

**SureStart**

**Thurnscoe**

Annual Report: Year 2

March 2005

Written by  
Becky Gulc

## **Acknowledgements**

QA would like to thank all those who contributed to the evaluation this year. We greatly appreciate the input of Sure Start staff and we are also grateful to Sure Start partners and representatives from other local organisations for their contribution to the research. Most importantly, we would like to thank the parents and children who contributed to the research.

## Contents

1.	Introduction .....	4
2.	Methods.....	4
2.1	Interviews with Sure Start Staff .....	5
2.2	Consultation with Parents / Carers .....	5
2.3	Consultation with Children / Observation .....	6
3.	Executive Summary .....	8
4.	Key Findings.....	12
4.1	Staff Training.....	12
4.2	Training for parents and carers / employment target.....	18
4.3	The involvement of fathers within the programme.....	42
4.4	A child's perspective.....	54
4.5	The health worker's position.....	61
4.6	Opinions of the programme's overall approach to targets.....	68
5.	Conclusions and Recommendations.....	73

## 1. Introduction

This report presents a summary of evaluation activity undertaken during the period August 2004 to March 2005, which forms the second year of evaluation for the programme<sup>1</sup>.

The aims of the evaluation for this year were focussed on several key areas:

- Staff training;
- Training provision for parents and carers;
- The employment target;
- The involvement of fathers within the programme;
- The health worker's position;
- Opinions of the programme's overall approach to targets;
- Gathering feedback from children.

The programme also commissioned separate and full evaluations of the following services / roles within the programme in early 2004:

- The home safety pack;
- The swimming sessions;
- The role of the seconded Educational Psychologist.

These evaluations were undertaken prior to the year two evaluation activity. Whilst the findings from these evaluations are commented upon in the report, these reports can be found elsewhere as stand-alone documents.

## 2. Methods

It is important to note that due to the budget available for the evaluation each area was covered quite broadly, with for example staff and parents / carers being consulted about a number of different areas at once. This was instead of, for example, holding particular group discussions on a specific topic such as the involvement of dads within the programme. However, some aspects were explored in more depth, such as parental training. The research team are happy that the methodology adopted allowed for a wide variety of parents and carers to have their say on a number of important issues.

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<sup>1</sup> The report was approved by the Programme Manager in June 2005; therefore comments have been inserted to highlight some of the areas the programme is now working on and changes that have been made.

To meet the aims identified above the following methods were chosen.

- Interviews with Sure Start staff
- Interviews / group interviews / participatory appraisal techniques / questionnaires with parents / carers
- Consultation with children / observation
- Case study with a father who has benefited from involvement in the programme
- Interviews with training providers that have worked in partnership with the programme
- Interviews with representatives from organisations the programme has links with in relation to helping and encouraging people into employment

The following sections outline each of these methods in turn.

### ***2.1 Interviews with Sure Start Staff***

A mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews were undertaken with thirteen staff members employed by the programme between November 2004 and February 2005<sup>2</sup>. At least one employee was interviewed from each of the Sure Start teams (management; outreach; administration; seconded staff and the nursery team). Staff members were consulted on a range of themes including the following:

- Training received / training needs / the programmes' emphasis on staff development
- Opinions of the programme's approach and progress towards the employment target, and opinions of parental training
- How informed staff feel about the programme's approach towards targets in general, and whether the right approaches are adopted
- The input from health workers
- The involvement of dads within the programme

### ***2.2 Consultation with Parents / Carers***

Parents and carers were consulted with through a variety of means for this year's evaluation.

A **self-completion questionnaire** was sent out to every parent / carer that had taken part in some Sure Start training, in order to gather views on the training and establish any benefits of this. They were also asked about their employment status and aspirations. A freepost envelope was included with each questionnaire, only two were returned to QA so these were followed up by telephone. In total 13 questionnaires were completed.

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<sup>2</sup> Three of these are no longer working for Sure Start Thurnscoe (February 2005).

Members of the evaluation team also attended the following Sure Start events and activities to consult with parents and carers on the topics of training and employment; involvement of dads in Sure Start and the support and information provided by health workers:

- The drop-in session at St Hilda's Community Centre
- Bumps to Babies
- Story and Rhyme
- The re-launch of the Parents Forum

Participatory appraisal techniques were adopted and used at some of the above groups. PA techniques involve using visual methods of research; these help researchers overcome going into a setting with any pre-conceived ideas. The techniques are also forward-thinking; they involve encouraging respondents to think about solutions to problems. Examples of the completed PA tools can be found throughout the report. The tools which were designed to meet the aims of the evaluation were the following:

- Stick Man: 'The thought of training / learning or starting a job makes me feel...'
- Graffiti Wall: 'What training / help with employment would you like?'
- Spider Diagram: 'I'd like to.....' [asking parents what they'd like to be doing now that they're not]
- Finding solutions: how they could do what they want to, asking why, where, who and how?
- Graffiti Wall: 'How do we get more dads involved?'

Whilst some parents / carers wrote their responses on the flip-chart paper themselves a researcher was always present to talk parents and carers through the questions and to follow-up any comments made. Researchers also wrote-down responses for some parents / carers when it appeared that low-literacy skills may have been an issue.

Through some of the sessions it was more practical to undertake one-to-one / paired interviews with parents / carers to ascertain their views. They were asked the same (and some additional) questions as the PA techniques involved. Where possible the views gathered through these interviews have been transferred to the flip-charts.

### ***2.3 Consultation with Children / Observation***

It was decided that it would also be useful to obtain a child's perspective of the Sure Start programme, to establish the ways in which involvement with Sure Start impacts upon their lives. This part of the evaluation was completed using different approaches: observation of a popular Sure Start activity session (Story and Rhyme) and asking children for their opinions of the session. Digital photographs of this session were taken.

A short colourful feedback form was created to use with the children. This contained key characters from nursery rhymes which they sing at the Story and Rhyme session as well as George the Dragon (Thurnscoe's mascot) and other pictures to make them as interesting as possible to the children. Parents of the children who were asked for their

opinions were encouraged to help complete the forms with the children, and to offer their own opinions of how the sessions benefit their child. All parents / carers signed a consent form for their children to take part, and to have their photographs taken for the evaluation.

## ***2.4 Case study with a father***

As part of this year's evaluation one focus is the involvement of dads within the programme, it was felt that a case study with a father who has particularly benefited from his involvement with Sure Start would be appropriate. The Programme Manager suggested the father and with consent a telephone interview was undertaken with him.

The key themes of the case study were:

- Involvement in Sure Start
- Involvement in their children's lives
- Life before Sure Start
- Impact of involvement with Sure Start
- Hopes for the future

## ***2.5 Interviews with Training Providers / Employment Representatives***

With emphasis being placed on assessing the training provision and approach to the employment target it was important to consult with partners working in these areas. Sure Start Thurnscoe provided QA with a contact list of seven representatives the programme has links with in terms of training and employment, from these six telephone interviews were completed.

The aims of these interviews were to establish the success of the relationships between these agencies and Sure Start, and to gather opinions of the local programme's approach towards helping parent's access training and employment.

### **3. Executive Summary**

#### **Staff Training and Development**

- Sure Start Thurnscoe is committed to supporting staff training and development, it represents an investment in its staff across all teams, both in terms of 'technical' job-specific training and 'personal development' training as well as compulsory training
- The general consensus is that staff feel able to discuss any training they are interested in with their supervisors, and staff feel that the programme is committed to their development
- There is indication that the programme is viewing the staff training strategically, with discussion about how they will be able to charge other organisations for the training Sure Start staff can administer once in the Children's Centre. This is something which could be developed with other members of staff this year
- Training and development requirements are identified by supervisors as well as staff themselves as part of the appraisal process, although there are opportunities throughout the year to discuss training needs and possible courses
- Information on different training is openly available to all staff members, although it could be ensured that staff members are able to view any training information that is sent to other members of staff
- Although staff haven't undertaken smoking cessation training themselves, as intended in the original delivery plan, the programme has links with a Smoking Cessation Specialist who will attend Sure Start events; the health worker also works towards reducing the number of expectant mothers smoking. The programme is also taking on a new Smoking Policy
- Some staff would welcome more formalised sharing of knowledge acquired through training, especially within the different teams when training can be relevant and of interest to several members of staff
- Staff need to be helped to set clear learning objectives and review and evaluate any training completed, this will be important if the programme is hoping to go for a British Standard in the future

#### **Training / Employment consultation**

- Despite clear efforts the programme is currently struggling with the employment target and with ensuring attendance at Sure Start training
- Parents that have attended Sure Start training are extremely positive about it
- There is a need however to collect feedback forms from anyone that has undertaken any training in order to systematically evaluate training provision
- Not all parents are interested in training but many are. When parents are probed, it is clear that the main barriers to accessing training / employment are childcare responsibilities and a lack of confidence

- It may be worth introducing a buddy system and volunteers system to make people feel more comfortable about attending Sure Start sessions, including any training<sup>3</sup>
- There is a need to keep parents up-to-date with what's happening with Sure Start training they've expressed an interest in, and there could be more publicity of training
- There is indication that the programme could involve parents in delivering training where possible. It is recommended that the programme use case studies of positive stories of local people who have undertaken training / found employment through Sure Start in the newsletters
- Partnerships with local training providers and employment agencies have been formed but there is indication that the programme needs to sustain and re-affirm these relationships. Partners should be informed of staffing changes and more signposting is needed – encouragingly partners are very willing to work more closely with Sure Start in the future and it's felt the Children's Centre will help to build relationships further

### **Involvement of Fathers**

- There is indication that whilst the number of dads involved in the programme on a consistent level hasn't been considerable, where they have been involved they have been given a sense of ownership and responsibility for the activities they've been involved in
- The programme could reaffirm commitment from all members of staff to working with and involving fathers, there needs to be more of a joined-up approach. Whilst this is important generally, it is especially important if the programme isn't going to have a dedicated dad's worker
- All outreach workers should continue door-knocking to encourage parental involvement; and all staff members should ensure they interact with dads as much as mums and to try and integrate them into existing groups they're new to
- All members of staff should also try to keep dads up to date with activities they could take part in
- The programme may benefit from having a dedicated dads worker if resources allow this. This research has found that consistency is important for dads and will be important in the future considering the changes that have already taken place
- Sure Start Thurnscoe may want to follow-up the dads who expressed interest in being part of the Parent's Forum before this becomes too established once again and potentially off-putting to them as 'new' faces. This may be an area where the buddy system which parents were enthusiastic about could come into play
- The programme should harness the interest of dads / granddads to become Sure Start volunteers
- It is important that any dads group be more child-orientated than it has been in the past, activities such as football could be used as an incentive for involvement rather than a regular occurrence

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<sup>3</sup> Something which the programme is now introducing and formalising.

- There is indication that the programme could improve awareness of staffing changes amongst parents and try to ensure a smooth and continuing of services being delivered when there are changes in staff<sup>4</sup>

### **Children's Consultation**

- Children clearly enjoy attending the Story and Rhyme sessions and for different reasons
- The sessions provide an opportunity for several of the key objectives of Sure Start to be met, this was evidenced throughout the observation and identified when talking to children and their parents
- The Sure Start workers do all they can to involve all of the children in the session, regular attendees as well as new families
- The fact that the session has George the Dragon 'and friends' associated with it appears to work well, all of the children appear to really like this character and look forward to getting him out and putting him to bed
- The reward system of a sticker and book for attendance appears to work well and the children enjoy receiving these, this could be developed for other Sure Start activities

### **Health Worker Consultation**

- The programme has experienced difficulty developing a relationship with health, an issue which many local programmes face. There has been a lack of input from health and a lack of start-point data and information about new births
- Encouragingly the seconded midwife has already made a seemingly significant impact on the programme, and some of the difficulties in relation to data collection and passing on key information are now being redressed
- Realistically the involvement of the midwife is being viewed as a starting point in terms of the relationship with health, there is still room for more involvement from health, especially in terms of the strategic side of the programme and learning from Sure Start ways of working
- The activities that Kate has developed appear to be gaining success, and parents feel able to ask her questions they would normally keep to themselves or ask family members
- The addition of Kate to the Sure Start team had provided the community with a much-needed friendly, recognisable and consistent health-worker face

### **Consultation on Targets**

- There is indication that staff knowledge of progress towards targets could be improved - raising awareness of the areas the programme is doing well in as well as areas that are proving more difficult
- It is important that staff meetings are regularly held<sup>5</sup> and that any members of staff who aren't able to attend the meetings are fully updated in what is discussed

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<sup>4</sup> This is now done through the programme's newsletters.

- The consultation has suggested that more could be done to give staff a sense of how they are contributing to the bigger picture of Sure Start
- It's felt that the programme is working well towards most targets, although doing particularly well in terms of social and emotional development and educating and working with children
- Difficult targets for this programme include childcare; strengthening families and communities; the employment target. In the past health targets have been a big issue
- It's felt the programme has the right approach to its targets overall, attracting and sustaining parental involvement to multiple activities is the main challenge as is continual monitoring and evaluation of projects

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<sup>5</sup> Staff meetings are now regularly held monthly on a Wednesday afternoon.

## 4. Key Findings

This section presents the key findings of the research. Findings are presented under each evaluation theme:

- Staff training;
- Training provision for parents and carers / employment target;
- The involvement of fathers within the programme;
- A child's perspective;
- The health worker's position;
- Opinions of the programme's overall approach to targets.

### 4.1 Staff Training

All staff members were asked during the interviews to discuss their experience of training since being employed by Sure Start Thurnscoe. Records of training were also provided to QA in late 2004. This section summarises the key findings of the discussions.

#### 4.1.1 Training Undertaken

Sure Start staff have undertaken a wide-variety of training whilst employed by the programme, as listed below:

Team	Training Received to date
Management Team	Child Protection Child Protection, Domestic Abuse ECDL Maternity Alliance HNC Early Childhood Studies Working Family Tax / Childcare Tax Credit Management Skills in Early Years Word for Windows Excel for Windows Outlook / email Webster-Stratton
Outreach Team	Microsoft Outlook Microsoft Word Microsoft Access Baby Massage Dial a Ride Test Welfare Rights and MASU Developing Basic Benefits SHARE – Information Session SHARE training Claiming Disability Living Allowance and AA Bereavement Gypsy Conference

	Better Meetings
Nursery Team	Child Protection Sign Language SENCO Appointed Person First Aid Child and Baby First Aid Microsoft Excel Microsoft Outlook Birth to Three Matters Accelerated Learning
Administration Team	NEBOSH General Certificate Data Protection and Information Security Child Protection Appointed First Aid Support and Supervision Building Assertiveness and Confidence Minute Taking Skills ECDL Excel for Windows Business National Certificate Year 1 Time Management Basic Excel Communicating and Listening Skills MS Outlook MS Excel Intermediate
Seconded Staff	Dial a Ride Test Baby Massage Aqua Natal Maternity Alliance Child Protection DEBT Training MS Excel MS Word Webster-Stratton

The training undertaken by Sure Start staff has ranged from compulsory courses such as Child Protection; to group ICT courses and First Aid through to more role-specific training such as Management Skills in Early Years for the former Early Years Co-ordinator, and Aqua Natal for the health worker. The above list shows that the programme is also supporting its staff to undertake personal development training, helping staff to develop 'soft-skills' such as confidence and assertiveness as well as skills such as time management.

The records show that there has been a good spread of training undertaken by staff across the different teams and across different people within each of the teams<sup>6</sup>. Clearly there are some forms of training that more than one staff member could have undertaken (and in some cases they have done), for example learning about benefit entitlements, issues surrounding bereavement etc. What is clear however through

<sup>6</sup> A couple of newer staff members had not yet undertaken any training, but were booked in for training in early 2005.

discussions with staff is that they know who they can approach within the Sure Start team for advice on a particular issue, and people take responsibility for and pride in knowing they are the main point of contact for particular issues, if they are. Staff feel that the training allocation is fair.

Sure Start staff were generally enthusiastic about the training that they had undertaken, and they were all grateful for it. A majority had found all the training they'd undertaken to be useful and were able to apply it to their work regularly. One person mentioned how their training is already helping them to put together procedures that they will need for the new building. Staff were particularly enthusiastic when they'd undertaken some form of training which resulted in them being able to offer parents particular advice or knowledge on a subject.

Some staff mentioned however that the training they've undertaken isn't something they could apply to their everyday work, but they nevertheless could see opportunities where they may need to apply their training in the future. Some staff members had found some of the training too basic.

Much of the training that staff access is free, and this doesn't appear to affect the quality of the courses attended. Whilst staff turnover can be quite high within programmes such as Sure Start it is encouraging to note that the three members of staff that are undertaking more long-term courses that the programme pays for remain working for the programme.

