



## **Local Evaluation of Sure Start St Ann's Programme**

*First Report*

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## **Preface**

It is important to establish at the outset the context and purpose of this report; to this end a number of points should be emphasised:

- This is an interim report which marks the culmination of an initial period of involvement with Sure Start St Ann's (from August 2002 to May 2003); it sets out the main themes of the local evaluation to date and starts to identify some of those characteristics and processes which typify the progress that Sure Start St Ann's has made. This evaluation remains on-going.
- This report should not be considered as an end in itself, it is simply one aspect of the formative process of local evaluation - where observations and questions feed into the evolution and development of local provision.
- The purpose of this report is to identify some areas of anticipated effective working and also to draw attention to perceived areas of difficulty so that these might be further investigated and addressed as the evaluation continues.
- In the absence of significant, measurable outcomes the early stages of this evaluation have relied upon the opinions and comments of a range of local stakeholders. Whilst these remarks do not necessarily reflect the views of the authors (or indeed all stakeholders) they are reported herein to illustrate the range of opinion and strength of feeling which has been expressed about Sure Start St Ann's.
- The comments and observations which close this report should be viewed as preliminary findings only. They are posed here in order to provoke discussion amongst staff members and other stakeholders about how build upon Sure Start St Ann's achievements, and how to ensure that it has a significant impact upon the local community.

The evaluation consists of a number of separate, yet interrelated, strands. The report reflects this approach and consists of seven sections:

- 1) Introduction - where the organisational and policy context of Sure Start are outlined, and the role of evaluation discussed.
- 2) Action Learning Evaluation – which describes four collaborative evaluation projects carried out with staff and stakeholders.
- 3) Case Studies – which reviews the positive impact that Sure Start St Ann's has had upon two local parents.
- 4) Community Survey – a report of the progress made towards a St Ann's community survey.
- 5) Data Monitoring – a short summary of Sure Start data assessing the impact that it has had upon local families.
- 6) Stakeholder Interviews - a review of a number of interviews with key stakeholders in and around St Ann's.
- 7) Observations and Reflections – a concluding section which identifies a number of key issues and key questions for Sure Start St Ann's.

## **Summary.**

- Sure Start is a cornerstone of the governments agenda to tackle social exclusion and reduce child poverty. It is a programme concerned with both creating and establishing mechanisms to reduce poverty, but is equally about changing agendas and the way that organisations work.
- Sure Start is an area-based, community-focused programme which strives to improve the life-chances of children and young families by: *improving social and emotional development; improving health; improving children's ability to learn; and by, strengthening families and communities.*
- Evaluation is an important aspect of the Sure Start agenda, and is established at three different levels: national evaluation, local evaluation and in-depth studies of key themes.
- Sure Start St Ann's is a second wave programme established during 2000. It serves a large and diverse community within a geographically large area. There are currently more than 1200 eligible children in the programme area.
- This local evaluation is, at this stage by necessity, largely a process evaluation focused upon establishing evidence of good practice, innovative working and perceptions of the programme. It adopts a collaborative Action learning evaluation approach which seeks to involve Sure Start staff, stakeholders and service users as far as is possible.
- The evaluation consists of five interrelated components: stakeholder interviews, action learning evaluations, case studies, data monitoring and a community survey.
- The evaluation demonstrates that Sure Start St Ann's has made a number of significant achievements - in the nature of its provision and the impact that it has had upon local families; however, the programme still faces the significant challenge of reaching and involving a greater number of local people.
- Stakeholder interviews are an important device for gathering information about Sure Start St Ann's and the community that it serves; they are also important in helping to formulate key questions and ensure that this evaluation is addressing the most pertinent issues.
  - Interviewees recognised considerable value in the Sure Start St Ann's programme. However, concern was expressed about a lack of community involvement and about the programme's lack of visibility and presence in the community.
  - It was recognised that Sure Start is formulated to enable greater local participation in decision making processes, however Sure Start St Ann's meetings were criticised as being repetitive and inconsistent. The local capital works programme was also highlighted as being overly bureaucratic.
  - A strong *professional service delivery* ethos is recognised in the programme and the creation of a *formal referral system* singled out as a major achievement. However, this style of approach may inhibit innovative ways of working.

- Stakeholders stressed that St Ann's is a difficult environment to work in, and that Sure Start St Ann's progress should be judged in this context.
- Four action learning evaluation projects were undertaken as part of this local evaluation.
  - Parents United benefited parents in a number of important ways – creating better awareness of parenting issues, contributing to participant's personal development and facilitating mutual support networks.
  - The Home Safety Scheme typifies the broader Sure Start agenda in that it is multifaceted and incorporates a number of local bodies. It is an initiative which has taken significant steps towards sustainability beyond the life of Sure Start St Ann's.
  - Despite being recognised as an excellent initiative attendance at the Toy Library is poor. Efforts to rectify this would seem to be heading in the right direction (by utilising venues such as schools and nurseries), although more publicity might also be beneficial.
  - The Community Parent Scheme should be an integral part of the Sure Start St Ann's programme, however there seems to be some confusion as to its purpose and it consequently appears isolated.
- *Sure Start success stories* offer a more detailed insight into life in St Ann's and a more connected vision of Sure Start and the positive impact that it can have upon local people.
- A community survey, directed by local people, will shed light on those issues which local people feel are important, and will capture opinions on the impact that Sure Start St Ann's has had.
- Data monitoring shows that:
  - 54% of eligible children are registered with Sure Start St Ann's; since Spring 2002 the programme has grown steadily.
  - During March 2003 38% of all eligible children in the St Ann's area participated in a Sure Start event, this included all babies born during this month.
- Although an impression of Sure Start's benefit might be better illustrated by parent's comments:
  - *"[before Sure Start] I just felt that I was a put upon parent. Now I'm a valued member of the community. ... I think I was just very kind of closed, closed and reclusive, like just with my family. Y'know I was stuck in the house with the kids, it was too much time just with the kids. ... I'm more confident and outgoing now. I know how to conduct myself properly with other people. I feel that I am a valued member of the community."* (Kevin)
- In summary, Sure Start St Ann's has adopted a more traditional statutory style approach which is focused upon service delivery and top-down management (i.e. it is most strongly informed by national guidelines and Sure

Start targets). Whilst this has facilitated excellent and important provision to individual families it has perhaps inhibited broader community participation.

- This conflict is perhaps reflective of a more deep-seated and inherent tension (which affects all similar programmes) between the desire for community involvement and the necessity of establishing services that are sustainable and attractive to other service providers.
- Two key questions would seem to underpin many of the issues that have emerged in this local evaluation: *Why aren't more people accessing Sure Start St Ann's? How do we judge the success of Sure Start St Ann's?* Addressing these is a fundamental aspect of the extension of the evaluation.

## **1. Introduction.**

### **1.1. Background.**

Sure Start is an innovative strategy targeted at children under four in areas of social and economic disadvantage, which seeks to improve life chances through an integrated approach to early education and play, health services, family support and advice on parenting. It is a cornerstone of the Government's agenda to tackle social exclusion (and reduce child poverty) and is illustrative of a drive towards new forms of governance and new ways of working. Partnership, participation and innovation are all central tenets of Sure Start policy and integral to the management of local programmes, which are designed and led in consultation with local people, local community and voluntary organisations as well as local statutory bodies. Sure Start is an important and significant initiative that not only establishes key targets and mechanisms for the reduction of child poverty, but which also sets an agenda for new and *joined-up* ways of working.

The programme emerged from an inter-departmental<sup>1</sup> assessment of Services to Children, which was part of a Comprehensive Spending Review<sup>2</sup> carried out by the then new government in 1997. Set against a backdrop of around 4.4 million children living in poverty in the United Kingdom<sup>3</sup>, this review identified the importance of pre-school years (0-4) and the potential long-term impact that multiple deprivation at this stage can have upon individual life chances and trajectories (e.g. in poor health, poor educational attainment, risk of criminal behaviour, social exclusion etc.). Moreover, services to this age group were recognised as being geographically patchy, uncoordinated and inconsistent; and, more significantly, as being overlooked by other Government programmes. In response the review proposed: "the provision of a comprehensive community based programme of early intervention and family support which, built on existing services, could have positive and persistent effects, not only on child and family development but also help to break the cycle of social exclusion"<sup>4</sup>.

Each individual Sure Start programme is located in an area of social and economic deprivation (as identified using the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation) and is geographically defined in collaboration with a partnership of local community, voluntary and statutory agencies. It is this partnership (alongside local parents) which is best able to recognise local circumstances and specific need and which consequently assumes responsibility for the delivery of Sure Start at a local level.

