



**Middlesbrough District
Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm
Evaluation Report
*'Where are we now?'***

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August 2004

Acknowledgements

This evaluation has been a collaborative enterprise and would not have been possible without the contribution of staff, parents, and volunteers, who have taken part. We are indebted to all those who participated in this evaluation with openness, clarity and professionalism.

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Executive Summary

This evaluation report documents the views of parents, staff and volunteers involved with Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. The report includes an evaluation of Parent and Toddler groups, Bright Start Daycare Nursery, and the views of professionals who were invited to a fact finding evening (Twilight Event) at the Sure Start Centre. The evaluation was carried out over the period August 2003-September 2004, with methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews, telephone interviews and survey questionnaires. The aim of the evaluation was negotiated and agreed with Sure Start management, and takes an holistic approach in order to answer the question:

'Where are we now?'

The main findings are summarised under the following headings:

1. Findings: Staff Views and experiences

- Five full time staff members participated in a semi-structured interview.
- All staff interviewed have a wealth of experience working with children and families under four.
- All are committed to the principles of working in partnership.
- From observation on Sure Start premises, the evaluator is able to conclude that the staff team as a whole, led by the Project Manager, are enthusiastic, committed and dedicated to the work they are doing with the community.
- The difficulties experienced in sharing information is commonplace in multi-agency working.
- Innovation, in terms of educating parents on issues of cultural diversity is laudable. Staff have made links with Sure Start Abingdon (a predominantly Black and Ethnic Minority community) and parents and children have forged friendship and understanding through sporting events.
- Staff are acutely aware that building up relationships of trust with some parents in the community takes a considerable amount of time and effort. All staff feel this is worthwhile.
- Integrating seconded staff to the Sure Start team is a slow process particularly when some staff are only employed on a one day a week basis.

2. Findings: Parents views and experiences

- Five parents participated in a semi-structured interview.

- Two of the parents interviewed found out about Sure Start via Social Services, one heard of the programme through the midwife and two through word of mouth.
- Overwhelmingly, parents interviewed mentioned the benefits of meeting and networking with other parents at Sure Start. Many have recognised their own personal improvement in self confidence and self esteem.
- The question of community spirit was re-addressed (see Jackson 2003). Parents felt this has intensified over the past three years.
- Community engagement with the Sure Start has improved in the area, however parents feel that some non-users perceive the programme to be Social Services led.
- Lack of Sure Start sustainability is still a major worry for some parents.
- Farm Tree parents are relatively self-sufficient, and fund raising to enable the group to develop is underway. The capacity building of this group by the Sure Start team is commendable.
- Parents who are members of the Sure Start Management Board gave mixed responses as to whether they felt their voices were heard in decision making.
- All respondents spoke of the positive impact Sure Start has had on their children's development.

3. Findings: Volunteers views and experiences

- Data reveal that the 10 week training course is clearly valued by volunteers who subsequently feel a sense of support and personal growth.
- Volunteer training is accredited at TROCN (Tees Regional Open College Network) levels 1, 2 and 3.
- To-date, 25 parents have completed the Volunteer Training course at level 2.
- Respondents felt that the topics covered over the ten week course was useful to them in terms of their every day life.
- Overwhelmingly volunteers spoke of raised confidence and self esteem as a result of undertaking the Sure Start Volunteer Training Course.
- Volunteers have undertaken various activities since undertaking the course. These include, paid employment and further education.
- Many feel they have gained personally by 'giving something back'.
- Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm staff encourage and support volunteers in further training and work opportunities.

- Many volunteers go on to work to paid sessional workers for the programme.

4. Findings: Parent and Toddler Group

- Parent and Toddler group is held one morning a week at Caldicotes Primary School and has been running for over three years.
- Eighteen questionnaires by families using the service.
- Most families taking part in the survey lived within a ten minute walk of the group.
- Survey respondents were not homogeneous group in terms of the length of time they had been attending Parent and Toddler. Length of membership ranged from four months to 2 years.
- 28% of respondents attended other Sure Start activities. 72% did not.
- Responses to the question of friendliness of staff suggest that staff of Parent and Toddler are approachable and welcoming.
- Overwhelmingly survey respondents were happy with the physical environment and atmosphere of Parent and Toddler Group.
- Parents are positive regarding the element of contact their children have with other (non-sibling) children and feel this brings about a positive change in their behaviour.

5. Findings: Working in Partnership

- The innovation shown by the Sure Start Project Manager in raising the profile of the programme is laudable.
- Partnership working is central to the vision of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm.
- A Twilight Event was held by the programme and 30 agency members were invited to find out more about Sure Start. Thirteen agreed to a semi-structure telephone interview.
- All respondents knew of Sure Start's existence prior to the event, however many were uncertain as to the exact nature of the programme.
- All respondents were impressed by quality of intervention.
- All said they would not hesitate to refer clients.
- In contrast to other studies (Goodship and Haydon 2003), tensions around the cash rich nature of sure Start did not emerge as an issue for respondents

- Some agency members suggested Sure Start deliver presentations to other staff members within their organisations.
- Local agencies do seem to support the over-riding aims and objectives of Sure Start and recognise the benefits of partnership working.

6. Findings: Bright Start Day Nursery

- In January 2004 a Daycare Centre (Bright Stars) was launched as part of the Thorntree and Brambles Farm Sure Start programme.
- Bright Stars day nursery aims to invest in local children and give them the best possible start in life.
- Bright Stars Nursery has strong links with other Sure Start programmes and a variety of external partners.
- All children aged 3-5 years are encouraged to work towards learning objectives set out by the governments Early Learning Goals and following the DFES Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA).
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 parents and three staff members involved with Bright Stars Daycare nursery
- All parents interviewed were positive regarding the impact Bright Stars has had on their child's development
- All staff are trained to a very high standard and opportunities for staff development are comprehensive.
- Bright Stars compares favourably with another local daycare nursery in the area.
- It was found that Bright Stars Nursery at Sure Start is 17.5% cheaper for a full day session than its competitor.
- All parents felt able to approach staff regarding sensitive issues they may want to discuss about their child
- All staff were aware of the importance of encouraging parents to develop their relationship with their children and involving them in activities at Bright Stars
- Sure Start are demonstrating their commitment to parents by encouraging and supporting one parent in her ambition to work with children.
- A particular problem for the staff team are the huge delays in speech and language of many of the children in the area. This problem is being continually addressed by use of the BLAST programme in all activities involving pre-school age children.

Recommendations

1. The short-term nature of staff seconded to Sure Start can be problematic in terms of staff integration. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm have sought to overcome this by delivering training to all staff to ensure greater understanding of others roles. Further training should be undertaken to extend these learning opportunities.
2. The impact of working around family support, health and education can take its toll on those working in a support role. Both staff and management need to prioritise supervision to enable good working relationships to develop.
3. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm continuously show their appreciation of the work of volunteers. Data reveal however that volunteers would prefer a show of appreciation in the form of a social event (i.e. trip to the cinema or a meal in a restaurant), in order to escape the domesticity of caring for their families.
4. It is crucial that lines of communication are open to volunteers. This could possibly be achieved by way of volunteer monthly meetings and/or a volunteer co-ordinator to liaise with staff / management on behalf of the volunteer group.
5. Some agencies are still not clear regarding the services offered at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. A presentation by Sure Start staff to other organisations would be useful, in order to raise awareness and allow agencies to effectively sign post service users where necessary. Parents could also be enlisted for help in this venture.
6. Data reveal that many parents in the area are not accessing Sure Start and feel the project is welfare orientated, policing the parenting skills of parents. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm should consider publicising themselves in terms of their capacity building and friendliness in order to alleviate fears among some 'hard to reach' parents in the community.
7. Sure Start offers a 'bottom up' approach to intervention whereby the views of parents are valued and acted upon. Professional stakeholders need to revisit the philosophical underpinnings of the programme in order that the views of parents become central rather than peripheral.
8. Data reveal that 78% of parents attending Parent and Toddler Group do not attend any other Sure Start activities. All services should be routinely promoted to all new members. A befriending system could be devised whereby staff introduce new parents to other parents with similar interests.
9. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles farm should continue exploring innovative ways to encourage agencies and other members of the community to make links with the programme. The Twilight Event was hugely successful in raising awareness of the programme to agencies with minimal previous involvement.

10. Given that research reveals the overlap between domestic violence and child abuse, it is recommended that a training strategy is developed to include a rolling programme of domestic violence training for all members of staff, particularly those with a role in providing daycare for children 0-5 years.

1.0 Introduction

This evaluative study has been undertaken by the Community Evaluation Team, School of Social Sciences and Law, University of Teesside, and was commissioned by Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm, Middlesbrough. The research commenced in August 2003 and was completed in September 2004. Two reports have been produced, a short interim report of work in progress, was submitted in December 2003, and the second and fuller Final Report, in September 2004.

1.1 Sure Start: A National Initiative

Vulnerable children growing up in disadvantaged areas are a focal point of recent government policy. The Sure Start programme is a major programme directed at improving the life chances of such children and is part of the wider set of initiatives to combat social exclusion. Sure Start originated in the consultations for the Treasury- led, Cross-Departmental Review of the Provision for Young Children, and was announced in 1997 as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The aim of Sure Start is to improve the health and well-being of families before and after birth, in an attempt to improve children's entry into school. It is a major part of government strategy to counter the cumulative disadvantage that leads to social exclusion (Sure Start Unit 1999).

The first Sure Start programmes were funded in 1998, and established in areas of high deprivation and poverty. Their aim was to develop and improve existing local services and to increase local participation. Sure Start were given clear local and national targets, and were required to conduct rigorous evaluation of the functioning and outcomes of the services over time. Most programmes commissioned independent local evaluation teams in a similar manner to this evaluation.

1.2 Local Context

Diagram 1



Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm is situated in Middlesbrough, a large metropolitan borough located in the North East of England (see diagram 1). The region was once an active site for local industry and the town itself was created to accommodate rapid industrialisation. However, in recent times economic decline has resulted in an area characterised by high unemployment, poverty, ill health, and pollution (McAllister, 1999). Accordingly the Department of Transport, Local Governments and the Regions, in their indices of Deprivation gave Middlesbrough a rank of 1 out of a total of 354 (rank 1 being the most deprived) in a study of the North East region. The evidence suggests then, that constant economic hardship and debt around many of the residents of the area who are dependant on low income, is indeed commonplace. It has been well documented that it is women who are overwhelmingly the recipients of long term benefits such as income support (Millar 1996:99). Thus, for almost all the women interviewed in this study, long term persistent hardship has marked their lives considerably. The town also suffers high rates of crime, with the town centre area demonstrating one of the highest. It also has a significant drug problem related to heroine abuse (Parker, 1998) and more recently crack cocaine (Evening Gazette 2002). Middlesbrough also has a street prostitution problem, with two prostitutes murdered in the year 1999/2000, and another currently missing. Data gathered by the Office of Population Census and Surveys, shows that in 2001 Middlesbrough had a total population of 134,855, of whom 48% are male and 52% female. People from

ethnic minority groups represent just over 4% of the population. The ethnic structure of Middlesbrough is shown in the table below. Figures for England are shown for comparison purposes.

Percentages of resident population in ethnic groups:	Middlesbrough	England
White	93.7	90.9
Mixed	0.9	1.3
Asian or Asian British	4.6	4.6
Black or Black British	0.3	2.3
Chinese or other	0.4	0.9

Source:2001 Census, ONS

To-date, five Sure Start programmes have been implemented in Middlesbrough.

These are:

- Abingdon, Breckon Hill and St Johns Gate Sure Start
- Grove Hill, Beechwood and Easterside Sure Start
- Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End Sure Start
- Thorntree and Brambles Farm Sure Start
- Hemlington Sure Start

1.2 Thorntree and Brambles Farm Sure Start

Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm is known as a ‘third wave’ programme. Community consultation for its development began in October 2000 and the programme came into being in April 2001. The programme has been developed within the boundaries of the ward of Thorntree in Middlesbrough. (Since May 2003 boundary areas have changed slightly, however numbers in this report are based on Tees Joint Strategy calculations pre May 2003). Situated to the east of Middlesbrough town centre, the area encompasses two large housing estates known as Thorntree, and Brambles Farm. The total population of the area is 8,275. The number of children in area aged 0-3 years according to Child Benefit calculation is 506. 76.4% of the housing are Council properties and the area has recently been evidenced as a area with significant social exclusion. Consequently Thorntree ranks third on the Index of Multiple Deprivation for all wards in England.

1.3 Sure Start Evaluation Strategy

All Sure Start programmes are required to conduct evaluation. Programmes are required to monitor progress towards nationally prescribed objectives, targets and benchmarks. Programmes are also expected to implement an ongoing process of monitoring and review working practices, with the objective of improving core principles such as local participation, partnerships, and professional practices.