#### **4.1.2 Commitment to Personal and Professional Development**

Through the interviews it became apparent that staff members are committed to their own personal and professional development. They take responsibility for their own learning but with the support of their managers and the programme manager. This is evident in the fact that training needs are just as likely to be identified by staff members as they are by supervisors in an appraisal setting and by other members of staff. Staff feel able to mention any training they're interested in.

*"I think if she [the Programme Manager] sees something and she feels it's appropriate to what you are doing she will offer it to her staff. Likewise I think if there's a course they want to go on she will organise it for them"*

Staff members are keen to develop new ideas and new ways of working, and it is clear that even if some of them had done similar training beforehand, they were keen to update and enhance their skills for their roles with Sure Start. Those members of staff who have undertaken longer-term courses are committed to how what they are learning could benefit the programme both now and in the future, once the Children's Centre is up and running. All three of these staff members also feel that they have learnt a great deal from these courses, and they have felt motivated to succeed more so because the programme is paying for the course and supporting them through it.

It therefore appears that the longer-term staff training has been a success due to the support provided by the programme overall and individual line-managers and the programme manager. Staff members discussed how they have been able to work on assignments during work hours, and when a course takes place on an evening they would be given the time back in lieu, or they would be given day release for the course.

*“if they want to take up any training where possible we will fund it and we give day release or hours back if it’s on an evening inline with our policy.”*

This support as well as dedication of staff themselves has resulted in mutually beneficial training. As one staff member explained:

*“one of the main stipulations of the training is that I had to have a lot of support because if not I was going to struggle to pass it”*

#### **4.1.3 Sharing of Knowledge**

Whilst most members of staff feel there’s enough sharing of information regarding the training that is available, there is indication from some of the interviews that this could be improved. It was felt to be important that there should be a central file of training information that is open to everyone, thus avoiding information being sent to someone who’s perhaps not interested in the training and discarding it. A majority of staff however felt that this information is readily available to everyone.

Respondents were asked whether they feel that there is enough sharing of information following the training that people undertake, there was no unanimous response to this. Discussion of training that people have been on appears to be quite informal and general at present; this suits most members of staff:

*“I don’t think there’s the usual blanket cascading or dissemination that you might get in some organisations, I think that would be a waste of everybody’s time really”*

The review and feedback process appears to be more formalised for those in the management team, when they are perhaps trying out different courses for other staff members to go on.

Some staff mentioned that they would just ask for more information about training that someone had been on, i.e. that the onus is on them to seek out the information. There were however some suggestions that more could be done to disseminate more formally information on courses that may have been of interest to several members of staff, baby massage for example.

It was mentioned that training people have gone on is sometimes discussed in staff meetings, but some respondents mentioned these meetings haven’t always been

regularly held<sup>7</sup>. This was felt to be an issue in terms of boosting morale when all staff are working to capacity:

*“to show commitment to the staff I think we should really stick with the meetings and even if we haven’t got a full agenda still run with them”*

One suggestion was to have an annual or six-monthly event for staff members; part of this event could involve raising awareness of staff roles and responsibilities as well as sharing any relevant training knowledge.

#### **4.1.4 Current / Future Training Needs**

None of the staff members had any urgent training needs and some didn’t feel they had any at all, although they added that they keep their eyes open as to what’s available. A lack of urgency combined with a lot of day to day work commitments was also cited by some staff members as being the reason why some training that they had been allocated had not been undertaken.

Personal circumstances were also cited as reasons why some people hadn’t been able to undertake particular training, or progress to the next level. One staff member discussed that they had been encouraged and supported to undertake some particular training and wasn’t pressured into it in any way. This person mentioned that if they progress to the next level they will be able deliver training courses to local companies and draw-in money for sustainability of the new building. This person has been supported to wait until the timing is right for this course, as she will need to be fully-committed to it.

A couple of respondents mentioned that there is training they are interested in, but they are unable to source it, working with music and children as well as foundation stage planning were mentioned. Others mentioned they are interested in undertaking further training in areas such as Child Protection; law-related training; business studies; mental health; anger management; welfare rights; baby signing; baby massage as well as cultural diversity. It’s clear that some of these courses could perhaps be delivered by other members of the Sure Start team. Time is clearly an issue however, with some staff mentioning that the team is working to capacity at present.

Staff members were also asked whether they felt that Sure Start staff overall were in need of any particular training. From a management point of view this would more easily be identified once they get into the new building, although new members of staff would have to go on the necessary training. It was also mentioned that some members of staff would have to be trained in relation to the new smoking policy the programme is developing. It was also suggested that some training in counselling would be beneficial:

*“perhaps more counselling, if we were trained in counselling then we’d be able to help parents more with their needs. Make it so that it’s on-hand really. ”*

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<sup>7</sup> Staff meetings are now regularly held on a monthly basis.

*"I think if we were all trained then we'd at least know we were answering and dealing with it appropriately, 'cos sometimes if you're not trained you can offer out advice and it might not be appropriate".*

Since these interviews were completed the programme has started to work with a trained counsellor.

Another suggestion was more staff training to do with understanding substance misuse, although they are able to signpost people to the appropriate agencies if needed<sup>8</sup>. In addition to this it was suggested that the team may benefit from not training per se but some team development work. It was mentioned that it can be difficult for the team to get together socially because most of them have children but it would be beneficial to have some form of away day.

*"I don't know about training but I think we could benefit from just getting together now and again, even if it's based in work or not. Staff meetings or general team meetings I think are very important; because we run with the statutory requirements, the partnership board meeting and regulations of the Sure Start Unit and I think sometimes there's not enough emphasis on our time"*

Another suggestion was some training to do with developing and retaining parental involvement in the programme. This may be particularly prominent at a time when the programme is struggling to get the number of parents / carers it needs at the various activity sessions:

*"I think because we've all got a role in this, in terms of recruitment and parental involvement, and not just the marketing side, and different methods of marketing but also what we know about involving parents, what are the key factors in the way that we operate in our particular roles, as representatives of Sure Start as a whole"*

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<sup>8</sup> As of June 2005, some members of staff will now be attending substance misuse courses.

## 4.2 Training for parents and carers / employment target

Various methods were adopted and various stakeholders consulted to establish views of Sure Start training for parents and carers and views towards employment in the area. This included questionnaires and one-to-one discussions with parents / carers at various Sure Start activity sessions (using PA techniques in some cases), interviews with members of staff as well as interviews with local training providers and employment representatives.

### 4.2.1 Situation So Far

Sure Start Thurnscoe have offered various types of training to local families, ranging from Webster Stratton parenting courses to computer courses as the following table highlights, it is mostly non-vocational. The programme also runs 'Time Out' sessions once a week wherein various taster courses have been offered to parents. The programme also runs baby massage training for parents which they get a certificate for and baby signing, whilst not a training course as such Sure Start workers have also helped some parents to learn to read. They've also run a course from English Heritage which involved three sessions; costume from Victorian times; making sugar paste flowers and making a screen for the new building. A key focus of the training that has been offered is in terms of confidence-building, this is felt to be a big issue for local families.

Until recently the programme's Family Development Worker took on the role of arranging the training for parents, this worker has since left their post. One of the outreach workers is now responsible for arranging the training and taster courses which take place at the Time Out sessions.

**Table 1: Training Courses offered**

Training	Numbers accessing training
Beauty Course	8
Cook and Eat	12
Webster Stratton	10
Computer Course	5
Food Hygiene	7
TOPS Course	6
Health and Safety	Not available
Childcare NVQ	Not available
First Aid	Not available

**N.B. These are the figures up to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2004.**

There is concern amongst management and other members of staff that interest in and take-up of Sure Start training has declined recently. In the early days of the programme they would have some kind of training on offer for parents every week, but as the former Family Development Worker explained, *"but then it just sort of dropped, people didn't want to do it"*. Attendance at training was felt to be much better in the early days

of the programme, one of the parents discussed that this is due to the fact that a core group of parents were quite heavily involved in the programme then, whereas children have grown-up and parents have moved on. Many of the parents who are involved in Sure Start now have very young children, as such it's felt that training is not a priority for them.

*"last year there was a lot of training, and people were really keen, but what we've found with this is that, there's one whole generation that have grown up now, they're older, 'cos all their kids at school, so it was quite a big shock and like starting again really"*

*"it's been a bit of a problem lately because the numbers have dropped, because of the new generation coming up there's a lot of people with young babies and there's a lot of problems at the drop-ins, because they need to be with their children, because that's the main thrust of Sure Start"*

A lack of attendance has been a real issue in terms of training recently for the programme; this is despite parents continuing to express interest in training. The Family Development Worker explained how this lack of attendance affected one partnership:

*"towards the end, the beautician was here, and they just said 'oh I don't want to do it today', and it just dropped, it's very strange. They finished at St Hilda's and she [the beautician] came here in the afternoon, and there were lots of people, and they said 'oh I can't be bothered' and I was having to get people, but it wasn't like a course then, but you can't make people"*

Similarly parents have expressed interest in undertaking a course in Childcare, several parents began an NVO course in this but many subsequently left, leaving two parents attending. Despite this encouragingly one of these parents has gone on to do travel and tourism at college whilst the other is still studying. The programme also recently arranged to run taster sessions in childcare at the Time Out sessions which parents expressed an interest in, once again attendance was very poor (see the partnership section for more details). Staff mentioned that it's very difficult to get any feedback into why people change their minds about such activities. To date the programme hasn't been collecting feedback forms on the training that's been undertaken, although some members of staff believe forms have been collected.

Despite the overall perception of attendance at the Time Out sessions being poor<sup>9</sup> (they have advertised these sessions on the radio), it was possible for staff to discuss some positive stories. The sessions were felt to be helping to involve dads more because they have laptops available and an IT tutor on hand:

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<sup>9</sup> This was the general perception at the time of the staff interviews

*“we haven't had many, because it's right at the other end of the village, we're trying to spread out a bit more, but one of the granddads, he started this course, and he said he'd never go anywhere near a computer, now he's taken the booklet home and wants to do it, and that's really positive because he's got literacy skills problems”*

*“it's just building up, we've had a few mums on computers too, and they can either do a course with Jo the tutor, or in the village in the library they've just extended the IT, so once they get the idea, 'cos people are scared, I was, so that's a start and they can go on and do all sorts of things at the library”*

Sure Start Thurnscoe has never had a formal strategy for what they would like to cover in terms of training, although there have been certain types of training that they wanted to offer:

*“we do Caroline Webster-Stratton still, and we did TOPS but they dropped out of that too”*

Members of staff explained that they have tried to build training on the basis of what families seem interested in. It was mentioned that trips to Brodsworth Hall and Castle Howard have helped to identify an interest in archaeology, which is an area where there maybe a course in the future:

*“they absolutely loved it, and from there we realised that they're interested in archaeology and history so we're developing a course on it, and we're trying to organise a dig before the building goes up”*

The Family Development Worker explained that in a part-time position it was proving difficult to spend as much time organising training as she would have liked. She had undertaken some Share training and felt this would be something that parents could be interested in, although she had been too busy with other things to arrange this by the time of the interview:

*“for that I can have just one, or ten, and they don't have to come every week, it'll suit the group. When they start they can do Share at school hopefully and all the way through and it's very hands-on, you can get a qualification but you don't have to”*

In terms of the employment target the programme has had some success in helping some dads return to work, through helping them make links with agencies and employers, helping them with application forms and preparing for the interviews etc. The programme has also offered a lot of one-to-one support to families, helping them to build up confidence, self-esteem and develop their social skills so that they're more 'work ready'.

The programme has also made links with various different agencies that have been able to come in and talk to parents about training and employment opportunities, as well as informing them of funding they could access, support with childcare etc.

The programme has made links with the following partners with varying degrees of success to deliver the training and support parents into employment: WEA; the Open University; Adult Learning; Action Team for Jobs; Jobcentre Plus and lone parent advisors; Credit Union; Citizens Advice and local colleges.

#### **4.2.2 Parents / carers opinions of training received / Opinions of Sure Start training**

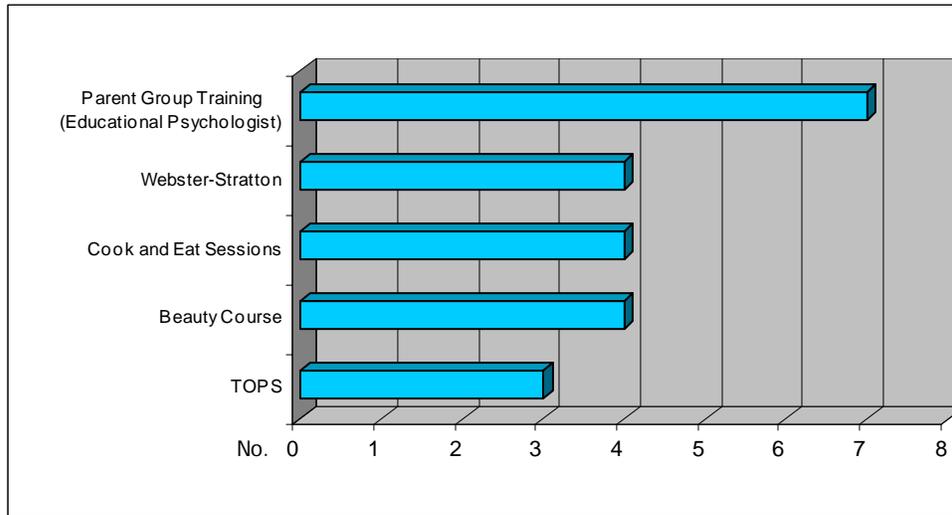
As feedback forms hadn't been collected by the programme it was felt to be important to gather some information from parents that have accessed Sure Start training. Sure Start Thurnscoe supplied QA Research with a contact list of everybody that had taken part in Sure Start training to-date. A self-completion questionnaire was designed by QA and approved by the programme's family development worker. The aim of the questionnaire was to establish opinions of the training received, as well as establishing views towards employment and future training needs. The questionnaire was then posted out to every contact along with a Freepost envelope for return to QA.

In total two questionnaires were sent back to QA. Due to the low response rate QA followed this up by contacting people over the telephone, a further 11 questionnaires were completed over the phone therefore 13 questionnaires were completed in total. The findings are presented below. In addition to these survey results, findings from previous consultation with parents /carers that had attended group training run by the Educational Psychologist have been incorporated into this section where possible. Findings from informal discussions with parents / carers at Sure Start activities have also been included.

#### **Training Undertaken**

The following chart shows the different courses that respondents had undertaken. Seven parents / carers had taken part in the parental group training run by the Educational Psychologist who is seconded to the programme. Four respondents had undertaken Caroline Webster-Stratton training; four had attended Cook and Eat sessions and four had attended a beauty course. Three respondents had undertaken the TOPS course.

**Figure 4.2.2.1 Number of respondents by type of course**

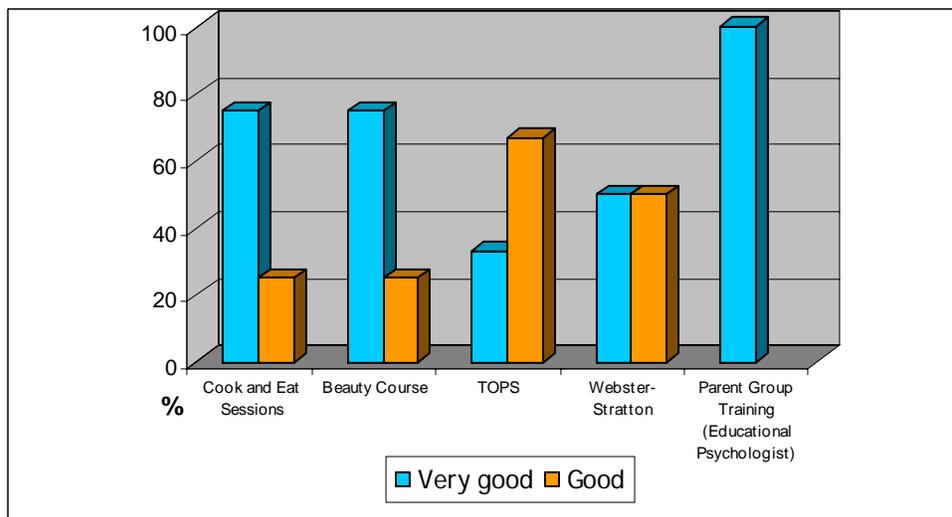


Sources: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire and Educational Psychologist questionnaire.

For all courses except for the Educational Psychologist training, respondents had taken part in the training over six months ago.

The various training courses that respondents have attended are rated extremely well as the following chart shows. Everyone that had taken part in the parent group training run by the Educational Psychologist said the training had been 'very good'. For all other training all of those taking part said the courses were either good or very good.

**Figure 4.2.2.2 How the training is rated**



Sources: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire and Educational Psychologist questionnaire.

