



**Broughton Sure Start
Annual Evaluation
Report:**

**A Strategic Exploration
of the Broughton
Programme**

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Introduction

This evaluation report seeks to address some important strategic issues. This is in marked contrast to the previous evaluation report, which centred largely upon the views of parents regarding Sure Start services.

The impetus for adopting a more strategic emphasis is a consequence of the national Sure Start programme ceasing to operate in its current fashion at the end of March 2006. Clearly there is a need to highlight the learning that has taken place in Broughton since the programme's inception, and to emphasise important lessons that need to be taken forward, under the direction of local authorities, in developing future services for young children.

This Annual Evaluation Report will address the following six issues:

- Reflect upon the degree to which Sure Start projects have been able to develop their service delivery in the light of parental views explored in the previous Broughton annual evaluation report (approved by the Broughton Steering Group in May 2005).
- Summarise the evaluation team's findings in relation to why certain communities within Broughton, who are eligible to receive support from Sure Start services, have been less able to access Sure Start services.
- Consider the impact of the Broughton Sure Start shop in enhancing service delivery for parents.
- Explore the experiences of the Broughton Steering Group, both positive and negative, in taking the programme forward.
- Explore the perceptions of both project co-ordinators and project workers in relation to the Broughton programme. This enables projects to identify both strategic and operational issues concerning the difference they have made to families in Broughton, whilst highlighting barriers to providing further services. This amounts to a critical evaluation of the Broughton programme.
- Explore the extent to which projects have understood the importance of evaluation, the degree to which they have been able to embed it within their regular patterns of work, and the obstacles that exist for taking this forward.

1. Feedback from First Broughton Report: Responding to Views of Service Users

• Introduction

The first Broughton Report (produced in May 2005) was centred upon a range of concerns and ideas expressed by parents in relation to each of the Sure Start projects. Parents clearly emphasised that a positive response to their suggestions would serve to enhance the work of individual projects, and so improve the overall effectiveness of the Broughton Sure Start Programme, so that it would be better placed to meet the needs of under 4s and their families.

Parental views were weighted into two categories: 'must do' and 'should do'. This was based upon the number of parents that had expressed a particular view, so that an opinion which was supported by a few parents fell into the 'must do' category, whereas an opinion which garnered less support fell into the 'should do' category.

Consequently, a list of actions was produced which reflected parents opinions regarding activities which ought to be delivered in order for the Broughton Sure Start Programme to adequately respond to their wishes and needs.

• Process of evaluation as a tool for project management

The Broughton Programme Manager used this list to discuss with projects how parents' suggestions could be implemented. This meant that projects had to justify why certain parental suggestions could or could not be implemented. The Programme Manager indicated to the evaluation team that this method of evaluation would be helpful in exploring the extent to which projects were able to develop services in line with parental views.

The Programme has indicated that, on the whole, projects have positively responded to the comments and suggestions made by parents on a wide variety of issues. Attention has been drawn to concrete project developments, and these are summarised within the 'project response' sections below. The rationale for parents being unable to take forward certain parental concerns is generally highlighted.

However, it would have been helpful for the Programme Management to have developed a method for regular and systematic feedback to the Evaluation Team of progress made by projects in addressing these issues. This would have allowed for a more comprehensive, rigorous critique of the ways in which projects had grappled with the challenges inherent in taking appropriate steps to respond to parental concerns.

The following indicates the 'Must Do' and 'Should Do' action points, together with the response for each project where it has been provided.

Part A: Projects aimed at all communities in Broughton

• Bookstart & Beyond: Must Do

- ❑ Ensure that there are always sufficient Bookstart bags.
- ❑ Encourage parents to volunteer as story tellers, running arts and craft sessions and preparing refreshments to help Project Worker
- ❑ Display children's arts and craft work around the story time venue to enhance the children's sense of pride and achievement in their work.
- ❑ Tell stories that celebrate cultural diversity to combat prejudice and racism.
- ❑ Undertake more events, and publicise them effectively.
- ❑ Encourage parents to develop and display advertising posters
- ❑ Encourage parents to accompany Bookstart worker to events, so that parents can informally encourage other parents to take part

• Bookstart & Beyond: Should Explore

- ❑ Label books more clearly according to age range
- ❑ Create a separate section of the library for parents with young children, so that parents don't feel uncomfortable or embarrassed that their children become noisy or unruly.
- ❑ Create a soft play area, as well as toilets and baby changing facilities
- ❑ Develop more frequent story sessions, together with a longer 'settling in' period, to help children feel more comfortable.
- ❑ Explore using diverse methods such as local radio, GP surgeries, local shops and other Sure Start projects to advertise Bookstart more effectively.

Bookstart & Beyond: Project Response to 'Must Do' points

The project has responded positively to 'must do' issues in a variety of ways. There are parent volunteers in story time sessions, children's art and craft is now being displayed, the stories do reflect greater cultural diversity (particularly in relation to the Jewish and African Caribbean communities) and buses have been organised to transport parents from Broughton library to Buille Hill, so that local parents can attend Sure Start events. In this way, parents are encouraged to attend events. The library now stocks enough bags for local parents to collect.

Bookstart & Beyond: Project Response to 'Should Explore' Points

A separate section has been created in Broughton library for under 4s. However, the other issues were not taken forward, and this is partly due to the fact that the library will soon be demolished and replaced with more modern facilities.

- **Broughton Friends: Must Do**

- Display children's artwork on the walls to make the venue brighter and more attractive.
- Investigate health and safety concerns regarding the venue.

- **Broughton Friends: Should Explore**

- Run the parent-toddler group on more than one day per week.
- Decorate and clean the venue, or investigate the costs of hiring professional contractors to do so.
- Investigate the costs of hiring professional contractors to carpet the floor.
- Obtain different types of ethnic clothing for children, so that children can find out about different cultures through dressing up.
- Obtain bicycles for children's play at parent-toddler group.

Broughton Friends : Project Response

The centre where the project delivered its activities was refurbished with a Sure Start grant. This enabled the venue to become brighter and more attractive, it has been painted and cleaned. The remaining suggestions were not introduced.

- **Dental Project: Must Do**

- Develop and distribute more leaflets explaining the project's work.
- Ensure available leaflets are up to date and contain accurate information.
- Distribute information at school home time, when many parents arrive to pick up children

- **Dental Project: Should Explore**

- Develop more outreach services.

- Produce and distribute a video for families showing the correct way to brush teeth.

Dental Project : Response

The project has not had additional funding to develop more leaflets, and argues that its publicity material is up to date. However, it has distributed further information within schools. It has also used the Broughton Shop to develop more of an outreach approach, and there have also been additional visits to primary schools in Broughton.

- **EFAS: Must Do**

- Draw up a list of places where cheap baby clothes and equipment can be obtained, and distribute to mothers.
- Improve signage in Hope Hospital so women can access it more easily.
- Use notice boards, posters and leaflets to advertise services more widely.

- **EFAS: Should Explore**

- Create an informal drop-in service in community locations.
- Provide emergency cash to women in dire immediate need.

EFAS: Project Response

The project's use of signage has improved, and it continues to advertise in diverse ways. It has begun to deliver an informal drop – in at the Broughton Shop in 2006, as well as at the Aguda centre for the Orthodox Jewish community. However, the project felt it was inappropriate to provide lists of places where cheaper children's clothes can be obtained. No emergency grants are provided by the project.

- **Language Development Project: Should Explore**

- Run more sessions, perhaps for 2 afternoons per week for an entire school term.

Language Development: Project Response

Although the project is unable to provide further sessions for 2 afternoon per week, there will be additional sessions from April 2006, which will amount to 6 per year.

- **Lifestart: Must Do**

- Advertise more widely, such as within GP surgeries and other community settings.

- ❑ Consider alternative venues for course delivery (other than Bradshaw Street Nursery) due to noise level, and the inadequate partitioning within the room. An alternative venue would have two separate rooms.
- **Lifestart: Should Explore**
- ❑ Develop outreach work with local playgroups, so more parents can find out about Lifestart.

Lifestart: Project response

Lifestart have continued to advertise widely and now use the Broughton Shop and the Aguda as these are much more suitable venues for their courses. The project has not developed outreach with local playgroups, as this was deemed too costly.

- **Midwifery Service: Must Do**
- ❑ Develop more local groups (to help women meet other women), cheap activities and better publicity.
- ❑ Provide an ante-natal appointment in women's own homes for greater privacy.
- ❑ Provide a longer post-natal visit to mothers.
- **Midwifery Service: Should Explore**
- ❑ Provide groups that relate to pampering sessions, aquanatal classes, baby massage, exercise classes, Parentcraft and relaxation groups.

Midwifery Project: Response

The Midwifery Service does not have the resources to deliver ante – natal appointments in women's own homes. However, through the Aguda centre and Broughton Shop, it has delivered more publicity and a diverse range of support services for various groups (e.g. guided birth, baby massage etc). The project felt that the length of its post-natal visits was adequate.

- **Tiny Tots: Must Do**
- ❑ Organise an afternoon playgroup session for local parents and children.
- ❑ Provide more crèche sessions, so more parents can access learning and training opportunities.

- ❑ Provide an open day, where all tutors are present, so parents can find out about training courses in an informal way.
- ❑ Look at alternative venues for future trips, such as Gulliver's World, Camelot and Haigh Hall.
- **Tiny Tots: Should Explore**
 - ❑ Develop an exchange board so parents can share items that their children had grown out of.
 - ❑ Develop a toy library for parents to borrow toys for a short while.