1.5 Evaluation To-date

Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm has built evaluation into their development plan and have worked within the Sure Start Unit's evaluation requirements (see Sure Start Unit, 2000). Previous research undertaken for Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm has included:

- A formative study was undertaken by Peter Jackson, Community Evaluation Team, University of Teesside (Jackson 2002). This study examined key issues, processes and challenges from local and professional perspectives, the involvement of parents and the perception of quality.
- In 2002-2003 a further study was undertaken by The Community Evaluation Team, University of Teesside. This reported on parental views of Sure Start and examined reasons for non-user participation (Community Evaluation Team 2003).
- Since inception of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm, the programme has also undertaken a number of other pieces of in-house evaluation. This has included the evaluation of 'Make the Difference', a starting nursery programme and 'BLAST' a speech and language programme. Two Parent-User Satisfaction surveys were also undertaken in 2002 and 2003.

1.6 The Evaluation Question

The current evaluation is the outcome of a series of discussions initiated in August 2003, between members of the Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm management team and the Community Evaluation Team, University of Teesside. These meetings resulted in the refinement of the main evaluation aims and objectives. They also led to the development of an evaluation strategy which articulates those aims and objectives.

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS 2002) guidelines require that a basic question underpin all existing and future evaluation.

‘What are we doing and how well are we doing it?’

The National Evaluation of Sure Start also suggest that programmes gradually incorporate different types of evaluation as they develop. The different types of evaluation are often represented as certain points on a continuum. Some methods are used only when each programme reaches its appropriate stage of development, consisting of formative, process and outcome. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm have already fulfilled NESS criteria for years one and two (see Jackson 2002 Report. Conway 2003 Report). Year three evaluation therefore has considered the achievements and progress of the programme over the first three years and will help inform how the programme can be developed further. In consultation with the Project manager the evaluation question agreed for year 3 is:

‘Where are we now?’

1.7 Aims and Objectives

The Sure Start Unit ask programmes to measure their performance against an indicator known as a Public Service Agreement. These five objectives are as follows:

- Improving social and emotional development
- Improving the ability to learn

- Strengthening families and communities
- Increasing the productivity of operations
- Improving health and social care

The aim of this current study is to build upon the research already carried out, and to address four of the five long term objectives of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. These objectives aim to:

- Improve social and emotional development
- Improve health
- Improve children's ability to learn
- Strengthen families and communities.

In order to assess the above objectives the evaluation also aims to:

- assess the sustainability of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm
- determine if project target populations are being reached
- determine if actual outputs are closely related to those outlined in the project outline, and the reasons for any deviations.
- detail the development of any innovative working practices within Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm.
- determine the views of parents, staff and volunteers involved with Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm and their perceived level of satisfaction.
- assess how services may be improved.

The evaluation has also addressed the issue of effectiveness ie what impact the project has had to-date on children, families and the community of Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Effectiveness however must be looked at both in the process of implementation (see Jackson 2002) and in the outcome of the interventions. Effectiveness here is defined as success in achieving measurable, pre-defined outcomes. It could be that elements of both good and weak practice will be present in different aspects of the projects. The evaluation therefore aimed to establish which elements of the programme are particularly effective. Because Sure Start is multi-functional with a range of services, we needed to select an

aspect of the programme which was illustrative of the Sure Start approach. The research therefore involved evaluating a designated area to allow for an in-depth focus on specific services. This area was agreed in consultation with the project manager and will involve the evaluation of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm Parents and Toddler groups and Bright Start Daycare Nursery.

2.0 The Research Process

2.1 Objectives of the Research

As noted, previous research has concentrated on professional and partnership perspectives and issues relating to service quality (Jackson 2002). Research has also been undertaken to assess the reasons for non-take up of Sure Start services in the locality (Community Evaluation Team 2003). This evaluation however has taken a somewhat different approach by investigating the impact Sure Start has had on staff, volunteers and parents in the community. It was decided, to omit the views of organisations involved with Sure Start and strive instead to gain an in-depth sense of work on the ground from the perspectives of those involved on a day to day basis.

The research question relates to the project's status as a developing community initiative and this evaluation therefore facilitates an understanding of its development to date. In order to achieve an answer to this question it has been necessary to embrace the views of staff, parents, volunteers and agencies.

2.2 Methodology

Many of the difficulties involved in evaluating complex social programmes such as Sure Start has been well documented by researchers over the years (see for example Connell et al 1995, Guba and Lincoln 1989). Because Sure Start programmes are typically designed as complex initiatives, comprising multiple interventions, working with different groups and towards ambitious targets, we drew from the abundance of research knowledge which in turn influenced the design of the research. Consistent with the Theories of Change model of research and Fourth Generation Evaluation (see Jackson Report 2002 for a full explanation of the methodology), this evaluation displays as one of its defining characteristics a theoretical perspective that acknowledges the Sure Start philosophy of engaging stakeholders from the onset.

2.3 Why a primarily qualitative approach?

'Research, quite simply, is a systematic inquiry: that is 'researching' consists in doing more systematically what we do in our everyday lives (Sapsford 1996:108).

In the field of the human or social sciences two very different and methodological approaches typify the range of this 'systematic inquiry': quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative model engages with measurement and classification, with causal relationships and correlations, with experimentation and with tests of statistical significance: its focus is on 'hard data' and to its most fervent critics it is seen, somewhat crudely, as being preoccupied with number crunching.

'The scientist or researcher is perceived as being 'outside' the area of study, able to do the research without affecting the nature of what is being studied, and with a duty not to impose value judgements or preconceptions on the results (Sapsford 1996:174)

Qualitative research, by contrast uses 'research methods which emanate from an interactionist stance in which the nature of social reality is not taken for granted but seen as actively constructed by its participants' (ibid). In short, this means that this study has adopted a model of research which aims to engage stakeholders from the onset and place their views central to the study. This is clearly in line with Sure Start philosophy and the National Evaluation of Sure Start. It is therefore primarily qualitative methods of research which have been used for this research study complemented by an element of quantitative data.

Qualitative interviewing has been likened to 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess 1984:102) and the aim of the semi-structured interview is to cover a broad range of question areas in an in-depth and highly flexible manner (Mason 1996:38). The interview process used in the research follows a data generating agenda and is significantly different methodologically from administering an interview schedule (which is more structured and formalised). This style is relatively informal with the appearance of conversation or discussion. The principle aim is to invite and encourage the participant to express themselves freely and in their own words, and not be constrained by a rigid question and answer format that characterises a questionnaire. It was also deemed more likely

that semi-structured interviews would improve the level and range of responses from participants and produce more interpretable data than either a self completed questionnaire or a rigid interview schedule. The use of a semi-structured interview therefore was adopted for all members of the respondent groups, with the exception of a particular group, namely those parents using Parent and Toddler Groups. It was thought advisable to keep these to a brief survey questionnaire given that the data was to be gathered at the sessions and the evaluators wishing to create the minimum amount of disruption to both parents and children. (see appendices for interview schedule and survey questionnaire)

2.4 Semi Structured Interviews

With regard to all of the interviews, how and why questions are asked and the wording actually used was decided by the interviewer according to the specific interpersonal dynamics and interaction with the particular respondent. It is for this reason that the terminology of the question themes are varied in the interviewing process according to levels of individual literacy rather than following an approach in which precise questions are uniformly asked without variation. The question areas for each group of respondents are therefore designed to be *triggers* and took a more fluent and natural course but with a consistency of focus. There was a relatively high number of question areas but many of them were responded to as linked answers in one composite reply, that is, one question leading to the answering of another without the latter being directly or specifically asked. The primary aim throughout all interviews, both face to face and telephone interviews, was to put respondents at their ease and so encourage expansive reply.

Respondent groups selected for interviews

- 5 semi structured interviews with Staff at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm
- 5 semi-structured interviews with parents using Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm for 12 months or more.
- 5 volunteers who undertook a 10 week training course at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm

- Members of organisations attending Twilight event (13 telephone interviews)
- 10 semi-structured interviews with parents and staff of Bright Stars Daycare Nursery

2.5 Survey questionnaires

Survey questionnaires were designed for parents using Parent and Toddler groups. Because the response rate of such questionnaires are notoriously low (May 2001:97), it was decided that the researcher would attend a number of Parent and Toddler sessions and become acquainted with parents using the service. This proved successful to the number of returned questionnaires and 21 were entered onto a computer statistical package (SPSS).

2.6 Documentary analysis and non-participant Observation

May (1997: 138) emphasises that documents need to be analysed in terms of the social context, and some form of engagement must take place in order for documents to be understood before analysis can begin. Documents relating to project development, implementation and publicity were examined and analysed thematically. Analysis of these documents has helped to reveal the extent to which the development of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm has progressed over the past three years.

Throughout the evaluation period (May 2003-April 2004) we have been in close contact with staff at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. A considerable amount of time was spent on the premises, at both board meetings and public events. This enabled the researcher to gather data and gain a sense of work on the ground. We believe this intensive contact is an integral part of the research methodology.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This research strictly adheres to the ethical standards of the British Sociological Association and the University of Teesside Ethics Committee. Ethical

considerations were thus taken into account at every stage of the research process. Consent forms (see appendices), were signed by participants and research data was anonymised to secure confidentiality. All participants were offered both the opportunity to review the transcripts in order to clarify what data they deemed necessary for analysis and also for confirmation of interpretation. None of the participants however took up this offer.

2.8 Limitations of the data

At the outset, the extensive concerns about confidentiality required complex systems for making contact with service users. Rather than compromise confidentiality, the evaluators became reliant on Sure Start staff to identify and contact people willing to take part in the evaluation. The evaluators are aware that because the numbers in this research are small, findings cannot be generalised. This in effect marks a limitation of the outcome data. Fortunately the wealth of other data facilitated in the exploration of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm serves to augment the current literature.

3.0 Staff Views

3.1 Structure

The staffing structure of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm is quite complex with some members being employed by Middlesbrough Borough Council, the lead agency of Sure Start, and others seconded by several different partner agencies.

The staff structure overall is as follows:

- Programme Manager: Responsible to Middlesbrough Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (MEYDCP) and Sure Start Board

Other staff comprise:

- One Part time (.5) Health Visitor (until March 2004)
- Health Project Co-ordinator
- Volunteer Co-ordinator
- Community Engagement Co-ordinator
- Curriculum and Childcare Co-ordinator
- Specialist Project Worker (Family Support)
- Specialist Project Worker (Volunteer Support)
- Specialist Project Worker (Physical Activities)
- Specialist Project Worker (Special Needs)
- Two Project Workers (Day Care)
- One part time (.5) Finance Officer
- Admin Officer
- One part time (.6) Admin Assistant (from April 2004)

A Specialist Health Team working with Thorntree and Brambles Farm Sure Start comprise:

- Clinical Psychologist (.37)
- Physiotherapist (.2)

- Under 4s Counsellor (.2)
- Specialist Children's Nurse (.5)
- Specialist Children's Nurse Assistant (.5)
- Nutrition Co-ordinator (.5)
- Speech and Language Assistant (.8)
- Midwifery Assistant (.8)
- Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (.2)
- Speech and Language Therapist (.3)

Consultant Support for the whole of the staff team:

- Specialist Nurse Consultant
- Consultant Midwife
- Health Promotions Consultant
- Specialist Speech and Language Therapist Co-ordinator

3.2 Staff Research participants

All staff interviewed are full time Sure Start staff members, and have worked at the project for 12 months or more. Between them, staff interviewed had a wealth of experience working with children and families under four, prior to taking up their post at Sure Start. This ranged from 12 months to 25 years.

3.3 Job Descriptions

Most seemed happy that their job description corresponded to their actual roles. Any deviation however was accepted by the respondents as being:

"...just one of those things that happens in any job. There are always things that you have to do when you think 'I don't remember reading about this in my job description'. But I don't mind (interviewee-staff member)'.

3.4 Multi-agency work

The manager and staff team have spent a considerable amount of time over the past three years building up links with other agencies. Staff were asked how far they thought multi-agency working has enhanced current practice in relation to working with families and children under four:

'I was used to multi-agency working to a certain extent before I came to Sure Start. But the extent to which I am doing it now is probably more. It enables us to deliver the best we can (Interviewee-staff member)'.

'Most of the things I do have links to other agencies. If we use everybody's expertise and knowledge then we can provide a better service (interviewee-staff member)'.

Respondents were asked what they perceived to be the main weaknesses associated with multi-agency working:

'Yeah, there are weaknesses there. The planning of things at the start for example Its difficult getting a date, time and place, and agreeing the best suitable time for an activity to happen because there is a lot of organisation. Its hard to arrange meetings, to come together and say this is what we want. I seem to get a lot of information second hand. [name of organisation] has to speak to [name of organisation] and they have to speak to us. Its like a triangle (interviewee-staff member)'.