A Government Response to Child Poverty - Sure Start

*1997 – 4.4 million children living in poverty.  
Government pledge to reduce this by one-quarter by 2004.*

*1997 – Comprehensive spending review.  
Including a multi-agency/cross-cutting assessment of Services to Children.*

*1998 – Spending Review completed.  
A budget of £540 million established for Sure Start for the period 1999 – 2002.*

*1999 - 60 trailblazing schemes established.  
Situated in areas of social and economic deprivation, and led by various agencies.*

*2000 – 2002 Sure Start extended.  
May 2002 saw the most recent (6th) wave of Sure Start programmes announced.*

*2000 – further funding of £580 million announced for the period to 2004.*

*2003 – 450 Sure Start programmes established nationally (April 2003).*

*2004 – Goals.  
By 2004 it is expected that there will be 524 Sure Start programmes reaching approximately 400,000 children.*

However, each programme is guided by one clear goal - *to work with parents and children to promote development so that they might flourish and break the cycle of disadvantage*; and, is informed by four centrally established objectives<sup>5</sup>:

*Objective 1 – improving social and emotional development.* To help families function by supporting early parent-child bonding, and to enable the early identification, and support, of children with emotional and behavioural problems.

*Objective 2 – improving health.* To help parents care for their children, and to promote healthy development before and after birth.

*Objective 3 – improving children's ability to learn.* To encourage high quality environments and childcare to provide stimulating play, improve language skills and identify children with special needs.

*Objective 4 – strengthening families and communities.* To involve families in building community capacity which might sustain Sure Start and create pathways out of poverty.

Each programme must work to meet targets in these objectives by building upon existing provision and by co-ordinating (and adding value to) the work of local

service providers. Sure Start undertakings are likely to be multigenerational (i.e. working with children, parents and even grand-parents) and multifaceted (i.e. linking health, education and welfare services and professionals), and may include such things as: outreach work and home visits; support to families and parents; good quality play, learning and childcare; new primary and community healthcare services; and, support to families with special needs. Programmes should endeavour to be inclusive of all parts of the local community, demonstrating cultural awareness and sensitivity to the needs of minority groups as well as by striving to reduce the stigma of participating in this kind of social initiative. As far as possible all Sure Start activities should be based in evidence of good practice and should be exposed to rigorous evaluation<sup>6</sup>.

Whilst Sure Start is fundamentally targeted at serving the needs of families with children under the age of four, it is expected that programmes will ensure long-lasting support to families by identifying and co-ordinating with the appropriate agencies for children older than four when appropriate.

*Sure Start local programmes - key principles and ethos:*

<i>locally driven.</i>	<i>a partnership.</i>
<i>long-lasting support.</i>	<i>co-ordinates to add value.</i>
<i>multigenerational.</i>	<i>multifaceted.</i>
<i>non-stigmatising.</i>	<i>culturally sensitive.</i>
<i>evidence of good practice.</i>	<i>meets national objectives.</i>

### **1.3. Sure Start St Ann's.**

Sure Start St Ann's is one of eight local Sure Start programmes in and around Nottingham. It was established as part of the second wave of local programmes with a delivery plan presented in May 2000 (produced by a local resident in consultation with a Steering Group made up of local statutory and community

agencies). A programme director was appointed in October 2000 and the Sure Start St Ann's staff has grown from this point; there are currently 24 full-time members of staff working in four broad teams (Programme Administration, Community Participation, Public Health and Childcare and Play). The programme is managed by a local Partnership Board, which is responsible for overseeing the programme's activities and establishing its strategic direction; and, has four local task groups (one for each Sure Start objective) and a Parents' Advisory Group to ensure a broad participation in decision-making processes. Nottingham-City Primary Care Trust acts as the programme's accountable body (monitoring spending and performance) and The Renewal Trust is the programme's key local partner<sup>7</sup>.

The programme covers a geographically large area and currently serves over 1200 children in more than 700 families. It offers a range of in-house provision and has established strong working relationships with bodies such as The Renewal Trust (who provide a father's worker through a service level agreement), WEA (who provide an education worker through a service level agreement), St Ann's Advice Centre (who provide regular advice sessions) and ENPROVE (who fit safety equipment as part of a Sure Start initiative). Sure Start St Ann's utilises (and has invested in) a number of local community facilities (e.g. health centres, community centres, family centres, libraries, churches, city farm, etc.) and works with a range of local bodies and professionals (including local housing associations, health professionals, community workers and education institutions amongst many others). The following table offers a sample of some of the activities and services that Sure Start St Ann's offers:

<u>Community Participation</u>	<u>Public Health</u>	<u>Childcare and Play</u>
<i>Parent volunteer training</i>	<i>Parenting classes</i>	<i>Toy library</i>
<i>A fathers' group</i>	<i>Home safety scheme</i>	<i>Indoor sports</i>
<i>Bumps and babies</i>	<i>Aqua natal</i>	<i>Stay and play</i>
<i>Meet and eat</i>	<i>Age and stage</i>	<i>Craft workshops</i>
<i>Young parents group</i>	<i>Bugs and babies</i>	
<i>Get it together course</i>	<i>Smoking cessation</i>	
<i>Community survey</i>	<i>Breast feeding initiative</i>	

These lists are by no-means comprehensive and it should be stressed that activities often draw together expertise from across the Sure Start programme,

and will frequently involve staff from other local agencies. For example staff from the childcare team are likely to offer crèche support to activities such as the fathers' group and the community survey; the bugs and babies video was undertaken jointly by the health team co-ordinator and parent volunteer co-ordinator; a community librarian participants in one of the toy library sessions; and, the fathers' group regularly has representatives from outside agencies to explore things such as housing issues. Despite this, truly multidisciplinary and multifaceted working remains a key challenge to this, and other, Sure Start programmes.

Sure Start St Ann's also faces the complexity of serving a large population within a geographically large and socially diverse community (average programme size is around 700 children, the St Ann's area includes over 1200 eligible children). Initial efforts to manage this by discerning four coherent neighbourhoods as the focus for local provision and capital investment (as outlined in the delivery plan) do not seem to have been pursued. This would seem symptomatic of a delivery plan, and local agenda, which is evolving in response to changes to national and regional guidelines, as well as local circumstances.

#### **1.4. Evaluating Sure Start.**

Evidence of good practice is a key aspect of the Sure Start agenda, consequently evaluation has been built into all levels of the programme<sup>8</sup>. This includes evaluation at both national and local level, as well as incorporating a number of in-depth studies of key themes or innovative projects.

A long-term national evaluation is being undertaken by the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues, Birkbeck College, University of London. This considers "*what difference does Sure Start make to children, which activities make the most difference?*", and consists of five different components. *Local Context Analysis* describes those locations where programmes are situated, and tracks health, social, economic and demographic changes in these places. A concern for the *Implementation* of Sure Start investigates exactly what is being done and how this might affect existing service provision. The *Impact* that Sure Start has had upon children, families and communities is a key focus; as is the *Cost-effectiveness* of Sure Start. The national evaluation team also offer technical advice and *Support for local evaluations*.

Local evaluation is less prescriptive, although is undertaken by each individual programme to address the key question "*what are we doing and how well are we doing it?*". It is likely to focus upon: how well each programme is meeting Sure Start objectives and targets; local service delivery and service performance; and, evidence of innovative and effective local practice. Local evaluations are likely to vary according to how well established individual programmes are, and will differ in method and scope according to the nature and form of local Sure Start provision.

Finally, four themes are currently being investigated as exemplars of Sure Start work, these are: *fathers, play and learning, employability and pregnancy and ante-natal*. To date no reports or publications have been produced from this aspect of evaluation.

### **1.5. Sure Start St Ann's Local Evaluation.**

The main focus of this local evaluation are the views and experiences of those individuals who receive Sure Start services, those who work to deliver them and other local stakeholders in the St Ann's community. Its goal is to combine both process and outcome evaluation in an assessment of how well Sure Start St Ann's is working: considering how it has interpreted the broader Sure Start agenda and adapted it to the particular circumstances of the St Ann's community.

#### *Key Aspects of a Process Evaluation*

This work is broadly informed by a model of evaluation focused upon<sup>9</sup>:

- Goals and Aims –are they clearly stated and broadly understood?
- Theory – what are the operating theoretical principles – managerialism, consumerism, other?
- Structure – who make decisions, how has this evolved?
- Dynamics - what drives change - top-down or bottom up, needs driven or service driven, professional or community focused?
- Objectives – are these coherent and explicit?
- Personalities – is there a shared vision? How do working relationships function?

Process evaluation is designed to create better understanding of good practice, how it is effective and how it can be developed. Process evaluation will focus on the working practices of staff, and interactions between staff, families, community groups, and other statutory and voluntary agencies. This aspect of the evaluation will typically rely upon qualitative research methods that investigate people's experiences and values.

Outcome evaluation is designed to assess the short term impact of the local programme by considering those objectives and targets established as part of the national Sure Start agenda. In addition, other indicators, relevant to the local community context, will be developed out of the process evaluation. This aspect of the evaluation is still very much underdeveloped, due the fact that many of Sure Start St Ann's initiatives are still becoming established in the community and have yet to produce meaningful, measurable outcomes.