Tiny Tots Project: Response

Tiny Tots does not provide playgroup sessions in the afternoon, but there are family fun time sessions during the afternoons when there are school holidays. Similarly there are no more crèche sessions, but more will be provided at the Broughton shop. Although no open days have been organised, the Broughton Trust learners, in collaboration with the Sure Start Shop, are able to do so. There have been numerous trips to new places, such as Chester Zoo, Blackpool and a farm, in 2005. With regard to training opportunities and access to learning, Tiny Tots staff have signposted to venues where this training is available to parents/carers (e.g. Data Base, Sure Start Shop). The project was not able to develop an exchange board due to concerns over health and safety issues. Furthermore, it was felt there was no reason for having a Toy Library, given that the existing Toy Libraries at Marlborough Road Primary School and the Broughton Shop were felt to be well-equipped.

Part B: Projects aimed at Jewish Communities in Broughton

- **Aguda Project: Must Do**
 - ❑ Obtain more toy buggies for the playcentre.
 - ❑ Develop a cleaning rota amongst mothers to keep the toys clean.
 - ❑ Develop a separate changing area distinctly from the playcentre to create a more hygienic environment.
 - ❑ Develop an appointments system for mothers to consult with health workers.
 - ❑ Develop a sheltered area for prams to ease general congestion.
 - ❑ Improve advertising for 'Time out for Mums' sessions.
 - ❑ Develop a wider choice of courses for 'Time out for Mums' sessions.

- ❑ Provide additional art equipment for 'Time Out for Mums' sessions.
- ❑ Ensure that there is an equitable system for distributing vouchers for attending special events.
- ❑ Ensure there is greater clarity regarding the times when special events will be run.
- **Aguda Project: Should Explore**
 - ❑ Create a separate leisure space for mothers to sit and relax away from noisy children.
 - ❑ Provide an examination room, where mothers can meet privately with health workers.
 - ❑ Provide more crèche workers.
 - ❑ Enable mothers to receive recognised qualification for 'Time Out for Mums' sessions.
 - ❑ Develop a larger indoor space for holding special events.

Aguda Project: Response

The Aguda project has addressed many of the parental concerns raised. Additional toy buggies were provided, and a separate changing area distinct from the play centre was also developed. Additional art equipment was provided, and a wider choice of courses, such as cake making, were provided. An appointment system for seeing health workers was in place. The project is seeking to develop as equitable a system as possible for the distribution of vouchers based upon the needs of Orthodox Jewish families. Furthermore, for some families, there may be a stigma attached to being in receipt of vouchers for discounted or free services, and so this was a difficult issue to address.

- **Aim Habayis: Must Do**
 - ❑ Develop a more rigorous appointments system for supporting mothers.
 - ❑ Distribute a domestic help checklist to help mothers organise their home life.
 - ❑ Develop a more wide-ranging advertising strategy to encourage more families to become involved.

- **Aim Habayis: Should Explore**

- Ensure that all night nurses have sufficient understanding of breastfeeding and helping babies to sleep.
- Ensure that families have the same night nurse, rather than different night nurses.
- Encourage more night nurses to be drawn from the orthodox Jewish community.

Aim Habayis: Project Response

The project has argued that it is difficult to indicate accurately when the workers will be able to visit families, especially when Night Nannies are moving from one address to another. The staff is fully committed to supporting families in Broughton through Night Nannies, but it is fully stretched in terms of its existing financial commitments, and is presently unable to support more families. Furthermore, it is not able to determine the cultural background of Night Nannies. Similarly, it is not able to influence the knowledge of Night Nannies in respect of breastfeeding, although it maintains that they all have a reasonable knowledge.

- **Chasdei Chaye Rochel: Should Explore**

- Meet the transport costs of the labour supporter.

Chasdei Chaye Rochel: Project Response

Volunteer expenses are now being met by the project.

- **Chasdei Devorah: Should Explore**

- Ensure that families receive adequate support over sufficient length of time.

Chasdei Devorah : Project response

The project continues to support parents over a variety of issues and for various periods of time.

- **Children's Choices: Must Do**

- Develop brief refresher sessions for the parenting class.
- Create a parenting support group in order to promote parent-to-parent support.

- ❑ Develop an advertising strategy that includes leafletting homes in the area, as well as involving a local Jewish school.
- ❑ Develop more trips out and activity days.
- **Children’s Choices: Should Explore**
- ❑ Extend the working hours for Project Smile.
- ❑ Develop school activities in relation to Project Smile, including those that are craft oriented.
- ❑ Extend the hours of the Toy Library.

Children’s Choices: Project response

The project feels that it has encouraged parenting support, albeit informally without creating a parenting support group. Furthermore, it feels that to leaflet homes in the area would be inappropriate, as some families would be offended by receiving such literature in this way. Additional coach trips and days out were organised during the summer of 2005. Refresher sessions, parenting support and advertising the project’s services are being undertaken informally. Due to funding difficulties, it has not been possible to extend the working hours of Project Smile, although the opening hours of the Toy Library have been extended.

- **JEMS (Jewish Maternity Services): Must Do**
- ❑ Display more publicity materials in various locations, such as GP surgeries.
- ❑ Arrange for labour supporter to have longer contact time with families for the first few days after child’s birth.
- ❑ Provide more help in the home during the 0-4 years, and advertise more widely the support that is available during this period.
- **JEMS (Jewish Maternity Services): Should Explore**
- ❑ Extend the project to cover other hospitals in Greater Manchester.
- ❑ Appoint an additional worker to support the project co-ordinator.
- ❑ Establish a helpline to offer confidential support and advice.

JEMS: Project Response

None received.

2. Communities engaging less with Broughton Sure Start

• Introduction

Anecdotal evidence during the production of the previous Broughton evaluation report suggested that certain groups had not accessed Sure Start services as often as they might, and this was reflected in parental participation in focus group discussions. The evaluation team has developed a strategy to identify which groups of parents had not accessed Sure Start services thus far, as well as to explore the barriers to their participation with Sure Start, and how these might be overcome.

This chapter will consider the research as to why the following groups of people had not accessed Sure Start services as often as they might, so that the local authority might be mindful of relevant issues:

- ❑ Teenage mothers
- ❑ Working parents
- ❑ Refugees and asylum seekers
- ❑ Black and minority ethnic communities

The Broughton Evaluation Workers developed slightly different strategies for each of the above groups. They sought to engage with representatives of these groups, and then to undertake qualitative research with them. On other occasions, a questionnaire was devised in order to obtain their views, and on other occasions they networked with experts in the field, where engaging with parents was not feasible.

2.1 Teenage mothers

• Introduction

Due to the stigma of being a teenage mother, the Broughton Evaluation Workers found it difficult to engage with this group.

• Survey questionnaire for teenage mothers

A questionnaire was devised and distributed to a community worker who supports teenage mothers. The following summarises the findings from the questionnaires:

- ❑ *Knowledge of Sure Start*

Generally parents were aware of different aspects of Sure Start services. One commented that Sure Start provided free equipment for families with young children. Another highlighted the mother and toddler groups as being a key aspect of service provision. One mother felt that Sure Start was responsible for better educational provision for very young children, but also felt that Sure Start was responsible for giving out maternity grants.

□ *Finding out about services in the community*

The respondents used different ways to find out about services in the community. One of them valued the leaflets provided by midwives and health visitors, whilst others felt that the local Job Centre and Connexions services provided her with useful information.

□ *Obstacles that prevent teenage / young parents accessing Sure Start services*

Some parents felt that poor transportation was a key factor in reducing access to Sure Start services, particularly for those living in parts of Broughton that were far from the Sure Start Shop. The physical tiredness caused by carrying their children to and from Sure Start facilities, particularly when bus services were not always reliable, was an important obstacle.

□ *Kinds of services that would benefit teenage parents / very young families*

Some parents felt that having more groups that were targeted at mothers and babies would be very beneficial, and could create greater participation in engaging with Sure Start, particularly if these were aimed at very young mothers. Other parents felt that maternity grants or loans provided through Sure Start would be very beneficial.

□ *How to make Sure Start services more accessible to teenage / young families*

Some teenagers felt that Sure Start Midwives and health visitors should put up more posters in community settings, informing them of Sure Start services. Similarly, it was felt that they should give out more leaflets. Others felt that the geographical boundaries of Sure Start Broughton should be widened, so that more families could access services. Others felt that a more social agenda, which included additional day trips, would encourage more young parents to become involved.

• **Evidence from an Expert: Issues affecting Teenage Mothers**

• **Introduction**

Due to the difficulty of engaging with teenage parents, the Evaluation Workers had discussions with a lead researcher within Salford PCT, who had recently completed work on issues pertaining to improved life-chances for teenage mothers in Salford. The work involved interviews with teenage parents and health professionals. Although this was a Salford-wide piece of work, it was felt that the lead researcher's investigation and analysis was pertinent to exploring issues around participation and non-participation among teenage parents in Broughton.

□ *Barriers to accessing community support groups*

One of the key barriers to teenage parents accessing services is that the main emphasis is on providing traditional one-to-one support to them, whereby they have specified appointment slots with staff from statutory services. There is little opportunity for teenage parents to develop their own social support networks.

Furthermore, many young mothers do not feel confident in attending a new group on their own. There were also concerns that, when they had attended general support groups for all mothers, there was a sense that older mothers were in some way disapproving of them, which made them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, some had complained that some members of staff from statutory services could be rude, or behave in a judgmental manner, particularly if they were unfamiliar with offering services to teenage parents. Consequently, teenage mothers wanted to have access to groups that were specifically for very young mothers.

□ *Teenage parents and social isolation*

Some teenage mothers reported that they didn't feel confident in going to a group session on their own, and would welcome having somebody to accompany them. In relation to preferred activities that could be offered within a group specifically for teenage mums, some mentioned that they would like to become involved with photography or art projects. Others, however, would just like to have time to chat with their peers, or to make new friends. Indeed some felt that having activities forced upon them might deter people from attending groups.

The sense of isolation was enhanced through many young mums feeling that they had lost their former friendships since becoming pregnant. This isolation was further compounded by many of the young mums being engaged with neither education nor employment, which left them with little to do during the day. Despite the variety of advice or emotional support services available to young mums, it seems that much less is provided in terms of making new friends and building their own social networks.