'Some of the time there is confusion. We (Sure Start) did not know what was happening but I mean as long as you keep it well...meetings. If agencies meet regularly and keep in contact then you can minimise the problems (Interviewee-staff member)'.

There was a general agreement between staff that the multi-agency process is working well in terms of information and data sharing:

'When families sign up to Sure Start they do agree to others having access to their information (interviewee-staff member)'.

Moreover, some felt that the implementation of Sure Start had provided a focus for more effective networking and skill sharing. One staff member said:

'We get the best out of every agency-whoever's got the most experience and qualifications and knowledge on an activity then they can take charge of that area...so by working with all the organisations you can deliver a lot better service and a lot higher standard as opposed one agency trying to do it themselves (interviewee-staff member).'

3.5 Data protection

However problems had been identified regarding the difficulties inherent to data protection.

'The government still haven't got this area clear and finalised. They brought out recommendations earlier this year about data protection and it seems to me that the Sure Start authorities thought the government understood their position. But, from a legal aspect they say 'no it doesn't,' so it has to go higher up than just local (interviewee-staff member).'

In terms of team working, data collected from staff would suggest that the Sure Start team at Thorntree and Brambles Farm work well with one another. This interdisciplinary team seems, on the whole, to be enthusiastic, committed and very motivated in their work. However some hinted at certain barriers to working in partnership with other staff who are seconded to the programme.

3.6 Barriers to partnership working

One staff member in particular suggested that some colleagues seconded to Sure Start were widely perceived by others to consider themselves 'professionally superior' to those employed directly by Sure Start::

'...especially those who have come from [name of agency]. They don't associate with us and I think they sometimes think they are better than us (interviewee-staff member).'

This issue has been documented elsewhere (see Banks 2002 and Goodship and Haydon 2003), and attributed to the traditional professional cultures of some agencies. It has been suggested that:

'There is some way to go before cultural change is achieved at every level of the partnership organisations, particularly at the front line where different professional worlds and inter-professional relationships impede partnership working (Banks 2002:2).'

The Scottish Executive (2003) has recently suggested that there is an urgent need for those working in collaboration with other agencies to develop a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of their colleagues. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm have recognised these issues and have found that over time, seconded workers do integrate successfully. Integration however can become problematic when the short term contracts of some seconded workers does not allow time for this to take place. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm have sought to overcome this by holding training days to enable all staff to achieve greater understanding of the different roles of seconded staff however it is suggested that further training should be undertaken to extend these learning opportunities.

3.7 Impact on Families

There was a general consensus among staff that the impact of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm on families in the area is positive. Many gave their own anecdotes regarding families they have worked with personally: One such narrative included families in the predominantly white ethnic area of Thorntree and Brambles Farm, coming together with parents from Abingdon Sure Start which is located in a predominantly Asian area. One staff member said:

'At first there was a clash of cultures, but now our parents understand a lot more about the Asian culture and their religious beliefs. At the end of the course we went to the football match together and we all sat down and had a drink together. It was quite an achievement (Interviewee-staff member).'

This staff member thought it increasingly important that parents in this area develop an enhanced understanding about different cultural identities. This is pioneering work for Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Integration and cultural cohesion is an important issue and it is commendable that this programme have taken strides to raise this awareness among families using the project. Other staff members commented on the impact Sure Start has had on parents:

'Yeah, I mean the year that I've been here, I've seen a lot of parents feel a lot better about themselves. A lot of them have gone into employment, they just needed a boost in confidence [laughs] and now I have the problem that I can't get any dads cos they are all employed. Its fantastic! (Interviewee-staff member)'.

'There was one woman, when I first met her she was very mouthy and I thought 'oh my goodness me', she was really scary. But now she is completely different to what she was, her confidence level...she has really improved and is now working (Interviewee-staff member)'.

One staff member however, felt that the underlying philosophy of Sure Start was unrealistic given the entrenched ideas of some disadvantaged communities:

Yes, I think we can make a difference, but it's not a straightforward process. You have to work at it gradually. It's like drip drip drip. You have to build up a personal relationship with each person. They have got to be valued as a person first. This is what we try to do here at Thorntree and Brambles Farm.

The 'softly softly' approach taken by staff towards parents attending Sure Start, seems to be successful in encouraging parents to take up activities and staff commitment to providing for the needs of the community surfaced repeatedly during interviews. Skills such as learning of the idiosyncrasies and characteristics of the local community is laudable, and imperative in gaining the confidence of parents.

3.8 Other Issues

Staff interviewed were asked whether there was anything they would like to add to the interview. One interviewee mentioned the issue of project sustainability:

'One of the reasons why I decided to work for Sure Start is that I felt it would be worthwhile because its over ten years and there's no way you can do anything within a shorter time. This area has been projected to death, with many projects set up and then folding through lack of funds. I really feel strongly about that because the community then classes itself as another failure because the project has gone. You've got to develop sustainability and it takes a generation (interviewee-staff member).'

Supervision was also an issue for some staff. All staff have supervision sessions with the project coordinator when any issues emanating from the work can be raised. For some however this is problematic in terms of feelings that this impacts on the Project Managers time:

'The only problem is some of us, including [Project manager] don't have enough time to sit down and talk about things. I think it would be a good idea if there was somebody else to speak to instead of [project manager]. Then if you have a problem or an issue you don't have to get [project manager] involved and that would be very beneficial (Interviewee-staff member).'

Supervision for all working in complex community projects such as Sure Start is vital. The impact of work around family support, health and the education of children can often take its toll on those working in supportive situations. The danger of 'burn-out' in front-line projects is well recognised within both the voluntary and statutory sector. Staff and management thus need to prioritise supervision to enable good working relationships to develop.

3.9 Conclusion

The evaluators can safely state that all project staff interviewed were enthusiastic, committed and very motivated in their work. There was a general agreement between staff regarding the positive impact Sure Start is having on members of the community. This has led to staff feeling positive about the work they are doing, and the realisation that it is a slow process but very worthwhile.

Data reveals that after three years of operation, Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm now has a well established multi-agency ethos and practice which has been crucial to ensuring the success of the project. However data collection and information sharing has been experienced by some as 'problematic'. At this point agreements exist around the sharing of data on a 'need to know' basis only and with the permission of service users.

A minor concern around supervision was mentioned by a few staff regarding their discomfort about impinging on the scarce time resources of the Project Manager. Another concern mentioned was the issue of seconded staff, thought by some to be not 'fully signed up' to the Sure Start ethos. This is problematic and difficult to overcome, given that some staff seconded to Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm are employed only one day a week. Integration is thus a particularly slow process. However, the issue has been wholly recognised by the Sure Start manager, and training has been delivered in the past in order to promote an enhanced understanding of the way different agencies view service issues. This training however, needs to be an ongoing process in order to help staff forge closer working relationships with their colleagues.

In essence, Sure Start staff at Thorntree and Brambles Farm are exceedingly positive about the project and its aims and objectives but have, over time found their own way of meeting these by working with parents in a way which reflects the idiosyncrasies and characteristics of the community.

4.0 Volunteers Views

4.1 The role of volunteers

Thorntree and Brambles Farm have developed and delivered a number of volunteer training courses for parents and community members since April 2002. The courses have gained accreditation at TROCN (Teesside Regional Open College Network) level 1, 2 and 3, and currently each course runs for 12 weeks. Credits are achieved by students which can be used towards gaining a higher level of qualification (i.e. NVQ), if they so wish. To-date twenty-five parents have completed the volunteer training programme to level 2. Monitoring of volunteers reveal that:

- 9 have gained full or part time employment
- 6 have moved on to higher/further education
- 5 are working as volunteers for other organisations
- 10 have started the next volunteer training course at level 3 (TROCN)
- 8 have been given sessional contracts with Sure Start

Volunteers play an integral role within both statutory and voluntary sectors working with people in the community. In essence, without the commitment and dedication of volunteers, organisations such as Sure Start would fail to function effectively. People who recruit volunteers often seem eager to prove that volunteering makes people happy and healthier (Lauffer and Gorodsky 1977), however, to date little research has been carried out on the experiences and feelings of volunteers within community based organisations such as Sure Start. This part of the research evaluation aims to focus upon this aspect in order to examine the role and perceptions of volunteers at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm.

4.2 How Volunteers heard about Sure Start

All the volunteers attending the courses at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm were women. That is not to say that men were excluded from attending. From an analysis of interviews with five of these volunteers, there is evidence to

suggest that most were introduced to Sure Start via friends and family. Such quotes included:

'It was about this time last year. My next door neighbour was showing me around the area as I had just moved from []. While we were walking around she said' Oh we might aswell register you with Sure Start while we are here (Interviewee- volunteer).'

' My friend found out about Sure Start through Social Services. There were a few activities and groups coming up and she didn't want to come on her own so I said I would come with her' (interviewee-volunteer).'

' I'd been in the area 3 or 4 years before Sure Start opened. I hadn't heard of it. My friend said 'oh come to this course with me' and that's how it started off (interviewee-volunteer).'

4.3 The Volunteer Course

Respondents were asked whether topics discussed over the ten week course were useful to them in terms of their everyday life. One woman said:

'One of the sessions I really enjoyed was child behaviour because what I learned there I could take home with me and use at home. How to discipline and things like that. Also child protection. Although it was a very difficult subject it was very interesting and something I hadn't thought of before (Interviewee-volunteer).'

Another said:

'We covered loads of things like speech and language, communication, confidentiality, domestic violence, and health and safety. Domestic violence was hardest for me because I had been through it and it brought up a lot of issues, but everyone was supportive and got me through (interviewee-volunteer).'

4.4 Confidence and Self Esteem

Research has consistently shown us that women brought together can offer each other support, validation and strength, and a growing sense of personal awareness in a way that is difficult to achieve otherwise (Bultler and Wintram 1995). As the quotes above demonstrate, one of the consistent findings to

emerge from the data is that the volunteer course helped raise confidence levels and self esteem. Many in fact, looked upon the group as a support network. For example:

'It definitely built my confidence. It gave me new meaning to life. I was one of those stay at home mums, just going to my friend's for coffee. That's what my life used to entail (interviewee-volunteer)

'Although I attended toddler groups, the volunteer course was much smaller and I was able to put names to faces and it gave me a chance to really get to know people' (interviewee-volunteer)'

'I used to feel intimidated by people in professional positions. Now I feel I can say things assertively. Now I think my views are important but at one time I never said what was on my mind it was just yes sir, no sir (interviewee-volunteer)'

4.5 Personal Gains

Volunteers were asked what personal rewards they perceive to have gained by volunteering:

'I feel as though I can cope with life now and maybe I can help other mothers who are going through the same as I did (Interviewee-volunteer)'

'I just felt as though I wanted to give something back (Interviewee-volunteer)'

The quotes cited above were typical of all the volunteers interviewed. 'Giving to others' provided most with a sense of mission and gave their lives some meaning and structure. 'Giving something back' is an important value for many people therefore acting in accordance with those values subsequently makes people feel better about themselves. Acts of benevolence also tend to engage people in social interactions that are usually positive, emotionally warm, and enable volunteers to use personal skills and strengths which enhance their sense of self. It is not surprising therefore that many of the Sure Start volunteers interviewed were convinced they have become more self assured as a result of their work. with some believing that the work has changed their lives.

Notwithstanding however, several participants offered a wholly instrumental reason for their decision to become a volunteer with Sure Start.

'I would really like to get a paid job with Sure Start eventually (Interviewee-Volunteer)'

They are advertising at the moment for sessional workers and this has opened up job opportunities for volunteers who have done the course. Sessional work is great for single mums like me because it allows us to earn without going over the benefit threshold (Interviewee-Volunteer)'

'I would like to get a paid job out of the work I do here. They have put me on a course for Speech and Language Therapy and they are very supportive (Interviewee-volunteer)'

Making career contacts, developing job opportunities or using volunteering to improve their CV is a common strategy used by many people who choose to volunteer, and an instrumental reason for offering their free time. Sure Start management team have recognised this and have consistently shown their appreciation of the work of their volunteers by offering opportunities of paid employment within the project.

4.6 Appreciation

The appreciation of the work of volunteers by the Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm management team is clearly visible to all volunteer respondents. Apart from job opportunities, appreciation is further extended by assisting volunteers to increase their skills via vocational and educational courses. Not all however expect or want this type of show of appreciation, and would prefer a show of thank you via a social event such as a trip to the movies or a meal out to escape the domesticity of caring for their families. As one volunteer put it:

'I would like Sure Start to show their appreciation by doing something just for us. They did give us a trip to Scarborough once but that was for the kids really, not the mums. We have told them we would like to do something for ourselves (interviewee-volunteer)'

The ideological construction that mother and child exist in an isolated dyad is often ever clear amongst professionals working in the field of children and families. Indeed, women themselves often inadvertently turn to their children to define themselves, gaining a sense of identity by concentrating on themselves as mothers first and foremost. Traditionally this sense of identity is often sanctioned within family services in statutory settings. Women accessing such services often need to be seen to be complying with the policies and philosophy of the agency in order to fit into the sanitised world of professionalism. This conceptualisation inevitably limits the scope of women's reality.