The evaluation adopts an Action Evaluation approach to achieve these process and outcome goals. This is a collaborative approach based on involving stakeholders in the design and development of the evaluation methods. Five different data collection methods have been applied in this evaluation: stakeholder interviews, action learning studies, case studies, data monitoring and a community survey. As far has been practical (and entirely in the action learning studies) staff, stakeholders and service users have been consulted about the focus, scope and application of data collection techniques. Critical reflection of (process and outcome) material will build evidence about working practices, programme achievements and perceptions of the programme.

More specifically the evaluation strategy has sought to: identify *innovative practice*, and recognise how this might be promoted in other contexts; recognise *good practice in partnership working*, and indicate how this build towards sustainable services; obtain reliable and credible information about *community perceptions of Sure Start*; and finally, generate *robust monitoring information* which highlights progress and which might influence decision making. In this way the evaluation will highlight Sure Start St Ann's achievements and difficulties; and will seek to understand these in the broader context of national guidelines and local circumstances.

### Sure Start St Ann's Local Evaluation Methods

1. **Action Learning Evaluations** – One initiative from each of the four Sure Start Objectives will be evaluated in collaboration with staff members and stakeholders seeking evidence of good practice and innovative working.
2. **Case Studies** – A small number of families drawn from the Action Learning Evaluations will become the focus of short case studies. These will offer a more developed insight into life in St Ann's, and will recognise the impact of Sure Start initiatives.
3. **Community Survey** – A survey will offer reliable evidence about community perspectives on the impact of Sure Start St Ann's. Community volunteers will play an active role in designing, undertaking and reporting this survey.
4. **Data Monitoring** – Monitoring a range of local and Sure Start data will help to chart the progress that the programme is making.
5. **Stakeholder interviews** - Interviews with a wide range of individuals linked to Sure Start St Ann's and to St Ann's will help to situate Sure Start in the local context and help to direct and frame this evaluation.

### **1.6. Summary.**

- Sure Start is a cornerstone of the government's agenda to tackle social exclusion and reduce child poverty. It is a programme concerned with creating and establishing mechanisms to reduce poverty, but is equally about changing agendas and the way that organisations work.
- Sure Start is an area-based, community-focused programme which strives to improve the life-chances of children and young families by: *improving social and emotional development; improving health; improving children's ability to learn; and by, strengthening families and communities.*
- Evaluation is an important aspect of the Sure Start agenda, and is established at three different levels: national evaluation, local evaluation and in-depth studies of key themes.

- Sure Start St Ann's is a second wave programme established during 2000. It serves a large and diverse community within in a geographically large area. There are currently more than 1200 eligible children in Sure Start St Ann's programme area.
- This local evaluation is at this stage, by necessity, largely a process evaluation focused upon establishing evidence of good practice, innovative working and perceptions of the programme. It is a collaborative Action Learning evaluation which seeks to involve Sure Start staff, stakeholders and service users as far as is possible.
- The evaluation consists of five interrelated components: action learning evaluations, case studies, data monitoring, a community survey and stakeholder interviews.

## **2. Action Learning Evaluation.**

One initiative from each of the four Sure Start Objectives has been selected as an Action Learning Evaluation project. Each of these is undertaken in collaboration with Sure Start staff members (and other stakeholders where appropriate) and seeks evidence of innovative and effective working, as well as considering the impact upon parents and the broader community.

Staff, and other partners, are involved in all aspects of the action learning evaluation process: particular activities/services are identified in consultation with team leaders; key issues and appropriate data collection techniques (and instruments such as questionnaires) are established with those staff working in these areas; and, where appropriate staff are involved in collecting and analysing data. This type of approach offers staff an insight into the process of evaluation (and those practical issues associated with data collection and analysis) but has also been applied in recognition of the expertise and local knowledge that Sure Start staff can bring to this local evaluation.

The action learning evaluation projects undertaken here are:

- 2.1. Improving Social and Emotional Development – Parents United.
- 2.2. Improving Health – Safer, Healthier Homes.
- 2.3. Improving the Ability to Learn.– Toy Library.
- 2.4. Strengthening Families and Communities - Community Parenting Scheme.

## **2.1. Improving Social and Emotional Development – Parents United.**

This is an eight week parenting skills course for parents who are experiencing social, emotional or behavioural difficulties with their children. The first cohort completed the course in November 2002, the second in March 2003 and two further groups have started in May 2003.

To date the course has benefited parents in a number of important ways – creating better awareness of parenting issues, contributing to participants personal development and facilitating mutual support networks. Efforts to establish and expand this programme will enable it to have a positive impact on a greater number of families.

### **2.1.1. Evaluation Plan.**

#### *Phase 1 – Non-participant observation.*

Attendance at a limited number of Parents United sessions in order to get a feel for course, the parents that are attending and the issues that it addresses. A short survey might be applied at the end of one such session to get basic information about participants and their opinions on the course.

#### *Phase 2 – Parent interviews.*

More detailed interviews with parents who have completed the course to collect information about those benefits and difficulties associated with participation (including personal, educational and parenting issues).

#### *Phase 3 – Longitudinal study.*

Return visits to interviewees after 6 and 12 months in order to consider the longer-term impact of Parents United.

### **2.1.2. Data Collected.**

Observational notes and staff and parent comments derived from attendance at Parents' United sessions for both the first and second cohorts.

Completed survey responses from those participants who graduated as part of the first Parents United cohort; in addition semi-structured, qualitative interviews were undertaken with five of these parents. Each interview lasted between 25

and 40 minutes. All were recorded on audio-tape, subsequently transcribed and their content analysed in accordance with a coding frame (focused upon *course aims/hopes, favourite aspects, course material and education issues, practical problems, home visits and course facilitators*) established with the course organisers.

### **2.1.3. Findings and Observations.**

The course appears to have benefited participants in a number of significant ways. First of all in better awareness of parenting issues, improved parenting skills and feeling more confident in dealing with children.

#### Parents United - Parenting Skills

*"It's simple things that make you think gosh. I'm conscious all the time now of saying things that she will understand, it's made our relationship better. I explain things more now. ... when I started I thought there was going to be an awful lot, but it's the simple things that make such a difference, that help so much. It sticks in your head and it becomes second nature" (Parent5)*

*"before I was really depressed, I was ready to say 'I can't cope', I was ready to give him up. This course has helped to put my mind to it and finally face that I can do it. ... before I used to be scared to tell him off in case he lashed out, now I'm more confident to say 'no' calmly. I think that the group has helped me to calm down" (Parent1)*

Perhaps more significantly the course appears to have contributed to the participants personal development, anecdotally identifying improved self-confidence, better communication skills and generally feeling better about themselves and their circumstances.

#### Parents United – Personal Development

*"I'm not so depressed and I'm getting out of the house more as well. Before I used to stay at home and do nothing, ... before I didn't have the confidence to go out and meet people. Sure Start and the groups I've been to have boosted my confidence." (Parent1)*

*"When I went I had no self-confidence, all I felt was that I was a mother and that was all I had to be. Since I've been to the course I know that I am allowed to go out, allowed to enjoy myself, allowed to take these relaxing baths and to do what I wish to do" (Parent3)*

Participants recognised other group members as important sources of information and support; there appears to be some considerable potential to use this course (with other aspects of SS) to aid the development of enhanced networks of informal support in the area.

Parents United – Social Networks and Mutual Support

*"we've all exchanged phone numbers and we are all keeping in touch, that's how well we got on. I know 2 of the other girls very well, I go round their house, go bingo with them and I had no friends before I joined." (Parent4)*

*"That 8 week session has really made a difference - the work that you did in the course and the stuff that you pick-up, and not just off the people running the course but off the other people." (Parent2)*

In summary, Parents United should be broadly applauded for the impact that it has had upon parents, and for its involvement of other local agencies (recent Parents United meetings have included representatives from Base 51, Mayholme, St Ann's family centre, the LEA, St Ann's health centre and Sneinton health centre). The only concern which emerges from this action learning evaluation is how to reach more families (younger parents and ethnic minorities especially) and have a stronger impact upon the local community. However, it should be recognised that this programme is still at a very early stage of development (only two cohorts have completed the course), and that measures to address these issues are being put in place: two courses have started in May 2003 (with more planned for the summer), and the third cohort includes parents from an ethnic minority background.

#### **2.1.4. Future Actions.**

Re-visit the first cohort in order to reflect upon the long-term impact of Parents United (upon parenting skills and/or personal development).

Identify and interview a small number of parents from each subsequent Parents United course which runs.

## **2.2. Improving Health – Safer, Healthier Homes.**

This scheme provides fitted safety equipment and information in homes where there is a perceived increased risk of childhood accident and injury (i.e. special needs, multiple children, history of accidents, etc.). The scheme has cross-agency support in the supply and fitting of equipment and in an established referral mechanism.

The scheme perhaps best typifies the broader objectives of Sure Start in its multifaceted and multi-agency working; it is an initiative which has taken significant steps towards sustainability beyond the life of Sure Start St Ann's.