□ *Teenage parents and accessing Sure Start*

A lead officer from the Connexions service in Salford also offered thoughts on why young parents are less likely to access Sure Start services. This is partially due to many young parents not knowing what Sure Start actually is. Although some of them have heard of the Broughton Shop, they would not feel comfortable calling into it, and perhaps would not respond to a flyer or leaflet. Consequently unless somebody actually talked to them and explained what it provided, they might never find out about the opportunities which it entailed for them.

The Connexions service also raised the issue of social stigma, citing one parent who was afraid to leave her home for fear of further verbal abuse from

older adults, who had abused her earlier during pregnancy. Many of them felt that they were being negatively judged by older parents, and this deterred them from accessing further services.

It was also suggested that the Sure Start shop might seem quite intimidating to a teenage parent, particularly if there are groups of older parents in the shop who all seem to know each other, or if there are lots of health professionals. This is an indication of the lack of confidence which young mums have in going about their daily lives. Connexions have commenced a young parents group, and have highlighted the difficulty of collecting them from their homes, and then take them home at the end of the group meeting. Although this is a time-consuming process, without this support and 'handholding', most teenage mums would not even consider attending such group meetings.

2.2 Working Parents

• Introduction

The Broughton Evaluation Workers developed a brief questionnaire for working parents, and distributed this to 30 of them within Broughton. A total of 20 were returned, and the following summarises their response.

□ Knowledge of Broughton Sure Start

It was very noticeable that the vast majority of working parents had not heard of Sure Start. Only 3 commented that Sure Start worked with children aged 4 and under, whilst 10 remarked that they knew nothing about Sure Start. 7 respondents commented that they knew virtually nothing about Sure Start.

□ Finding out about services in the community

The respondents used different means to find out about events and services within Broughton. Half of them gained their information through word of mouth, 6 of them were informed through their child minder whilst an additional 4 used material advertised in the local press to keep abreast of what was locally available for parents.

□ Obstacles for working parents in accessing Sure Start services

Roughly three quarters of parents commented that the timing of Sure Start events during the day was unhelpful. Given their working responsibilities during the day, working parents were simply unable to take advantage of daytime activities in the way that non-working parents were able to. Four of the respondents felt that their capacity for accessing services was made more difficult by the poor communication strategy employed by Sure Start. Much more information needed to be sent to families, or else Sure Start services needed to be advertised in places where all parents – both working and non-working – could find out about them.

□ *Kinds of activities that would benefit working parents*

Respondents indicated different kinds of activities that would be useful for working parents. Some of them called for out-of-school-holidays club activities for children, which could keep children engaged with interesting activities, and also give parents a break from childcare. Others felt that they would like to learn more about healthy eating on a family budget, particularly if this kinds of training or advice sessions could be offered on Saturdays (i.e. when they were not at work). Some working parents felt that without adequate information on what is currently available, it is difficult to comment on supporting activities that would be beneficial.

2.3 Refugees and asylum seekers

• Introduction

The Broughton Evaluation Workers held a focus group with refugees and asylum seekers in Salford through Salford Refugee Link at the Resource Centre. The event was well-attended, with 15 participants in total (4 males and 11 females) taking part, whose countries of origin included Zaire, Congo and Somalia. 8 of the parent carers had more than one child under 4 years of age. The following summarises key findings from the focus group.

□ *Current knowledge of Sure Start*

Knowledge of Sure Start was very poor within the group, as only two members had heard of Sure Start from their midwives, who had provided them with goody bags and leaflets on projects. However, as their English language skills were not particularly strong, they found it difficult to read the information and understand what kinds of facilities might be available to them and their children.

The remainder of the group had not heard of Sure Start. One person commented that, as their English was not good, they would feel embarrassed in not being able to comprehend Sure Start staff, and vice versa. One observed that there was a fear of being seen as rude or ignorant in not being able to speak easily with other parents. Some participants were concerned that involvement in Sure Start might adversely affect their benefit entitlements.

□ *Finding out about services in the community*

Participants stated that they found out about local services through attendance at the local church, word of mouth or else through friends and family. Salford Refugee Link was itself a source of information.

□ *Kinds of activities that would benefit refugees and asylum seekers*

Some parents commented that providing information on Sure Start in French, Italian and Portuguese rather than English would help to inform refugees and asylum seekers. It was also observed that, as a group, their verbal English

language skills might lead people to believe that their ability to read English is better than it actually is. Consequently, written materials in English were not deemed to be particularly useful in informing refugee and asylum seeking communities about Sure Start events and activities.

The group also felt that certain organisational venues should be targeted in providing this support:

- Primary schools,
 - Local churches,
 - Community organisations (such as Salford Refugees Link),
 - Antenatal / baby clinics
 - GP surgeries
 - Broughton Library (as many people used internet services to maintain contact with family and friends), and
 - African food shops and hairdressers
- *Increasing accessibility for refugees and asylum seekers and their families*

One person commented that Sure Start needed to be more proactive in engaging with the places listed above, and offer talks (with interpreters) to encourage involvement. It was felt that Sure Start needed to employ a dedicated link worker, with the necessary language skills, who could undertake these kinds of activities.

It was also suggested that the Programme Manager should have greater contact with Salford Refugee Link, and that welcoming events in the Sure Start shop, aimed at refugees / asylum seekers and attended by interpreters, would also be very useful. Furthermore, greater contact with schools would be useful in that some of them have workers employed to support refugees and asylum seeker children, and in this way it was felt that the information could be relayed to their parents.

The Chair of Salford Refugee Link also suggested that an invitation extended to Sure Start to attend Salford Refugee Link's Annual General Meeting would help to break down barriers and provide a platform for how Sure Start could move forward in supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

2.4 Black and minority ethnic communities

• Introduction

A focus group was held with members of the Asian community to explore reasons for non-involvement with Sure Start. Although only three women attended, it did provide some useful insight into some of the barriers that exist, and how they might be overcome. The following summarises the content of the discussion.

□ *Current knowledge of Sure Start*

All of the participants had learnt of Sure Start through the Broughton Friends. Indeed the Broughton Friends project was the only one that they had heard of. However, they all felt that they would have made some use of Sure Start services if they had known about it. The Evaluation Workers gave a basic introduction to Sure Start in Broughton, and some of the services were appealing to the participants. One of the group intimated that the language barrier would inhibit them making the most of Sure Start services.

□ *Finding out about services in the community*

Participants commented that they found out about local services through community contacts.

□ *Kinds of activities that would benefit South Asian communities*

The group felt that the demands of house work and childcare responsibilities meant that they were not able to devote time to engage with community facilities, such as Sure Start. They also felt that there was an onus on Sure Start to reach out to minority ethnic communities.

The group indicated that having a Sure Start worker visit them at home to provide them with information in community languages, such as Urdu and Punjabi, would be helpful. One of the group also felt that a healthy eating project would also be useful.

Others felt that day trips would also be useful, and two of them remember trips organised by the local authority to the seaside.

The group also felt that, where community events were organised to promote Sure Start, all of the food provided should be clearly labelled as vegetarian or non-vegetarian. This was important to avoid offending religious sensitivities. Similarly, where meat dishes were provided, it was essential that they be specifically labelled as 'halal'.

3. Evaluation of Broughton Sure Start Shop

• Introduction

The Broughton Shop has been a highly significant development within the Broughton programme, in that it provides a valuable base from which projects can offer services to parents. The Broughton Shop opened in September 2004, and it seeks to allow parents to easily access information on available services. The Broughton Evaluation Team produced a questionnaire to be distributed to users of the Broughton Shop, in order to explore local people's perceptions of the impact which it had made. Having met with the staff of the Broughton shop, they agreed to hand out the questionnaires at the end of each sessions (i.e. baby massage), and then hand them over to the Evaluation Workers for analysis. Questionnaires were distributed for a total of one month. A total of 50 questionnaires were given to the staff of the Broughton Shop, and 29 of these were completed and returned. The following summarises the findings from this questionnaire.

□ *Finding out about the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Most of the respondents found out about the Broughton Shop through word of mouth, and communicating with other parents. However, a sizeable number learnt about it through a health care professional (e.g. midwife or health visitor), or else through parent-toddler groups. Some parents found out about some Sure Start projects through attending other Sure Start projects. Others gained information through baby clinics, whilst others learnt of activities through home visits from health professionals. Play group attendance was also a useful introduction to Sure Start services.

□ *Information currently provided in the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Two thirds of respondents described the information as 'very useful', whilst the remainder described it as 'fairly useful'. None of the respondents deemed it to be 'not useful'.

□ *Further information required in the Broughton Sure Start shop*

Of the 29 completed questionnaires, 18 left this section blank, commented 'not sure' or left no comment at all. It can be assumed that this group of respondents were relatively happy with existing information provision.

3 respondents commented that they would like a sales board to be developed, whereby people could swap or sell children's toys and equipment that they no longer used. Furthermore, 3 respondents felt that it would be useful to have a jobs board, which could have details of existing vacancies, particularly for mothers who wish to return to work. There was also the occasional call for more information regarding the Grecian Street nursery (i.e. fees, opening hours, etc), as well as some information leaflets on how to cope with growing children, including the availability of local services to help in this regard.

□ *Most helpful services provided in the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Roughly half of the respondents (13 in total) did not give a response to this questions, which might indicate that they did not feel that any one service was more favourable than any other. The remainder commented on a wide variety of services: a couple of people mentioned play workers, whilst another couple highlighted being able to learn courses and obtain benefits advice. In addition, 3 people mentioned the value of breathing and relaxation classes, whilst a further 2 valued the opportunity to associate with other mums.

Other parents highlighted the opportunity to borrow baby toys, obtain information on various projects and the toddler group / crèche. One parent specifically valued the impact of the Broughton Friends as being a vital service for those with access to no other support service. One highlighted her enjoyment of baby massage, whilst others mentioned the arts and crafts facilities and bookstart.