There is a pressing need for innovative agencies such as Sure Start to proffer the notion of women as individuals and offer them the opportunity to 'have something for themselves', rather than in relation to their children.

4.7 Job Satisfaction and Inclusion

In terms of the actual volunteer *work*, respondents were asked if they felt pressurised to work in areas of the project they have little interest in:

'Well, all they ask of you is three hours a week. But they always ask you if you want to (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'If there was something I didn't particularly want to do they wouldn't make me feel bad about it (interviewee- volunteer)'.

No, but I have heard other volunteers say they have. But all the way through the course emphasis was placed on the fact that we didn't have to do any work we didn't want to. I have been asked to do things and have said no, due to time constraints. People just have to learn to say No (interviewee-volunteer)'.

Some however were not so positive and felt slightly marginalised in their role as volunteers:

'Sometimes some staff will make me feel I am in the way (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'There are some members of staff who will praise you and some that will not acknowledge you (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'It depends on the staff member. One staff member will tell you you are doing something wrong and the other will take a softer approach and suggest another way of doing it (interviewee-volunteer)'.

It would seem however that the above comments were primarily directed at one or two particularly strong personalities within the Sure Start staff team and were not perceived as a problem across the board. Following up this theme, respondents were asked whether they felt a sense of inclusion in the Sure Start Team:

'I don't feel as though there is any distinction between paid workers and unpaid workers (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'I feel that everyone, right up to the manager, appreciates what I do. I feel part of the team. That's the thing here, there is no distinction between staff and volunteers. We recently did a full day training session and it felt like we were all a team. Before the training day, I did feel a bit intimidated by staff but I think the training day overcame that. Since then, I feel the volunteers and staff have bonded as a team. The only difference is, they get a wage and I don't (interviewee-volunteer)'.

4.8 Communication

Respondents were asked whether they felt they were able to express their views on certain issues within the organisation:

'yes, we are seen by [staff member] once a month to go over any concerns that we might have about the volunteering, any problems we have found or equipment we might need. We are even able to bring outside issues to the meeting if we need to talk about them (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'We are supposed to have meetings but they never seem to get organised. Even if we wanted to call a meeting ourselves we couldn't because we don't have access to information held by Sure Start (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'Communication is a bit slack (interviewee-volunteer)'.

'Communication is a problem. One person will tell you one thing and someone else will tell you something else. Its confusing (interviewee-volunteer).'

It is crucial that lines of communication are open to volunteers. This could possibly be achieved by way of monthly meetings and the designation of a volunteer co-ordinator who is able to liaise on behalf of the group.

4.9 Conclusion

Clearly, word of mouth is one of the most effective ways to involve the local community in Sure Start. All volunteers interviewed were introduced to the project this way after hearing about it in a positive light from friends, neighbours and family members. All participants were categorical in their praise for the content of the volunteer course with many stating that topics for discussion, such as positive parenting were helpful to them in their every day lives. As the quotes reveal, many of the volunteers gained an acute sense of satisfaction in volunteering and of being part of a working environment. All gained in confidence and self esteem, with several going so far as to state that the project had changed their lives. Although there was some critical feedback regarding inclusion and communication, this has to be viewed against the backdrop of a few strong personalities and the traditional working backgrounds of some staff, who would appear to be not yet fully signed up to the Sure Start ethos. (ie working in partnership with parents and volunteers). Critical feedback also encompassed the need for the Sure Start team to show their appreciation of the work of volunteers by viewing them as individuals rather than in relation to their roles as mothers with caring responsibilities. Overall, the data suggests that volunteer's see their work as valued by both the management team and other Sure Start staff. Care however must be taken in order to ensure that Sure Start professionalism does not marginalise and disenfranchise volunteers in any decision making process, thus potentially alienating a group who are crucial to the existence of organisations such as Sure Start.

5.0 Parents Perceptions of Sure Start: 3 years on

5.1 Parents Views

This section documents the views of parents, bringing local views and experiences into focus. Parents contributed to the evaluation in different ways, some informally such as local parent and toddler groups and the Drop In at the local school.

Others were approached to participate in a semi-structured interview. Collectively they produce data of a varied and diverse nature that give important insights into local opinion, knowledge and experience. Empirical categories for questioning include, benefits of their involvement in Sure Start, community awareness of the programme, their thoughts on non-users reasons to participate in the programme, and the impact of the programme on themselves and their children.

5.2 Why involve parents?

In 1967 the Plowden Report, for the Central Advisory Council for Education, stated that *'parents involvement should be a key feature of high quality early years provision'*. Since then, a wealth of other research findings have demonstrated that when parents and practitioners work together, the results have a positive impact on a child's development and learning (DfEE/QCA 2000:9). Consequently, the promotion of parental involvement in the education of children has become a significant part of government agenda, with the national implementation of Sure Start programmes being the latest and most innovative to-date. As Director Sure Start Naomi Eisenstadt stated in 2001:

'Sure Start has always been intended to reach the parts that other initiatives and services do not reach, to ensure that all children in disadvantaged areas get a good start in life' (Eisenstadt 2002:10).

Interviewing parents as a means of investigating how they perceive their participation and support for capacity building in the project was crucial to the evaluation and enables us to assess the impact their involvement has had, both on themselves and their children.

5.3 The Sample

As noted in Chapter 2, the methodology of this evaluation requires a bottom up approach which focuses on the importance of service users understandings of the project. It also recognises that within any given community, different members can hold many different ideas of the same situation. In order to capture a snapshot of parents views, experiences and expectations of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm, five parents were interviewed at length, all of whom had been signed up to Sure Start for eighteen months or more. All participants were female and aged between eighteen years and 30. Four were white and one of African decent. All had at least one child under 4. Four women were single parents living with their children, and one was cohabiting with her boyfriend. Two of the parents interviewed were also members of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm Management Board.

Parents were asked how they found out about Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Two parents found out about the project through Social Services, two were introduced to the project by friends and one was given information about the project by her midwife. She states:

'I didn't know what to do after having the baby, [the midwife] helped me a lot. I wasn't even sure about attending the baby clinic because I was so shy. [the midwife] told me that if I didn't want to come alone [staff member] would come and pick me up and stay with me (Interviewee-parent)'.

5.4 Benefits of involvement

Parents were asked what they considered to be the main benefits in attending Sure Start both for themselves and their children. Responses were as follows:

'After I had my baby I had post natal depression but I wanted to change my life for the sake of my baby. Sure Start helped me to get out of the house (Interviewee-parent)'.

I have met lots of new people and had loads of support from the Sure Start staff. (interviewee-parent)'.

Others stated:

'I used to live in [name of town] and there was only a mother and toddler group for the whole area. After that you had to find your own amusement. Sure Start therefore is wonderful, especially for us, coming to an area that is new. I have met lots of new people. (Interviewee-parent)'

'Everyone's friendly and considerate. It's more of a family thing than anything (interviewee-parent)'

Overwhelmingly, the parents interviewed mentioned the benefits of meeting and networking with other parents, with many recognising their own personal improvement in self confidence. The approachability of Sure Start staff members was also a key issue for one parent:

' Because my Mum doesn't live near me I can't always have her there for advice and support. Sure Start staff are always there to ask advice (Interviewee-parent)'

In terms of benefits to their children, one participant summed it up succinctly:

I think if the parents are supported the children are bound to benefit aren't they? (Interviewee-parent)'

The benefit of children's social development, independence and confidence was an important issue for parents:

' [daughter] was fairly isolated from other kids before we came to Sure Start and she was quite clingy. She loves it here, she like a different kid (Interviewee-parent)'

'All in all, yeah it's a good idea for younger children. My two have come on so much since we started coming here (interviewee-parent)'

5.5 Sure Start and Community Spirit

As stated in Jackson's 2002 formative evaluation report, parents interviewed noted the increasing potential for Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm to connect people. The current evaluation again addressed this question in order to establish

whether this has increased over the past two years. Although it is beyond the scope of this report to gauge the prevalence of this view amongst the wider population of Thorntree and Brambles Farm, participants were asked whether they thought a sense community spirit had intensified over time.

'Yes definitely. I really feel as though I belong to the community now (Interviewee-parent).'

'I say hiya to loads of people in the street that I've met through Sure Start (Interviewee-Parent).'

'Its good that its near the shops. It's part of the community isn't it (interviewee-parent).'

The quotes above demonstrate that many parents involved with Sure Start, now view themselves and their families as part of the community. There will however, always be a minority of families difficult to engage into any community initiative.

5.6 Non service users

Respondents were asked if they knew of any parents in the locality not using Sure Start facilities and possible reasons why. One woman replied:

'I think they will think that they will get staff on at them about how to bring up their kids and therefore they make a stand and refuse to join. Not that there is anything to fear. I think Sure Start are able to strike a balance. They are available to help but are certainly not pushy (interviewee-parent).'

'When I ask other parents to come along some of them say, 'oh who goes?' Then if they don't know anyone who goes, they don't go. Me...I will go anywhere by myself (interviewee-parent).'

'I think it's the area. A cultural thing. A lot of people my age would rather just stay at home. They just do what their mams have done . I don't want to live on benefits all my life. I think if they had wanted to come they would be here by now. Many people in this community are stuck in a rut and some think that if they do come staff will say 'you are bringing up your kids wrong' (interviewee-parent).'

'Some people just don't want help at all (interviewee-parent).'

Previous research reports (see Jackson 2002, and Community Evaluation Team University of Teesside 2003) have documented issues regarding the reluctance of some community members to engage in Community based projects. This lack of receptiveness is often attributed to a lack of aspiration and expectation among community members and is one of the main barriers faced by Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. What should be added to this particular analysis is that on most occasions it is women in a caring role who are expected to engage with such community based projects. In an area of relative financial deprivation, women living in the area will be no strangers to statutory agencies such as benefits agency, social services and child protection bodies. Set against such a background it is hardly surprising that women feel they will be subject to even more scrutiny if they access Sure Start facilities. While this is clearly not the case (as documented by the respondents in this research), it may be useful for Sure Start to send out this message to non-users in the community via leaflets, publicising themselves in terms of their friendliness and capacity building.

5.7 Concerns

Many parents expressed their concerns regarding the sustainability of Sure Start. This concern is borne out of parent's experiences of other voluntary sector community projects previously set up in the area. Due to the time limited nature of much voluntary sector funding, many projects cease to operate after a short period of time. Lack of consistency seemed to be a major worry for parents: Typical responses included:

'It would be devastating for the community (interviewee-Parent)'.

'I only hope they stay. I sometimes think it is better if they never had things like this in the first place rather than give us a project and then take it away (Interviewee-parent)'.

Other parents were concerned that they only deal with children up to age 4:

'Children need ongoing support. It would be nice to have something for the kids until they are at least six or seven. That is the only problem I have with Sure Start, what happens when they go to school. I think they need that extra support. I feel the kids are cut off dead.'

However a recent Government Review (November 2002) states that the establishment of Children's Centres working in partnership with Sure Start will provide childcare, family support and health services in one centre. This will build on the work already achieved by Sure Start and will benefit, and provide wraparound care for up to 650,000 children in disadvantaged areas by 2006. It is envisaged that this will eventually fill the gap recognised by one of the parents in the quote above, and benefit children who do not fall under the age criteria of Sure Start as it stands currently. In addition, Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles provide Daycare (9am-5pm) for children of pre-school age.

5.8 Farm Tree Group

The Farm Tree Parent Team was established by a group of parents signed up to Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. It was prompted by their concern that Sure Start activities were primarily directed at children under 4, in effect limiting activities for older, school age siblings.

The group was formed in 2000, and initially funded by Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Today however they are self financing and use a variety of methods to raise funds, such as holding children's disco's, and organising day trips out. Recently they have accessed charitable funding bodies and as one parent put it:

'We are writing bids and sending them off right, left and centre. I think Farm Tree activities have been a great success (interviewee-parent)'.

Parents meet on a monthly basis to develop ideas and activities for the whole family. Activities to-date have included, craft days, day trips and disco's. Parents involved in Farm Tree are exceedingly proud of this achievement, particularly as they no longer require help from Sure Start staff to continue with the project. The self-determination shown by parents involved in Farm Tree to provide activities for older children is admirable. Credit must also go to the Sure Start team for their encouragement and support in the capacity building of parents.