### **2.2.1. Evaluation Plan.**

*Review existing evaluation material.*

An extensive literature exists in relation to the provision of home safety equipment and safety awareness information, reviewing this material in order to establish the efficacy of the type of provision and/or models of best practice is a necessary first step.

*Track fund-raising and broadening the initiative.*

Attempts to mainstream this initiative have major implications for other Sure Start activities (and for the programme more broadly), monitoring how this progresses (and talking to partner organisations) is an important *process* aspect of this evaluation.

*Household perceptions of risk awareness.*

A longer-term *outcome* focused study of risk awareness and accidents in the home will assess the value of this initiative. This type of study requires a substantial and long-term commitment and involves establishing baseline data on risk awareness and the incidence of accidents in the home, as well as constructing rigorous data collection tools (which might be applied elsewhere) and surveying both homes that have equipment fitted and those that do not.

### **2.2.2. Data Collected.**

A extensive literature review has been carried out and supplements the in-house study of a *quick-win* pilot scheme carried out by Sure Start St Ann's. Personal

contact has been established with Dr. Denise Kendrick and the team working on a major Nottingham-wide study of childhood injuries.

Non-participant observational notes taken at Home Safety/Healthly Homes meetings. Content analysis of funding applications and programme development proposals.

### **2.2.3. Findings and Observations.**

This scheme stands out in Sure Start St Ann's as the initiative (of those reviewed) which most clearly reflects the Sure Start priorities of multi-faceted and multi-agency working.

The scheme is broad ranging (impacting upon a number of Sure Start targets); incorporates a considerable number of external agencies (with Sure Start St Ann's acting as a hub for the involvement and co-ordination of other agencies); is expanding in its focus (developing a greater focus upon child safety more broadly and incorporating fire safety and car safety issues); and, is expanding geographically beyond the St Ann's area (working with other Sure Start programmes initially, but with a city-wide project planned).

*Organisations involved in the Home Safety Initiative*

ENPROVE.	Nottingham Road Safety
The Renewal Trust	Nottingham Fire and Rescue
Nottingham City Council (area 5)	Nottinghamshire Police
Refugee Housing Association	Metropolitan Housing
The Guinness Trust	The Resource Centre
Local Residents Association	R.O.B.I.N.
Health visitors from St Ann's, Sneinton and Sherwood Rise.	

These factors would suggest that the Home Safety scheme is working well towards the goal of sustainability. This fact is further illustrated by an established and effective referral mechanism, by attempts to secure external funding (and a

funding steering group) and by the direct referral of households to ENPROVE (the body which fits safety equipment) rather than via Sure Start St Ann's. Plans for a publicity event during Child safety week (and the planned involvement of parents in planning and organising this) would suggest that the initiative is trying to balance organisational issues with community involvement and awareness raising.

Whilst the scheme should broadly be applauded, evidence for the efficacy of this type of home safety scheme is still unclear – the findings of a major study in Nottingham which will inform this (and the dissemination of home safety information) are now overdue. It is also difficult to assess the impact of fitting equipment in St Ann's homes at this stage - it will take some considerable time for a meaningful outcome measure to become evident, and this will rest upon tracking accident and hospital admittance data over a number of years, as well as assessing risk awareness in the community.

#### **2.2.4. Future Actions.**

Interview key partners in the home safety initiative in order establish key factors which have made working with Sure Start St Ann's attractive.

Outcome based risk awareness study – an extended study which establishes baseline data prior to surveying homes pre and post fitting. Alternatively anecdotal evidence will be collected by spending time with equipment fitters and in homes where equipment has been fitted.

### **2.3. Improving the Ability to Learn.– Toy Library.**

The Toy Library seeks to enhance *good quality play* and improve *speech and learning skills* by operating a toy library van which visits a number of locations in the St Ann's area. At the start of this evaluation the toy library was at a very early stage of development; this work has tracked its progress as it attempts to become more established in the community.

Despite being recognised as an excellent initiative the Toy Library is experiencing some difficulties in becoming established with local families. However, efforts to rectify this would seem to be heading in the right direction by utilising venues, such as schools and nurseries, where more families are likely to become aware of the provision.

#### **2.3.1. Evaluation Plan.**

##### *The purpose of the toy library.*

Review Sure Start goals and targets in the *ability to learn* objective; consider with the appropriate staff which of these the toy library will address.

##### *Participation at the Toy Library.*

Attend a number of Toy library sessions as a non-participant observer in order to witness how the library functions and to gain an impression of attendance levels and parent experiences. Informally talk to Sure Start staff, volunteers, partner organisations and parents at these sessions.

##### *Review of Toy Library records.*

After the library has been operative for six months (April 2003) review its progress by monitoring the frequency and location of library sessions, as well as attendance levels and lending patterns.

#### **2.3.2. Data Collected.**

Information was collected from both the Play Co-ordinator and the Toy Library organiser about the purpose and focus of the toy library. Similar opinions were gathered from volunteers helping to organise the library, as well from representatives of those organisations that host the toy library sessions.

Observational notes and parent comments were recorded at toy library sessions.

During April, toy library records were reviewed to consider the location and frequency of sessions; as well as attendance levels and lending patterns at each location.

### **2.3.3. Findings and Observations.**

The toy library is recognised as an excellent initiative by staff, parents and organisational partners alike. However, attendance at sessions is low, despite there being around 90 registered members as few as 20 families access the service, and fewer still access a toy library session on a regular basis. This is a source of some concern and some considerable frustration.

#### *The Toy Library – a frustrating venture*

*No more than four families attended any 2-hour session observed as part of this evaluation; on at least one occasion no families attended.*

*'shall I just go and grab someone and tell them what we are doing, how good it is ... drag them in to see' (Sure Start Worker – St Ann's library session)*

*'It's a shame more people don't use it ... we think that it has a real benefit. We've seen parents joining the library and taking books home with them ... and then coming again' (Community Librarian – at a Carlton Rd Library session)*

Whilst a number of reasons for this low attendance have been suggested by people in and around the Toy Library (e.g *parents do not like the idea of library, parents do not the idea of used toys, etc.*), it is clear that the scheme is not sufficiently publicised. There is little evidence of when and where sessions might be taking place – A4 sized posters were often the only evidence of the library taking place, and on at least occasion it was unclear that the timing of a session had changed. It is also worth noting that the visibility of the toy library would be enhanced if the *toy library van* was currently being used and driven around the area (this would also ease some of the practical difficulties associated with storing toys in numerous locations and holding sessions in different parts of St Ann's).

Recent months have seen a number of new toy library sessions and venues introduced, holding these in local play groups, toddler groups, nursery schools

and housing association venues would seem a positive way to increase awareness and use of the toy library. However, it is likely that these will take time to become established and successful – it is perhaps unsurprising that one of the longest standing venues (Carlton Road Library) is possibly the most successful (with a number of regular attenders).

One final point worth highlighting is that some of those families most regularly accessing the toy library scheme (at the Carlton Road library) demonstrated an awareness of the value of good quality play – ordering specialist toys, asking about toy-suppliers and having previous contact with other agencies. The key question would seem to be not only how to increase usage of the toy library, but also how to reach parents who are not already convinced of the importance of play for development (perhaps in the way that the initiative is packaged and framed).

*The Toy Library – preaching to the converted?*

*'the library play-sessions are good ... he can play with other children, but I can also find out about where to get the right sort of toys'* (parent – Carlton Road Library)

*'I hadn't met them before, but I have provided [x] with reading material through another library scheme'* (Community Librarian - Carlton Road Library)

#### **2.3.4. Future Actions.**

Develop a parent evaluation sheet and establish a schedule for its application.

## **2.4. Strengthening Families and Communities - Community Parenting Scheme.**

Community Parents are trained in order to befriend and offer informal support to isolated families in St Ann's. The first cohort were trained in spring/summer 2002 and a second cohort in spring 2003. All parent volunteers have gone on to take-up placements within the Sure Start St Ann's programme.

Parents have been positive about their involvement in the scheme and a number of the first group have gone onto employment, further education or training. Effort should be made to establish this more centrally in Sure Start St Ann's.

### **2.4.1. Evaluation Plan.**

#### *Review existing evaluation material.*

With the parent volunteer co-ordinator, review existing evaluation material which is based upon the comments of training providers and participants.

#### *Experiences of training.*

Informally talk to volunteers about their experiences of being trained, and their initial experiences and impressions of working within Sure Start St Ann's.

#### *Being a community parent.*

Interview parents to investigate their apprehensions and initial experiences of offering support and friendship to families in the community.

### **2.4.2. Data Collected.**

Evaluation material for first cohort training has been reviewed, summarised under the headings *community capacity* and *personal development* and fed back to the Parent volunteer co-ordinator.

Through involvement in a number of SSSA activities (the community survey included) comments about the parent volunteer scheme have been collected from the first cohort of community parents.

The Parent volunteer co-ordinator has been interviewed on two separate occasions – the first to review the aims and objectives of the scheme and the

second to review its progress (including a strong focus on the failure to develop the be-friending aspect of the scheme).