□ *Ways to improve services provided in the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Respondents raised a variety of practical suggestions in this regard. Some commented that they would valued more information on local nursery and play groups, others felt there was a need for more and better advertising of the Broughton shop and others felt that there should be a designated place to keep buggies. A couple of respondents called for fewer biscuits and more fruit, so as to encourage healthier eating. There were further ideas for a suggestions board in a prominent place in the Broughton shop. Others raised issues of the shop's opening hours, feeling that it should be open more during the holiday, as well as at weekends.

□ *Events / activities that should be provided*

Two thirds of respondents made no comment, suggesting that they were relatively satisfied with services that are being provided. A handful of respondents made various suggestions, such as more day trips, increased group activities (not specified) and increased activities during school holidays. Some others suggested a swimming group and baby yoga, whilst one parents suggested more toys and story time sessions. Another parent called for further information on preparing nutritious family meals on a budget, whilst another suggested group buggy walks. Picnics in the park and craft / story time for older children were also suggested.

□ *Comments on the Staff within the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Virtually all the of respondents commented very favourably in this regard, indicating that they found the staff to be 'very helpful'. No negative comments on staff were made.

□ *Comments on the location of the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Roughly three quarters of respondents regarded the shop as having a 'great location', with the remainder regarding it as 'fairly good'.

□ *Further comments on the Broughton Sure Start Shop*

Despite there being very few additional comments made, all of them were extremely complimentary. Two respondents remarked that the shop is a very good place to socialise and meet with other parents. Another offered thanks to Sure Start for providing the shop facility, whilst another felt that it was good in every way.

4. Evaluating the experiences of the Broughton Steering Group

• Introduction

The Broughton Steering Group acts as a decision-making forum, and has clearly played a vital role in developing the activities of the Broughton Sure Start programme. It is generally chaired by Joan Williams (from the Broughton Trust), and is comprised of key officers from statutory and non-statutory organisations, as well as project representatives. Varying levels of community participation is also evident. Through regular monthly meetings, various issues which reflect ongoing concerns are raised and discussed.

Given the strategic context of this evaluation report, it became essential to consider the perspectives of the membership of the Steering Group. In taking this forward, a brief questionnaire was devised.

• Methodology

A questionnaire was devised regarding key aspects of the Broughton Steering Group, and this was distributed to the Steering Group membership together with freepost self-addressed envelopes. In addition, a focus group was organised for members of the Steering Group, and five people took part in this.

The following summary combines both the findings from both the Steering Group and questionnaires.

4.1 Involvement with the Broughton Steering Group

Focus group participants had become involved in different ways. One parent had become involved in attending meetings through participation in a particular project's activities. For another, participation was inherent in their employment with statutory services. One person mentioned that they had been contacted by Sure Start at the inception of the Broughton Programme and invited to take part.

4.2 Initial expectations of the Broughton Steering Group

During the discussions, a commonly-held view was that most of the membership had little idea of what to expect of the Steering Group, or what might be expected from them. There was little sense of what they were supposed to do, and that it took some time for roles and responsibilities to evolve. The group were keen to emphasise that the absence of clarity on expected roles could not be attributed to anybody, as there was little guidance provided on how the Steering Group should operate.

Some felt that there was initially a sense of political disputes between some members of the Steering Group, but that fairly quickly this disappeared as the group became a more cohesive unit and gained a greater sense of awareness of its authority.

One questionnaire respondent expected a clearer agenda from Sure Start. However, the respondent felt that the responsibilities within the Steering Group (i.e. who is responsible for what) was not made clear, particularly in relation to the Regional Sure Start Unit and the remit of Salford City Council.

4.3 Broughton Steering Group: Key Achievements

- *Cultural unity of purpose between Jewish Orthodox and non-Jewish Orthodox Participants*

The group were unanimous in identifying certain powerful achievements. They felt that, not only had they been instrumental in making decisions that were of lasting benefit to families, but that both Jewish Orthodox and Jewish non-Orthodox participants had been able to perceive themselves as a single group acting together on behalf of the entire community. A strong culture of unity had emerged within the Steering Group, such that the Jewish Orthodox membership of the group was not regarded as a 'component' of the Steering Group, but was, instead, an integral part of that group. This sense of unity had not happened immediately, but was the consequence of cultural awareness and mutual understanding.

- *Practical outcomes of cross-cultural understanding on Broughton Children's centres*

Participants felt that the sense of unity between Orthodox Jewish and non-Orthodox Jewish members had had a very encouraging outcome, in that Aguda and Bnos will offer separate services to the Orthodox Jewish communities that are linked to the main children's centre. In this sense, the Broughton model for children's centres was markedly different to that pursued in other parts of England. There was a general feeling that the Broughton steering group had had to be insistent that the standard model for children's centres, whereby services for all children would be provided in a single place, was simply not appropriate for an area such as Broughton.

Participants felt that this had required a considerable degree of courage, on their part and in the face of opposition from the North West Regional Sure Start group, but that this had been advantageous for families in Broughton. They also highlighted the important role of the Programme Manager in acting as an intermediary in this regard, particularly in relation to Salford City Council.

- *Flexibility of approach for service development*

The flexibility with which the Steering Group was able to address a range of problems and issues was perceived to be a real strength. It indicated that the Steering Group was able to respond to different issues in different ways, and was not duty bound to follow particular solutions. The creative nature of collective problem-solving within the Steering Group was felt to be a real strength. One questionnaire respondent valued the way in which complex issues were made easily comprehensible.

- *Supporting Sure Start project activities*

Participants highlighted the positive support given to projects, and provided some particular examples. The Aguda library development, and the collaboration which had taken place with the Bookstart project, was seen as being particularly valuable. The Steering Group was felt to have played a pivotal role in accessing initial funds, which then allowed further funds to become available.

The development of the Family Support project via Bradshaw Street nursery was felt to be extremely important in providing a service to vulnerable children from socially deprived backgrounds. In addition, the Health Awareness Days were highly regarded in helping new mothers engage with the Broughton programme, particularly in relation to the gift vouchers for fresh fruit and vegetables. Moreover, activities which had improved facilities for outdoor play in Broughton were also seen as important.

4.4 Broughton Steering Group: Key Strengths as a Management Group

- *Financial scrutiny and accountability*

The participants felt that the group had been able to scrutinise the ways in which public funds have been spent on children's services. There was a general sense that, as a management group, the diverse skills of the Steering Group had been brought together to enhance financial accountability. This meant that the programme's overspend or underspend had been kept under control.

- *Supporting monitoring and evaluation*

Some commented that the Steering Group had been successful in enhancing the monitoring and evaluation function by working with projects in this regard.

- *Collective decision-making*

The group felt that the truly collective nature of the decision-making process involved each of the members listening to what each other had to say during meetings, and then coming to collective decisions. This culture of listening to fellow members was considered vital, in that it meant that no interest groups were able to dominate the Steering Group. One questionnaire respondent remarked that the Steering Group had been fairly consistent in its drive and composition.

4.5 Broughton Steering Group: Issues of Community Involvement

- *Representation from non-Orthodox Jewish parents*

Concerns were raised that there had been insufficient representation from non-Orthodox Jewish parents, tempered with satisfaction that Orthodox

Jewish parents had become involved. Some felt that this was illustrative of parents feeling excluded from the Steering Group, or that some felt that they might not be entitled to attend meetings. An important learning point was the need for greater advertising within community settings, which could encourage greater parental participation. Similarly, newspaper advertisements, poster displays or flyers distributed locally could also secure these ends. This could enable services for young children in Broughton to be developed in ways that were more reflective of parental views.

- *Age restrictions and community participation*

One questionnaire respondent commented that it would have been useful if parents could have remained involved in the Steering Group beyond their children reaching their fourth birthday. It was suggested that this regulation was a barrier to parents, for whom it took some time to become familiar with the process of the Steering Group.

- *Potential role of 'disinterested' parents*

One respondent commented that having a majority of disinterested parents on the Steering Group would have been more useful, especially if they full voting rights. Instead, there was a sense that the small parental representation was largely a consequence of narrow sectional interests, which did not fit easily with encouraging maximum parental involvement.

- *Participation of Local Councillors*

Some participants were concerned that there had been little representation from Broughton councillors in Steering Group meetings. Furthermore, when councillors did attend, it was felt that they were 'out of touch' with what was going on in Broughton, and so were not able to make effective contributions. There was a sense that local councillors had only become involved when they began to grasp the political power of the Steering Group as a decision-making body in developing services, and the economic repercussions of those decisions.

4.6 Broughton Steering Group: Key Weaknesses

- *Absence of clarity over participation and voting rights*

An issue of pressing concern has been the dubiety regarding who is allowed to participate and / or vote at Steering Group meetings. There was a lack of clarity as to who is eligible to vote, and who is able to have observer status. Some felt that a proper introduction to the Steering Group from the Chair, in which new members could have been properly informed of their status in the group, would also have been useful. Perhaps a short written guidance document, that could have been provided to new members of the Steering Group, would also have been useful in this regard.

However, the group also felt that central government had not been sufficiently supportive in defining voting and non-voting members of the Steering Group, and that clear guidelines should have been produced. Some commented that they felt other Steering Groups in different areas of Salford had different kinds of conventions regarding roles and participation in group meetings.

- *Absence of clarity over financial reporting*

The financial reporting at Steering Group meetings was felt to be a weakness. The manner in which tables were provided by the finance representative on the Steering Group, without proper explanation of what the figures indicated, and how 'underspends' or 'overspends' for projects had arisen, was confusing and hard to comprehend for members. A few commented that a couple of paragraphs of accompanying text that explained what the financial records actually meant would have been useful. The absence of explanatory material within the financial reporting framework indicated an assumption, on the part of the programme and finance representative, that Steering Group members were familiar with interpreting financial data of this kind. Evidence from the Steering Group clearly showed that this was not the case.