5.9 Parental Representation

The Sure Start Board at Thorntree and Brambles Farm is responsible for the operational management of the programme and for the management of the Sure Start team. It was anticipated (see Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm Final Plan 2001) that the Board would have a membership of 24 people consisting of one third parents, one third voluntary representation and one third statutory representation. Two participants in the evaluation were members of the Management Board and were asked how they felt about being approached to undertake this role:

'I wasn't nervous, just pleased that I had been considered for it (interviewee-parent)'.

'They asked me to be on the Board and I said OK. There was a couple of people on the Board that I knew so I felt OK about it (interviewee-parent)'.

Parents were asked if they felt their voices were heard at meetings:

'They wouldn't ask parents on the Board if they didn't think we could be of any use. I feel as though I have every opportunity to have my say (Interviewee-parent)'.

'I feel as though I am listened to if I have anything to say (interviewee-parent)'.

One parent however was appalled at the treatment of a parent Board member by a statutory agency Board member. She said:

'There was an occasion when one of the parents, it was her first meeting. She gave her opinion on an issue regarding low reach figures and she was shouted down by this particular person. The parent was telling them where the problem lie and how to fix it and she was quite within her rights to make that suggestion. It was like they said, no that's not what we want to hear. The parent didn't speak for the rest of the meeting. She must have felt so small. That person [agency member] was really rude (interviewee-parent)'.

Although an isolated incident, the treatment of parents in this way is totally unacceptable and will only serve to deter parents from undertaking a role in the management of the programme. Professional elitism has no place in the philosophy of Sure Start. Clearly there is a need for the Sure Start ethos to be reiterated to all members of the Management Board on a regular basis.

At the beginning of the evaluation period, parental representation on the Sure Start Board was low, with only 2 or 3 parents attending monthly meetings. However in order to address this, all parents were invited to participate in two recent Board meetings (8th December 2003 and 26th January 2004) to try to find ways of recruiting new parent Board members. The meeting was well attended by parents who had every opportunity to air their opinions and give their views on ways of retaining parents on the Board. The Sure Start management team were both receptive and sensitive to all parents views and will be addressing the issues raised in the near future.

5.10 Conclusion

Findings suggest that all research participants have benefited greatly from being involved in Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. The impact the programme has had on both themselves and their families over the past 3 years has been positive, with many suggesting that confidence levels of their children and themselves has increased as a result of their involvement. There was a general consensus among parents that the project aims and objectives are realistic, worthwhile and achievable with key benefits being the support of staff in capacity building for parents. Concerns around programme sustainability are still an issue for many parents who need reassurance that the programme will continue in the community for the for-seeable future. Whilst the recruitment of more parents onto the Sure Start Management Board is commendable, professional stakeholders need to revisit the philosophical underpinnings of Sure Start in order that the views of parents become centralised rather than peripheral.

6.0 Parent and Toddler Group

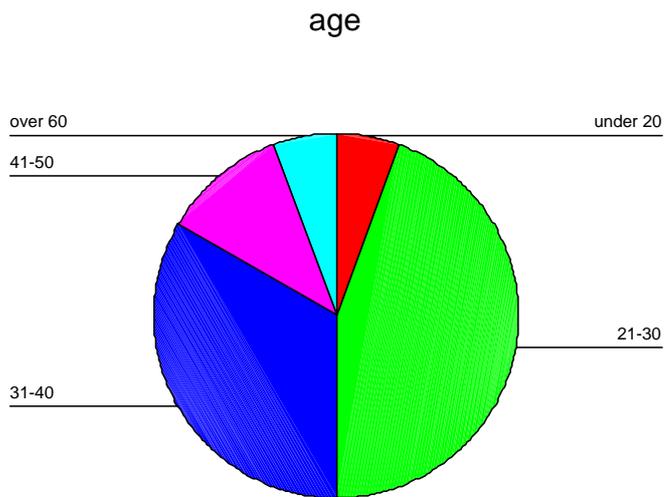
6.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore parents' perceptions of a child centred activity, Parent and Toddler. These sessions are held by Sure Start once a week at Caldicotes Primary School. Since the evaluation began, Sure Start have implemented an additional Parent and Toddler Group at the Sure Start Centre. To avoid confusion the current evaluation only incorporates the views of parents using Caldicotes School Parent and Toddler Group.

Parent and Toddler Group has been running at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm for over three years. Children attending the facility are all under four years old. Monitoring data collected by Sure Start reveals that the group is well attended each week, averaging around twelve children per session. Survey questionnaires distributed to parents during sessions have been used to collect data on who is attending as well as other issues such as user satisfaction. Eighteen survey questionnaires were returned. Although the sample is small and findings cannot be generalised, the data gives a snapshot of parents' demographic data, experiences, and satisfaction with the activity. This chapter will examine and consider the findings from the Parent and Toddler survey data.

6.2 Parent and Toddler: Respondent's Background

In terms of ethnicity 17 respondents described themselves as White, with one being of Black African descent. The graph below shows that in terms of age, most (44%, $n=8$) were between the ages of 21-30. 33% ($n=6$) were aged 31-40, two respondents were 41-50 with one being under 20 and one over 60 years old.

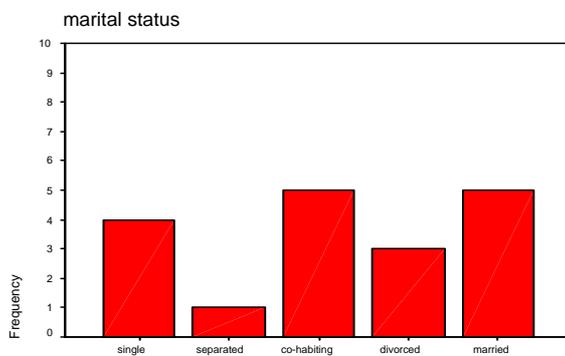


Graph 1: Age of Respondents

6.3 Marital Status

The highest number of respondents were co-habiting with partners 27% ($n=5$), or married to partners (27% ($n=5$)). Four parents were single (22%). One respondent was separated and three were divorced.

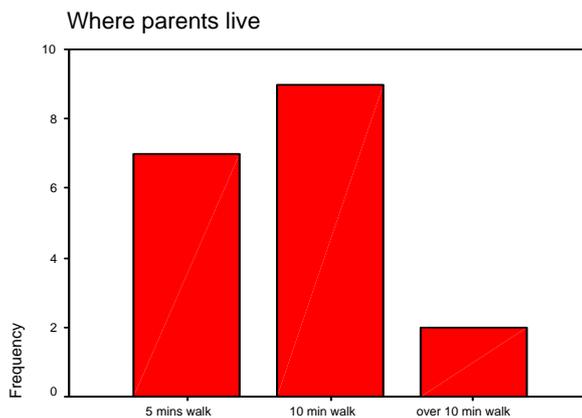
Graph 2: Marital status of respondents



6.4 Where Families Live

In order to ascertain whether Parent and Toddler Group is accessible, parents were asked where they lived in relation to the venue. This was quite evenly distributed with 50% ($n=9$) of respondents living a 10 minute walk away, 38% ($n=7$) living within a five minute walk and only 11% ($n=2$) living over a ten minute walk away. This suggests that all families using Parent and Toddler Groups at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm live within walking distance of Parent and Toddler group sessions.

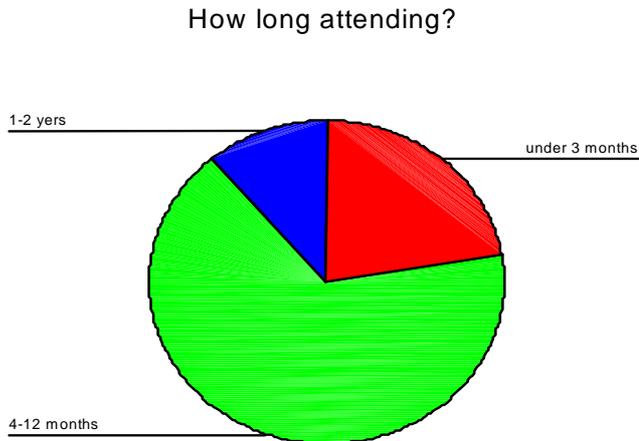
Graph 3: Where families live



6.5 How long parents have been attending

Most parents (66% $n=12$) have attended for between four and twelve months, 22% ($n=4$) have been attending under 3 months and two parents (11%) have been attending for between one and two years.

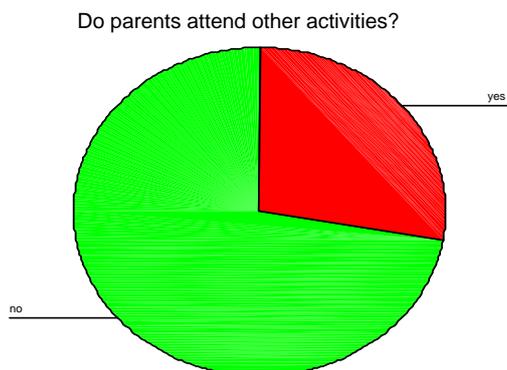
Graph 4: How long respondents have been attending Parents and Toddler



6.6 Do parents attend other Sure Start activities?

Parents were asked whether they are currently attending or have previously attended, any other Sure Start activities. 28% of respondents said they did. However, 72% of respondents do not attend other Sure Start activities.

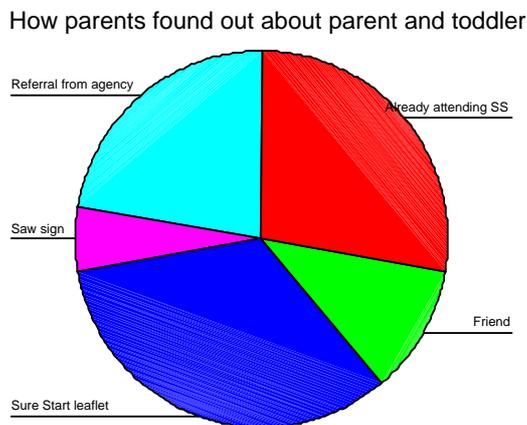
Graph 5: Do respondents attend other Sure Start activities?



6.7 How parents found out about Parent and Toddler?

Parents were asked how they found out about Parent and Toddler Groups. 27% ($n=5$) said they were already attending other Sure Start activities. 22% ($n=4$) were referred to the programme from an agency (Social Worker, Health Visitor). 11% ($n=2$) heard about the sessions through word of mouth and 33% ($n=6$) attended after receiving a leaflet through the post. One person saw the Sure Start sign when passing and decided to attend the sessions.

Graph 6: How respondents found out about parent and Toddler



6.8 Friendly and helpful staff ?

Respondents were asked if staff were friendly and welcoming. Overwhelmingly responses revealed that staff are friendly and helpful. 72% ($n=13$) said staff were very friendly and 16% ($n=3$) said staff were quite friendly. Two people replied OK to this question.

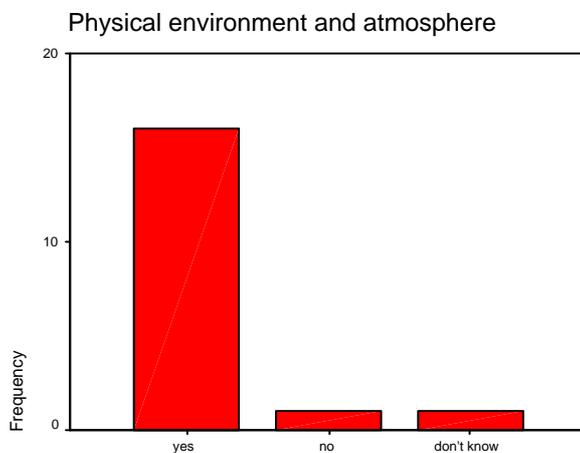
Graph 7: How friendly and helpful are Staff?



6.9 Physical environment

Parents were asked whether they thought the physical environment and atmosphere of Tots Have Fun was adequate in terms of comfort, mixing with other parents and the range of activities on offer. Most (88%, $n=16$) respondents answered yes to this question, 1 did not reply, and one said no. When questioned further on the issue, this parent said more toys were needed.

Graph 8



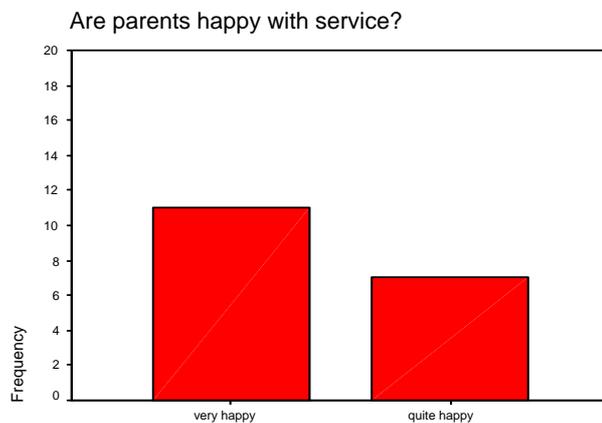
6.10 Service delivery

Parents were asked whether they were happy with the service overall. All eighteen survey respondents said they were happy or very happy.