Respondents were asked what they found particularly useful or enjoyable about the training. As the following quotes demonstrate, practical as well as soft skills have been developed throughout the courses. It is also clear that the videos used throughout some of the training courses have been well received.

*"Learning about skin and nails and how to look after them properly"* [Beauty course]

*"Learnt a lot"* [Beauty course and TOPS]

*"Helped to look at other ways to bring up children"* [TOPS]

*"Cook and Eat taught me more than I knew, very informative"* [Cook and Eat]

*"Mixed with other people, learnt how to make cheap and easy meals and learnt how to follow a recipe"* [Cook and Eat]

*"Found strategies useful when dealing with children's behaviour"* [Caroline Webster-Stratton]

*"Videos and the strategy and ideas"* [Caroline Webster-Stratton]

*"Very useful on how to deal with difficult children"* [Caroline Webster-Stratton]

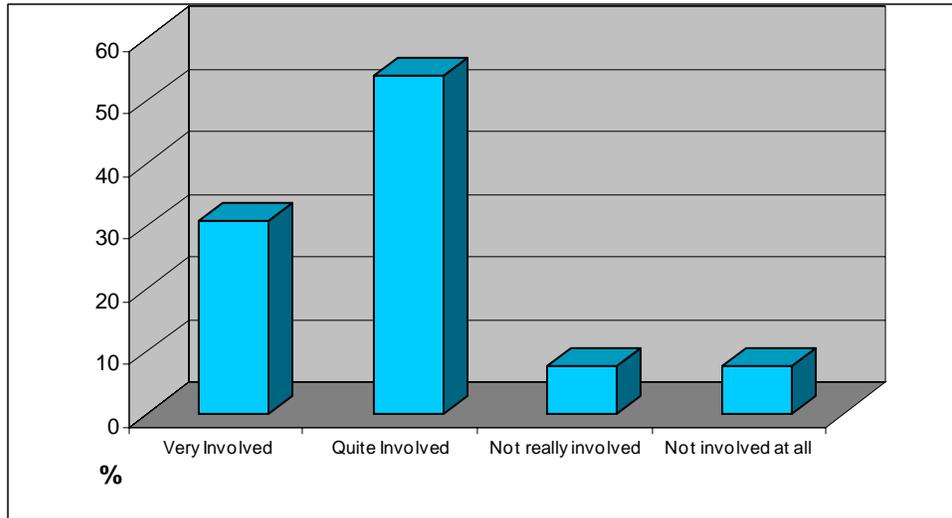
*"The whole training session was enjoyable"* [Educational Psychologist parental training]

*"Video, talk and group participation"* [Educational Psychologist parental training]

In terms of improvements, it was mentioned that the programme could try and encourage greater numbers of parents / carers to take part in the training, especially when it involves group work. One respondent felt that the Webster-Stratton programme could have been longer. There were no particular difficulties with attendance mentioned by these respondents, although one person mentioned that the Cook and Eat sessions were stopped because not enough people were attending, which highlights attendance overall as an issue. One person stopped attending a course when they fell pregnant, and another stopped when they gave birth.

Respondents were asked how involved they feel parents / carers are in deciding what is covered in the courses and in giving feedback on courses. A majority feel that parents are quite involved (54%) whereas 31% feel they are very involved. A small proportion of parents feel they're not very involved.

**Figure 4.2.2.3 How involved parents / carers are in course content / providing feedback**



Source: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire, base: 13.

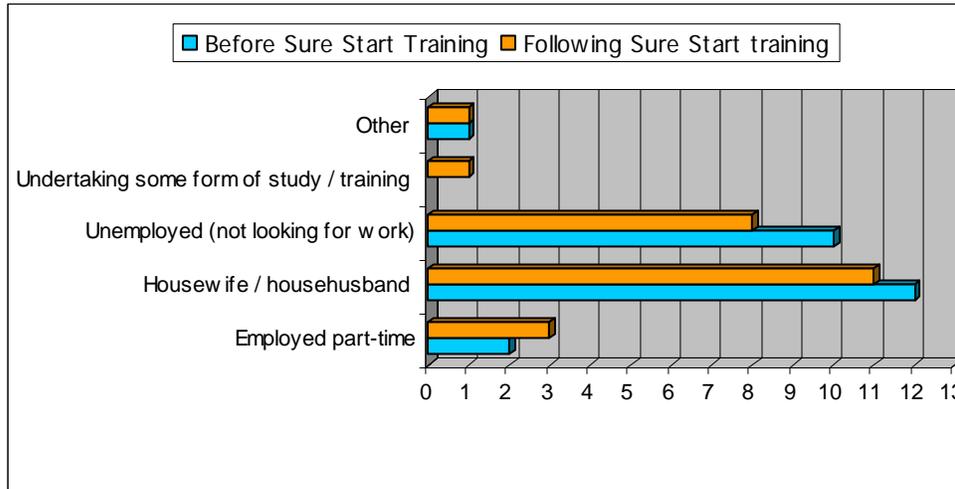
Respondents made the following comments in terms of the involvement of parents in Sure Start training:

- *"I feel as a parent you are asked about what sort of training you would like"*
- *"Do more courses"*

### Employment Situation

As the following chart shows, a majority of respondents were not employed (and not looking for work) prior to undertaking training nor subsequently. It must be recognised however that the training discussed is not vocational in nature but this does not mean that skills have not been developed. For those that have taken up employment since undertaking training, this wasn't felt to be as a result of the training per se. Three respondents were currently employed part-time and one person is currently undertaking an NVQ Level 2 in childcare. One respondent was on long-term sick leave.

**Figure 4.2.2.4 Employment situation prior to and following Sure Start training**



Source: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire, base: 13.  
 N.B. This was not a mutually exclusive question therefore totals may not equal 100%.

### Impact of training

The age of respondents ranged from 19 to 50, and in most cases they hadn't undertaken any other training or studying since they were at school. One respondent mentioned they had been attending a nursery nursing course at college but didn't finish it; another respondent had completed a two-year course in community care and others had completed courses at college such as hairdressing and health and hygiene.

Respondents were asked what difference the training had made to their lives and how it had helped them, responses included the following:

- "Understanding children better"* [TOPS]
- "Got me out of the house, mixed with new people"* [TOPS]
- "became a more confident person"* [Webster-Stratton]
- "met different people, gave me more confidence"* [Webster-Stratton]
- "I am more out-spoken and it's taught me a lot. More confident and have a 'try that' attitude"* [Webster-Stratton / Cook and Eat]
- "Help with sleep problems"* [Educational Psychologist parental training]
- "Reassurance that other parents have similar concerns to ourselves"* [Educational Psychologist parental training]

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements relating to the impact of the Sure Start training. As the following table shows, all those who had taken part in the Cook and Eat sessions say that their family now eat healthier meals. Almost all of the respondents said they probably wouldn't have undertaken any training if it hadn't of been for Sure Start (92%), and more than half agreed that their relationships with their children had improved (62%).

A further 77% of respondents agreed that their confidence had increased. Respondents were less likely to agree that the training had helped them to get a job (none), despite this 62% said the training had encouraged them to think more about what job they'd like to do in the future.

**Figure 4.2.2.5 Impact of Sure Start training**

	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. I am more confident in my abilities as a result of the training	77	23
2. I probably wouldn't have undertaken any training if it hadn't of been for Sure Start	92	8
3. The training has encouraged me to undertake further training / study	46	54
4. The training has encouraged me to think more about what job I would like to do in the future	62	38
5. The training has helped me to get a job	-	100
6. The training has helped me to improve my parenting skills	69	31
7. As a result of the Cook and Eat training my family now eat healthier meals	100	-
8. My relationship with my child(ren) has improved	62	38
9. I am not as scared of using computers	62	23
10. Everyone is encouraged to be involved in the training sessions	100	0
11. There is a good mix of talking about issues and watching videos etc in the training	100	0
12. I felt comfortable discussing my personal experiences in the training	100	0
13. I have made new friends through the training	86	14
14. The training has resulted in me changing the way I approach my child's difficult behaviour	57	43
15. Everyone is encouraged to be involved in the training sessions	100	0
16. There is a good mix of talking about issues and watching videos etc in the training	100	0

**Sources: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire, base varies from 13 (for rows 1-9, although not all statements were relevant to all courses) to 7 (rows 10-16, these questions were only asked in the Educational Psychologist questionnaire).**

### 4.2.3 Training needs / views towards employment

In the questionnaire with those that had accessed Sure Start training, people were asked what their intentions were in terms of future jobs / careers. As the following table shows, a majority of people intend to continue with their current situation (69%), with most respondents currently not being employed, and not looking for work. It is encouraging to note that 46% intend to undertake further training or study whilst 31% intend to get a job, the same proportion plan to undertake voluntary work. Some parents plan to get a job, but not until their children are a bit older or are at school, similarly some plan for further training in the future.

What became clear through this research is that childcare responsibilities and a feeling of wanting to be at home whilst children are young are not the only 'barriers' preventing people from returning to work. A lack of confidence is an issue, both in terms of trying to get a job generally (23%), but especially in terms of people feeling able to get their ideal job (31%). A further 31% feel that they don't have the right skills to get a job.

**Figure 4.2.3.1 Respondents views towards employment that had accessed training**

Intention	%
Continue with my current situation	69
Undertake further training / study	46
Get a job	31
Undertake voluntary work	31
Get a job when children are at school	31
Get a job when children are older	15
Undertake further training when children are older	15
Lacking confidence to try and get a job	23
Lacking confidence to try and get my ideal job	31
Don't have the right skills to get a job	31
Other	15

Source: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire, base: 13.

N.B. This was not a mutually exclusive question therefore totals may not equal 100%.

Respondents were asked what kind of jobs they would like to do in the future. Jobs mentioned included childcare; photography; beauty technician; teaching assistant; carer for older people. Not all respondents were sure what they wanted to do.

Respondents were asked explicitly about the barriers that prevent them from undertaking further training or seeking employment, which adds more detail to the above table. Only 23% said that they don't face any barriers, as they don't wish to undertake further training or find employment. For over half of the respondents transport was an issue (54%), as were childcare responsibilities (46%) and worries about interviews (46%). A further 38% felt there is a lack of jobs available locally; this is something which also emerged as an issue in some parental consultation for the year one evaluation – 64% of parents felt the availability of local jobs was poor. A further 31% mentioned other caring responsibilities as being a barrier.

**Figure 4.2.3.2 Barriers to training / employment**

Barrier	%
Transport	54
Childcare responsibilities	46
Worries about interviews	46
Lack of local jobs	38
Other caring responsibilities	31
Cost of childcare	31
Not wanting to use formal childcare	31
Lack of basic skills (literacy, numeracy, English as a second language)	31
Lack of job specific skills	31
Don't know what I want to do / what I'd be good at	31
Find colleges intimidating	31
Lack of confidence in myself	23
No barriers – don't wish to undertake further training or find employment	23
Lack of suitable local childcare	15
Other	8

**Source: Sure Start Thurnscoe parental training questionnaire, base: 13.**

**N.B. This was not a mutually exclusive question therefore totals may not equal 100%.**

A further 31% said that both the cost of formal childcare was a barrier, as well as not actually wanting to use formal childcare. A lack of basic skills (31%); a lack of job specific skills (31%) and not knowing what job they'd be good at (31%) as well as finding colleges intimidating (31%) were also mentioned as barriers. Just less than one in four respondents felt that lack of self-confidence was a barrier for them. Just two respondents felt that a barrier was the lack of childcare that is available locally. One person mentioned that ill health was a barrier.

These respondents were asked whether they felt there were any particular skills they need to develop:

*"My childcare skills and confidence skills"*

*"Computing skills"*

*"Maths and English"*

*"IT"*

One respondent mentioned that Sure Start had helped them to get involved with the Open University. Respondents mentioned that they would benefit from further support in terms of childcare facilities and transport.

Although the base figure is small for the questionnaire, it is felt that the results can be viewed as indicative of local parental views towards training and employment. The statistics are backed up by the general discussions which took place with parents / carers at various Sure Start activities. Researchers from QA attended various Sure Start activity sessions in order to consult with parents and carers that have not accessed any Sure Start training to-date.

One emerging theme from the one-to-one discussions was that whilst on the surface some of the parents / carers said they didn't particularly have an interest in accessing any training, clearly when probed for further information concerning their employment aspirations etc there is an underlying interest in further training / study. Often a lack of confidence is an issue for parents, with people being able to discuss what their ideal job would be, and the training they would need to get this job, but there is a sense of not believing in their own abilities to achieve their aims and thus there was a sense of almost being embarrassed at talking about what they really want to do.

One mum for example initially stated that she would probably return to work when her children are at school, doing the only job she had ever done in the past which was factory work. When probed it became clear that this parent didn't find this kind of work enjoyable, and that she has a particular interest in beauty and would ideally like to be a nail technician. She discussed how a lack of confidence and self-belief was the issue in terms of aiming for her ideal job. For other parents they could discuss their ideal job when probed, with some mentioning jobs such as working with people with terminal illnesses. Clearly childcare responsibilities dominate parents thinking and as anticipated looking after children when they are young is the main priority for many parents. Several parents mentioned that any training they would undertake would have to fit-in with their childcare responsibilities, with some mentioning that any employment would have to be on their *"doorstep"*.

It appears that having an extended family close-by is important for parents / carers. There was a lot of talk about how parents would access support from grandparents if they wanted to undertake any training. When there is no extended family close-by this appears to lead to difficulties for parents, and isolation can be an issue. In some cases however even where there is extended family close-by some parents are still not doing the jobs they have been trained to do, or doing the University courses they have places on, because it is easier for them to work in jobs that fit-around their childcare responsibilities.

Whilst parents / carers can see the benefits of undertaking training, the thought of undertaking it is clearly easier than actually undertaking it for some. As the following image shows, parents were asked how the thought of undertaking training / learning or getting a new job makes them feel. Whilst in many cases these thoughts are positive, thinking in terms of what the outcomes of the training would be, the process of actually doing the training is something which some parents feel uneasy with. A lot of this comes back to the fact that many local parents have not undertaken any training since school.

**Figure 4.2.3.3 How the thought of training / learning or getting a job makes people feel**

The following feelings were noted:

- nervousness
- worries about who would look after children in the holidays
- that it would increase their confidence
- excited
- that they could only do it if it was on an evening
- worries about not knowing anyone
- that it would be a challenge
- how it would give them a new outlook on life
- it would lead to independence
- ambitious
- would make them feel good about themselves

Clearly the buddy system which was discussed at the re-launch of the Parent's Forum would be welcomed, and it may help parents to feel less nervous about accessing not just training but other Sure Start activities too. Some parents for example stated that they'd found it difficult to get to know other Sure Start mums, *"it's hard to get close to people"*, especially when the children are toddlers and they have to keep running around after them. Not knowing other parents and not having a friend to accompany them means that some parents that are interested in training perhaps aren't accessing any, they feel nervous when attending new groups.

Some parents mentioned that they had recently put their names down for courses. It appears that parents could have been kept better informed about when the training was likely to take place.

The types of courses and training that parents/ carers expressed interest in throughout the consultation (both on the questionnaire and at Sure Start activities) were the following:

- IT
- First Aid
- Childcare
- A different beauty course covering different topics
- Beauty, especially how to do manicures
- Confidence-building
- 'How to distract children'
- Interview techniques
- Training on how to network
- Practical training, e.g. mechanics
- Art-based courses
- Child Psychology

- Local families sharing existing skills with others

One respondent mentioned that they'd be interested in training that they could do at home. Even if people already had certificates such as first aid, they'd be interested in updating this.

