubt a challenging experience to begin with, (name something that isn't challenging with multiples!) but the experience affords you a chance to understand and bond your children a bit more, and get some much needed rest and may even just provide a few extra skills to take home. I can't thank the team at Mothercraft enough!

*More information:*

<http://www.waikatodhb.health.nz/directory-of-our-services/waikids/mothercraft/>

*Referrals can be made via your GP or WellChild Provider*



**multiplesnz**

**MultiplesNZ Club Area Details**  
[www.multiples.nz](http://www.multiples.nz)



Did you know the MultiplesNZ website is specifically designed to help you on your journey of raising multiples? It is bursting with information from the early stages of a multiple pregnancy through to parenting twin teenagers and beyond! Through your affiliated membership to MultiplesNZ you are able to access and download our quarterly magazine and browse our wide range of Nationwide Discounts via this login. As we have now started a new financial year, our login details have changed.

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