Other reasons why parents like Parent and Toddler group include:

- Meeting other Mums
- Session has different activities so child doesn't get bored
- Staff get involved
- Stimulating for children
- Gets me out of the house
- Never felt any prejudices-open to all
- Children mix with others
- Lots of activities. Keeps child amused

Graph 9



6.11 Conclusion

From the survey data collected it would seem that the majority of parents using Parent and Toddler are happy with the service and feel it meets the needs of both themselves as parents and their children. Parents are also positive about the element of contact their children have with other (non-sibling) children and feels this brings about a positive change in their behaviour. It is worrying however that many parents are not utilising Sure Start services, with 78% of respondents not attending any other Sure Start activity, yet most parents (66%. $n=12$) had attended Parent and Toddler Group between for 4 and 12 months. Many parents mentioned the need for more Parents and Toddler sessions and one parent felt more toys were needed for smaller babies. Overall the outcome was positive, particularly regarding feedback on the efforts made by staff to welcome all parents and children into the session.

7.0 Bright Stars Daycare Nursery

7.1 Introduction

Since 1997 there has been a dramatic increase in childcare and early years services. More than one million new childcare places have been created nationally through the government's Childcare Strategy. The implementation of Neighbourhood Nurseries, Children's Centres and local Sure Start programmes has meant that every three and four year old is now entitled to a free part time early education place.

In January 2004 a Daycare Centre (Bright Stars) was launched as part of the Thorntree and Brambles Farm Sure Start programme. Bright Stars nursery is located a short distance from the local programme base and can provide day care for up to 48 children aged 0-5 years from 9am-5pm Monday to Friday. Bright Stars aims to provide good quality childcare and play opportunities, with the main objective being to improve child development and the ability to learn. In September 2004 Bright Start Day Nursery at Thorntree and Brambles Farm will become one of 1,700 Children's Centre's in the country. The aim of Children's Centres is to bring together a range of children's services including childcare, health support and parenting advice on one site.

In order to evaluate the efficacy of Bright Stars, semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven parents and three staff members (see appendices for semi-structured interview schedule).

7.2 Aims of Bright Stars

It has been well documented that:

'Children who attend nursery/pre-school do better socially and academically than those that don't (Magaret Hodge, Children's Minister 2004)

Bright Stars day nursery aims to invest in local children and give them the best possible start in life. The nursery also fulfils the requirements of all four Sure Start objectives, however support is particularly relevant in relation to Objective 3 'Improving the Ability to Learn' and Objective 4 'Strengthening Families and Communities' (see Chapter 9 Milestones and Targets, for details of Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) within these objectives). The Nursery is also working towards Children's Centre status to offer the following:

- To develop and deliver high quality integrated education and childcare for young children and their families
- To improve children's life chances
- To offer a homely environment which is safe and secure

7.3 Documentation, Policies and Procedures

Bright Stars offers an information leaflet to those parents considering placing their child in Daycare. This includes information on opening hours, fees, Holiday entitlement, children's personal requirements, sickness and medication, security, and how to book a place. In addition there are numerous policies and procedures available for parents to peruse. These include:

- Mission Statement
- National Daycare Standards
- Parent information and partnership policies
- Admission and settling in policy
- Policy on play
- Behaviour management policy
- Child protection policy
- Policy on food and milk
- Special educational needs policy
- Policy on recruitment and staffing

- Complaints procedure
- Confidentiality policy
- Child protection policy
- Health and safety policy

The detail of each policy is user friendly without being jargonistic. Information is bullet pointed and encased in a brightly coloured folder, easily accessible for parents to read if they so wish.

7.4 Links with other organisations

Bright Stars Nursery has strong links with other Sure Start programmes and a variety of external partners. These include:

- Thorntree Primary School
- Early Years Team
- Middlesbrough Social Services
- Health Visitors
- Middlesbrough Borough Council
- Pertemps Back to Work Initiative
- Job Centre Plus
- Playgroup Network (Training)

7.5 Bright Stars Project Operation

Care for children is offered by way of a variety of flexible approaches. Parents can choose to access four timed sessions throughout the day, 9am-11.30am, 11.30am-1.30pm, 12.30pm-3pm or 3pm –5pm. Full and half day sessions are also available, as is use of the nursery in term time only. Staff are available to take and collect children to/from school nurseries if parents need this service.

Childcare places can be funded in several ways. Places can be paid for privately, funded by Sure Start at the discretion of management, or funded by Social Services on a respite basis.

There are separate rooms for each age group, with individual toilet and changing facilities, outdoor space and designated areas within the indoor space for different activities. These include reading, puzzles and a variety of toys, laid out for children to easily access. Sleeping areas are also provided and each child has his or her own key worker. This ensures a close link between worker and individual children. The ratio for staff to children is determined by the age of a child, for example one worker is responsible for up to three children under two, up to four children aged 2-3 years and up to eight children aged 3-5 years. Each child has their own coat peg with his or her name on. This helps learning as children first learn to recognise their picture, then their first name, and then their full name.

When considering a child place for their children, parents are welcome to attend the nursery and look around before they make a decision. A senior nursery nurse tours the facilities with parents and explains what each area is for. If parents wish to, they may leave their children for shorter periods of time to avoid distress to the child. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child's nursery experiences and are free to chat with staff members at any time. A notice board is also featured in the foyer to enable parents to access up to date information.

7.6 Learning Objectives

All children aged 3-5 years are encouraged to work towards learning objectives set out by the governments Early Learning Goals and following the DFES Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA). 'Stepping Stones' are achieved through the child's development in the areas of:

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Language

- Communication and literacy
- Mathematical development
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development

Parents of children aged 3-5 years are informed of their child's development in these areas on a regular basis. For younger children, a recent government document entitled 'Birth to Three Matters' also provides guidance on learning objectives for children 0-3 year. The team are currently in the process of implementing this guidance in Bright Start for children in this age group.

7.7 Staff training and development

Opportunities for staff development are comprehensive. All members of staff have at least NVQ level 3, one staff member has a BTEC in Nursery Nursing and another a degree in Nursery Nursing. One staff member is currently studying for a Special Educational Needs Certificate, which will enable the team to provide care for children with autism, speech and language difficulties, behavioural problems and global delay. There is also a priority that all staff are kept up to date with changing legislation and necessary qualifications. Staff are also trained in Child Protection and First Aid. One Sure Start parent is currently working at Bright Start on placement, working towards her NVQ level 3 in Care and Education.

7.8 Parents Views

Most of the parents participating in the evaluation had either returned to work or were studying at college. Overwhelmingly comments received from parents were positive. It is apparent that with something as sensitive as childcare, places would not be filled if parents did not think that the nursery was a good place for their children.

Typical comments were as follows:

'I have seen good daycare and I have seen bad daycare. Bright Stars standards are really high (interviewee-Parent)'

'The quality of facilities at Bright Stars is very high. Toys, facilities, staff, food, everything (Interviewee-parent).'

'I have always used daycare for my children, I have worked in daycare too, and when Bright Stars opened, and it was linked to Sure Start, it was an ideal opportunity. Working with the staff and knowing the staff that work here, I knew that a very high standard of care that would be provided (Interviewee-parent).'

'Daycare has enabled me to go back to work. If daycare hadn't been here I would have found it very difficult to go back to work (Interviewee-parent).'

7.9 Fees

Parents were asked about the costs of sending their children to Bright Stars:

'It is reasonably priced and on a par with other daycare centres (interviewee-parent).'

'The cost of four pounds per two hour session makes it more open to suit the parents in the area who work. Those who wouldn't necessarily want to pay 26 pounds for a full day can now access a couple of hours in the morning if they need to do something with-out their child in tow. A lot of parents have their older child in the school nursery which is attached to Bright Start, so if they are dropping off their child there between 9am and 11am, they can book their little one in Bright Start 9am to 11am too (Interviewee-parent).'

Most participants were managing to meet the costs of daycare for their children. Fees for Bright Stars appear to compare well with other daycare facilities in the area. In particular, the sessional slots of two hours are becoming increasingly popular and are being utilised by parents who do not wish to access full or half day care. For the purposes of the evaluation, a local nursery based in the area was contacted and

used as a comparator for fees. It was found that Bright Stars Nursery at Sure Start is 17.5% cheaper for a full day session than its competitor. In addition the comparator nursery did not allow for sessions of 2 hours which makes life particularly difficult for parents who would like daycare provision for younger children at the same time as they drop and pick up older siblings from school nursery. However the comparator nursery is open from 7.30am until 6.30pm which makes it easier for parents with 9am-5pm work commitments. Both nurseries provide nappies, baby wipes and baby lotion and both provide a cooked lunch every day, however overall it is apparent that Bright Stars offers better value for money than the comparator.

7.10 Approachability of staff

Parents were asked how accessible and approachable they find staff.

'There is always somebody there to talk to if I have any worries. They always make time, its that sort of environment (Interviewee-parent)'.

'The staff are brilliant and easy to talk to. They always tell you if something has happened. At one nursery my little boy was at, he must have bumped his head or fallen over, I asked what had happened but no-one knew. That would never happen here (Interviewee-parent)'.

'The staff are always available, I would definitely feel comfortable talking to a member of staff if I had any problems (Interviewee-parent)'.

It is imperative that parents find staff approachable, and this appears to be the case at Bright Start Nursery. Difficulties in a child's home life can affect learning and development therefore staff need to be aware of any family issues in order to take the appropriate steps in helping the child to cope. The impact of domestic violence for example can be traumatic for children. Given that one in four women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives (Mirlees-Black 1999), staff need to be fully aware of the issues relating to children caught up in the problem. In recent

years, the link between domestic violence and child abuse has been well established

(Bowker, Arbitell and McFerron 1988). Itzin (2000) suggests:

'Altogether there is a very substantial overlap between domestic violence and child abuse perpetrated by men against their wives or partners and their children (Itzin 2000:360).

The receptiveness of staff towards parents is therefore crucial in order to enable parents to disclose sensitive information such as domestic violence.

7.11 Developmental progress

Parents were asked how they felt their child's development had progressed since attending Bright Stars.

'Yes, I think she has come on since coming here. It's nice that they encourage the little ones to mix with the older kids sometimes too. The equipment is really nice...really high quality. There are a good range of activities that you would expect to find in a day nursery but also things that you would expect to happen at home. That in itself makes it easier for the children because it's like a homely environment. For example, sometimes at the end of the day when I come to pick her up they would all be sat on the mat having a story together. I think that's nice and it teaches the older ones to have consideration for the younger kids and vice versa (Interviewee-parent)'.

'My son has really come on. His speech has really improved (Interviewee-parent)'.

'Yeah he was very clingy but mixes with all the kids now...and loves me to read to him at home. We always put an hour aside before bed for reading. We didn't do that before he came here (interviewee-parent)'.

'She loves physical play and brings things home that she has made herself...from being tiny. Only a nursery nurse would have the patience to do that wouldn't they? You know, physical messy stuff like painting (Interviewee-parent)'.

'He's come on so much. His speech has come on as-well. He used to be very shy but now I can see a big difference. He has a good relationship with other kids and I can attribute this to him coming here (Interviewee-Parent)'.

All parents agreed that Bright Stars had helped their children: improving their child's ability to play, and their ability to communicate and get on with their siblings. All parents who were interviewed felt that the nursery had also helped them by improving their ability to cope, their self esteem and their parenting skills. General comments were that *'Sure Start is great for the community'*. The nursery was described as *'very accommodating'* with *'excellent quality resources'*. The **'Drop in'** centre attached to the nursery was described as *'somewhere relaxing to have a chat with other mums'*. Some concern was expressed regarding the outside play area, with one parent suggesting that *'the outside play area needs some attention'*. There is however a clear complaints policy which details how parents can raise issues: in the first instance with the child's key worker or Senior Nursery Nurse, or discussion with the Sure Start Management Team. Additionally, parents are also given the contact details of Early Years Ofsted, offering them the opportunity to progress with any complaints. All parents interviewed however felt they would be happy to any raise issues with nursery staff in order to come to a resolution.

7.12 Staff Views

Three staff members were interviewed including one parent who was working on placement at Bright Stars towards her NVQ level 2 in Care and Education. Staff were asked how working for Sure Start differs from working in private nursery settings:

'Its about working with the community, getting parents on board with their child's education (Interviewee-staff member)'.

'I wanted to work in a community setting, working more in partnership with parents (Interviewee-staff member)'.