Some members suggested that it would have been more useful to have been presented with condensed budget reports on a monthly basis, with a more detailed report every six months or so. Furthermore, such reports could have been produced in a more user-friendly manner, through incorporating graphical materials.

- *Overabundance of paperwork*

A key criticism of the Steering Group procedure was the volume of paperwork which members were required to consider. Whilst members recognised the need to be rigorous in exploring the development of the Broughton programme, the volume of paperwork was sometimes seen as overwhelming. This was particularly so for those members who were less experienced in working within such an environment.

- *Clarity over relationship between funding and evaluation report*

Some participants commented on the lack of clarity in relation to funding and the evaluation report, with its traffic light ratings. Some projects had felt that a positive evaluation rating would naturally secure future funding, and some members of the Steering Group were also of that opinion. This presented problems to the Steering Group in making collective decisions on behalf of the entire Broughton programme. There was a need for the programme to explain more clearly why certain projects had had their funding cut in the context of the Children's Centre agenda. The Steering Group was aware that issues of 'value for money', or that other projects were performing a similar role had been used to justify decisions on funding. Nonetheless, a perception remained that projects were unsure as to the reasoning behind their proposed future funding, and this was felt to be unhelpful to the Steering Group.

- *Lack of decision-making from statutory authorities*

One questionnaire respondent felt that, at times, there had been limited involvement from statutory bodies when difficult decisions needed to be made. This meant that decisions were made by local providers of services rather than policy makers, which was not deemed to be satisfactory.

- *Broughton Sure Start and the Orthodox Jewish Community*

One questionnaire respondent felt that, although it was positive to have a strong representation from the Orthodox Jewish Community, it had come to dominate the local Sure Start agenda. Involvement from other sections of the Broughton community was relatively poor, and this was a particular cause for concern given the high levels of social deprivation affecting many communities in Broughton.

- *Benefits of a 'mid term review'*

One respondent suggested that a mid term review of what had been accomplished, and what else needed to be done from a strategic / practical perspective would have been useful in sharpening the focus of the Steering Group. However, the respondent also felt that, given the fast-changing nature of the Children's Centre agenda, perhaps such a review was not feasible.

- *Sectional interests*

One person commented that the group was quite unwieldy, as there were too many representatives who were largely motivated by concerns for their own sectional group's interests, rather than taking a broader perspective of Broughton's long-term needs. However, the combination of those interests was also felt to have made a huge difference to overall service provision in Broughton.

- *Accuracy of statistical monitoring of project activity*

The group were critical of the varying degrees of accuracy / reliability of the monitoring information provided, which was regarded as giving misleading impressions of project activity.

4.7 Broughton Steering Group: Further Comments

- *Length of meetings*

Some commented that the Steering Group meetings continued for too long, and that it was sometimes difficult for members to devote sufficient time and energy to the meetings.

- *Dialogue with the Local Authority*

One commented that there seems to be little effective dialogue with the local authority on key strategic decisions. This meant that the Steering Group, to a certain extent, had been operating in a state of limbo for some months. Although the group has been effective, the absence of an effective dialogue has hampered the planning process.

- *National timetable for making decisions*

The group felt that the government-led deadlines for making decisions was extremely tight, and this meant that sometimes there was insufficient time for careful consideration of issues.

- *Dates / venues of meetings*

One person commented that the dates and venues of Steering Group meetings had not always been clearly notified to the membership by the Sure Start administration team.

- *The age range for children eligible for Sure Start support*

Some participants commented that certain service providers were unaware that children were eligible for services upto their fifth birthday, and thought that their eligibility ended on their fourth birthday. In some areas of Broughton, there was evidence that some children, between the ages of 4 and 5 years, were deemed too old to receive Sure Start services which they were entitled to receive.

- *The future management of children's centres*

The group felt that they had gained a great deal of valuable experience in moving the Broughton Sure Start agenda forward. They felt that this experience would be extremely useful if it could be continued, whereby they could become the managing group of future children's centres.

5. Exploring the views of Sure Start Project Co-ordinators

• Introduction

The Broughton Sure Start programme has sought to address a variety of needs amongst children aged 0-4. In keeping with the strategic nature of this report, it was deemed both necessary and relevant to capture the perspective of Sure Start projects on the Broughton programme, so that the Children's Centre agenda in Salford might learn from these perceptions when developing future services. Furthermore, it was felt that eliciting the views of projects would provide a valuable balance to the views of service users that were obtained within the first Broughton evaluation report.

• Method of Evaluation

Two questionnaires were devised and delivered to each project, and responses obtained via stamped self-addressed envelopes. The first of these was for the attention of project co-ordinators, who have provided strategic leadership and development for the delivery of project services. The second questionnaire was for the attention of project workers, who have been involved in the operational delivery of project services.

It was felt that project co-ordinators and project workers would have a different perspective on the Broughton programme given their different levels of responsibility and accountability. Through obtaining the views of both, it was felt that this would provide a more rounded perception of the Broughton programme.

• The Views of Project Co-ordinators

The project co-ordinator questionnaire required them to reflect upon seven key themes associated with their activities and those of the programme. These are listed as follows:

- *Evidence that projects had succeeded in meeting objectives*
- *Key project achievements*
- *Key obstacles experienced by projects*
- *Support provided by the Broughton programme, both managerially and organisationally*
- *Financial matters pertaining to project development*
- *The Steering Group as a decision-making body*
- *Further comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the Broughton programme*

The response to this exercise was disappointing, as only 7 of the 15 project co-ordinators returned completed questionnaires. The following summary seeks to highlight responses in relation to the seven themes listed above.

5.1 Evidence that projects had succeeded in meeting objectives

All of the projects provided evidence that they had succeeded in meeting their objectives. The objectives themselves are highly varied for each project, and so it is necessary to illustrate feedback in relation to these diverse objectives. Consequently, questionnaire feedback is interpreted in the context of each objective.

□ Improving communication, language and literacy skills

The Language Development project highlighted data collected by Central Government (i.e. the Department for Education and Skills) that relate to foundation stage assessments of communication, language and literacy. These assessments are closely linked to Sure Start targets. In addition, the Sure Start Language Measure (SSLM) has been in existence since the Broughton Programme became operational. It has indicated hard quantitative evidence for an increase in the proportion of two-year old infants having satisfactory speech and language development. Statistically, the percentage of two-year old children with a high word count has increased from 84% (2004-05) to 88% (2005-06).

□ Increasing the use of libraries by families with young children

The Bookstart project highlighted quantitative evidence of its success in increasing library use. It indicated that there were approximately 260 children aged 0-4 in Broughton who were library members, and that an average of 30 children in this age range had joined the library every quarter. It also indicated that the weekly storytime sessions in Broughton library were well-attended, with an average of 15 children attending each session. Furthermore, the Bookstart project indicated that there had been an increase in the number of books borrowed from the library during this period.

□ Improving health to families / communities

Improving health is a vital aspect of the Broughton programme, and many of the Sure Start projects have worked towards this goal.

The Midwifery project did not draw upon specific evidence provided by service users in relation to midwifery services. Instead, it emphasised the variety of ways in which it has worked to improve health in Broughton, particularly through providing parenting support and information to all pregnant and newly-delivered mothers and their families.

The Wellbeing Assessment made during the additional home visits between 16 and 30 weeks of pregnancy is a cornerstone of this support. It enables the midwife to discuss a range of social issues pertaining to family health, such as

smoking cessation, potential drug and alcohol concerns, as well as more general issues relating to housing matters. It also allows for an assessment of the client's mental health, and enables the midwife to refer, where necessary, to the Perinatal Project. The Perinatal Project is a separate Sure Start-funded service aiming to support women with depression in pregnancy, as well as post-natal depression.

Further work to improve health includes discussion of car seat safety, and the provision of vouchers to purchase a free car seat, provided by the road safety unit. The benefits of breastfeeding are also outlined to parents, as well as the importance of maintaining a balanced, nutritious diet for both mother and child. Mothers are also signposted to various other Sure Start projects. The work of the dental project, and the importance of having an appointment with a dentist during the ante-natal period, is also highlighted to mothers. Free Parentcraft and guided birth sessions are held at the Broughton shop, and mothers are invited to attend these.

□ *Improving social / emotional development and strengthening families / communities*

The Language Development Project commented that despite the absence of concrete evidence in this regard, research clearly indicates that communication and language abilities have a significant impact upon children's personal, social and emotional development. Therefore, through improving language skills in a verifiable fashion (see above), it was natural to assume that the project was succeeding in enhancing social and emotional development.

The Expectant Family Advisory Service (EFAS) referred to the variety of completed client satisfaction questionnaires as providing evidence of the service's value in providing confidential, impartial and independent advice. Many of these questionnaires highlighted ways in which Broughton families' quality of life had been improved, and that the advice provided by EFAS had been extremely important in this regard. The EFAS has a specific ambition for reducing the numbers of young children living in households where no one is working. A high percentage of completed project questionnaires indicate that advice from EFAS has helped them to return to work, and there are many direct quotes from former clients that substantiate this assertion.

The Broughton Friends reflected upon the very positive feedback to their work in supporting local families in Broughton. The project's work has largely centred upon working with hard-to-reach families in Broughton who are experiencing a range of complex social and emotional difficulties. Its work has revolved around signposting families to facilities and services in Broughton; informing and introducing families to various training courses (such as ESOL, Parent Survival Classes) and encouraging families to access both the Sure Start shop, as well as various Sure Start projects.

Much of the social and emotional benefits experienced by families have been provided through one-to-one support from the Broughton Friends, as well as

through involving families in community facilities. The parent and toddler group, for example, has provided an excellent opportunity for children in Broughton to engage with their families in a play-focused, social environment.