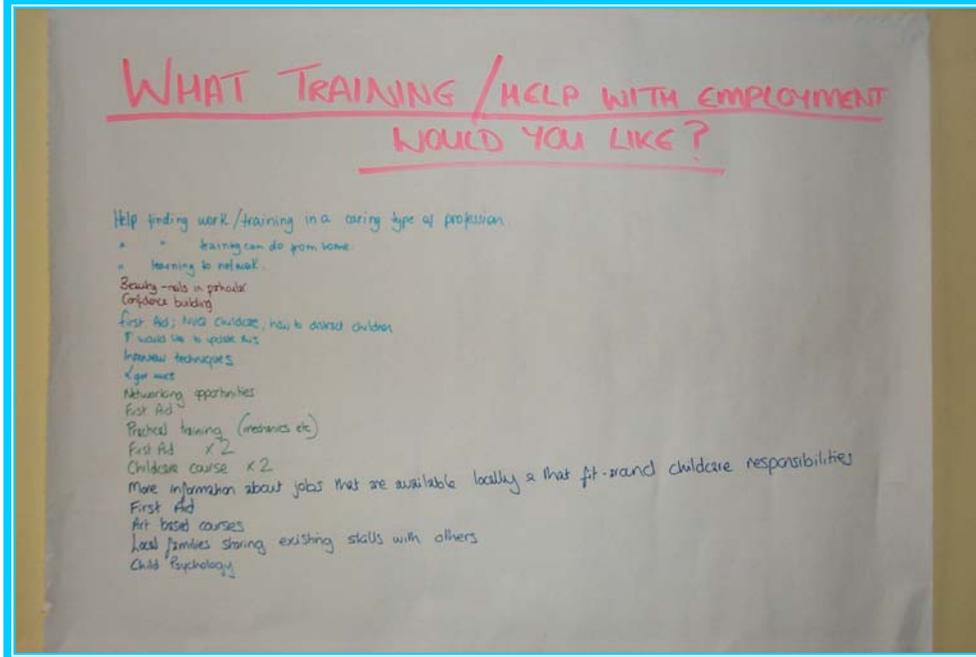
Parents mentioned that the programme could try and get more parents involved in training by:

- asking them what they want (perhaps in a survey)
- more advertising
- sending letters to parents about what's on offer
- send leaflets out and hold forums

In terms of help with employment people mentioned the following:

- Help finding work / training in a caring type of profession
- More information about jobs that are available locally and that fit around childcare responsibilities

**Figure 4.2.2.4 What training / help with employment people would like**



In addition to this parents were asked whether there was anything they'd like to be doing now that they're not able to. Respondents mentioned the following:

- Lose weight
- Go back to work when the children are older in a more skilled profession
- One parent said they'd like their child to be speaking – this was their main concern
- Undertaking a course at University (currently deferring their place)
- Learning more about other peoples experience of work
- Be able to work in the job they'd trained to do

These parents found it very difficult to identify any solutions that would help overcome the barriers that prevented them doing what they wanted to be. One parent who wanted to lose weight had been attending Thurnscoe Slimmies, one of the midwives projects.

**Figure 4.2.3.5 What parents / carers would like to be doing that they aren't able to**



#### 4.2.4 Partnership Working

This section summarises the findings of telephone interviews which were undertaken with representatives from organisations Sure Start Thurnscoe has been working with in terms of delivering training, and helping parents to gain employment. Interviews were undertaken with representatives from the following organisations, although not all of the respondents were still working for the organisations:

- Lone Parent Advisor
- Credit Union
- The Open University
- Action Team for Jobs
- The Eldon Centre (Adult Learning)
- The Workers Educational Association

In terms of initial contact, Sure Start Thurnscoe had approached some of the organisations; however in some cases the organisations themselves approached Sure Start Thurnscoe with a view to mutually beneficial partnership working.

These partnerships have ranged from delivering workshop sessions on child development to delivering courses on parenting skills; behaviour management and living and working with under 8's. All of these workshops / training took place at community centres in Thurnscoe, childcare was provided. The aims of the training were clearly

identified and from a staff perspective training partners have showed willingness to work with them to ensure the programmes devised are suitable:

Training providers have been realistic in viewing the workshops / training offered to Sure Start parents as a starting point rather than an end point.

*“The idea was that my tutor would go out and do an hour and a half of input with the parents in the morning and then do a play session that the children could tap-into as well in the afternoon. And then obviously if there was an interested group we could offer some progression.”*

Attendance at these courses and workshops has varied. One partner was disappointed that only one parent turned up for the childcare taster session. It was felt that they had been assured by Sure Start staff that there would be quite a few people attending, *“the idea was that this was a captive audience”*. It was mentioned that Sure Start had put posters up in the hall about the workshops. The partner subsequently wonders whether the demand was there in the first place. On a positive note however this partner would happily work with the programme again in the future, but added that the organisation of it would need to be more structured.

One partner discussed how it is always difficult to run taster courses, as parents are always interested in the incentives for getting involved:

*“I think with taster courses what you have to, it's like the carrot and the donkey thing, come along to this and see what you can find out about, and you can get a qualification at the end of it. They always want something at the end of it, and offering them a qualification even if it's only a certificate to say that they've attended is a huge incentive, and people always want incentives.”*

Another partner who Sure Start had worked with to deliver training felt that the relationship worked extremely well and they had good and consistent attendance by parents. There has however been little partnership working between them recently. This partner is however involved in the education sub-group of the programme and can liaise with people there if there's anything else they can help them with. This partner questioned whether Sure Start training was more popular in the beginning because it was 'new and exciting then'; they added that there are a lot of organisations providing opportunities to local people now.

Some partners have worked with Sure Start Thurnscoe in terms of delivering outreach work, going into the drop-in sessions and other Sure Start activities to talk about and discuss what they can offer people in terms of training and help with employment, job searches, as well as being there to offer particular advice. This is something which partners feel the programme is quite good at, bringing in a variety of organisations to talk to parents. Those that had been involved in this outreach work generally felt it was beneficial and worthwhile, some parents were of course more receptive and interested in the information partners could offer than others. These partners were positive about the work Sure Start Thurnscoe is doing in terms of training and employment:

*“very helpful and very accommodating”.*

*“I think basically they’re doing a good job, they all work well and they’ve got a lot of initiatives and strategies in place”*

The family development worker also accompanied some parents to attend a local college to discuss possible Open University courses, two parents subsequently accessed courses.

One partner said that the only barrier people mentioned to accessing training courses at the drop-ins was a lack of time: *“nothing substantial to turn round and say you know I can’t do this, it was purely on a voluntary basis that they wanted to visit and they perhaps wanted to take-up the courses anyway”.*

One partner didn’t feel that the prospect of a lot of writing put parents off in her experience:

*“I think they were quite happy because of it being distance learning, so I don’t think that that came into it in that way”*

There are differences of opinion amongst partners however about whether local parents want to work and have aspirations. One partner mentioned that a lot of local families would like to work but haven’t got the right childcare facilities. It was mentioned that there’s community childcare (Roundabout), which isn’t too expensive, but schools have introduced them now as well and they’re felt to be quite expensive. A partner mentioned that if both parents are working and don’t qualify for tax credits then they wouldn’t be able to afford to do pay for childcare because a lot of the jobs are low-paid. Partners discussed that the childcare situation will improve when the Children’s Centre is up and running.

*“if the children are very young there’s not a lot of support for childcare which has a knock-on effect to which jobs they can and cannot go for because a lot of them are not financially sustainable”*

Partners tended to agree that local families are in need of courses to raise confidence levels rather than perhaps vocational training.

*“confidence-building is an absolute major thing, they always think ‘I’d never be able to do that’, they always say that and ‘I’m not clever enough’. ”*

One partner discussed the fact that the relationship between themselves and Sure Start could be maximised in the future in terms of signposting and referrals:

*“if they refer, we actually offer confidence-building and assertiveness training. So as a referral system we can actually support them by putting their parents onto a confidence-building course in their own area”*

Partners discussed how there are jobs available in the local area for parents, with some mentioning the call centres that offer people flexible hours of working. This helps people work if they want to work, but can have a negative effect on the numbers taking up training and the number of people doing voluntary work. One partner discussed the high turnover of the staff within these organisations:

*“they’ve got a large turnover because they’re not really good to all the people they employ. I think they just think there’s that many people that’s unemployed that they can sort of treat them as they want. Unfortunately that’s what quite a few factories here do”*

It was suggested that a lot of the people taking up these kinds of jobs are women, and therefore training is perhaps a more pertinent issue for dads and granddads in Thurnscoe. It was identified that any training offered to parents needs to be supportive. The public transport issue in the local area was also mentioned as being a barrier to accessing jobs further away:

*“to be in employment, they’ve got to be in the local area because our transport is just not reliable”*

Encouragingly partners feel that the training that Sure Start Thurnscoe has offered to parents has very much been parent-led rather than professional-led. Partners also feel that the programme’s approach fits in well with the approach for the area as a whole.

A key issue emerging from interviews with partners is that successful relationships that have been created aren’t always sustained, and communication between Sure Start and the partners has been somewhat on an ad hoc basis recently. There is indication that relationships could be maximised further in the future with many of the partners.

There is also indication that more effort could be made to work with organisations such as Action Team for Jobs in the future, relationships haven’t always been as beneficial as either Sure Start or the partner themselves would have hoped, encouragingly partners are willing to try again and find new ways of working together. Action Team for Jobs currently have no direct links in Thurnscoe, they used to have an Action Team van next to one of the community centres one day a week. From April 2005 Action Team for Jobs is only able to work with those claiming incapacity benefit or on income support; one partner who was interviewed here was very enthusiastic about trying to work with Sure Start.

One issue is staffing changes, both within Sure Start and within the partner organisations. Some of the respondents were no longer working for the organisations they had been and therefore links have been lost, especially when posts haven’t been filled. Correspondingly, some of the Sure Start staff that partners had liaised with are no longer in post and there is indication that partners haven’t been informed of this.

Partners made the following additional comments:

- *“while ever they’re setting new things up and when eventually they get the building and things then we’ve no problem with having certain days in there with advice work, financial literacy and all that sort of thing”*
- *“I think what could be improved is just that they realise, that you are committed, that there are deadlines that you have to meet, there are certain things and procedures that you’ve got to do in order for it to be successful for you”*
- *“personally I think what they need is somebody there that they can trust and I think it has to be a person that is based there that they can turn round, feel comfortable with and feel confident with, because again it is the confidence thing”*

#### **4.2.5 Approach**

This section of the report focuses on staff opinions of the approach Sure Start Thurnscoe takes in terms of training and employment for parents.

Staff members discussed how it was a difficult area to engage parents in, but it’s generally felt that the programme is doing everything that it can to encourage training and support parents back into work. The small number of people the programme has helped to get back into employment is felt to be *“a drop in the ocean but a step in the right direction”*. The interest in training hasn’t been as great as staff would like recently. From a management point of view they haven’t got the room or space to train people as they feel they should be trained at the moment.

*“we do work towards it but it isn’t always as successful as we might like it to be”*

Many members of staff discussed the variety of training that has been available to parents however:

*“it’s the parents that I just don’t think are bothered, we’re doing everything we possibly can to encourage them to get back into work and we’re doing days where they can come in for job opportunities, we can give talks to them, but I think on our side we’re doing more than what we should be. At the end of the day it’s up to parents”*

It was discussed how some parents are just happy to stay at home rather than work. Others mentioned that there’s not much incentive for people to work, adding that all they can do is show them how they’d be better off financially, but in a lot of cases they probably wouldn’t be. Some members of staff therefore stated that perceptions are the main barrier to achieving the employment target.

*“I think it’s all about role models at the end of the day, and if you haven’t got that role model then you’re not bothered”*

*“no matter how hard you try to push it, they’ll only return back to work if they want to”*

*"I would like to see them more confident about themselves, that they can do things, because that is the biggest thing, they just don't think it's worth doing, and it's getting through that barrier, apathy. So it's got to be something that motivates them"*

Staff discussed how a softly-softly approach is needed in terms of training, trying to get people to try different things. Staff mentioned that it can be difficult to get people to buy-into something that's even ever so slightly educational. It was also discussed how the programme has to be really careful about how they approach the issue of employment with parents.

*"at the minute it's been limited, that's why we're using Time Out as a basic thing and hoping to develop key skills for getting them back into employment"*

It's generally felt that good partnerships have been developed, offering a wide-variety of support to parents, although it doesn't necessarily mean parents are receptive with some parents speaking to employment / training representatives that are present at drop-ins out of courtesy rather than interest.

One staff member mentioned that Lifelong Learning are often around who are good for doing psychometric testing etc and pointing them in directions which they didn't necessarily feel they had an aptitude for.

It was also mentioned that some members of staff have been given training in WFTC and have been able to support parents around this; also parents can use the offices to access computers to look at information about this. The link they have with the citizens advice bureau means that parents can receive advice about the financial implications of returning to work. Despite this some staff feel that the programme needs to be working more closely with local businesses and job agencies.

Some staff didn't feel that progress towards the employment target has been brought to light particularly, but mentioned that they've been made aware in staff meetings of the importance of this target and the fact that they need to start meeting it. Some members of staff discussed the possibility of setting up mini job-fairs.

It was suggested that the programme could have a more structured approach to the training it offers and to its approach in terms of meeting the employment target. Another member of staff feels they would benefit from a brainstorming session to think of some new ideas:

*"it's time to look at new ideas as to how we can draw these people in, and if we have to put food on, which we absolutely resent doing because we shouldn't have to, then we'll do it"*

*"it's not for want of not enough staff, or not enough commitment, or drive from them; we simply can't pull them in"*

Other members of staff gave particular examples of how the work the programme is doing in this area is benefiting people. One staff member discussed how Sure Start has helped one family through the help of the dads outreach worker:

*“One of the stresses was the lack of training and job opportunities for the family, that’s something that the dads outreach worker worked on, he got the dad into full-time employment, also with training. It’s moved the family on quite considerably”*

Staff feel that the programme is willing to offer group support as well as individual support to help families. It was mentioned that they will arrange for transport if people need it to be able to access training. It was also discussed how Sure Start don’t cut off parents once they’ve found employment but that they continue to support them which is felt to be important.

It was also felt that the programme tries to raise aspirations amongst parents and to help them access training they’re interested in, not just what will get them ‘out there’.

*“they’re very keen here of training them up to a level which is quite good, not learning them how to pack a box and then shoving them in a factory. Rather than do that they’re happy to upskill them even further, try and lift them up to a bit better, higher aspirations and higher salaries”*

Some members of staff feel the programme needs to be more pro-active in terms of encouraging parents to access training. It was mentioned several times that there are opportunities to get new parents involved in training as there are now so many new mums registered with the programme.

*“we have got a lot of new parents at present and it is getting them motivated and accepting that they have to think outside of the box”*

*“I think we could give parents a chance to reflect on their circumstances and their strengths and interests and to use these in the programme and in the activities, also as a way of developing those aspirations and strengths”*

It was recognised that encouraging parents who are probably lacking confidence to access training and eventually employment is a gradual process:

*“Action Team for Jobs have a van that parks up and down the road and you never really see anyone go into the van to go and look for jobs, but there are ways and means. By getting these chappies to our dads groups, encouraging them, getting them to play footie, getting them involved in their families more, in turn they’ve ended up finding employment, it’s a slow process, you’ve got to build their confidence first”*

*“I think maybe some people would like to do it but they haven’t got the confidence, or if they didn’t do well at school, but it’s hard to get them over that initial barrier to go in and realise that it’s not that bad”*

One member of staff discussed how it is important to break down the 'them' and 'us' barrier, they feel there needs to be more murkier boundaries, with conversations about strengths and interests, abilities, aspirations:

*"maybe looking to provide little pathways of opportunities in the activities that we provide, maybe jointly or even encourage parents to put-on in order to give them a springboard into the next step"*

In this sense it was suggested that perhaps parents who are interested in childcare could co-lead sessions, shadow Sure Start workers etc.

*"there isn't that focus for dialogue in a lot of the activities that we carry out and I think there could be"*

Some staff discussed how courses such as baby massage fair better than more academic courses because they're not as off-putting, they don't have to produce any work. Within baby massage they can focus on their child and not on the 'training' per se. It was also commented upon that a taster beauty session went down really well at one of the community centres but the next step to that would be in college because they'd need the facilities to do it.

Despite what one of the partners mentioned, one staff member mentioned that parents can find the writing aspect of courses off-putting:

*"they were all very keen and then suddenly they dropped off, then I realised afterwards that they were frightened of doing the writing, I mean there wasn't much, it was just like writing a diary, but a lack of literacy skills"*

*"they find it hard to sustain a thing, you might get them to come to a thing, and they just don't sustain it"*

The venues for Sure Start training, namely the two community centres in Thurnscoe are not felt to be ideal for training. Childcare has had to be provided at the same venue and it had proved difficult for parents to concentrate because of this sometimes. It's felt that the situation will get better once the building is up and running, when there will be a separate crèche facility.

Staff members as well as partners feel that Sure Start training is led by the parents.

The national evaluation of Sure Start has identified that local programmes can have quite different approaches towards employability, namely the following<sup>10</sup>:

1. Disengaged Approach
2. Passive Approaches
3. Intermediate Labour Market approaches
4. Lifelong Learning Approaches
5. Active Approaches

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<sup>10</sup> NESS (2004), *Sure Start Local Programmes and Improving the Employability of Parents*.

Members of staff were given a showcard with details of each of the approaches and asked for their opinions as to which was the approach most inline with Sure Start Thurnscoe. Most respondents stated that the programme was somewhere between a lifelong learning approach and an active approach. Others felt that the programme is aiming for 4/5 rather than actually achieving it. These are defined as the following:

#### *4. Lifelong Learning Approaches*

'Programmes respond to parents' expressed wish for education and training, encourage a return to learning and support an easy progression from basic to advanced training provided by other agencies. This approach emphasises skill development rather than immediate employment and the programme's links with agencies delivering employment support may be less well developed than the links with education and training agencies – which are usually strong.'