7.13 Working with Parents

All staff were aware of the importance of encouraging parents to develop their relationship with their children. This is crucial. Previous research suggests that the most important factor influencing a child's life is their relationship with their parents. Good relationships help prevent anti-social behaviour and poor educational attainment. A literature review by Professor Charles Desforges has shown that:

'Good parenting in the home is one of the most important influences on a child's future (Surestart.gov.uk accessed June 2004).'

Staff however are aware of the huge challenges this creates with regards to parents in the locality.

'We always knew it was going to be a huge challenge. It is really difficult I mean when some of the children came to the nursery they didn't really know how to play they just stood there and really didn't know what to do, so we had to get down to their level. A lot of the parents thought we just really messed about with the children and it wasn't really that important (Interviewee-staff member).'

Consistent interaction with the parents over time however is beginning to show that the investment is slowly making an impact

'As time as gone one and we have explained why we are playing with the children, why we have got the sand and the water . I think the parents are learning a lot more now. At first they just dropped the children off but I think a lot of the parents thought we were a babysitting service, but now they are learning the importance of play (Interviewee-staff member).'

'The children are only here a few hours and obviously with their parents more, so they [parents] do need to know what we are trying to achieve and we do need their help. It has been a struggle to be honest, but I think we are getting there (Interviewee-staff member).'

On another level Sure Start are demonstrating their commitment to parents by encouraging and supporting one parent in her ambition to work with children. She started out volunteering for the programme, and with the encouragement of the Sure

Start Team, has gone on to work towards her NVQ in Childcare and Education. She was also offered a placement by the team to undertake some practical experience at Bright Stars. She said:

'I wouldn't have got this far without Sure Start. They encouraged me to do the BLAST training and I am now working towards qualifying to become a Speech and Language Assistant, which is what I want to do. I have always wanted to do something that has a purpose to it. It's taken a long time, due to family commitments, but I'm really committed to doing this. I feel as though I am getting somewhere now and I am really excited about it (Interviewee-parent)'.

The Sure Start objective of parental participation and supporting parents to reach their own personal goals is clearly evident throughout this evaluation report. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm are committed to involving parents at all levels and should be commended on their input.

7.14 Speech and Language

A particular problem for the staff team are the huge delays in speech and language of many of the children in the area.

'Its kind of a real weak point in this area we have had quite a lot of problems with children's delayed speech (Interviewee-staff member)'.

In 2002/03 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm, in order to establish a baseline, assessed 87% of 3 year olds in primary school nurseries in the Thorntree ward. Findings revealed that 65% of children in this age group had comprehensive speech and language delay and 73% had expressive language delay. The Boosting Language and Auditory Skills Training (BLAST) programme, developed by the local Sure Start Speech and Language Therapist has been implemented in all child centered settings throughout Sure Start programmes locally and aims to develop the speech and language of all pre-school children in the area. With such ambitious goals, it is clear that the ultimate efficacy of BLAST cannot be determined for quite

some time and that children growing up in the community will need to be studied well beyond their early years before the final accounting of the success of BLAST will prove possible. Nevertheless, evidence of early efficacy has been noticed by staff of Bright Stars. One staff member said:

‘We have introduced the BLAST language programme, and since we started doing it we have noticed quite an huge improvement in the children’s speech and language. Just their ability to sit down and listen and concentrate. I think its made a vast improvement (interviewee-staff member)’.

One staff member mentioned the fact that parents often use dummies to pacify their children. This tends to hinder the speech of children, particularly when they are used well beyond the child’s first birthday when a child’s speech and language skills are just beginning to develop:

‘I was quite shocked when I started here because a lot of the children have dummies and that really hinders their speech a lot. I think its going to take a lot to get parents to stop using dummies and its going to take a while. Sometimes its just an easy solution you know if they’re a bit grizzly. We say to parents ‘lets try a different solution, lets try another way around this’. It can be difficult for the parents to take on board all of the speech and language, but we try to break it down. We do encourage parents to come in and watch the BLAST programme and watch the development. We give them work sheets to take home so we do try to get the parents involved as much as we can (interviewee-staff member)’.

Clearly staff recognise the importance of getting parents motivated in the education of their children. This will ultimately have profound consequences for the children, families and community of Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Bright Stars staff not only aim to enhance health and wellbeing during the early years but to increase the chances that children will enter school ready to learn and prove to be academically successful in school. Staff were also acutely aware that by improving, early in life, the developmental trajectories of children known to be at risk of compromised development in the early years, they may be able to contribute to breaking the all too frequent intergenerational transmission of poverty, school failure and social exclusion.

7.15 Conclusion

Bright Stars nursery is a good example of a Sure Start programme providing more than just childcare. It facilitates training, employment, access to other activities, respite and multi-agency links, opportunities that would probably not exist without it. The children benefit long term from the educational and socialisation opportunities that the programme provides, as do parents, who are able to focus their energies on themselves and their ambitions. It also helps to remove a barrier to participation in activities i.e. allowing parents to ensure their children are cared for whilst they access opportunities.

The outcomes of services offered by Bright Stars are marked. The childcare provision contributes to promoting health and social welfare, aiming to provide a sure foundation from pregnancy through birth and childhood. It also helps to remove a barrier to getting parents back to work, whilst additionally creating jobs and training opportunities for local people. By having the nursery facilities available, parents are also able to access further training opportunities offered within Sure Start. In addition, the children who are looked after not only have a play environment but also a learning environment. Although Bright Stars is a relatively new programme having only been in operation eight months, the effects of the intervention are already showing evidence of success. A longitudinal study would no doubt validate this efficacy.

8.0 Working at partnership

8.1 Partnership working at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm

Since implementation, the commitment and practice of working together, fostered by the manager of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm has been a significant accomplishment of the programme. Strong ties have been established with local agencies in the area, and previous studies (see Jackson 2002) have revealed that partnership working is one of the highest priorities to all parties involved. This is in part, due to the fact that most local agencies fully support the principle of partnership working and are willing to develop strategies to work together successfully. Evidence suggests that local agencies appear to genuinely support the over-riding aims and objectives of Sure Start and recognise the potential benefits of joint working for developing integrated services that better meet the needs of families and children (Jackson 2002). However, recruiting agencies in order to develop collaborative relationships is a continuing process for Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. This section documents the responses of these agencies after an information sharing Twilight Event was held at the Sure Start Centre.

8.2 Partnership working

Partnership or multi-agency working is now an established policy response in many areas of work including: crime prevention, community care, health services, child protection and drug and youth services. Multi-agency working aims to bring agencies together, thus ensuring that hostilities and difficulties between them can be broken down and joint partnership policies and practices can be developed. Subsequently the user receives a service that is co-ordinated, effective and to the point.

Partnership and multi-agency working are central themes of the Sure Start approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion, reflecting the current

political emphasis upon developing 'joined up' thinking into 'joined up' action. The importance of

Partnership working is recognised by the National Evaluation for Sure Start (NESS) team, who suggest:

'Working in multi-agency partnerships, developing collaborative relationships and 'joining up' with partners and other relevant groups, is one of the most important, albeit challenging and time consuming tasks, faced by [Sure Start] programme managers (Tunstall et al 2000).

8.3 The Twilight Event

Innovative in approach, the Sure Start team held a Twilight Event on 25th September 2003, inviting a myriad of agencies to come along and find out for themselves what Sure Start has to offer. The event was scheduled from 4pm until 7pm, and included a tour of the premises and the chance to liaise with staff and ask questions regarding the services Sure Start offer. Boards were also displayed, with brightly coloured posters and information leaflets on the services available. The event was well attended, with over 30 agency members visiting the programme.

8.4 Agency participants

Some time after the event (October 2003), agencies were contacted regarding their views and experiences of the event. Thirteen agencies agreed to take part in a short semi-structured telephone interview. The aim of the interview was to gauge agency responses to their 'first impression' of Sure Start, with particular emphasis on profile, visibility and expectations.

8.5 Knowledge of Sure Start prior to Twilight Event

Participants were asked questions regarding their prior perceptions of the programme before the event. Most were knowledgeable about Sure Start's underlying principles, and a few referrals had previously been made to the

programme. For others however, there was some confusion as to what Sure Start actually does.

Responses included:

'I knew that Sure Start existed before the event, but it was useful to come and gain knowledge about the specific areas they work in (Interviewee-agency member)'.

'I thought it was something to do with families, education and health issues, but after attending the event I realise that the services they offer are far superior to what I had envisaged (Interviewee-agency member)'.

Respondents were asked if they thought Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm would be useful to their client group and whether they would consider referring clients to the programme on a regular basis. Typical responses were as follows:

'Yes, some of our clients would be ideal to refer to Sure Start. I have to say I am impressed with the range of activities the programme has running (interviewee-agency member)'.

'Without a doubt (Interviewee-agency member)'.

In particular, the facilities in place for families with children with Special Needs was mentioned as a particularly useful resource.

'Yes, now that I know they have the facilities to work with children with special needs I would definitely refer clients to Sure Start (Interviewee-agency member)'.

8.6 Benefits of partnership working

Rhetoric and practice of partnerships is based on the assumption that they not only enhance outcomes but also results in synergistic rewards, where the outcomes of partnership are greater than the sum of what individuals partners contribute. Bearing this in mind, agencies were asked whether working in partnership with Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm would be beneficial to their organisation and service users. Several responses indicated that working in partnership with the programme would be advantageous.

One agency member said:

'I'm sure that working in partnership with Sure Start would provide us with the opportunity to deliver a more coordinated service (interviewee-agency member).'

'I think multi-agency working is the way forward (interviewee-agency member).'

Several agency members mentioned the cash rich nature of Sure Start programmes nationally. However, the substantial resources (10 million pounds) made available to Sure Start had a degree of political urgency attached. The government, anxious to deliver on their election promises to reduce social exclusion and child poverty implemented Sure Start with substantial financial support, in a bid to produce visible results in months rather than years. Previous studies have documented how the substantial resources invested in Sure Start can produce feelings of rivalry and competition. Collaboration between agencies can then be frustrated by tension and power struggles (Goodship and Haydon 2003). Surprisingly, in this study, tensions around this issue were absent and all participants responded to Sure Start resources in extremely positive terms:

'Yes, everyone knows that Sure Start have loads of resources, but personally I think that's a good thing (interviewee-agency member).'

'Yes, we already work in partnership with many local agencies in the area and we have found this to be very beneficial. With Sure Start resources I think we could do great things (Interviewee-agency member).'

8.7 Final Thoughts

At the close of each interview respondents were asked for their thoughts on Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Many agency members suggested that Sure Start staff deliver presentations to agencies about their work. This was a re-occurring

theme and one which has recently emerged in other local Sure Start evaluations (Community Evaluation Team 2004). For example:

'I was really impressed with the programme, however I feel they need to be shouting about it more (Interviewee-agency member)'.

'I'm sure staff at [organisation] would really like to know more about Sure Start. It would be useful if they [Sure Start staff] could come and give us a talk on the programme (interviewee-agency member)'.

Other participants spoke about how impressed they were with certain specific aspects of the programme.

'The Special Needs room was really impressive, the lighting effects were delightful!(interviewee-agency member)'.

'I loved the garden area (interviewee-agency member)'.

'Staff were friendly and helpful and showed us around answering any questions we had (interviewee-agency member)'.

'Speech and Language therapy is sorely needed. I'm pleased to see Sure Start doing the work (Interviewee-agency member)'.

8.8 Conclusion

Local agencies do appear to genuinely support the over-riding aims and objectives of Sure Start and recognise the potential benefits of joint working for developing integrated services that better meet the needs of families and children. The commitment and practice of working together being fostered by the manager of Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm should be regarded as a significant accomplishment. In addition, the innovation shown in getting those agencies with limited involvement on board is laudable, and demonstrates a commitment to the partnership collaboration.

9.0 Milestones and Targets

The Sure Start Unit ask programmes to measure their performance against two types of indicators. The first is a Public Service Agreement, the second is known as a Service Delivery Target. These are concerned with:

Objective 1: Improving Social and Emotional Development

Objective 2: Improving Health

Objective 3: Improving Children's Ability to Learn

Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities

This chapter summarises the performance of the programme by measuring this against the core indicators for each objective.

9.1 Improving Social and Emotional Development

Objective 1: Improving Social and Emotional Development

In particular, by supporting early bonding between parents and their children, helping families to function and by enabling the early identification and support of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties

Public Service Agreement Target

To reduce the proportion of children aged 0-3 in the 500 Sure Start areas who are re-registered within the space of twelve months on the Child Protection Register by 20% by 2004

Service Delivery Target

All local Sure Start programs to have agreed and implemented, in a culturally sensitive way, ways of caring for and supporting mothers with post natal depression.

100% of families with young children to have been contacted by local programmes within the first two months of birth.

How has Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm helped to meet objective 1?