In addition to encouraging families to become involved with Sure Start, through promoting Sure Start events, the Steering Group, training courses and the Sure Start shop, the Broughton Friends also cited its work in enhancing information available to local families. The Information Directory, developed by the Broughton Friends, is regarded as an important resource for enabling local families to make informed choices in relation to accessing available services.

The Broughton Friends also highlighted its work in building the confidence of local families through encouraging them to access training courses (such as ESOL), as well as the BBC Storytelling Project. Through building confidence within the family and sign-posting adults to courses, the project feels that it has empowered them to improve their employment prospects, in addition to providing a good role model for their children. Quantitative evidence is provided by the project, in that 27 people have attended a wide variety of training courses (e.g. numeracy; literacy; health care studies), and 8 families have obtained employment.

Children's Choices reported that children are well stimulated by the activities provided by the project. Parents commented that their children's behaviour had improved, and the Stay and Play toy library was cited as a strong example of the project's work in providing a place for children and parents to relax and unwind, and to receive emotional support. The use of family support workers has provided respite for parents of children with disabilities, and these care plans have been developed by a social worker. Parents have reflected positively upon this kind of support. The project also reflected upon the needs of its vulnerable client group, and the value of respite breaks in rejuvenating tired and stressed parents.

There are 5 Sure Start projects in Broughton serving the needs of the Orthodox Jewish Community. Two of these projects – Chadei Chaye Rochel and JEMS – provided evidence of their work with regard to strengthening families / communities and improving social / emotional development.

Chasdei Chaye Rochel highlighted evidence from earlier evaluation work undertaken within the community. This enabled mothers to comment favourably on how the service had made childbirth an experience that they could look forward to. The evaluation had also shown how mothers' recovery from a positive experience had left them stronger and healthier to look after their babies, both physically and mentally.

Aim Habayis highlighted the positive feedback from families supported by projects, particularly in relation to personal letters of thanks, and provided quotations from parents to illustrate the high level of appreciation. The domestic help was hugely appreciated by families, particularly during the immediate post-natal period during times of great stress.

5.2 Key project achievements

Each of the seven project co-ordinators highlighted achievements. The following seeks to summarise these.

The Language Development Project felt that they had played an important role in improving children's opportunities for education and employment through maximising their communication skills. The project felt that the key to its achievement had been a flexible approach, which encouraged parents to exercise choice in the services that their children should receive.

The Bookstart project emphasised their work in increasing library membership, and so working to improve the literacy skills of children. It had also successfully distributed story bags (containing storybooks to encourage parents to read with their children). The project felt that a key achievement was its work with another Sure Start project serving the needs of the Orthodox Jewish Community in establishing a satellite Jewish library and monthly story time sessions at the Aguda centre. This was itself a consequence of a confident, assertive approach to outreach work, which had encouraged positive engagement with families in Broughton.

One of the projects emphasised achievements that had occurred through Sure Start funding, which enabled 30 hours per week of health care support to pregnant women and new mothers. Therefore it is the provision of regular services to more women that constitutes the key achievement. Further achievements include a midwifery drop-in service for homeless families.

The EFAS project emphasised its accessibility, high quality of service to expectant mothers, and a friendly and welcoming approach as being its key achievements, as these have helped it achieve its objectives. The project also felt that it offered a client-centred approach in seeking feedback from mothers about their approach, rather than making assumptions about the quality of service provision.

The Broughton Friends drew attention to the informal nature of the weekly parent and toddler group. This had encouraged parents to interact socially with each other, and has helped to give them the confidence to become involved with the local community, particularly in relation to gaining employment and life skills. Furthermore, this informality has enabled the Broughton Friends to identify the practical and emotional needs of families, and so develop a one-to-one strategy to support them. A further key achievement has been encouraging parents to engage with other Sure Start projects. The quality of the Broughton Friends' work, combined with the approachable nature of the support workers, has encouraged more families to seek their support, which is itself a key achievement.

The Broughton Friends highlighted a key achievement as bringing together different ethnic communities through its training provision, and the important role that this has played in breaking down barriers. This has facilitated greater awareness of each other's cultural backgrounds. The carer and toddler

groups, community events and the distribution of the Information Directory have all served to enhance this process of cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

Children's Choices project observed that its key achievements was to assess the needs of the families it was working with, and to be able to provide resources to meet identified needs.

Of the Orthodox Jewish projects, Chasdei Chaye Rochel felt that its key achievements was in providing emotional and practical support to mothers in a variety of ways connected with childbirth. This included enabling the birth supporter to assist mothers who have miscarried, or else with the normal birthing process, breastfeeding support and in answering queries in connection with childbirth.

Aim Habayis reported that its key achievements were in providing a happy home, particularly in relation to supporting families when they are most in need of support. In this way, the project feels that it has helped families avoid future difficulties through addressing difficulties when they first appear. The project also felt that, for parents experiencing post-natal depression, the absence of sleep is a key factor. Through supporting mothers in having restful sleep, the project feels it has played an important part in helping mothers to become stronger and better able to deal with the challenges of motherhood.

5.3 Key obstacles experienced by projects

Projects reported various obstacles in achieving their objectives. One commented that it could still be a challenge to access all of the families that might require support, particularly in an areas where there is such a high level of socio-economic deprivation.

Another obstacle, partially linked to the one given above, concerned the lack of confidence on the part of some families in coming forward to access services, particularly if those families were not in the habit of accessing such services. Furthermore, given the cultural diversity of the Broughton population, providing equal attention to different communities in order to maximise access to services was a challenge. One project emphasised the large refugee and asylum seeker and Orthodox Jewish communities, for whom English language skills are not always well developed. Working with some families from these communities has required a considerable amount of time to build up their confidence in the work of the Broughton Friends.

One project highlighted operational difficulties that had resulted from staff having to cover different Sure Start areas, and the stress which this placed on staff. This was enhanced by existing staff shortages through long-term sickness.

Another project commented that being located within a health setting sometimes made it difficult to target families within various Sure Start areas, including Broughton. It also commented that a different project which offered linked services to women in the community had had its funding cut, and that

this would have a detrimental impact in which it would be able to offer services.

A further issue raised was the time spent in the recruitment of the Broughton locality manager to the post. It was felt that if this could have been done sooner, then the different Sure Start projects could have been more closely co-ordinated and this would have facilitated better cross-project working to the benefit of local families.

One of the project's mentioned that its client-centred approach, whereby activities were partially based upon the family's needs, had served to increase the demands upon the project's advice and support work. Whilst this was welcomed, it placed additional strain on project staff time.

One of the Jewish orthodox projects indicated that a key obstacle was the great demand upon its services, and the problems of meeting these demands given the finite financial resources available. This is particularly so given increasing requests from parents with babies who have special needs, or have allergies. Such families require additional support, which means that the financial demands are that much greater.

The following explores support provided by the Broughton Programme, both managerially and organisationally

□ *Positive aspects of Managerial and Organisational Support*

One of the projects highlighted the Programme's extremely valuable role in providing access to families, as well as positive promotion of the project's work. On a practical level, providing addresses of service user families, supporting the recruitment of local people to act as volunteer support workers through Open Day events and encouraging the attendance of Programme staff on project training days has helped to promote the work of the project. Supporting the project to work with the evaluation team around focus group activity was also cited as being valuable.

Another project emphasised the work of Broughton Sure Start shop staff in helping to promote the work of projects, so that families can become involved. Furthermore, the shop itself had been of immense value, particularly as a venue through which services could be offered. In addition, the Broughton Shop was felt to offer a very positive, welcoming environment in which parents can find out about different services and how they might benefit from them. It was also felt to be an ideal facility for projects to promote the work of fellow projects. More generally, the project felt that the Programme had helped other projects to promote its work, and this was felt to be mutually beneficial to all projects. The drop-in facility provided at the shop was felt to be easily accessible, and was well-publicised within the local community. Furthermore, the employment of more staff within the shop and its positive restructuring prior to setting up the Children's Centre were seen as highly beneficial aspects of the Programme's work.

One project commented positively on the Broughton programme's work in facilitating the networking process with other agencies, which had made them better informed of the work of other projects, so that they could better signpost parents as necessary. It also welcomed the financial support which enabled it to provide educational and play resources to children. The project also welcomed the varied programme of training supported by the programme, which has helped the project to gain a better understanding of the social and emotional development of children. One project highlighted the financial assistance which the programme had provided at different times, and the positive impact that this had had on project services.

Assistance with storing project equipment, and offering advice and assistance with recruitment to posts was also cited as valuable managerial and organisational support. Supporting regular team meetings for workers, providing locations for project activity and developing connections with other projects were given as further examples of this kind of programme support.

One of the projects mentioned basic training support from the Programme. Another mentioned that, beyond support regarding initial shortlisting and interviewing for key posts, the project had been line-managed through the local authority, and there had been little managerial or organisational input from the Broughton Programme. Another project highlighted the solid, structured framework which the managerial / organisational support had provided, and how this had helped projects to develop their approach.

One of the Orthodox Jewish projects emphasised the value of financial support in enabling a key project member of staff to be employed. This worker occupied a pivotal role in ensuring that work undertaken with pregnant women from the Orthodox community could be continued to the benefit of local women. The programme had also enabled the project to feel part of a wider network of Sure Start support to local families, and this was valued.

□ *Negative aspects of Managerial and Organisational Support*

However, two of the projects commented that there were times when communication between the Programme and the project had fallen down. It was sometimes unclear whether the responsibility for conveying certain information lay with the responsibility of the Broughton Locality Programme Manager, or else with a separate agency. One project indicated that conflicting information about the organisation and delivery of family support services had resulted in low staff morale, particularly towards the end of its work.

A further criticism concerned the Sure Start Project File, which provided a practical overview of the services which all projects provided in Broughton. This was felt to be extremely useful, and yet despite plans to have it updated, this did not happen. An updated Project File would have been extremely useful in facilitating the work of all Broughton Sure Start projects.