#### **2.4.3. Findings and Observations.**

The success of the community parent volunteering scheme will strongly influence the long-term success of SSSA - by creating a more confident and able local population who are active in community issues.

Despite this there is a strong feeling that this is just one more Sure Start St Ann's initiative which, more significantly, seems to be operated in isolation of other service providers and other aspects of the programme. At the heart of this there seems to be some confusion about the nature and purpose of the scheme: the question as to whether the scheme is about creating active volunteers or about supporting and developing parents' skills seems unresolved<sup>1</sup>. As a consequence the befriending and community support aspect of the scheme has assumed a much lower priority on the agenda (no volunteer has offered support to a local family, and referrals to the scheme are few).

##### *Community Parenting Scheme – a lack of clarity?*

*'some staff have not been that keen to work with the volunteers, they don't see it as part of their work ... they forget that the parents are not just a resource but are part of our client group that we have to serve and help'* (parent volunteer coordinator)

However, parents are very positive about their involvement in the scheme and about the training that they receive. It is a testimony to the scheme that a number of the first cohort have moved on to employment or further education and training; and that the second cohort have all assumed placements within the St Ann's project.

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<sup>1</sup> The scheme is evidently about both of these aspects, but this is not clear and would seem to be the cause of some friction.

*Community Parenting Scheme – benefiting parents?*

*'they've turned my insecurities into a positive experience'*

*'it has been a healing process ... 'I feel empowered, I feel alert'*

*'Members of the group have shared some really deeply personal things ... Hopefully these friendships will last and serve as a support network'.*

Extending this scheme to reach more people (especially from the Asian community) should be encouraged and the scheme should perhaps seek more active involvement with agencies outside of Sure Start St Ann's. This will potentially broaden the impact of the scheme and will help it to become more established within the community.

#### **2.4.5. Future Actions.**

In order to gain a broader overview of the Community Parent Scheme a number of Sure Start St Ann's staff (who are not directly involved with the community parent scheme) will be interviewed – these are likely to include the programme director (for overview) and staff who have mentored community parents.

The parents' support group will be utilised to collect more focused information on parent experiences and opinions about the volunteer scheme.

### **3. Case Studies**

Case Studies are a more broadly focused component of this evaluation which offer a detailed insight into life in St Ann's and a more connected vision of Sure Start and the impact that it has upon local people. More specifically, in this phase of evaluation, case studies have been utilised to present *Sure Start success stories*, which illustrate the difficulties of raising a family in St Ann's, and the very positive impact that Sure Start St Ann's can have upon this.

#### **3.1. Constructing Case Studies.**

In order to fully appreciate the impact that Sure Start is having in St Ann's it is essential to develop a clearer understanding of those complex and varied issues that impact upon family life in the area. This evaluation seeks to do this, in part, by presenting an extended insight into the impact that Sure Start has had upon local parents – focusing upon their contact with Sure Start but also more broadly considering personal issues (such as health, well-being, family unity, etc.) and their perspective upon life in St Ann's (including community resources, social integration, social problems and the area's reputation).

The following pages describe the experiences and opinions of two parents who are heavily involved and strongly committed to Sure Start<sup>10</sup>. Both identify Sure Start St Ann's as a key influence in their life, and as something which has had a massive impact upon their family life, parenting skills and personal development; both might justifiably be identified as *success stories* which illustrate the very real benefit of involvement with Sure Start St Ann's.

#### **3.2. Future Actions.**

Further data collection (including informal conversations with parents and staff, documentary evidence, observation at events and further interviews) might further develop the existing case studies. Of perhaps greater value will be to undertake similar case studies with families who do not access Sure Start St Ann's – paying particular attention for their reasons for not doing so.

### **3.3. Kevin<sup>11</sup>.**

Kevin has lived in St Ann's with his wife and three children since August 2000 (although he has known the area for much longer), he has been involved with Sure Start since 2001 and currently participates in a considerable number of activities and groups.

**On life in St Ann's** – Kevin recognised that St Ann's has a terrible reputation for drugs and violence, but suggested that programmes like Sure Start might help to combat these stereotypes and produce stronger communities.

*The reputation is bad ... it is a problem. Taxi-drivers try and charge double, y'know danger money. When we wanted someone to wire our cooker, quite a lot of the people wouldn't even come into St Ann's 'we don't do there', like it's this blackspot. ... [we went paintballing] they were like 'you won't need your safety masks, you dodge real bullets'. ... the reputation just exceeds itself.... There are a lot of problems, a lot of problems come because it is near the city centre ... they are pushing the problem out [of the city centre] rather than dealing with it, and then this place gets a reputation.*

*[but] the community is brilliant, once you got to know the community, which I suppose you didn't do before Sure Start, before that you were cautious because of all the shooting and that ... now [through Sure Start] everyone just seems to be there for everyone.*

**On being a parent in St Ann's** – Despite feeling positive about St Ann's (*I'm a convert, I'll stick with it*) Kevin recognised that there are particular difficulties associated with bringing up children in the area.

*They were dealing in our back-garden ... Like at the old house I wouldn't let the kids ride on their bikes, because they was dealing and it wasn't a nice area, there was no privacy for them to play.*

*there wasn't much to do with the kids before Sure Start. I'd be out walking the pram around town for about 4 hours because there was nowt to do. But now, if [my wife] wants to get on with the housework, or whatever, I can keep the kids out of the house all day from one event to the other.*

**On how Sure Start made a difference as a parent** – Kevin was very positive that Sure Start had helped him to become a more effective and confident parent.

*I had a lot of problems with my son, his behaviour was very bad because of things that have happened to him. ... the training I went on last year was an eye-opener in how to handle my son. At the time I was only having him at the weekend, I was picking up the pieces and it was a nightmare. It was hard to deal with him and my daughter was being left out. It gave me an insight into how to handle things, that was fantastic. ... [when I was teaching on parents united] I*

*learned as much from the other parents as they did from me ... I'm not a brilliant parent, but it's helped me. There are still issues that are coming up but now I'm confident enough to seek help and admit when I am making mistakes. It's opened my eyes to see that I am doing things wrong.*

**On how Sure Start made a difference as a person** – more significantly Kevin recognised that Sure Start had had a massive impact upon his self-confidence and his ability to deal with things.

*[before] when these issues [with my son] came up I went about it wrong, I was threatening them and giving them verbal, I was like an erratic parent instead of doing it more professionally ... [Sure Start] helped me to go about things the right way.*

*[now] I've got good self-esteem. Some of the training that you do is confidence building. Like you have to talk to professionals. I've had child protection training, and I've had child protection issues and I've told the head of social services that he was doing his job wrong, it's given me the confidence to do that, because I thought he was and he came back to me and said 'yeah'.*

**On contributing to Sure Start St Ann's** – a major factor in Kevin's improved self-confidence has been the ability to contribute towards decision making processes and local service delivery.

*I didn't like the way that they were doing things, so I jumped up and said so, and they took it on board ... there were needs in the community, and my experiences were valid. They seemed to take on board all your things and work around you ... Like I feel that I'm not responsible for all of it, but from my comments and suggestions positions have been made or avenues have been ventured.*

### **In conclusion:**

*[before Sure Start] I just felt that I was a put upon parent. Now I'm a valued member of the community. ... I think I was just very kind of closed, closed and reclusive, just like with my family. Y'know I was stuck in the house with the kids, it was too much time just with the kids. ... I'm more confident and outgoing now. I know how to conduct myself properly with other people, I feel that I am a valued member of the community.*

### **3.4. Emma.**

Emma lives in St Ann's with her partner and daughter, she has been involved with Sure Start since 2002 and currently participates in a number of activities and groups.

**On life in St Ann's** – Emma described a community which has considerable problems with drugs and violence; but which more importantly has its own values and codes of behaviour.

*I was very naive when I moved here, before if anything went wrong you called the police, that's what you do, that's what law-abiding citizens do. But you move up here and you mention the police and people look at you terribly ... I saw someone go into the house opposite with a gun, we went upstairs and left it, even though I was gagging to call the police. They thought we had so we had to have a panic button installed in the house. I was petrified I thought that someone was going to come through the door and get us. It's that bad.*

*St Ann's has certain rules and regulations... keeping yourself to yourself. When we first came here my partner had a go at me 'don't look at people in the face, keep your eyes down' ... even just a month ago he said 'keep your eyes down, stop smiling'. It's not nice, there are still times when I'm coming back from school and I can hear footsteps behind me, and you are thinking ... it's not right to be thinking like that but that's how it is.*

**On local people and Sure Start** – This sort of environment has created a very insular population, which is inherently suspicious and which is resistant to initiatives such as Sure Start.

*There are certain families in St Ann's that don't want officials in their lives, a lot of people are scared of people with a briefcase and a clipboard ... they don't want intrusion in their lives, in their homes, they don't want people to tell them how to run their families ... 'don't tell me, I know what to do'. They don't have the capacity to open their minds and listen to other people ... there hasn't been anything like Sure Start. ... It's very difficult I suppose, St Ann's people are used to being left on their own, and to fending for themselves.*

**On how Sure Start made a difference as a person** – It is against this backdrop that Sure Start has had a very real impact upon Emma, giving given her increased confidence and changing her whole perspective on living in St Ann's. It has helped her form a whole new set of friends and contributed to turning her life around.