#### *5. Active Approaches*

'Involves collaboration with a range of agencies and positive encouragement for parents to take advantage of opportunities offered; identifying obstacles and helping parents overcome them; links with both employment and training agencies are strong.'

One staff member feels the programme has a mix of a passive approach combined with a lifelong learning approach. One person could think of an instance for all of the different approaches:

Respondents made the following comments:

*"I suppose I like to think we were active, as it involves collaboration with a range of agencies, but if you can't get the agencies to collaborate then it can't be active, but through no fault of its own"*

*"I think there is a lifelong learning approach element, but maybe it's not strong"*

### ***4.3 The involvement of fathers within the programme***

This section of the report focuses on the involvement of fathers in Sure Start Thurnscoe. The information presented is based on interviews and discussions with staff members and local parents, including mums, dads, grandmas and granddads as well as on observation of Sure Start activities.

#### **4.3.1 Situation So Far**

Sure Start Thurnscoe has demonstrated commitment to involving dads in the programme since the beginning; this commitment is documented within the original delivery plan. National Sure Start evaluation concluded that 'where programmes had high levels of father involvement they had decided early in the planning stages of the programme that fathers would be central to their work.'<sup>11</sup>

Thus far the programme has employed two male outreach workers whose roles have involved working with dads and trying to encourage more dads to get involved with Sure Start, neither of these are employed by the programme anymore. These two workers have used quite different approaches to encourage the involvement of dads as will be discussed further on in this section. At present the programme is re-considering its options in terms of this post, and it is hoped that the programme may be able to share a dad's worker with other local programmes. As of March 2005 there is just one male member of staff employed by Sure Start Thurnscoe, the Educational Psychologist.

Most members of staff concluded in the interviews that the programme overall had not been very successful at involving fathers despite trying "*everything*". In most respects these opinions relate to the "*poor*" number of fathers the programme has involved as opposed to how successful the involvement of those fathers assessing Sure Start services has been. When discussing the involvement of dads some members of staff discussed how some activities had helped to improve the number of dads being involved in Sure Start, football once a week for example, aside from this the general consensus is that they will get "*one or two*" dads attending Sure Start activities, although not every week. The interviews clearly highlighted that staff have different opinions on the different approaches and activities that been used to try and attract dads into the programme.

Many of the mothers that contributed to the evaluation mentioned that they never really see dads at the Sure Start activity sessions (as staff members responsible for delivering activities also discussed), and in addition to this some are not aware of what the programme offers for dads as a distinct group. Dads that were interviewed also mentioned that they see other dads at Sure Start activities once every so often. Dads that were more heavily involved in Sure Start, and whose partners were, tended to be aware of what the programme was offering to dads, whilst other interviews highlighted that dads haven't been kept up-to-date with what activities are available for them which may be a result of staffing changes.

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<sup>11</sup> NESS, *Fathers in Sure Start local programmes* (N. Lloyd; M. O'Brien; C. Lewis), 2003.

### 4.3.2 Level of Involvement

Although overall only a small number of fathers have been consistently involved in Sure Start Thurnscoe since its inception, fathers have been involved in the programme in a variety of ways, this extends beyond just groups and activities for dads themselves.

The Sure Start activity which is for everybody that appears to have been most successful in encouraging and maintaining the involvement of dads and granddads is the weekly swimming sessions. They have been able to attend the swimming with their partners and children when it's fitted in with their work patterns. One member of staff felt that this works well because the partners are attending with the men, adding that in some cases the men may have wanted to be more heavily involved in Sure Start than they were. At one stage one of the dads undertook training to drive the bus to take families to swimming, he took responsibility for this as well as taking the attendance register. The success of this sporting activity in involving dads fits in well with national Sure Start findings, that where fathers do take part in Sure Start it's most likely to be in 'active fun-type activities'<sup>12</sup>. Some members of staff mentioned occasionally some dads will attend Messy Play, another 'hands-on' fun session. Dads and granddads will also attend events such as parties as well as day trips.

Sure Start Thurnscoe has also run a dedicated group for dads in the past. Both of the outreach workers working with dads ran the group for a period of time although there was a time delay between the two. The dads group isn't felt to have been very successful due to the low numbers involved, three or four dads / granddads tended to attend, but in some cases this was felt to be on the advice of social services and not through actually wanting to be there.

However, some of these dads were extremely pro-active in running the dads group with the support of a Sure Start worker; they tried various methods to encourage more dads to get involved. This included creating publicity materials to launch the group; running the group at different times and on different days including on weekends; using different venues; cooking breakfasts for dads; playing table tennis; having laptops available for use; trying to share best practice from more successful dads groups in the area etc. They would also have speakers in from organisations such as BADAS and YMCA to speak to dads about what was on offer.

*"The dads group that we tried, we moved it around days, we tried different things, we tried the odd trip out, but I just don't think dads seem to be bothered about getting involved really"*

The dads group was disbanded eventually due to the poor attendance figures and a different approach was adopted of trying to work with dads on more of a one-to-one basis (although workers had already been trying to encourage dads to get involved through the programme's family support work):

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<sup>12</sup> NESS (2003), *Fathers in Sure Start*

*“we set-up a dads group, which ran for about two months with decent numbers, but as soon as we initiated children into that group numbers dwindled, significantly, to the point where it was just me and one dad so I cancelled that group. Now the work I do with dads is specifically done on a person to person basis, there's still family involvement, I take things round for kids to play and learn with. We also have a five-a-side group which runs, which has pretty good numbers”*

The pro-active men from the dads group have also been involved quite heavily in Sure Start overall, as are their partners. They have been involved in various sub-groups and as well as the management board, one has chaired Sure Start meetings. A concern raised therefore is that it seems to be the same dads who are involved with the programme; this is something which the programme will need to be cautious about. Encouragingly however it was noted by staff that other dads expressed interest in attending the Parent's Forum (this was recently re-launched), disappointingly however none of these new dads attended the re-launch.

Dads have also benefited from one-to-one work and support the programme can offer. This includes helping them to develop literacy skills; supporting them to obtain financial advice; working with the Educational Psychologist; supporting dads with drug and alcohol issues etc. The programme also has links with social services and Barnardo's and so have the ability to support dads and attend contact cases with them.

At least three dads have been supported by Sure Start Thurnscoe in getting back into employment therefore there has been some success in terms of working towards targets. One member of staff discussed how positive this had been for one family:

*“it's just amazing to see the change, by just setting aside some time for this one dad, yeah you've got problems with dyslexia and confidence and what not but let's get through them, there's ways to do it”*

Workers have helped dads prepare for interviews; helping fill in application forms; attending interviews with them and through making links with agencies and local companies. Through outreach workers dads have also been put in touch with agencies where they can undertake training such as Moving and Handling. An issue for the programme has been that the dads who have gone into employment haven't been able to subsequently be as involved with Sure Start, therefore re-affirming the need to encourage more dads to get involved. In this sense the programme has been the victim of its own success.

An outreach worker who had worked with dads stated that a lot of this one-to-one work didn't count towards meeting Sure Start targets which was felt to be a shame. It was discussed how a lot of the one-to-one work with dads, helping them to develop social skills, helping them through substance misuse etc has a very positive knock-on-effect for families, helping them to function better within their families, which perhaps isn't recognised by all members of staff.

*“people were lacking in their social skills, and their ability to fill-in job application forms, just in self-accountability as well, it's all things you can gradually introduce to people”*

This outreach worker explained that it takes a long-time to build-up trust with the dads, and a gentle approach is needed to encourage them to attend other Sure Start activities.

More recently the programme has been offering weekly football sessions for dads. This has included a trip to Old Trafford. Members of staff noted that these sessions were working well in terms of the numbers of attending:

*“it’s been very patchy until the last few months, then it’s kicked off that little bit”*

Some of the dads attending the football were non-resident dads. Some staff expressed concern that it wasn’t an activity that involved children (as the dads group had for a period) and the dads weren’t accessing other Sure Start services. From the point of view of the outreach worker however these dads were receiving one-to-one support. The dads involved in the football were described as being quite *“a specialised group”* that would be challenging to integrate into other activities. Just as those involved in the dads group were given a sense of ownership and responsibility for the group, a similar method was tried with the football with the aim of developing skills:

*“I tend to give the dads I work with the onus of groups that I’m running, I know it can look as though it’s a lazy thing from my point, but I give them onus of rounding each other up, making sure that they’ve got all the equipment, and it’s just giving them ownership over what they do, so there’s not an over-reliability on myself, and they learn skills that they need in everyday life”*

Whilst some members of staff stated that most dads who attend Sure Start sessions will take an interest in their child’s development it was also acknowledged that some dads that aren’t as heavily involved in Sure Start will tend to *“sit at the side”* rather than where the rest of the parents are. This was observed at a drop-in session, the only dad present was sat on the carpet at the back of the room where some of the children were playing, the mums tended to be sat with each other on chairs in the main section of the room or watching over their children sat at the activity table. The dad stated that he’d sat at the back because that’s where his children started playing, he admitted that he felt *“quite uncomfortable”* walking into the room that day but was there to help the development of his children. The Educational Psychologist had taken this dad and his children along to the drop-in; otherwise he said he wouldn’t have gone.

Both staff and parents feel it would be nice to have more dads at the different groups. It’s felt that having a few more (and new) dads / granddads attending the groups would have a knock-on effect and encourage further dads to attend. Two mums also discussed that because their children spend so much time with them they think they can sometimes get on their children’s nerves, in this respect they feel it would be good for dads to be able to do something different with their children.

### 4.3.3 Approach To Date

As discussed, the programme has tried various methods to try and get dads involved in Sure Start. Broadly two distinct approaches to encouraging involvement have been adopted to date in terms of a 'dads group', activities which involve dads and children, and activities just for dads.

Through the staff interviews it became clear that there were some quite strong opinions as to which approach is best and which approach has been most successful. In general, although there has been some overlap, the initial dads group used to involve children whereas children weren't involved in football sessions. The two outreach staff working with dads were described by one dad as being "*completely different*".

The ultimate aim of the latest dads outreach worker who ran the football sessions was admittedly to work with a Sports Development Worker to apply what they learnt from other Sure Start programmes, for example having a soft-play area for the children besides where the dads play football. This worker had also been trying to encourage dads to bring their families to Manvers along with another Sure Start programme; men could play football and then join their partners and children for swimming. This was in the experimental stages when the worker left the programme. It was discussed that many dads were seeking escapism from their everyday lives, and they weren't interested in attending activities with their children therefore building up trust and a relationship with Sure Start in a fun way through football was felt to be a starting point.

There appears to be some discrepancy between staff that are concerned with the number of dads the activities attract, and the actual activities themselves and how they will help to meet Sure Start targets and how they fit in with the ethos of Sure Start. In this respect the football sessions have been deemed a success by some in terms of numbers attending, which had been an issue with the dads group (it was mentioned by some that the dads group only really involved one family), but for others the fact that children weren't involved with the dads activity, and the fact that they didn't see many of the dads at other Sure Start sessions was a big issue, as one member of staff discussed:

*"by starting it that way, it would have been hard for the dads to want to stop hanging around doing things with their mates and want to take their children to any other of the events. Whereas if you started it the other way, and got them to have their children involved and bring in something like football as treat once a month. We don't do things for mums without their kids, so why should we for dads? In my opinion taking a group of dads to football is just like taking a group of mums to Meadowhall shopping for a few hours"*

Parents, both mum and dads, also expressed this sentiment that any activities laid on for dads should also involve the children. One dad mentioned that he'd been involved in the initial dads group and also attended the football a few times. He explained that the scene was quite different at the football, there would be a lot of swearing etc amongst the new dads that were involved and they weren't necessarily seen to be the kind of people they would want their children to be around:

*“The best way to get dads involved would be just dads, but I don’t think you’re gaining anything by just working with dads, I think you need to have the dads and kids. You could perhaps start with just dads and then move onto family things but then I think you’d find that most dads would back-out then if it involved bringing your kids anywhere”.*

Another dad explained that he had attended the old dads group once and was interested in the possibility of doing practical activities like mechanics in the group which appealed to him. That Outreach Worker then left his post and the dad hadn’t heard anything about the dads group or any activities targeted at dads since. The dad explained that activities such as the football wouldn’t interest him and for him Sure Start was about helping his children to socialise.

It’s clear that both other members of staff and parents would need to see that an activity such as football for dads would have a positive effect on the dads’ involvement in other areas of Sure Start, with their children; this hadn’t happened by the time the worker left his post. This raises the question of whether enough information is shared amongst Sure Start staff about how they’re helping to work with families on an individual level.

It appears that staff and parents who contributed to the evaluation would welcome a more child-orientated approach to a dads club. It was felt that a group shouldn’t be reliant on the same dads and any future worker whose responsibility it is to work with dads should persist with trying to engage new dads by door-knocking etc, as should all outreach workers. It’s also important to maintain the one-to-one support offered to more ‘hard-to-reach’ dads.

Some staff expressed that not all staff members work towards getting dads involved, even though they take it seriously. It’s felt that there’s an assumption that one person does all the dads work and it’s subsequently too reliant on one person who isn’t a ‘dads worker’ as such and also has other areas of the programme to work on.

#### **4.3.4 Inclusiveness**

Staff and parents were asked whether they feel Sure Start Thurnscoe is inclusive to dads. The overall consensus is that the programme generally is inclusive, certainly the promotional literature and newsletters that the programme produces are inclusive in the sense of not being full of pictures of mums and children (it tends to be of children themselves), although perhaps more images of dads and children could be used to send out positive messages.

Both staff and parents discussed that dads would be made to feel welcome at Sure Start activities but the difficulty is getting them there in the first place. The activities aren’t always felt to be types of activities that dads would want to get involved in generally as one worker commented, he had taken dads along to various Sure Start activities but they’d generally say *“I don’t want to sit around gassing and having cups of tea, that’s not what I want to do”.*

Others mentioned again that the onus of being inclusive to dads has been too reliant on one member of staff to date, and this was apparent from some of the responses members of staff made. With this it's felt that more could be done by the whole team to support dads, whatever their personal circumstances. This is something that is backed up by observation of one Sure Start session, where one dad who was new to the session sat at the back of the room away from the rest of the group, aside from the member of staff that had taken the family there, there was little evidence of staff making an effort to introduce the dad to other people and integrating them into the session:

*"it's a frame of mind the inclusivity of dads, it's not about putting things on separately necessarily, it's about looking at our own prejudices and attitudes towards the way that we might involve or not involve and that's through the types of activities that we do put on but also the way we encourage people to participate and the people we are trying to hit"*

Some members of staff mentioned that the names of activities could be off-putting to dads, Music with Mummy being mentioned, although this activity has now been integrated into Story and Rhyme. It was questioned how inclusive the programme is to dads who work regular hours and who perhaps are not interested in sporting activities.

From a dads perspective some of the groups such as Bumps to Babies are set-up for mums and so they wouldn't think of attending them. With a feeling of not being included in pre and post-natal support by health workers, this is perhaps an area needing further exploration. The research team are aware that since the fieldwork was completed pre-natal parenting groups have been set-up which are being attended by dads.

From a management perspective a mixture of activities are laid on, some of which, for example Messy Play may be more appealing to dads than other activities.

#### **4.3.5 Barriers to Success**

An aim of the discussions with staff and parents was to identify what barriers may prevent dads from getting involved in Sure Start Thurnscoe. The following key themes emerged:

##### ***Cultural Barrier***

There is felt to be a stigma that Sure Thurnscoe is for mothers and children and this can be off-putting to dads. This situation is perpetuated by the fact that there are very few dads attending the activities, leading to dads admitting in the research that they felt like the odd-one out at sessions and feeling uncomfortable. It is important for the dads to know someone and be able to go to a session with someone else to prevent this uncomfortable feeling. Some mums explained that their partners would just feel out of place with all the mums there. One mum explained that her partner is going to another Sure Start's dads group with a friend with the children, having a friend to go with is clearly important.

At the re-launch of the Parents Forum it was identified that a buddy system would be a good idea, this may be of particular benefit to dads.