One project felt that the programme could have provided greater support regarding the practical aspects of collating information

5.4 Financial matters pertaining to project development

One project welcomed the flexibility in being able to move monies from one budget heading to another. Furthermore, all projects welcomed the financial support from the programme. However, some felt that the financial that has been received has required clarification, as occasionally errors from Salford PCT's finance department had been noted. It was felt, by one project, that allocating more staff time within the finance department to Sure Start would have improved reliability and consistency of information, as well as general efficiency.

One project was critical of the process for applying for renewed funding in 2006-2007, arguing that it was unclear, and that the project coordinator was not given adequate opportunity to discuss the project's needs for the coming year before the decision had been taken on funding. The net consequence is that the project has had to review some of the activities that it would normally offer, and have them reduced. There was a sense that the project recognised the dilemma of seeking to dovetail two agendas – the Children's Centre and Sure Start – and that some of the difficulties have been a consequence of this.

Another project was critical of the initial difficulty of the system for transferring monies between Sure Start, the PCT and other statutory providers. Another felt that the deadlines for financial returns has been somewhat unrealistic (i.e. 3 to 5 working days at the end of the period concerned).

One project felt that there was insufficient liaison between its finance officer and the Sure Start finance officer, which mean that there were delays in payment through invoices being passed from one section to another. At times, this was frustrating and not the best use of the finance resource.

One of the Orthodox Jewish projects indicated that the financial support proved that a project such as itself, which seeks to support family life in the home, could actively strengthen families and communities through avoiding post-natal depression. However, the project regretted that it was not able to access underspend funds from the Broughton Programme during the current financial year, as had happened earlier.

5.5 The Steering Group as a decision-making body

There were few comments made in relation to the Steering Group. One felt that the Steering Group had functioned well, but expressed concern about the lack of representation from local parents. The outnumbering of parents by professionals was felt to indicate the daunting nature of Steering Group meetings for local parents. Another project co-ordinator raised concerns regarding the voting procedures in meetings, and the lack of clarity as to who can and who cannot vote. There was also a sense that attendance at

meetings often related to matters for discussion, and that when financial decisions need to be made, there was a much more significant attendance than at other times. This suggests, therefore, that some co-ordinators seek to use the Steering Group for their own ends, which is rather contrary to the philosophy of joint working across all projects for the benefit of all young children in Broughton.

There was a sense that some project co-ordinators had never attended Steering Group meetings, so were not able to comment on how they functioned.

Further comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the Broughton programme

□ *Strengths*

Some project co-ordinators highlighted the role of the Programme Manager as being approachable, easy to contact and helpful throughout. Another emphasised parental involvement, and this was felt to be a key strength.

Some project co-ordinators emphasised the significant benefits which local families had received, particularly in relation to accessing additional services that had previously been unavailable to them. The provision of financial support to take this work forward was felt to have made a real difference to the quality of life which families with very young children could enjoy.

One project co-ordinator commented on the value of the information base regarding services available in Broughton, and the way in which this supported parents in getting in touch with a wide range of specifically designed services to support parents with children aged 0-4.

One project co-ordinator felt that the Sure Start programme in Broughton had been successful, particularly in building bridges between different projects and services. However, it was felt to be too soon to make a judgement on the impact of the programme, and that the benefits it had created would take some years to become evident.

The Orthodox projects felt that a key strength had been the provision of a play centre and other facilities, which meant that the Orthodox community could expand their service to families. Without this support, many Orthodox families would have been unable to access culturally sensitive services at all.

□ *Weaknesses*

A key weakness identified by a project co-ordinator was the fact that some highly successful projects have not secured funding beyond March 2006. There is a concern that even when the Children's Centre is functional, it will still be necessary to motivate people to use it. There are still many people who lack the confidence to access such services, and will be reluctant to

engage with services independently, and without the necessary support from other agencies.

One project co-ordinator was concerned with the whole ethos of area based services that lie at the heart of Sure Start. It was felt that there were deserving families who live just beyond the Sure Start boundaries and therefore not able to access services, whereas other families whose needs were not as great were able to access services, simply by virtue of their postcode.

6. Exploring the Views of Sure Start Project Workers

• Introduction

Seven teams of project workers provided completed questionnaires, and two of them were aimed specifically at the Orthodox Jewish community. The project worker questionnaire required them to reflect upon six key themes associated with their activities and those of the programme. It should be emphasised that some of the very small projects, particularly those pertaining to the Orthodox Jewish Community, may not have had separate Project Worker staff to deliver services, and there is a general assumption that these questionnaires have been completed by the Project Co-ordinator.

These are listed as follows:

- *Key project achievements, and their possible enhancement*
- *Key obstacles experienced by projects, and how they have been overcome*
- *Support from project management*
- *Facilities for providing services to local families*
- *Resource and materials for providing services to local families*
- *Any further comments*

6.1 Key project achievements, and their possible enhancement

□ *Broughton Friends*

Project workers from the Broughton Friends highlighted different achievements. Signposting families to a wide range of information, services and training courses was felt to be highly important. Similarly, establishing good relationships with diverse communities (including professional organisations) was also a significant achievement.

The Broughton Friends Project Workers identified additional features which could have enhanced its support. Having additional funding from Sure Start to employ more staff, more regular updates from the Sure Start programme and greater support and involvement from other Sure Start projects in the Broughton Friends' carer and toddler group would have enhanced the services that could have been provided. It was also felt that had the Broughton Trust provided the Friends with a wider remit, this would have also produced enhanced benefits.

□ *Language Development Project*

The Language Development Project Workers emphasised raising awareness among local parents of the importance of their children having good

communication skills. Associated key achievements included raising awareness of effective parent/child interaction, the provision of a stimulating group environment for undertaking language development work and working collaboratively and effectively with other projects (particularly Bookstart and Beyond).

Project Workers identified better parental attendance at group sessions, and enhanced promotion of Language Development events as necessary to enhance its achievements. It was also indicated that if the database from which names and addresses of families had been more up-to-date, this would have produced a better ratio of successful home visits.

□ *EFAS*

The EFAS Project Workers indicated that being able to extend advice to social services claimants beyond a 3 month period meant that the project was able to offer continued support to a client group with complex benefit, housing and other advice needs. A further achievement was being able to refer clients internally within the Citizens Advice Bureau for additional advice on debt management, overpayments of benefits, rent arrears and other benefit issues.

Project Workers indicated that an outreach worker would have enabled EFAS to reach more clients within the Sure Start area through providing greater access to hard-to-reach families. Similarly, greater advertisement of EFAS within the Broughton media would also have helped, in addition to more referrals from other Sure Start projects.

□ *Midwifery Service*

The Midwifery service felt that working effectively from the Broughton shop in providing additional support and advice to parents was a key achievement, in addition to offering the Wellbeing Assessments, which enabled a range of health and social care issues to be discussed.

Midwives felt that longer opening hours at the Broughton Shop would have encouraged more women to be able to access services.

□ *Children's Choices*

Children's Choices Project Workers highlighted the importance of providing services to Jewish families who may not previously have been able to access them given previous funding limitations. As a consequence, families have received valuable, culturally appropriate services.

Project Workers indicated that additional funding would have enabled families to access more services.

□ *Kehillo Project*

Kehillo Project Workers felt that the diverse services which it was able to offer were key achievements. These included the library service, the play centre, project work around Time Out for Mothers, an extensive range of courses, as well as trips and outdoor events.

Project Workers indicated that additional funding would have enabled families to access more services. In addition, better quality premises and, ideally, a purpose-built centre would have supported the project in its work with the Orthodox Jewish community.

□ *Chasdei Chaye Rochel*

Similarly, Chasdei Chaye Rochel highlighted project services to Jewish mothers, both prenatal and postnatal, and the general support to motherhood.

6.2 Key obstacles faced by projects, and how they have been overcome

□ *Broughton Friends*

Broughton Friends Workers identified 3 key obstacles in carrying forward its work: establishing good working relationships with clients, as well as professional and voluntary organisations in Broughton; dealing with a culturally diverse community; and accessing hard-to-reach families.

Broughton Friends Workers have resolved the obstacle of establishing good working relationships through engaging effectively with the community. Furthermore, through establishing good working practices, in particular networking with families in a sensitive, confidential and non-judgemental fashion, the project has gained the respect and confidence of many people in Broughton. The project's capacity to empathise with its client group in a discreet fashion, and its willingness to employ local residents, has also been valued within the community it has served. These qualities have helped it to deal with a culturally diverse community, as well as engage with hard-to-reach families. However, additional cultural awareness programmes and better links with interpreting services could have furthered this process.

□ *Language Development Project*

The Language Development Project Workers also highlighted obstacles of engaging hard-to-reach families and the diversity of the ethnic communities, particularly the Orthodox Jewish Community. They sensed a lack of trust and confidence from some families, which was partially a consequence of low self-esteem which created anxiety around attending group meetings and events.

The Language Development Project Workers indicated that community events, such as the 'Friendship Day', had helped to overcome some of these obstacles. In addition, making use of Family Support Workers to proactively

engage with parents and meeting parents on a regular basis has helped to establish bonds of confidence and trust. Furthermore, training days and other similar activities have helped to overcome some of the obstacles identified, and have given Project Workers a better insight into some of the issues affecting the local community.

□ *EFAS*

One of the obstacles has been the practical difficulty of reaching clients living in Broughton, given that the EFAS project is based at Hope Hospital.

Further obstacles related to arranging appointments with clients, who were then unable to keep them. It was frustrating for EFAS Project Workers to try and contact clients, especially given the time limits for clients seeking to claim a benefit within a specified time limit.

EFAS Project Workers felt that an outreach worker would solve these problems, so that home visits could have been arranged, in addition to regular advice sessions.

□ *Midwifery service*

The midwives highlighted the lack of premises, as well as insufficient time to carry out activities. The lack of funds, as well as the shortage of staff to support the midwifery service, were additional obstacles.