*Since I've joined Sure Start I feel that the area has changed, but maybe that's because I know more of people now from Sure Start. Now I walk down the street and there are loads of people that I say 'hello' to, all the mums meet on the Chase of a morning, we go off to a meeting or to someone's house for a coffee. I*

*think that it's opened my life up, it's made me more confident ... I know loads of people here now, it feels more like a community.*

*I just feel that if me of all people, who has come from the worst brink of self-destruction can come and take full advantage ... that's why I want to go around and tell everyone 'I was crap, you wouldn't have recognised me as a person - now look at me' and a lot of it has to do with Sure Start because it has made my confidence boom. That's why I like to tell everyone 'come and take advantage, it does wonders'.*

**On how Sure Start made a difference as a parent** – However, Sure Start has also had an impact upon Emma's parenting skills and her daughter's development.

*Parents United was a big eye-opener, it enlightens you on aspects of bringing up your child. Learning to sit down and talk properly to your child is important; sometimes you don't think like that, but you stop yourself and slow yourself down to explain things clearly, which helps them to understand more from you.*

*[Sure Start] enabled [my daughter] to develop her skills. She was a very clingy baby because I was with her all the time, if mummy wasn't there she wasn't happy. But going to play groups has enabled her to mingle with other children, her social skill and mental skills soared; it wasn't until then that I realised I had been holding her back. ... it was down to Sure Start that [my daughter] was able to settle at nursery, I was terrible but she was like 'ok mum, bye', she was used to the playgroups*

### **In conclusion:**

*During the week I can guarantee that I'll have at least three meetings and two or three playgroups, I'm a busy bee now. When Tracy [parent volunteer coordinator] left I wrote a little card I put: 'if it wasn't for people like you, you've enabled me to live again'. Compared to two years ago when I was virtually nothing, now I've got something to do everyday and it is lovely ... They offer all the support, they say if you want us to come round for a chat, we'll come round. You've got the best of both worlds.*

#### **4. Community Survey.**

A community survey broadens the scope of this local evaluation by paying greater attention to the wider experiences of those families that live in St Ann's, and by shedding light on the issues that they want to see addressed. In this way a community survey will help to contextualise the Sure Start St Ann's programme and capture opinions on the impact that it has had upon on local services and resources.

##### **4.1. Designing a Community Survey.**

It was proposed that local residents should direct the community survey and should be actively involved in its design, application and analysis. To this end *the community survey* was offered as a *placement* to Sure Start Parent Volunteers. A small number of volunteers took up this *placement* and have met on a monthly basis to participate in informal training on topics such as *What is a survey*, *Surveying St Ann's* and *Writing survey questions*. Each of these sessions has built towards a survey questionnaire that parents will apply in and around St Ann's (at community events) during the summer.

The survey questionnaire is currently at a very advanced draft stage and is included on the following pages.

##### **4.2. Future Actions.**

Parent volunteers will receive further informal training, including sessions on *interviewing and asking questions*, *Information Technology* (for data management) and *report writing* (so that they might be involved in disseminating the survey findings).

A number of events and locations where the survey might be carried out have already been identified by the parent volunteers, who will be supported by a local evaluator in collecting data at these events.

## Sure Start St Ann's Community Survey

Please Circle.

1. Where abouts do you live?  

Blue Bell Hill Area	Ransom Road Area
The Chase Area	Phase 10 Area
Arboretum	Other
  
2. How long have you lived around here?  

Less than 1 yr	1 - 3 yrs	4 - 10 yrs	More than 10 yrs
----------------	-----------	------------	------------------
  
3. Do you like living around here?  

Always	sometimes	never
most of the time		almost never
  
4. Do you have friends in St Ann's?  

Lots	Few	None
------	-----	------
  
5. Do you have family in St Ann's ?  

Lots	Few	None
------	-----	------
  
6. What do you like about living around here?  

Housing	People	Shops	Leisure facilities
Facilities	Medical Facilities		Reputation
Safety	Clean Streets	other	Youth Personal
  
7. What do not you like about living around here?  

Housing	People	Shops	Leisure facilities
Facilities	Medical Facilities		Reputation
Safety	Clean Streets	other	Youth Personal

---
  
8. Are there children in your household? Y / N  

(if no go to question 15)
  
9. How old are these children? [indicate how many in each category?]  

Less than 1 yr	1yr - 4yr	5yr - 10yr	11yr - 16
----------------	-----------	------------	-----------
  
10. What child care facilities do you use?  

Private nursery friends	school nursery family	play group	child-minder other
		none of above	
  
11. Where do feel that it is best for your children to play?  

At home	At friends	At the Park	At a play group
---------	------------	-------------	-----------------



## Personal Details:

27. Gender. M / F

28. Age. <16 16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55+

29. Ethnicity

White	Black – Caribbean	Black – Other	Indian
Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Asian–other
			Other

## **5. Data Monitoring.**

Evidence of good practice and data monitoring are integral parts of the Sure Start agenda, and consequently should be an important aspect of any evaluation. However, many of Sure Start St Ann's initiatives are yet to be fully established and it is difficult to capture objectively the impact that they have had upon the community. For this reason data monitoring here is concerned mainly with the number of families registered with Sure Start St Ann's and the contact that they have with programme. Whilst this is a limited exercise, which can in no way reflect the range and scope of the impact that Sure Start St Ann's might have, it is an important indication of how established Sure Start St Ann's has become.

### **5.1. Data Collected.**

Local and deprivation profiling for the St Ann's area has been obtained from the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics, with whom a limited working relationship (information sharing) has been established<sup>12</sup>.

#### **Key statistics<sup>13</sup>**

71% of St Ann's residents are unwaged.

57% of all households are in receipt of Income Support.

75.6% of all households in St Ann's are without access to a car.

43% of St Ann's housing stock is Council maintained.

40% of children in single adult households.

60% of local secondary school pupils claim free school meals. Only 14% of pupils gained grades A-C at GCSE level (1997). 40% of pupils have special educational needs (1998).

Whilst it is likely that many of these statistics have now been superseded they still clearly indicate the considerable extent of social and economic deprivation in the area.

Softsmart data compiled by Sure Start St Ann's highlights that approximately 54% of children under 4 in St Ann's are registered with the programme. Whilst there is still some room for improvement it is evident that new registrations have

become more consistent since the spring of 2002 (since when around 220 new parents and children have registered in each quarter), prior to this only a small number of families were registered with the programme. It is evident that the Phase 10 neighbourhood is under-represented and that the programme has been particularly effective in the Chase neighbourhood (this is likely to reflect where Sure Start offers most provision). It is also notable that the programme has been more effective in registering younger children (0-2); this is also borne out by regional analysis.

#### Children Registered

Number Registered	Total in St Ann's	% Registered
Total:		
661	1219	54%
By age:		
0 years	194	332
1 years	178	308
2 years	147	310
3 years	143	269
By neighbourhood:		
Chase	193	309
Phase10	85	231
Bluebell	187	327
Ransom	196	352

Data for monthly reach (i.e. how many families are *actively involved* each month) is perhaps of greater value in tracking the programme's progress, however it is complicated by difficulties of double-counting (contact with parents, families and children are considered separately and maybe recorded in multiple categories). However by considering (in isolation) contact with families (i.e. where both parents and children are actively involved) illustrates that the programme's reach is increasing through time.

#### Number of families accessing programme

Jan 2002	Jun 2002	Dec 2002	Jan 2003	Feb 2003	Mar 2003
43	68	103	96	143	125

Data collated at a regional level would seem to support this and illustrates that Sure Start St Ann's reach is comparable to other programmes in the East

Midlands region and slightly better than the average for other Wave 2 programmes. This data also shows that Sure Start St Ann's is especially effective at reaching new born babies in the first two months of life; although, it might be a cause for concern that the programme is less successful with older children (only 12% of 3 – 4 yr olds in St Ann's participated in activities during March 2003).

<b><u>% of all children accessing programmes (Mar 2003)</u></b>						
	% of < 2 months	% of 0-1	% of 1-2	% of 2-3	% of 3-4	% of all <4
SSSA	100	46	25	17	12	38
East mid SS	100	31	21	20	28	44
Wave 2 SS	76	28	22	25	25	25

## 5.2. Future Actions.

More sophisticated analysis of Softsmart data will be undertaken to identify trends in Sure Start provision and access. Particular attention will be paid to geographic patterns within the St Ann's area, and the broad objectives of Sure Start provision (health, play, community, etc.).

Original location profiling will be undertaken to gain a more up to date and detailed perspective upon the local community (and how this might impact upon Sure Start St Ann's). This is likely to include small scale deprivation profiling as well as an assessment of the nature and extent of social capital in the community.