Through discussions it emerged that Thurnscoe is still quite a traditional village in terms of gender roles. Many of the dads will go out to work so that's one barrier to involvement, but the other mentioned by mums and staff is that some dads are just not interested in taking part in activities to do with their children, especially when they are still babies, it's seen as women's work. Some of the dads clearly do not take an active part in their child's development:

- *"it's hard though for dads, a lot of them work. We're kind of a very traditional village where the mums stay at home with the kids and the dads go out to work, so I think with the people we do get in we're going to be very successful, but I don't think we can ever expect masses of numbers coming along"*
- *"the dads are more interested on the whole in getting out of the house, getting away from the women and kids, which is a shame"*
- *"he's there but not there if you know what I mean"*
- *"they're quite happy to come out for the football, but they're not too happy about coming and doing something with their child, because it's a very male chauvinist area, a lot of dads thinks that for women"*
- *"they're quite happy to come if it's a male event but if it's a mixed event they're not too keen"*
- *"I've come across some that I've put a hell of a lot of work into that just don't respond, they don't see it as their role."*
- *"it's breaking down barriers and getting the message across that it's not just for women, it's not just for deprived people it's not just for people who are crap at parenting, it's not for people that need help it's for everybody. I don't think that barriers broke-down with males or females in this village"*
- *"Fathers know about the service but I think it just might be in the culture, some do want to get involved but they think it's just a woman's thing and it would make them look bad. It's a cultural thing about dads groups and kid's things; we need to break that mould. We're struggling, banging our heads against a wall trying to get people involved"*

It was also mentioned by staff that dads are not happy with group situations; they get more out of them through individual chats when other family members are around than they would in a group. It was added that a lot of issues stay behind closed doors in Thurnscoe.

It's not necessarily just the attitudes of dads themselves that's an issue, but other family members too. One member of staff explained that a dad had recently mentioned to him that he wanted to go to a party that Sure Start was holding, his family made fun of him

for wanting to so he didn't go in the end. Despite this most of the parents that contributed to this evaluation stated that they would like to see their partners more involved in Sure Start, mostly it's just a case of them not being interested.

It was felt to be important to have some kind of incentive for dads to attend:

*"Getting dads involved in Sure Start, is like mums, you need to look at what's in it for me? What's in it for us? Unless we have very obvious incentives or opportunities then I think any assisting group like ours, with dads you're always going to find there's a barrier to overcome just to get mainstream dads in, when I say mainstream I mean those that haven't got any obvious personal difficulties that might be a barrier to getting in, it's just lack of interest, or lack of a sense of anything to do with me, or because of time"*

It was also discussed how some dads can be wary of Sure Start, thinking Sure Start are nosey and that they're there to take their children away.

### ***Lack of Awareness***

Another barrier preventing dads getting involved in Sure Start relates to a lack of awareness. Several mums mentioned that they weren't aware of any particular activities just for dads. It thus appears that if Sure Start wants to access dads through the mums, awareness of what's on offer needs to be increased.

Similarly, through a conversation with one of the dads it emerges that more could be done to ensure dads are better informed about what activities may be of particular interest to them. This dad had been involved in the dads group before one of the workers left but wasn't kept informed of changes, therefore in terms of maintaining the interest and involvement of dads in Sure Start this sharing of information, and consistency, is something which needs to be addressed.

### ***Employment***

Clearly a barrier for some dads is their employment. Several mums mentioned that their partners either attend Sure Start activities or events when they're not working, or that they would probably get involved if it wasn't for work. One mum mentioned that her partner *"would love"* to be able to attend sessions like Messy Play with their child but can't because of work. This mum also said their partner would also be interested in attending Sure Start training.

Several parents said their partners would attend weekend / evening activities if they were available. There is suggestion that more family-orientated activities at these times may be worth trying rather than purely activities for dads and their children, or parallel activities for dads and mums. This is something which the programme is currently addressing.

### ***Resources***

One barrier mentioned was a lack of resources, specifically time to spend trying to engage with dads. The outreach workers who have taken responsibility for working with dads have also been running other Sure Start activities and would have liked to have been able to devote more time to involving dads. Flexible working hours were felt to be necessary for anyone working with dads.

### ***Relationship breakdown***

Another barrier to involvement mentioned was when relationships have broken down, particularly when dads are struggling to gain access to their children. An example was given of a mum changing the hours the dad could have access to his child, this consequently meant he was no longer able to attend the Sure Start sessions he'd been enjoying with his child.

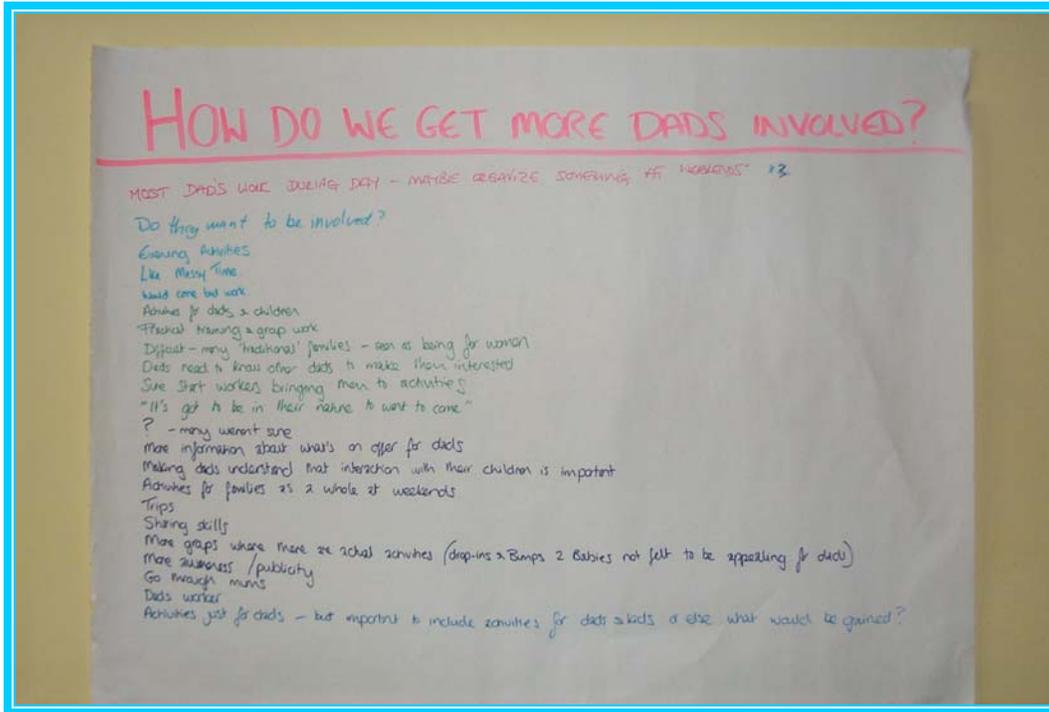
#### **4.3.6 Ideas for the Future**

Respondents were asked for their ideas about what Sure Start Thurnscoe could do to get dads more involved. Some members of staff and parents feel that the programme is currently doing all it can do and that *"it has to be in their nature to want to come"*. Overall mums would welcome more dads getting involved in their children's lives and attending Sure Start activities.

As the following picture shows other parents came up with several ideas, namely:

- Weekend / evening activities
- Activities for dads and children
- Weekend activities for the whole family
- Practical training and group work
- Sure Start workers accompanying dads to activities
- More information about what's on offer
- Ensuring that dads understand why interaction with their children is important
- Trips
- Sharing skills
- More hands-on activity sessions
- Having a dads worker
- Going through the mums

**Figure 4.3.6.1 Ideas of how to get more dads involved**



Family activities (not necessarily trips) were felt to have potential to break the ice and enable dads to get to know each other, an important step before attending other Sure Start activities.

Another suggestion was to offer more sporting activities for families. Others stressed that the programme shouldn't just think about what dads will enjoy however, and emphasised activities that will help them gain employment for example. Other respondents suggested offering training / workshops that would interest dads, but added that it would be important for this not to impinge on their lives too much. It was felt to be important to accept that the interests of dads and mums are different and to ensure that they can cater for these:

- *"I'd like to see something more constructive for them, maybe in joinery or carpentry. The ideal thing I'd like to see is a workshop like you have at school, engineering, woodwork, employed staff who can come and train dads on DIY and maybe try and learn them a trade. I think they'd be more susceptible to learn with us than going to a college or university, I don't think they'd do that"*
- *"I don't think that you can expect to give dads service on an equal par with women. All groups are basically set-up for both genders, but it's well understood that you need to specify in dads work, you need to do things together, you're going to run at low numbers but you need to keep plugging away at it, you might need to do things differently"*

- *“you’ve got to look at the dads area differently to how you do women’s, and then try to integrate and have a system that will not be reliant on a specific dads worker, that everything can mould into one and run smoothly.”*

A problem identified at the moment is that they don’t have a focal point of what they can offer. It was suggested that the programme could make more effort to publicise the training it offers to parents, perhaps through newsletters.

Other suggestions included for the programme to have a flexible dedicated dad’s worker and a *“proper”* dads group. It was also suggested that the programme needs more male employees overall.

*“let’s offer people what they need not what we think they need to fit around our working hours”*

From a dads perspective there needs to be more consistency in terms of those working with dads. A concern was expressed that the programme will cut-back their emphasis on getting dads involved because it’s not been that successful to date, although management assure this will not happen.

#### **4.3.7 Case Study – How Sure Start has helped one dad**

##### **Introduction**

Danny is 27 years old, is married and has three children aged 3; 19 months and 4 months. He works full-time with people with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour.

Danny got involved in Sure Start through his wife, who was attending the drop-in sessions with her mum. His wife encouraged him to start going.

##### **Involvement in Sure Start**

Danny wanted to get involved in Sure Start because it was seen as something that could help him and his family to meet people, he didn’t have any concerns about getting involved. He didn’t feel there was much for families in Thurnscoe prior to Sure Start.

When he first got involved in Sure Start it was purely the drop-in sessions he attended, *“the mother and toddler”*. At this time he was working so wasn’t able to attend other activities, although shortly after he first got involved in Sure Start Danny became unemployed. This was when Danny really started to get heavily involved in Sure Start, particularly with the dads group. Danny has also been quite heavily involved in Sure Start meetings, not just the parent’s forum.

Danny has attended training run by the programmes Educational Psychologist, and has also attended a basic childcare course that they got a certificate for. The best part about being involved in Sure Start so far has been the work the Educational Psychologist has done with them: *“child psychology, that’s*

*helped a lot, you know if you've got any problems or anything, things to do with sleeping, getting them into routines, what to do when they're misbehaving."* There isn't anything Danny hasn't liked about Sure Start.

Danny was quite heavily involved in the dads group when he was out of work. He enjoyed this and it was something he was looking to go into at that point – working with children and families. He applied for a position with Sure Start but was unsuccessful, but he feels it's similar to the work he's doing now.

A Sure Start outreach worker got Danny in touch with an agency that got him work with the organisation he's working for now and was *"lucky enough to get a permanent position there"*. He's no longer able to attend all of the Sure Start meetings because of his work commitments but he was able to attend the re-launch of the Parent's Forum recently. His wife still attends the meetings.

Sure Start has helped Danny in various ways. When he went for the job one of the outreach workers was sat on the interview panel with him. They set-out everything what Danny should expect to happen in the interview so there weren't any surprises. Particular staff members that have helped his family with financial problems by taking them to Citizens Advice when they didn't have a car. Other members of staff were mentioned as being particularly supportive and willing to go to their house to help.

Danny is naturally quite a shy person; he feels that through his involvement with Sure Start Thurnscoe he's learnt to push himself: *"I've always been shy so I've learnt to push myself."* Danny mentioned that Sure Start has definitely helped to develop their children. He mentioned that his eldest child is a lot more confident in herself:

*"She seems more advanced in her reading because she's had books at Sure Start and we've pushed books here, and her counting and things. She seems like she's had a bit of a push-up from the other kids we've seen who don't go"*

Danny was asked whether he would recommend Sure Start to other dads:

*"There's a lot for them if they want to get involved, they can get a lot out of it."*

#### ***4.4 A child's perspective***

In addition to the views of adults presented so far, it was also felt to be important to consider children's experiences of Sure Start. Different approaches were adopted for this element of the research. This included observation of one of the most popular Sure Start activities, Story and Rhyme, which took place in January 2005. A short colourful feedback form was used with the children containing key characters and animals that

the children are familiar with, they were asked questions about what they liked about the session etc, using the pictures as prompts.

### **Observation of Session**

The Story and Rhyme sessions take place each Tuesday afternoon at Houghton Road Community Centre. Two Sure Start Nursery Educators run the sessions (L and R).

When the observation begins at the start of the session three girls (Madison, aged 2, and Amber and Brogan, both aged 3) were present with their mums. By the end of the group there were 6 girls at the session and 1 boy present, as well as a baby boy and two baby girls. All but one of the parents / carers present were female (one was a granddad).

L sits on one of the chairs and is giving out stickers of the different characters associated with the session and the programme, Quacking Ducks, Sammy Squirrel etc. The children get a sticker for each time they attend the session, and if they get so many they get a free book. Madison sits on a chair in-between her mum and L. L gives Madison a sticker to put on her booklet, she appears excited by this. She smiles broadly as the sticker is put on the booklet and looks proud. Madison then goes to lie down on the sheets that are in the middle of the floor (ready for the session) and says *"come on"* to the other children.

As other children arrive L asks them (always using their name) whether they're going to go and collect their sticker from her for attending. One child sits quietly on her mum's knee. When all the children have been given their sticker L and R sit on the floor facing everyone and asks *"shall we find George?"* L and R and most of the children then go to find George the Dragon (a large cuddly toy), who is located in another room, they then all come back to the main seating area and they start to sing 'George's song'. This involves everybody singing the song to each child in turn; one of the workers will ask the children 'there's a little girl wearing (for example) pink, shall we sing to X?' Whilst the singing takes place one of the girls sits in-between the two Sure Start workers holding George the Dragon tightly. When L says 'there's a little girl wearing white..' Madison looks at her jumper and lifts it up, she looks excited, when L asks Madison if she wants everyone to sing to her she nods her head and smiles. When asked who is wearing black boots, Brogan (who is holding George) shouts out *"me!"* and kicks George away from her in the excitement.

Whilst the singing is taking place Madison points to the box of toys that are used in the session, she shouts out *"footprints"*, her mum explains that she means lily pads, and enjoys the 'five little speckled frogs' song. L explains that they'll sing that song in a bit, she mentions the 'Five Little Monkeys Bouncing on a Bed' song and asks the children to all take their shoes off (this involves the children standing on some duvet covers). R tries to encourage the children that are staying close to their mums to *"come and bounce on the bed"*, she uses each of the child's names when asking them. Madison goes up to the other children and her mum and asks *"are you coming?"*

R gets out the frogs and lily pads for the 'Five Little Speckled Frogs' song. Some of the children go straight to the workers to choose a frog and a lily pad to stand on. One young girl is asked by R if she wants to go and choose a frog to hold, she appears shy, her grandma approaches her and holds her hand and takes her to the front to choose a frog. Leah-Jane is invited to choose a frog, her mum goes with her. Once they've all sang the song the children are asked to take their lily pads back to the front.

Similarly when they sing Old MacDonald, all children are encouraged to choose an animal toy to hold. They then sing a verse involving each of the animals that the children are holding.

They then start talking about Bob the Builder. L tells the children that she doesn't know the words to the song, and asks the children if they can sing it themselves. Brogan then sings Bob the Builder for everyone. One of the initially shy children sits quietly on R's knee whilst Brogan sings. Christopher runs around excitedly.

The children are then asked to go to the front and choose a duck for 'Five Little Ducks..' For this song they move into the main section of the room where there is more floor space. All of the children who were of walking age got involved in this activity. When they move into the centre of the room some of the children run around excited by this. When they've finished this song they move back into the corner of the room where there is seating. Two of the children remain in the main open-plan area, one child pushes the other over and that child cries. The parents of these children rush over and the child who pushed the other child over is told to apologise, this child then starts to cry. The parents laugh about the situation and try to get the children to talk to one another.

There is then a short break in the session and the children are given a drink and a biscuit each.

L then reads a story to the children. Some of the children huddle round closely so they can see the pictures; other children sit with their parents. One child runs around in the main area of the room, he comes up to me and points to everyone else who's sat on the floor listening to the story.

All of the children are then invited to go to the front of the room and choose a musical instrument for 'I am the Music Man..' At this point another family arrives; the granddad sits on the floor with his granddaughter playing an instrument. All of the children clearly enjoy this activity, as most of the children apart from the very young ones get involved and stand / sit with the Sure Start workers and the rest of the children. One child sits looking through the book that's just been read to them whilst waiting for children to choose their instruments.

They then move onto singing a series of nursery rhymes. They have a song book on flip paper that everyone can see. The children appear keen to sit near this and enjoy turning the pages over. As some of these rhymes are being sung, another child now holds the story book. Some of the children stay near their parents when the rhymes are being sung, but quite a few of the rhymes involve interaction and everyone is encouraged to

get involved in these. The quieter children appear happier when their parents / grand parents are getting involved, for example during the Grand Old Duke of York and Ring-a-Ring O' Roses.