- 9.1.1 In 2003/04 there were no children re-registered within the space of 12 months on the Child Protection Register (CPR) in the Thorntree and Brambles Farm Sure Start area. However it is worth noting that re-referrals may be an ineffective measure. Under fours tend to stay on the CPR for longer and once children are over four they are out of the remit of Sure start statistics. This is regardless of whether they are re-registered or not.
- 9.1.2 The programme implements a rigorous approach to Child Protection. A Child Protection policy is in place in line with the local Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC), and procedures are in place to communicate this policy to all staff. Policies related to child protection include safe recruitment, selection and vetting of staff and volunteers through police checks. A programme of induction training is also in place for all staff who receive initial or updated training on the issues of Child Protection within one month of employment. Plans are also in place for Child Protection Training to be delivered to parents. Referral procedures with the local Social Services Team are formalised and staff are clear about contacts and methods of communication.
- 9.1.3 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm strive to support Mothers with Post Natal Depression. However, the problem of identifying women with post natal depression has proved problematic in that there is no single method of identification currently being used by health professionals. The Edinburgh scale is used by some Health Visitors, however data relating to the illness is not collated by Health visitors. The Sure Start database however has 122 mothers of new babies registered with them. Of these, 13 are known to have Post Natal Depression and all are receiving appropriate advice. These figures however do need to be treated with caution, as many new mothers are often reluctant to disclose their feelings. For this reason the figures may be a lot higher than those recorded. Leaflets however, are available and plans are in

place to deliver a new mums group. Identifying and helping women with PND also aims to improve the attachment between parent and child, to reduce future problems and enhance mental health. Some work has been done to introduce a programme of assessment for new born babies (namely The Brazelton Assessment), which aims to improve bonding between infants and their mothers. This assessment is however in the early stages of development and subsequently too early to predict any improvements.

- 9.1.4 All mothers signed up to Sure Start are identified by the Health visitor working in the area, and an individual support package is put into place. This package includes support from the Health Visitor, Midwife assistant, Project workers/volunteers and, if needed, the Sure Start Clinical Psychologist.
- 9.1.5 All families with new babies are identified by the Sure Start Maternity Health Care Assistant within 2 months of delivery. In 2003 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm contacted 100% parents within two months of birth and information about services and support is available. Parents' reasons for non-registration with Sure Start are identified and addressed by the Sure Start midwife.
- 9.1.6 A new measure to increase the proportion of babies and young children under 4 living in Sure start areas who have normal levels of personal, social and emotional development for their age by x percent has recently (April 2004) been implemented by the Sure Start Unit. The target will subsequently be measured using the Foundation stage profile, and information collected centrally and loaded into the database by the Sure Start Unit.

9.2 Improving Health

Objective 2: Improving Health

In particular, by supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth

Public Service Agreement Target

To achieve by 2004 in the 500 Sure Start areas, a 10% reduction in mothers who smoke in pregnancy

Service Delivery Target

Parenting support and information to be available in all Sure Start areas

All local Sure Start programmes to give guidance on breast feeding, hygiene and safety.

A 10% reduction in children in the Sure Start area aged 0-3 admitted to hospital as an emergency with gastro-enteritis, a respiratory infection or severe injury.

How has Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm helped to meet Objective 2?

- 9.2.1 All new parents are encouraged and supported in their decision to quit smoking and an audit system has been set up for identifying potential quitters. A smoking cessation clinic is available and a 'No Smoking' event for quitters is currently being planned. Support is further expanded by offering incentive items and rewards for quitters such as aromatherapy and hairdressing vouchers, and skin care demonstrations to counteract the effects of smoking.
- 9.2.2 The objective of providing support and information to parents in the Sure Start area has been achieved. Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm, as part of its services, ensures that support and information is available to all parents. The Farm Tree Parent Group are successful in making contacts with other parents and getting information into the community. Outreach/Home visits ensure that families feel comfortable meeting staff for the first time.

9.2.3 Through the work of the Baby Clinic, New Mums Group, and Breast Feeding Support group, guidance on breast feeding, hygiene, and health and safety is available at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. The Farm Tree Parent Team are also instrumental in promoting health and safety by incorporating healthy eating options into children's parties and promoting hand washing with both adults and children. A breast-feeding peer support group is also being planned for 2004. The objective of providing advice and guidance on breast-feeding and the promotion of health and safety has been achieved.

9.2.4 A scheme 'Surely Safe' is currently operating at Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. This scheme offers parents the opportunity to buy safety equipment such as car safety seats, fireguards and safety gates, at reduced rates. This promotes the idea of safety in the home and subsequently leads to less accidents.

9.2.5 The objective of a 10% reduction in children in the Sure Start area aged 0-3 admitted to hospital as an emergency with gastro-enteritis, respiratory infection or severe injury has been difficult to achieve. This is due to a lack of baseline data regarding hospital admissions. However measures in place to achieve this target include:

- Food hygiene course
- First Aid course
- Healthy Eating course (Come and Cook)
- Home Safety Scheme: Information leaflets available
- Breast feeding encouraged to result in fewer infections and higher immunity in babies
- Support for bottle feeding i.e. sterilising bottles and making up feeds correctly

9.3

Improving Children's ability to Learn

Objective 3: Improving Children's Ability to Learn

In particular, by encouraging high quality learning environments that promote early learning, providing stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with very special needs.

Public Service Agreement Target

To achieve by 2004 for children aged 0-3 in the 500 Sure Start areas, a reduction of 5 percentage points in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring intervention by the age of 4.

Service Delivery Target

All children in Sure Start areas to have access to good quality play and learning opportunities, helping progress to early learning goals when they get to school.

Increase the use of libraries by parents with young children in the Sure Start area.

All settings in Sure Start area to be encouraged to adhere to consistent standard procedures

How has Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm helped to meet Objective 3?

9.3.1 In order to achieve the objective of reducing by 5% the number of children with speech and language problems requiring intervention a Speech and Language Co-ordinator, a Speech and Language Therapist and a Speech and Language Assistant have been employed by the programme. All 4 year olds attending nursery are formally assessed using a standardised test. A baseline figure for 2001 revealed that 54% of children assessed had a speech and language delay. To-date a 2% percent reduction has occurred, however long term evidence is expected to reveal a significant decrease in the numbers of children with a speech and language delay. During 2004, Speech and Language Therapy will also be delivered to children in nurseries and playgroups. Interventions include:

- BLAST for 3 year olds
- Making the Difference

- Individual language work
- Speech sound groups in nurseries
- Language measures for two year olds
- Training for other team members on how to identify children with problems
- Training for volunteers / parents
- Training for education staff working with children with speech and language problems
- A Dummy Tree

9.3.2 The Sure Start Centre provide access to good quality play by providing an excellent good quality outdoor play area. Protocols have recently been devised for working in partnership with other childcare providers. Other play activities such as: Parent and Toddler groups, under 2s baby Gym, over 2s Weenie Gym, Parent and Toddler swimming sessions have also been provided. These sessions enable parents and children to enjoy learning and playing together. Wraparound care via 'Daycare' is available to children whose parents work full/part-time. Support is also available to parents of children with special educational needs.

9.3.3 An increase in the use of libraries is being actively promoted by Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm. Library based activities have encouraged more parents to become library members. These include Story Sack, a book and puppet pack with training for parents on how to use them. In March 2001 only three children aged 0-3 based in Sure Start area were active library members. Since then 169 children 0-3 registered with the library. However these figures may well be underestimated as some parents may borrow books for their children with their own library ticket. Problems with data protection also limit the amount of information available to the programme regarding the addresses of children who receive books. Plans are underway to employ a specialist library worker whose remit will include, educating parents on the benefits of reading to babies and children and encouraging them to register their children with the library.

9.4 Strengthening Families and Communities

Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities

In particular, by involving families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby creating pathways out of poverty

Public Service Agreement Target

By 2004 to reduce by at least 10% the number of 0-3 year old children in Sure Start areas living in households where no one is working.

Service Delivery Target

75% of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support.

All Sure Start programmes to have parent representation on the local Sure Start Board.

Sure Start programme to develop local links between local Sure Start partnerships and Employment Service Job Centre.

Sure Start programme to work with the Sure Start Middlesbrough Partnership to help close the gap between the availability of accessible childcare for 0-3 year olds in Sure Start and other areas

How has Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm helped to meet objective 4?

- 9.4.1 A lack of baseline data on the numbers of children 0-3 living in households where no-one is working has made the objective of reducing these numbers by 10%, difficult to meet.
- 9.4.2 The objective of 75% of families reporting personal evidence in the quality of services providing family support has been difficult to assess. The programme has however carried out an in-house service user evaluation with 50 families in the area and findings were positive. A full survey has been recommended by

the Sure Start Unit for the future. In 2002/03 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm commissioned an evaluation of 'Reach' (why some parents do not attend Sure Start) and findings from this are currently being addressed.

9.4.3 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm have recently recruited several parents onto the Board bringing the total number of parent board members to 13. A creche facility is provided for parents to attend meetings.

9.4.4 A parent sub group has been developed in order to brief the Sure Start Board on parental views of mainstreaming services.

9.4.5 A jobs fair has been organised in order to look at employment training and job opportunities in the area and a job application skills workshop is in place.

9.4.6 Full Daycare for children under school age is available to parents returning to work. A strategy has been developed to establish practical links with Thorntree Primary School nursery including opening times, session changes and arrangements for meals. This will eventually provide wraparound care for families in work.

9.4.7 Parents' experiences to date regarding routes into work have been collated by the Sure Start Team and will shortly be drafted into a report.

9.4.8 Building self confidence through groups such as New Mums, and volunteer courses all act as pathways into employment.

9.4.9 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm continually strive to employ local people within the programme in order to demonstrate the underlying philosophy of Sure Start which is to engage parents from the outset.

9.4.10 Links have been forged with the local Job Centre.

9.4.11 Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm, working in partnership with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) are attempting to close the current gap between the availability of childcare for 0-3 year olds in the area. A Training course to prepare parents for work in the childcare sector (Making Choices) has been devised and implemented. This will, subsequently create more childcare places for families in the community.

10.0 Conclusion

Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm is located in accessible premises and provides a focal point where families can access information and support. It brings together under one roof a referral point to all the major organisations who can assist in giving children under four the best possible start in life.

Evaluation data to-date has evidenced a general consensus that the aims of Sure Start are realistic, worthwhile and achievable. The programme is developing well after three years and a great deal of this can be attributed to the working ethos of management, staff and volunteers and their commitment to the inclusion of parents in the area. Parents have overwhelmingly gained benefit from Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm with all interviewees stating that their involvement with the project has had a positive impact on their lives and the lives of their children. Challenges remain however. Care needs to be taken that volunteers are not marginalised within the programme and the nomination of a volunteer willing to liaise with staff and disseminate information to other volunteers would be useful means of communication. Currently Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles is reviewing its board membership in order to initiate wider participation of parents in decision making processes. Parents were recently asked to attend a board meeting (8th December 2003) in order to highlight barriers to involvement. This gave parents the opportunity to air their thoughts and grievances and more importantly gave Sure Start an insight into ways they can move forward.

It must also be recognised that for many families in the area, women are often the sole carer of their children. It can also be assumed that this prescribed social role also applies to families not using the project. It needs to be recognised that many working class women have internalised a self deprecating self assessment and sense of inadequacy *vis a vis* those in professional positions, which in turn prevents them seeking help from Sure Start for fear of rejection and criticism. While disparagement and scrutiny is clearly not within the remit of Sure Start, this message does need to be disseminated loud and clear to those women in the community who fear they will be judged unfavourably in their child rearing skills.

Data shows that after three years of operation Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm now has a well established multi-agency ethos and practice which has been crucial to ensuring the success of the project. However data collection and information sharing has been experienced by some as 'problematic'. At this point data is shared on a 'need to know' basis only and with the permission of service users.

The issue of seconded staff, thought by some to be not 'fully signed up' to the Sure Start ethos, is problematic and difficult to overcome. However, given that some staff seconded to Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm work only one day a week, integration for these workers can be a particularly slow process. Although the issue of integration has been recognised by the Sure Start manager and training has been delivered in order to promote an enhanced understanding of the way different agencies view service issues, this training could be built upon and may go some way in helping to forge closer working relationships.

Persuading local agencies to work in partnership with Sure Start has been carried out with innovation. Data collected from agencies attending the Twilight Event was positive. Local agencies do appear to genuinely support the over-riding aims and objectives of Sure Start and recognise the potential benefits of joint working for developing integrated services that better meet the needs of families in the area.

Milestones and targets are clearly being reached in most areas of the programme. The paucity of baseline data, particularly on women with post natal depression, and families returning to work, makes it difficult to assess whether targets are being reached in these areas.

In essence, Sure Start Thorntree and Brambles Farm has progressed exceedingly well over the past three years and is developing its practice daily in relation to families with children under four.

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