## **6. Stakeholder Interviews.**

Stakeholder interviews are a key aspect of this evaluation which have punctuated its duration and helped to develop key themes and issues. These interviews facilitate a broader (and perhaps more developed and informed) perspective upon Sure Start, upon St Ann's and upon broader issues of social inclusion and family life. Significantly they provide a mechanism to establish a perspective upon how Sure Start St Ann's functions as an organisation and how it relates to its surroundings. They also offer an opportunity to judge the quality of Sure Start St Ann's services, the broader impact that these are having upon the community and the programme's long-term prospects.

### **6.1. Evaluation Plan.**

Stakeholder interviews were undertaken in phases in order to consider three distinct perspectives upon Sure Start St Ann's. Working in this way, and by asking slightly different questions with each set of interviewees, ensures that (within a limited time-frame) a range of key issues might be developed with the best informed respondents.

It was envisaged that each phase would consist of five or six interviews:

Phase 1 - *preliminary interviews*, with welfare professionals who have strong links to the Sure Start St Ann's programme. These interviews offer an introduction to St Ann's and the Sure Start initiative; importantly they focus upon the identification of key issues and help to frame and guide this evaluation.

Phase 2 - *outsider interviews*, with welfare professionals who have no direct involvement with Sure Start St Ann's, but who are either linked to the St Ann's area or the Sure Start initiative more broadly. These offer a more detailed and developed perspective on issues that are pertinent to Sure Start St Ann's – identifying things such as where need is greatest and where Sure Start might have the most immediate or significant impact.

Phase 3 - *staff interviews*, with members of the Sure Start St Ann's staff. These seek to develop a clearer understanding of how Sure Start St Ann's works, the nature and extent of the provision that it offers and the programme's relationship with local people and other local service providers.

## **6.2. Data Collected.**

In total twenty semi-structured, qualitative interviews were undertaken, each lasting between thirty and sixty minutes. During each interview a small number of direct questions would be posed to introduce topics and the interviewee would be encouraged to develop these issues further. Whilst this strategy makes direct comparison of responses difficult it does ensure that respondents are free to develop topics in a way which reflects their expertise and knowledge of local issues.

A small number of interviews (with Sure Start staff) were recorded on audio-tape, otherwise detailed notes, taken during and immediately after interviews, are relied upon.

The first phase of stakeholder interviews saw five professionals linked to Sure Start St Ann's included. Three of these are currently members of the St Ann's Partnership Board, one is a former Sure Start St Ann's employee (now working in another Sure Start programme) and one attends a Sure Start St Ann's task group. This group has a developed perspective on the St Ann's area, including representatives from the Renewal Trust, a local community centre and an individual previously involved in a major St Ann's initiative. This group also includes a representative from an afro-Caribbean community organisation.

The second phase saw a more diverse group of professionals considered. This includes officers from regional and local government, members of the City-wide Sure Start group, an academic researcher as well as individuals who work in a variety of contexts in the St Ann's area. This group is broadly split between those who might be considered as *experts* in Sure Start issues, those with considerable experience of child welfare issues and those who have a specific, professional interest in the St Ann's area.

The final phase saw seven members of the Sure Start St Ann's staff interviewed. These were drawn from each staff team (childcare, health, administration and community participation) and were identified team leaders. In the main those staff interviewed were more longstanding staff members who have a more developed insight into the programme and the community that it serves.

### **6.3. Findings and Observations.**

Stakeholders recognised considerable value in the Sure Start St Ann's programme, identifying a committed and able staff working with an important client group (young families) in difficult surroundings. The programme is perceived as having had a beneficial impact upon a number of very vulnerable families, and as potentially benefiting a large number of families in a positive and lasting fashion. However, some concern was expressed about the breadth of Sure Start St Ann's local impact, indicating that it needs to raise its local profile and involve more local people (especially from ethnic minorities). These sentiments were reinforced by Sure Start staff, whose comments demonstrated frustration at the low take-up of Sure Start services.

A number of particular issues were raised in this regard: first of all the programme's lack of visibility (including concerns about a lack of publicity and the appropriateness and accessibility of the Sycamore Business Centre); secondly, the programme's recruitment procedure (which has sought to employ professionals from outside of St Ann's, rather than looking to local people); and, most fundamentally a failure to engage with the local community.

#### Sure Start St Ann's – Hidden Away

*'Sure Start St Ann's should be shouting from the rooftops, but it isn't even standing-up and waving yet'* (a member of the SSSA Partnership board)

*I only know about it because of the job that I do* (expressed by two professionals who also happen to mothers of young children in St Ann's)

*'a familiar face will make people more comfortable and encourage them to participate'* (a member of an afro-Caribbean community group)

*'you can only call groups hard to reach if you've tried to get them involved and failed, if you haven't it is an institutional failure, it's about the programme not the population'* (a local family worker)

*'the programme has not got a handle on community development work, it works with the local people at arms length'* (a regional government officer)

However, it is recognised that these concerns have to be understood in the context of a geographically large and socially diverse community which is experiencing major social and economic difficulties. Interviewees recognised that St Ann's is home to a considerable number of vulnerable families, that it has (in parts) a high turnover of residents and that it is marked by a reputation for

drugs, crime and violence. It is this reputation which shatters self-confidence and inhibits participation in initiatives such as Sure Start; it is also a reputation which fuels a media (and policy) spotlight which perhaps makes programmes such as this more cautious and conservative. It was recognised on a number of occasions that Sure Start St Ann's *consent form* and *register* feed into this reputation and project an image akin to child-protection, *it's like parents are inadequate or bad parents who have to be monitored*<sup>14</sup>.

#### St Ann's – A Difficult Environment

*'It's amazing how many people live "on the edge, or just outside" of St Ann's. People don't want to be associated with it or any St Ann's event'* (City Council Officer).

*'St Ann's is a place that lacks self-confidence, people don't have the confidence to get involved, failing to address this is major shortcoming.'* (local community worker).

*'Many parents themselves are victims, some are children themselves, they lack self-esteem, lack life skills and don't have the skills to be effective parents'* (a local family worker)

Sure Start was identified as 'an exercise in change management', an attempt to prioritise local decision making. However, many were critical of the St Ann's programme, indicating that it is overly bureaucratic with too many meetings (which are of inconsistent value and often repetitive), and focused too heavily upon targets and guidelines (rather than local need). The capital works programme was singled out as particularly frustrating (*'I don't know where they've spent their money, or even if they've spent it?'* – a city council officer).

#### Sure Start St Ann's – Change and Bureaucracy

*'A lot of things nearly happen – the shops and at least 3 nurseries I think'* (a local community worker)

*'It's like they've been left holding the baby without any institutional guidance or support'* (a city council officer, but also regional government officer)

*'I've haven't seen 'consent forms' in other programmes, I think that they might project the wrong image'* (academic researcher)

*'It seems that we talk about the same things all the time, it doesn't matter if you miss one it's still the same when you come back'* (Sure Start member of staff)

Staff expressed a strong interest and desire to work in an innovative, cross-cutting, multi-agency fashion; identifying this, along with greater responsibility and the opportunity to work in the community as their main motivations for joining Sure Start. However, other interviewees felt that innovation and genuine partnership working had been slow to occur. It was suggested that the programme works in a *traditional medical* fashion – it has a considerable number of specialist health staff and a programme philosophy which is strongly biased towards professional service delivery (which is reactive to particular issues rather than being focused upon the entire community). It was recognised that this type of approach has enabled Sure Start St Ann's to develop a very positive formal referral system with other statutory bodies in the area, but that this has effectively distanced the programme from smaller groups and local people.

#### Sure Start St Ann's – The Right Approach?

*'it works like another arm of the health authority that has been parachuted in'* (a member of the city-wide Sure Start group)

*'it offers a missionary like service trying to save individual children, rather than working with the community'* (local community worker)

*'I think some parents felt pushed out when Sure Start came in and just took over'* (local community worker – talking about a local play-group)

*'the programme is revenue rich, it's meant that we can employ a sizeable staff and try to offer services ... I'm not sure other programmes will work in this way'* (a member of the Partnership Board)

#### **6.4. Summary.**

- Considerable value is recognised in the Sure Start St Ann's programme. However, stakeholders were concerned about a lack of community involvement and about the programme's lack of visibility and presence in the local community.
- Stakeholders recognised that Sure Start is formulated to enable greater local participation in decision making processes, however Sure Start St Ann's meetings were criticised as being repetitive and inconsistent. The local capital works programme was also highlighted as being overly bureaucratic.

- A strong *professional service delivery* ethos is recognised in the programme and the creation of a *formal referral system* singled out as a major achievement. However, this style of approach inhibits innovative ways of working.
- Stakeholders stressed that St Ann's is a difficult environment to work in, and that Sure Start St Ann's progress should be judged in this context.

#### **6.5. Future Actions.**

The next phase of interviews will focus upon the management of Sure Start St Ann's. It is likely to include the programme director, members of the partnership board and representatives of the Parents Advisory Group. Soon after this the three staff team co-ordinators will be interviewed as part of a further phase of staff interviews.