There was a clear sense of excitement and familiarity with some of the nursery rhymes. Some of the children were able to confidently sing along to the songs, and they were keen to ask for their favourite songs to be sung. When L announces that they're going to sing 'Row Row Row Your Boat' one child shouts "*yeah!*" and runs to the front of the room.

When the group are singing 'I'm a Little Teapot', one of the younger girls stands away from the group dancing and clapping her hands. Her grandma goes to join her and starts to do the actions to the song, another child who hadn't been with the rest of the group then joins them and starts doing the actions. Once the rest of the group finishes singing two of the girls then go over and join the grand parent and the other children, Brogan is playing with the Incy Wincy Spider puppet. The children run around excited.

After some more nursery rhymes R announces that it's home time and "*time to put George to bed*". One girl is chosen to carry George back to another room, all of the children go with them to say goodbye to George. After this one of the girls comes up to me and tells me "*George is in bed*".

### **Madison's Story**

Madison is two years old. At the moment she is an only child although her mum is expecting her second child in July. Madison and her mum have been attending the Story and Rhyme sessions on and off since September 2004. They also attend Messy Play and go to the drop-in session.

#### ***Madison's View***

Madison sat on her mum's knee whilst she was asked some questions about the session. When shown a number of different drawings of different facial expressions, Madison pointed to a picture of a girl with long hair and said "girl". She said she is happy when she comes to Story and Rhyme.

When asked what she likes most about coming to Story and Rhyme Madison pointed to the picture of the group of children, the 'seeing your friends' option.

Madison clearly likes George the Dragon, and when asked what her favourite toy and song is at the session she pointed to the pictures of the dragons first. She also mentioned the "frog" song and pointed to the picture of the fish.

Madison says she enjoys the food and drink she is given at the session, and was enjoying a chocolate biscuit as the questions were being asked.

She enjoys playing with the other children and said she enjoys running around with them.

#### ***Madison's Mums View***

She mentioned that Madison really likes George the Dragon. She thinks Story and Rhyme is one of the best sessions Sure Start runs because it involves the children and staff interacting with each other and doing things.

#### ***Observation Notes***

Madison clearly enjoys the Story and Rhyme sessions and was clearly very happy to receive a sticker for attending. She is enthusiastic about the different songs and activities and has developed favourite songs and toys through her time there. She displayed that she is keen to get other people that are sat on the sidelines to get involved in the activities; she's also confident and sociable around the other children and workers. She was able to sing along confidently to some of the songs and was very interested in the book that was read to them.

### **Brogan's Story**

Brogan is three years old and has one baby brother. Her mum also attends the Bumps to Babies session.

### ***Brogan's View***

Brogan says she is happy when she comes to Story and Rhyme. There isn't one thing in particular that Brogan likes best about the session, she mentioned liking everything about it; the other children; the stories; playing with the toys; seeing the staff and singing songs.

George the Dragon is Brogan's favourite toy at Story and Rhyme, her favourite song is the Wheels on the Bus. Brogan enjoys the food and drink she is given at the session.

Brogan enjoys playing with the other children at the session and mentioned that one of her friends is Amber.

### ***Observation Notes***

Brogan visibly enjoys attending the Story and Rhyme sessions. She was pleased to be able to hold George the Dragon throughout the first part of the session and hugged him closely. She was enthusiastic about the different songs and activities and mentioned the ones she was looking forward to singing next. She knew many of the songs and rhymes word for word and confidently sang a song to the rest of the group on her own. She appears to be a confident child who gets on well with the other children and Sure Start workers, she was happy to stay in the centre of the seated area and join in all of the songs and activities.

### **Amber's Story**

Amber is three years old and is an only child.

### ***Amber's View***

Amber feels happy when she comes to Story and Rhyme. Her favourite aspects of the session are singing the songs and having stories read to her.

She has a few different songs that she particularly likes, especially ones which involve children doing actions and involving other toys. Her favourite songs are 'Five Little Ducks.', 'The Wheels on the Bus', 'Five Little Speckled Frogs' and 'Five Little Monkey's Bouncing on the Bed'.

Amber enjoys the squash and biscuits that she is given at the session. She also enjoys playing with the other children, especially her friend Brogan.

**Amber's Mum's View**

Amber's mum mentioned that Amber really enjoys attending Story and Rhyme. She couldn't think of any improvements that could be made to the sessions but she mentioned that it's important to keep introducing new songs in the sessions, which is important as the children get older.

**Observation Notes**

Whilst Amber appears to be fairly quiet, she clearly enjoys the session and is confident and independent enough to take part in all of the activities and interact with the other children and workers. She seemed to particularly enjoy the story that was read to them and enjoyed looking at the pictures. Amber was also keen to flip over the song sheets and was fond of George the Dragon.

Both Brogan and Amber were very interested in looking at the digital photographs that were taken throughout the session. They were shown each picture that was taken and pointed out themselves and each other in the pictures. They also both pointed out "*George*" each time he appeared in a picture.

## **4.5 The health worker's position**

All staff members were consulted about the involvement of health within the Sure Start programme. Parents / carers (predominantly at the Bumps to Babies session) were also consulted about their experiences of health workers to date. An aim was to examine the initial impact that the seconded midwife has made to the Sure Start programme. The midwife had not been in post very long when this consultation was undertaken.

### **4.5.1 Involvement of Health to date**

Each Sure Start local programme is working towards key health targets. These include helping parents to support their children's healthy development before and after birth; reducing the number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy; providing ante-natal advice and support to all pregnant women; providing information and guidance on breastfeeding; nutrition; hygiene and safety to all families with young children and reducing the number of children admitted to hospital as an emergency with gastro-enteritis, a lower respiratory infection or a severe injury.

In the Year One evaluation report it was highlighted that whilst there was a good variety of involvement within the programme, both in terms of statutory and local representatives as well as parents, a lack of health involvement was clearly an issue for this programme as it is for many local programmes. Sure Start Thurnscoe has experienced difficulty in engaging with the local health authority, and as such the programme has had difficulty achieving key programme milestones in relation to health. This struggle to develop a partnership with health services meant that the programme has experienced difficulty gaining access to key start point data such as the number of hospital admissions, and other information particularly around pregnant women in Thurnscoe.

The health targets have thus been described as *"an absolute nightmare"* for this programme, *"a downside"* to the programme, a situation that is only now improving since a midwife has been seconded to the programme. One member of staff explained that there has been some animosity amongst some people in health about Sure Start being given the funding and not health themselves. Health has also questioned why Sure Start needs the statistics and what they're going to do with them.

The lack of involvement from health has thus, in most staff members' opinion, had quite a significant impact on the progress that the programme has been able to make towards some of its health targets, and making contact with new mums. The lack of partnership with health has resulted in Sure Start not having access to the contact details of new mums as soon as they would like them:

*"The health visitors following up have not really directed parents towards Sure Start in a systematic and consistent way."*

*"It was hit and miss as to whether we'd hear about new births in the area. We'd get the odd birth-notification form"*

The programme was lacking a health worker who could run projects that would work towards meeting the health targets. Despite this however, it's clear that the programme attempted to work towards health targets in this time, as it was widely recognised that there is generally poor health in Thurnscoe, with particular issues around breastfeeding and child safety. Baby packs and weaning packs were provided to families as was an extensive home-safety equipment pack and accompanying booklet. As one staff member discussed:

*"She did the best she could do, with the knowledge that she had, but not coming from a health background or an NHS field we just tried as best we could".*

On an encouraging note, the Bottle to Cup Exchange has been mainstreamed in the last year.

#### **4.5.2 The Secondment**

Kate, a midwife, has been seconded to Sure Start Thurnscoe since 2004, on a part-time basis to begin with. Kate showed an interest in Sure Start and the programme manager followed this up by contacting Kate's line manager about a potential secondment. She is very much a welcomed addition to the team, with one member of staff describing it as *"a huge sigh of relief"* when she took up the post.

This midwife now works purely in Thurnscoe therefore she is able to get to know many local families, and is a consistent and familiar face around Thurnscoe, something which is important for parents (see parent's perspective below). Kate's involvement with Sure Start means she gets to spend more time with families than a purely mainstream midwife would be able to, picking up on areas where a family may need more support. There is also more opportunity for parents to ask the midwife any questions and discuss any issues they have.

Kate usually attends the Bumps to Babies group each week, and staff commented that more parents attend the session if they know Kate will be there. Kate will also make appointments to spend more time doing home visits with parents if they require it. Kate also runs baby massage sessions with parents as well as aqua natal classes, both of which have proven to be popular sessions. The midwife also developed a 'Thurnscoe Slimmies' group, Kate has been working with parents in terms of healthy eating, how to devise healthy eating plans etc. This is something they're hoping to expand upon with the introduction of a Baby Café. Kate is also developing smoking cessation work, attending different Sure Start events and sessions to discuss this with families. Kate is also developing a Breastfeeding buddy system.

Although Kate had not been working for Sure Start for a very long period when this consultation took place, it is encouraging to note that staff are extremely positive about the impact this post is already having on the programme. Whilst it is too early to look at the impact in terms of statistics, there is agreement that Kate came to the programme with ideas and enthusiasm about how to work towards meeting the health targets and she has already had a great deal of success in terms of engaging with families; working

alongside existing staff members and bringing in health data that the programme was lacking beforehand.

When asked what difference Kate's involvement has made to the programme, most members of staff discussed the fact that Kate can notify parents of, and directly involve new parents with, Sure Start and thus registrations have increased. Parents / carers are thus being introduced to Sure Start when they are expecting or when their child is newborn rather than a couple of months old. This is because Kate knows of all the new mums in Thurnscoe, and she is also helping to provide the programme with statistics they were previously lacking. Her involvement is also helping to increase the number of families accessing the different Sure Start activities.

*"Now very young children are much more obvious within the programme"*

*"She has made her presence known which I think has been quite good, and we've had a lot of new registration forms come back in, and with her being a community midwife people know her as well and I think that helps, they know who they're working with, who they're dealing with"*

*"Kate's hit the ground running and the numbers are just amazing"*

*"Now that Kate's on-board we're getting that full on effect from the health side so we're able to find out new mums and we're able to visit them and get in touch with them prior to the birth"*

This involvement from health has also given other staff members more confidence in the support they are able to offer families, *"She's like a breath of fresh air to the programme"*. The example was provided of parents seeking advice on breastfeeding, beforehand staff could only give their own opinions and advice, but Kate is qualified to give this advice. Other staff mentioned that they've wanted to run things like weaning sessions before but weren't able to because of the lack of involvement from health, something which will not be an issue now. It was also mentioned that Kate works alongside other members of staff to work towards the targets:

*"most importantly, she involves other staff members in what she's doing; it's not an isolated post"*

Several members of staff discussed how Kate's personality fits in well with Sure Start, and parents get on well with her and appreciate the fact that she's down-to-earth. The fact that relationships with local families can be built-up means they are more likely to feel able to ask for advice.

*"They really like her, some health visitors can be like 'do this do that', but they all like her, she's very good, she's just normal"*

*"I think because she's that kind of bubbly person, then we will get a lot more people coming to us now than we did before, because they know that if they have got any"*

*particular problems with the health side we have got somebody onboard now who can help them. I don't think they're as scared to come anymore"*

*"That's what they like, they like people who are just normal, they don't like anyone who looks too official, there's a lot of insecurity".*

*"They've got her on a bit of a pedestal actually because she has such a good relationship with them, it's like Kate can show us this, Kate can help us with that"*

*"She's absolutely brilliant with the community, you couldn't wish for a better person than her to be in that role, she's got a lot of respect from the community members and the groups love her"*

The fact that Kate was previously working in Thurnscoe too is felt to have helped the secondment be a success, by having a good knowledge of local families. Parents trust Kate and take on-board what she says. One respondent mentioned that other health workers had promised to attend Sure Start activities in the past and haven't shown up.

Even one respondent who didn't feel that the lack of involvement from health in the early days of the programme had any repercussions, they could definitely see that the secondment has added something to the programme.

#### **4.5.3 The Future**

The secondment of the midwife is clearly seen as a starting point in terms of the relationship between health and Sure Start Thurnscoe. Whilst progress towards the health targets is now fully underway, the relationship with health overall is still recognised as something which needs to be developed further by all of those involved. It is hoped that Kate's involvement will help to build bridges between the programme and the local health service generally, it will be important in this respect for her secondment to be renewed in 2005<sup>13</sup>.

There are encouraging signs of potential improved relations, with meetings planned with health visitors in the area to discuss the referral process in more detail etc. The programme has also had a contact made available to them from the NHS that they gather information from, although it's still recognised as a struggle sometimes:

*"They're more willing to pass on information now, but we still struggle sometimes"*

*"I think that health needs to accept us"*

It is felt to be important to develop relationships with health further as there has been a bit of friction with health visitors in the past, and there is felt to be a need for health generally to adopt a more informal approach to working with parents, as Kate is doing with Sure Start. It's felt that the health authority isn't very flexible, sticking to *"historical*

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<sup>13</sup> As of June 2005, Kate now works purely for Sure Start.

*procedures*". One staff member added that there needs to be better access to health services in the area.

There is also felt to be a lack of involvement from health in terms of strategic side of programme. Some members of staff mentioned the fact that although Kate is working towards what most people would consider to be the key health concerns in the area, there is a danger of relying too much on one person, and thus there need to be more health workers involved. Encouraging a local health visitor has been attending aqua-natal with Kate.

*"I know we've got Kate on board but I think we need to work more with other health workers and more social workers"*

*"If we had social workers and health workers working together we'd be ensuring that they're providing for the all round development of the children, whereas it's limited what they can do without this."*

It was also recognised that parents would welcome more involvement from health.

#### **4.5.4 Parent's Perspective**

A survey conducted in 2003 revealed that 65% of parents in Thurnscoe were either very satisfied or satisfied with health services in the area. Whilst this is clearly something which will need to be examined once again for the three-year evaluation, it highlights that there is room for improvement in terms of opinions of health services in Thurnscoe.

To gather more in-depth information about people's opinions of health services and in particular the work Kate is doing with the programme, a researcher attended two Bumps to Babies sessions, to observe the session and interaction with Kate, and to speak to parents about their experiences.

At the observation session four mothers were present, and in total five children were present. There were four Sure Start workers present as well as Kate, the seconded midwife. Toys were provided for the children, and coffee and toast was provided. The session consisted of general chat. It was explained that the sessions aren't particularly structured at the moment although they are hoping to structure these more in the future. The sessions are meant to be quite relaxed and an opportunity for new mums to ask any questions and get to know each other, without having to focus on a particular activity such as baby massage which takes place at other times in the week.

As soon as Kate arrived the mums started talking to her about medical issues, appointments and six weekly checks etc. The observation revealed that Kate is clearly a very warm down-to-earth person and was happy to discuss anything and the mums seemed to get on with her very well. They talked about smear tests, Christmas and shopping, their children etc. At one point Kate asked if there was anything they wanted to discuss but there didn't appear to be anything in particular. There was a lot of

laughter in this session and parents commented that they got on well with Kate and they could *“take the mick”* out of each *other*.

At the seconded Bumps to Babies session that was attended, where parents were asked about their experiences, Kate was not present. There were many more parents present at this session, again this was a relaxed session where parents would talk about various things, there was a lot of talk about shopping in this session. One parent who had been quite chatty when Kate was present was much quieter in this setting, whilst the difference may have been the size of the group, another difference between the groups was that Kate would instigate a lot of the chats in the group when she was there. This parent had three young children and openly discussed how she would only approach a health worker if they needed to, stating how she just gets *“on with it”*. This parent had sought medical advice from Kate at the first session.

From the discussions with parents it appears that they have generally felt well supported by health workers throughout their pregnancies and when they've given birth, although some mentioned negative experiences of taking their children to the doctors. Whilst those who had children before Sure Start began as well as younger children could not identify any particular change in support they've been given, all could identify the benefits of Kate working with Sure Start. This is mainly in terms of Kate being on-hand to answer any questions parents may have, questions they wouldn't necessarily go to the length of making an appointment with a doctor or health visitor about. Most parents would normally ask their mums for such advice, although one person said they wouldn't ask anybody and would keep questions to themselves.

One mum who had a lot of contact with Kate when she was expecting her youngest child mentioned that every week someone comes up with medical questions that Kate will respond to and that people can relate back to them. Kate is a definite person that she'd ask any questions to.

A theme emerging from the discussions with parents is that there has been a lack of consistency in terms of the health workers parents get to see both before and after giving birth. One mum mentioned she never saw the same midwife when she had her first child (now three years old) and this had bothered her, therefore having Kate around now offers some important consistency. One mum also mentioned that she requested to have her ante-natal checks in Mexborough because she couldn't get to see the same people in Thurnscoe

It appears that Kate's signposting is working well. One parent mentioned that they found out about Sure Start through Kate, she said she may have received leaflets about the programme but these didn't stick in her mind. This parent said that if she didn't have friends who were attending groups she probably wouldn't have gone to any but the push from Kate helped.

From a dads perspective it is felt that there is relatively little support for dads-to-be from health workers. Groups such as Bumps to Babies are felt to be geared towards women and so are seen as off-putting; at the time of the consultation no dads were attending Bumps to Babies, Aqua Natal or Baby Massage. From a health workers point of view

they will talk equally as much to dads as the mums during home visits if they're present, although this feeling isn't shared by the dad:

*"I think in general medical people tend to speak to the mother more than the father, the father's easily passed by even if I'm there."*

This dad mentioned that a while ago he was given a booklet about dad's rights etc which he felt was quite good, but doesn't feel there's as much support for new fathers or fathers-to-be now.

## ***4.6 Opinions of the programme's overall approach to targets***

### **4.6.1 Awareness of Progress Towards Targets**

All staff members were asked how aware they were of the programme's progress towards meeting targets. As might be expected there were quite different levels of awareness amongst staff, with the management team naturally feeling most informed due to it being part of their everyday work. Those involved in inputting data and submitting information to the Sure Start Unit were also well informed.

Some members of staff mentioned that although they are aware of what they are working towards in Sure Start, they aren't particularly aware of how successful Sure Start Thurnscoe has been with the targets. This is particularly the case for members of the nursery education team and the administration team.

Several members of staff mentioned that progress is discussed at staff and individual team meetings, although it was also mentioned that until recently it was not possible to hold these meetings regularly. It was mentioned that the information discussed at the meetings isn't in as much depth as it could be, although the situation is felt to be improving with charts etc used to highlight performance. One staff member noted that they discuss the number of parents involved at the meetings but not actual progress towards meeting targets.

Some staff members discussed how these staff meetings are useful in terms of getting people to think about how any gaps in progress can be filled. It was discussed how every Sure Start project has to clearly tie in with a Sure Start target now.

Whilst some of the staff with less knowledge of progress towards targets are satisfied with the extent of knowledge they have, some would like to be more informed than they are, they would find it useful. One member of staff mentioned that part of the reason they don't feel well informed is because they work part-time.

*"that's why it's difficult being part-time because you never get the whole picture".*

*"maybe there should be some acknowledgement of where we are, I'm not sure if staffing is the right place to do it. I think you're more likely to get the information at the different sub-groups, but even then it's not really about the targets"*

It was suggested by some that more could be done to keep members of staff informed about progress towards targets outside of the staff meetings as well as within them. Others felt that it was up to individuals to seek updates on progress from the management team:

*"I think we're informed enough, and if we're not informed to be honest with you we can always ask"*

It was discussed by one respondent that they will often only hear about the areas that the programme is not doing very well with; in this sense things could be more positive and motivating.

#### **4.6.2 Targets - Success**

Respondents were asked to discuss which targets they feel the programme is working well towards. Again some members of staff were unsure about this, and could only really comment on the work they were doing for the programme on a day to day basis. This suggests that more could be done to encourage and remind Sure Start staff of the particular targets the programme is working towards, re-affirming how individuals are helping meet the targets. This would give them a sense of how they are contributing to the overall picture of Sure Start.

Some members of staff feel that the programme is working equally well towards all the targets at the moment. The difficulties that the programme has experienced in terms of health targets are now being tackled in a way which they weren't before a health worker was recruited.

*"Kate's hit the ground running and the numbers are just amazing"*

One respondent mentioned that good communication between staff is at the heart of the programmes success. Some members of staff provided examples of projects that are contributing to particular targets, for example the drop-ins for social and emotional development, and Bumps to Babies and the baby café for health. It's also felt that sessions such as Messy Play and Story and Rhyme encourage children to be creative. Story and Rhyme was mentioned as being a project which works particularly well.

It was recognised that the programme can be doing better in some areas than others at different periods, and that it's just the nature of the programme. Sometimes they can do well with education, some years it's more social-led. It's felt that they are promoting *social and emotional development* in everything they do, be it a parent and toddler group or tell a story.

It's felt that the programme is making strides towards Improving Learning now, as they now have a worker in post to work with the Educational Psychologist on language and literacy. It was mentioned that the Educational Psychologist works on baby-signing at the drop-in. It's also felt that the programme focuses on improving learning for adults as well as children:

*"developing our own programme to try and bring it on and accelerate their learning, so we're definitely focussing on that"*

Despite this it was discussed that the programme is having more success in terms of the education of the child as opposed to the development of the parent, although not through lack of trying. There are more attendees at the activities for children rather than sessions which are aimed at the education of parents. One member of staff noted:

*“I’ve seen children come on a long way from where they started from”*

One member of staff discussed how it can be difficult to measure the success of the projects and activities they’re running, it’s not always easily identifiable and doesn’t always fit-in neatly with the targets:

*“somebody could attend a parent and toddler group, and you could think oh it isn’t making much of an impact, but that in turn can build their confidence, then in-turn to get over post-natal depression and in turn to seek employment”*

#### **4.6.3 Targets - Difficulties**

Respondents were then asked to discuss what targets they believe the programme to be having difficulty with. Childcare provision is one of the main difficulties cited, having to work with other childcare providers – this is something which will not be an issue once the Children’s Centre is up and running.

It’s also felt that whilst a lot of the projects the programme runs revolve around strengthening families and communities, it doesn’t necessarily mean people are going to go on to employment. From a management point of view this PSA target is somewhat *“woolly”* but they nevertheless hope to have made significant progress towards this by 2006. Other staff members also mentioned the programme was having difficulty with the employment target.

*“it’s communities response to what we’re putting on, until they’re on board we are fairly limited in what we can do”*

Strengthening Families and Communities was cited by another staff member as being the programmes weakest area, including the education and development of parents. One respondent mentioned that speech and language development has been ok but stated that it’s difficult to measure. Others once again mentioned that health targets have been difficult to tackle until recently due to the lack of involvement and co-operation from health.

Several members of staff discussed that one of the major difficulties the programme is facing in terms of targets is getting people along to activities. It’s felt that the number of families involved is quite poor at the moment; they have a lot of regular attendees from the same family units, but not so many new faces. It was explained that there was a danger of the programme becoming socially-supportive, for example spending a lot of time with families but not being able to meet the demands of the Unit in terms of numbers.

The programme is currently adjusting to the fact that they’re having to focus on getting people to multiple activities at the moment, as attending a drop-in for example five times in a month only counts as one contact.

The fact that there are two distinct areas of Thurnscoe makes this situation difficult, if activities are run in one area families in the other area will not generally access them. It's felt that the situation will improve once the building is complete.

*"I think it's to do with that we're spaced out all over, and it's just difficult, if people could link us with one place I think we'd do better"*

*"they'll only attend the sessions in their area, there's not many that will venture out to go to the other venue even if it's something they want to do, and that's our main problem. When we get the building we'll be right on the border between the two, which should be a good thing"*

It was also mentioned that parents need an incentive to come along to activities, being less inclined to get involved if it involves activities they can do with their children than for example coffee mornings. It's recognised that parents can be scared of new activities and it generally takes word-of-mouth to increase attendance.

*"you can put posters up everywhere but if one of their friends says 'oh yeah it's good there come down with me'; that'll be a lot more successful than putting leaflets through people's doors"*

The programme has increased the number of registrations recently however, mainly through the health worker, a challenge is to sustain these peoples involvement.

One member of staff feels that an area for improvement would be in terms of monitoring and evaluating projects more thoroughly to assess how successful these are. It was explained that there aren't enough resources at present for this.

*"I think we've got a long way to go in monitoring and evaluation of projects, I think there's a lot we can do to progress now. We've concentrated so hard on getting the groups set-up and getting the numbers in that actually seeing what's happening"*

#### **4.6.4 Approach to achieving targets**

All members of staff were asked whether they feel the programme has the right approach to meeting its targets. It's generally agreed that the programme does have the right approach, it's a programme which is willing to try new projects and activities, give them time to develop, but the programme will also stop activities that aren't felt to be very successful.

*"it's everything to do with trial and error; if something's not working then they'll try something else"*

*"it's finding the right ones that are a success, not only in a fun way for parents but ones that meet targets as well, it's just trying to get a balance between the two"*

*"yes I think overall we're aiming to cover those targets as best we can"*

It's felt that the programme has a nice balance of projects, and they're now running more projects than they've ever had. They're trying to work with parents in a different way, by introducing sessions such as Time Out at a different venue where parents can undertake taster courses, develop computer skills etc.

One member of staff feels they need to re-look at the health targets as well as consider how they could be encouraging more parents to access training and continue to access training. One staff member feels there's a lot more focus on the process rather than the end product of where they are with regards to targets; it would be felt to be good to have progress checks.

It was discussed how the programme has been working more effectively towards targets over the past few months. They've been better at assessing why they are putting particular activities on and what the benefits of these are. Management commented however that they experience difficulties with staff not recording every contact. Trying to get attendance information from staff was described as *"painful"*:

*"It's an ongoing battlefield, selling the need of it is not always bought into, we try"*

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations are provided under each theme that was covered in this year's evaluation. It is noted that the programme may now be tackling some of the issues raised in this section.

### 5.1 Staff Training and Development

The programme shows real commitment to the development of its staff; suggesting and enabling staff members to pursue a range of training. It represents an investment in staff across all teams, both in terms of 'technical' job-specific training as well as compulsory training and personal development courses. Staff ultimately find the training useful and most of it can easily be applied to their everyday work. Staff also show commitment to undertaking long-term courses which will ultimately benefit the programme and themselves, the programme is also clearly thinking strategically about the training people attend.

Training and development requirements are as likely to be identified by supervisors as well as staff themselves. There are opportunities throughout the year to discuss training needs. During discussions surrounding staff training it emerged that employees value staff meetings as a way of getting to know what everyone else is doing, also as a means of acting as a morale booster.

Although staff haven't undertaken smoking cessation training themselves, as intended in the original delivery plan, the programme has links with a Smoking Cessation Specialist who will attend Sure Start events; the health worker also works towards reducing the number of expectant mothers smoking. The programme is also taking on a new Smoking Policy.

#### Key Recommendations:

- Whilst information on different training is openly available to all staff members, it should be ensured that staff members are able to view any training information that is sent to other members of staff
- Keeping staff meetings frequent is important, especially when everyone is working to capacity as they are at present. In terms of morale regular meetings are important, it also appears that it would be beneficial for the team to have an away day, as a means of reaffirming relationships and enhancing these, it could include team building activities as well as constructive sessions on particular issues, for example the Parent Involvement Strategy could be discussed. This discussion could involve using PA techniques so everyone would get a chance to contribute and debate issues which affect everyone

- More formalised sharing of knowledge acquired through training is recommended, especially within the different teams when training can be relevant and of interest to several members of staff
- There is indication that the programme is viewing the staff training strategically, with discussion about how they will be able to charge other organisations for the training Sure Start staff can administer once in the Children's Centre. This is something which could be developed with other members of staff this year
- Staff need to be helped to set clear learning objectives and review and evaluate any training completed, this will be important if the programme is hoping to go for a British Standard in the future

## **5.2 Training / Employment consultation**

Despite clear efforts Sure Start Thurnscoe is currently struggling with the employment target and with ensuring attendance at Sure Start training, although there has been some success. In the early stages of the programme when a core group of parents were active within the programme, there was more enthusiasm for and take-up of training. These parents were positive about their experiences of the training. As this core group of parents has dispersed, and children have got older, there has been less interest in training. Many of the parents now involved with Sure Start have very young children; training is less of a priority for them.

Consultation with parents and carers highlighted that there is an interest in training, and parents often have employment aspirations that they sometimes don't feel able to achieve either through a lack of confidence, or due to barriers including childcare responsibilities. Confidence and self-esteem are clearly areas where parents need support in order for them to feel able to access both training and employment.

A number of partnerships have been formed with training providers and employment agencies, although there is indication that these relationships were stronger in the early days of the programme.

### **Key Recommendations:**

- As some parents had put their names down for training, but hadn't been informed of what was happening with this for a long period it is important to keep parents up-to-date with what's happening. There also could be more publicity in terms of training
- It is important that the programme monitors and evaluates any training provided to parents by collecting feedback forms
- A buddy system and volunteers system may help to support parents who are less confident about attending new groups / activities

- Involve parents in delivering training where possible. Some form of training for parents to do with raising confidence and self-esteem, as well as positive thinking is also recommended
- Partnerships with training providers and employment agencies need to be re-affirmed and sustained

### **5.3 Involvement of Fathers**

Whilst the number of dads involved in the programme on a consistent level hasn't been considerable this isn't through a lack of effort, different approaches and techniques have been used to try and encourage involvement. Where dads have been involved they have been given a sense of ownership and responsibility for the activities they've been involved in.

Both dads and mums would like to see more fathers involved in the programme's activities, and mostly suggested more weekend activities, involving children, to help encourage this involvement. Most staff and parents / carers felt it is important for activities to include children; any activities solely for men should be used as a treat not as a regular occurrence. Consultation highlighted that it is important for dads to know other dads that are going to attend activities.

#### **Key Recommendations:**

- There is indication that the programme needs to reaffirm commitment from all members of staff to working with and involving fathers, there needs to be more of a joined-up approach. Whilst this is important generally, it is especially important if the programme isn't going to have a dedicated dad's worker
- The programme may benefit from having a dedicated dads worker if resources allow this. This research has found that consistency is important for dads and will be important in the future considering the changes that have already taken place

Sure Start Thurnscoe may want to follow-up the dads who expressed interest in being part of the Parent's Forum before this becomes too established once again and potentially off-putting to them as 'new' faces. This may be an area where the buddy system which parents were enthusiastic about could come into play. The programme should also harness the interest of dads / granddads to become Sure Start volunteers.

- All members of staff should also try to keep dads up to date with activities they could take part in. Mums should also be informed of activities that may interest dads so they can pass information on.
- There is indication that the programme could improve awareness of staffing changes amongst parents and try to ensure a smooth and continuing of services being delivered when there are changes in staff

#### **5.4 Children's Consultation**

The observation sessions at Story and Rhyme and the consultation with children at these sessions highlighted how much the children enjoy the sessions, and for different reasons. These well-attended sessions also provide an opportunity for several of the key objectives of Sure Start to be met. The nursery team staff clearly do all they can to fully involve all of the children in the session, regular attendees as well as new families.

One of the key successes of this session appears to be the interaction involved as well as the fact that the session has George the Dragon 'and friends' associated with it. All of the children appear to really like this character and look forward to getting him out and putting him to bed. The reward system of a sticker and book or attendance appears to work well, and the children enjoy receiving these.

Key Recommendations:

- A recommendation is to keep ensuring that the rhymes and songs used at the session change regularly so that children maintain their enthusiasm and interest for them, as well as continually learning new songs
- As the reward system appears to work well, it may be worth applying this to other Sure Start activities to encourage attendance

#### **5.5 Health Worker Consultation**

The programme has experienced difficulty developing a relationship with health, an issue which many local programmes experience. The programme has therefore had a lack of input from health and a lack of start-point data and information about new births. Encouragingly the seconded midwife has already made quite a significant impact on the programme, and some of the difficulties in relation to data collection and passing on key information are now being redressed.

Realistically the involvement of the midwife is being viewed as a starting point in terms of relationship with health; there is still room for more involvement from health, especially in terms of the strategic side of the programme and learning from Sure Start ways of working.

The activities that the midwife has developed appear to be gaining success, and parents feel able to ask her questions they would normally keep to themselves or ask family members. The addition of the midwife to the Sure Start team had provided the community with a much-needed friendly, recognisable and consistent health-worker face.

Key Recommendations:

- Sure Start Thurnscoe should continue efforts to form further relationships with health workers. This is important in terms of the strategic side of the programme.

## 5.6 Consultation on Targets

It's felt that the programme is working well towards most targets, although performing particularly well in terms of social and emotional development and educating and working with children. Difficult targets for this programme include childcare; strengthening families and communities and the employment target. In the past health targets have been a big issue. It's felt the programme has the right approach to its targets overall.

The consultation highlighted that staff aren't always clear about how they are contributing to the bigger picture of Sure Start, and awareness of progress towards targets could be improved, areas that the programme is doing well in as well as areas that are proving more difficult.

Key Recommendations:

- It is important that staff meetings continue to be regularly held and any members of staff who aren't able to attend the meetings should be fully updated as to what is discussed
- Attracting and sustaining parental involvement to multiple activities is a key challenge for this programme. The Parent Involvement Strategy will be a key document for the programme which all staff should have input into and be familiar with, this should be a working document
- There needs to be more emphasis on continual monitoring and evaluation of projects, as well as assessing what activities are laid on for the targets which the programme is experiencing difficulty with