## **7. Conclusions - Observations and Reflections.**

This final section identifies a number of key issues raised by this evaluation and poses a number of important questions that have to be addressed as this evaluation develops and evolves.

### **7.1. Key issues.**

At an early stage of this evaluation a virtuous circle incorporating *investment, innovation, participation* and *sustainability* was recognised as essential for Sure Start St Ann's long-term prospects. It was recognised that each of these key notions has a major role to play in ensuring that Sure Start has both a strong and immediate impact upon St Ann's, and also establishes a framework which might be sustained beyond the duration of Sure Start funding.

The key issues identified here will consider how Sure Start St Ann's has *interpreted its mission*, and to what extent this *virtuous circle* has been closed; it will also tentatively identify some of those local and organisational factors which have facilitated or inhibited success.

#### **7.1.1. Organisation and adaptation.**

First of all how is Sure Start St Ann's organised and how well has it adapted to a new and challenging ways of working?

Sure Start St Ann's has a committed and able staff who seem well supported and who feel able to take responsibility, demonstrate initiative and participate in decision making processes. Staff seem to work well together and are sympathetic to multi-agency / innovative ways of working – indeed they recognise this as the key feature and main benefit of Sure Start. However, it would seem that it has taken time for staff to build confidence in new ways of working and much Sure Start provision seems focused upon professional service delivery, and seems constrained by traditional professional boundaries.

However, initiatives such as Parents United, Home Safety, the Toy Library and Service Level Agreements with bodies such as the Renewal Trust, WEA and ENPROVE suggest that Sure Start St Ann's can effectively work with other local bodies. The success of the Home Safety scheme in particular demonstrates that

Sure Start can act as a hub (and facilitating agent) for other organisations, and can establish provision and processes that will be maintained beyond the life of the programme.

### **Innovation and Adaptation**

- The strongest and most consistent comment about Sure Start St Ann's is that it has sought to serve the community rather than to work with it.
- Whilst the *referral system and package of care programme* offer critical support to families with serious needs and difficulties, it is illustrative of a philosophy of formal provision and professional style of service delivery.
- A failure to fully engage and utilise the community parent volunteer scheme is illustrative of these difficulties, and perhaps symptomatic of traditional professional boundaries and demarcations remaining evident.

It is important to recognise that concerns around Sure Start St Ann's ability to innovate and adapt have to be understood in the context of a number of more general restrictions and constraints. Like many other similar initiatives its is vulnerable to a high turnover of staff (due to the fixed-term nature of the employment that it offers). It also draws together staff from a number of different professional backgrounds, it takes time to understand, adapt and utilise the skills and expertise that these individuals bring to the programme. Finally, and most significantly, Sure Start St Ann's is guided (and restricted) by those goals and targets which have been established nationally: consequently there is a potentially problematic relationship between what Sure Start St Ann's has to do (to meet national targets) and how it might want to adapt and respond to local circumstances. A strong concern for national objectives might also add to the programme (and those meetings which direct it) having an overly bureaucratic feel.

#### **7.1.2. Perceptions and Involvement.**

How is Sure Start St Ann's perceived by local people and local organisations, and how does this influence levels of participation and involvement?

Sure Start St Ann's has been slow to get going but is now starting to demonstrate a marked increase in the number of families reached, the number and frequency

of the provision that it offers and in the support and involvement of local professionals (such as health visitors and midwives).

Involvement in Sure Start St Ann's would seem to have been (until recently) inhibited by a perception of the programme being just another statutory service provider (*"It works like another arm of the health authority that has been parachuted in"* – a member of the City-wide Sure Start Group; *"it offers missionary like services, saving children"* – local community worker). Local service providers have perhaps perceived the programme as a replacement for family and social services which have been cut-back; and local people perhaps view it as a form of social services or child protection service (offered only to families with severe problems).

These criteria have enabled Sure Start St Ann's to establish effective formal links (and a very successful referral mechanism) with other statutory service providers – although they have inhibited the involvement of smaller voluntary/community organisations (especially those from ethnic minorities). They have also facilitated a very strong and wide-ranging impact upon a small number of families – although they have acted to keep the programme *at arms length from the community* (especially young people, fathers and ethnic minorities).

#### **Just another Statutory Service Provider?**

*Consent forms, referral mechanisms and packages of care* have created a very formal feel to the programme and have added to these difficulties. They have contributed to a perception, amongst professionals, that Sure Start St Ann's is a replacement for social services, and inhibited community involvement by making the programme seem formal and official.

Relaxing the *referral system* and putting less emphasis upon *packages of care* are steps in the right direction; might renaming the consent form as a *membership card / fun card* (or something similar) also give the programme a more relaxed, less statutory service feel?

It has also been recognised that participation in the programme has been inhibited by a lack of visibility – establishing a greater presence in the community with the Chase shops, the Toy Library Van and more effective publicity (such as the bus poster and timetable) are viewed as essential.

Whilst some of the difficulties around participation and involvement rest in how Sure Start St Ann's has focused its efforts and packaged its identity, it is important to recognise that a range of other factors influence this. First and foremost the programme is reliant upon the commitment of local people (who are, as Emma explained, *scared of people with a briefcase and a clipboard*). Secondly, it is reliant upon the actions and commitments of other agencies - for practical support (i.e. venues, childcare facilities, etc.) but also for strategic support (i.e. involvement in task groups, the partnership board and to partnership working more broadly). Finally, and fundamentally, it is constrained by national targets and the drive towards sustainability: it may be that local organisational partners and residents do not share Sure Start's priorities and objectives and hence are reluctant to get involved; it is also possible that the long-term goal of sustainability masks the short-term importance of involving local people.

## **7.2. Key Questions.**

Two key questions would seem to underpin many of the issues that have emerged in this local evaluation; addressing these is an integral part of the extension of this work.

### **1. Participation.**

#### **Why aren't more people accessing Sure Start St Ann's?**

It is important to establish to what extent the reason for low participation might be a function of: Sure Start St Ann's (lack of visibility, inappropriate provision); St Ann's as an area (socially diverse and fragmented, poorly served); or, St Ann's parents (low self-confidence, resistant to officials).

### **2. Local Context:**

#### **How do we judge the success of Sure Start St Ann's?**

It may be that a strong concern for national guidelines is inappropriate in a community where participation has traditionally been low and where local people are suspicious of outside agencies. Understanding more about St Ann's might offer a more informed perspective on how to judge Sure Start and recognise the impact that it has had.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this multi-agency consultation see: Glass, N. (1999), Sure Start: the development of an early intervention programme for young children in the United Kingdom, in *Children and Society*, Vol 13, (pages 257-264).

<sup>2</sup> *Modernising Public Services for Britain* (July 1998) in Comprehensive Spending Review, The Stationery Office Ltd.

<sup>3</sup> Palmer, G., Rahman, M. & Kenway, P. (2002) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2002*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

<sup>4</sup> Glass, N. (1999), op cit.

<sup>5</sup> Summarised from [www.surestart.gov.uk/text/about](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/text/about). To this list of four childcare might be added in response to very recent changes to the Sure Start Public Service and Service Delivery Agreements.

<sup>6</sup> Glass, N. (1999), op cit.; Eisenstadt, N. (2000) Sure Start: Research into Practice, in *Public Money and Management*, Dec. 2000; Roberts, H. (2000), What is Sure Start, in *Archives of the Diseases of Childhood*, Vol.82 (pages 435-437).

<sup>7</sup> The recognition that the Primary Care Trust (with its more established policies and procedures) is better placed to deal with issues of recruitment, financial management and performance monitoring led to it assuming accountable body status, having originally been the lead partner.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the evaluation strategy see the Sure Start National Evaluation website: [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk).

<sup>9</sup> Summarised from a evaluation model described in St Leger, A.S., Schnieden, H. & Walsworth-Bell, J. (1992), *Evaluating Health Services' Effectiveness*, OUP, Milton Keynes.

<sup>10</sup> Whilst a more academic case study approach might utilise a range of data collection techniques (interviews, observations, documentary resources, etc.) these case studies (due to the limited time available) are based upon extended, unstructured interviews - although they are more broadly informed by previous contact and discussion with the parents and the opinions of Sure Start staff.

<sup>11</sup> Both Kevin and Emma were given the opportunity to review and alter the text relating to their case study; both were happy for their real names to be used in this report.

<sup>12</sup> CASE are currently undertaking a long-term nation-wide study of disadvantaged areas. St Ann's (and Phase 10 more specifically) is one of twelve case studies included in this work. For more information see Lupton, R. (2001) *Places Apart – the initial report of CASE's area studies*, LSE, London. Available via [sticerd.lse.ac.uk/Case](http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/Case).

<sup>13</sup> See Lupton, R. (2001) op cit.

<sup>14</sup> Whilst stakeholders recognised the need for parental consent and those issues pertinent to data protection it was still felt that *registration* and *consent* forms might be presented in a more user friendly (less official) manner.