Some of these obstacles have been overcome. Premises have now been provided, although some of the midwives have not been replaced. Consequently, there are still some midwives whose workload was beyond the usual remit.

□ *Kehillo Project*

Kehillo Project Workers highlighted the difficulty of working with an ultra Orthodox Jewish Community, which meant that they had to be extremely sensitive in meeting the needs of this community.

The Project Workers have overcome this obstacle through developing a range of courses that are culturally suitable for Orthodox Jewish women.

6.3 Support from project management

□ *Broughton Friends*

Broughton Friends Project Workers felt that the project had been well-managed. However, there had been a few occasions when the line-management had been ill-defined. There was a suggestion that there was a blurring between the Sure Start Locality Manager's area of responsibility and that of the Broughton Trust Co-ordinator, which could be confusing for Project Workers.

□ *Language Development Project*

Language Development Project Workers felt that the support from project management had been consistent and of a high standard.

□ *EFAS*

EFAS Project Workers emphasised that they had received very few referrals from other Sure Start projects. There was a sense that the programme management could have done more to increase these referrals.

□ *Kehillo Project*

Kehillo Project Workers emphasised the high quality of project management support, commenting that the lines of communication were clear and direct.

□ *Chasdei Chaye Rochel*

Project Workers described themselves very satisfied with the project management support that had been provided. It was felt to be both consistent and helpful, and the project reported being very well supported by the Locality Manager.

6.4 Facilities for providing services to local families

□ *Broughton Friends*

Broughton Friends Project Workers highlighted the absence of an office space from which to co-ordinate their activities. This was particularly important given the confidential nature of the work undertaken, and having to work within a general office environment has not been ideal. Furthermore, there has been a general lack of suitable buildings from which to offer services. The Carers and Toddlers Group set up and supported by the Broughton Friends has largely functioned within a poorly decorated setting, which offered very few toys.

However, the Project Workers acknowledged that the Local Authority had decorated the building, which had produced a much more inviting and pleasant environment for local residents. There was further acknowledgement of the toys which had been recently provided by Sure Start for the benefit of young children.

□ *Language Development Project*

Project Workers also felt that a base in Lower Broughton would have enabled families in that part of Broughton to gain access to services more easily. Further space at the Broughton shop would have been beneficial, particularly if it could have involved producing more child-friendly facilities, such as low level sinks and toilets.

□ *EFAS*

EFAS Project Workers were satisfied with the location of the EFAS office, which provided ease of access through a drop-in service and appointments. A telephone advice service has also been made available and has provided continued support to the client group through their pregnancy. However, an outreach service would have done much to enhance the work of EFAS.

□ *Kehillo Project*

Project Workers were extremely satisfied with the facilities provided, commenting that the feedback from the Orthodox Jewish Community was positive in this regard.

6.5 Resource and materials for providing services to local families

□ *Broughton Friends*

Broughton Friends Project Workers were highly satisfied with the provision of toys and materials for the Carer and Toddler group. However, there were concerns that resources were not allocated for an update of the Broughton Friends Directory, which has proved to be an invaluable information tool. Furthermore, there were concerns that the Broughton Friends leaflet was not professionally printed.

□ *Language Development Project*

Language Development Project Workers felt that the resources and materials provided to support families had been satisfactory.

□ *EFAS*

EFAS Project Workers reported that it had a wide range of resources and materials to provide support to families. However, they reported that there is a lack of immigration advice within the Broughton community, and that this would have been a valuable resource given the needs of the project's client group.

□ *Kehillo Project*

Project Workers commented that greater financial support would have allowed the project to provide a wider range of resources to families. However, despite the limited budget, the project emphasised its gratitude for the support provided.

□ *Chasdei Chaye Rochel*

Project Workers intimated that they were delighted with the support provided by project management. Particular gratitude was offered to the Locality Programme Manager in this regard.

6.6 Any further comments

□ *Broughton Friends*

Broughton Friends Project Workers emphasised their status as the first Sure Start funded project within the area, which meant that they undertook a great deal of the groundwork in terms of engaging with diverse communities. This has meant that other Sure Start projects have been able to use this experience as a springboard for developing their own services. The Project Workers also highlight the way in which the ongoing evaluation process has illustrated the successful and very worthwhile nature of the Broughton Friends project. Consequently, it is a source of considerable disappointment that the decision has been made to bring the Project to a conclusion in March 2006. The Project Workers feel that this will constitute a significant loss to the Broughton community, especially given the Project's proactive outreach approach. They hope that when the Children's Centre becomes a reality, there will be a Family Support Outreach Team to continue the good work of the Broughton Friends.

□ *Language Development Project*

Language Development Project Workers commented on the rewarding nature of the work, and that they had felt that the process enabled them to make a valuable difference to the community. The feedback from parents had been positive in terms of how their children had benefited, and this had been a source of considerable delight for Project Workers.

□ *Kehillo Project and Chasdei Chaye Rochel*

Project Workers from both projects emphasised the considerable difference which their projects had made in enhancing the social and emotional well-being of people from the Orthodox Jewish Community in Broughton. Both of them expressed a deep sense of gratitude to Sure Start in enabling them to offer such valuable services. The financial input, combined with work around the training of volunteers, advertising and information provision, particularly for Jewish mothers, has been highly appreciated.

7. Developing Self-Evaluation: Opportunities and Obstacles

• Introduction

A vital aspect of the Broughton programme has been seeking to encourage projects to self-evaluate the work that they do, so that evaluation can become an integral part of their activities. Becoming skilled in evaluation, and recognising the benefits which evaluation can bring to project development, has been a key ambition of the evaluation team since the Broughton programme came into existence.

How do projects feel about evaluation? To what extent have evaluation skills become embedded within projects, and what barriers have projects encountered in furthering this process? In order to explore these questions, focus group discussions were set up with project co-ordinators in order to explore their views. The following summarises the content of the discussions which took place.

7.1 What is evaluation and how can it further project development?

'Evaluation' was defined by the group as reviewing the project's activities, so that the extent that the activities were making a difference could be assessed. Based upon this assessment, it meant projects had an opportunity to reflect upon whether their activities were effective. If it was deemed that there was a lack of effectiveness, it meant exploring ways to enhance project effectiveness.

There was a general sense within the group that it was important for project to exercise self-criticism, and to ask whether their activities were relevant to their customer base, and whether project activities were meeting set targets. There was an acknowledgement that the needs of the customer base may have changed over time, and the different solutions might be needed to counter current difficulties.

All of the project recognised the value of evaluation, and highlighted significant dangers of not taking it forward. This would mean that projects would become more removed from their customer base, and were arrogant about their activities to the point of carrying on with existing activities regardless of whether they were successful or not.

7.2 What should be the aims of evaluation?

Participants indicated that the ultimate ambition of any evaluation was to enhance service provision, which could mean changing one's approach to achieve these goals. It meant considering different strategies to impact upon opportunities for families with children aged under 4 years.

7.3 What methods of evaluation are familiar?

Some participants highlighted different methods of evaluation, such as evaluation-oriented activities undertaken within the home through one-to-one work with a parent. An alternative method concerned group-based activities with a range of service users. The participants felt that each of these approaches were useful, and that it was important to consider the circumstances when deciding upon the best method of evaluation depending upon a given situation.

One participant also mentioned the importance of working with fellow service providers, and assessing their perceptions of project outcomes, when seeking to evaluate the impact of projects. Some felt that much could be gleaned from informal group meetings with colleagues, in relation to finding out whether approaches to evaluation were still valid. This could lead to changed working practices if it were felt that by doing so would enhance the quality and range of services that could be provided within the community.

One participant highlighted the value of one-to-one support within the service user's home. This involved assisting service users to complete a questionnaire, which could then be used to highlight other related issues which did not strictly feature within the questionnaire. The participant recognised the drawback of some service users not being as critical as they might otherwise be without the presence of the project co-ordinator. However, there were clear advantages in being able to elicit responses from service users, who may be reluctant to complete questionnaires, especially given the demands of having to care for young children.

Irrespective of the approach taken to evaluating services, the key aspect involved being able to consult with parents, reflect upon current activities, and then seek to change service delivery in ways that are more in keeping with the demands of service users.

7.4 What kinds of evaluation tools have proved useful?

All of the participants commented that the focus group approach taken by the evaluation team during 2005 had been helpful in enabling them to reorientate their service provision in different ways. This enabled them to critically consider their practices, and to look at different ways of service delivery. One participant cited the example of different types of group activities provided to young families in the community, and that the findings from focus groups had encouraged greater emphasis being placed on one of the existing group activities.

The participants had all found questionnaires a useful method of gaining feedback from parents on the value of project activity. However, they all recognised the difficulties of busy parents having the opportunity to meaningfully complete questionnaires, especially given the demands of young children. This was felt to be particularly difficult issue for those projects which offer services to parents of new born babies.

Participants highlighted the compromise that needed to be struck between obtaining the kind of detailed information that could be provided by properly completed questionnaires, and information provided by shorter questionnaires which might be completed at public venues, such as Buile Hill park and other such events. Some participants highlighted the need to combine one-to-one informal discussions, questionnaires, focus groups as well as project workers reflections on project developments.

7.5 What have been the opportunities for embedding evaluation?

Some of the projects did feel they had been able to embed evaluation through various activities. One participant highlighted quarterly questionnaires which are distributed to parents in relation to a particular activity session, which have enabled parents views to be assessed so that action might be taken when necessary. This had been useful, as it meant that additional craft sessions had been provided at the request of parents.

Another participant felt that some of the larger projects could undertake quarterly focus group with participants, and felt that enabling local service co-ordinators to take part in such activities in areas other than their own would encourage parents to be more forthright in their opinions. This would create a more level of discussion around what services were seeking to achieve, and whether the correct methods were in place. This would also enable parents to be more assertive in highlighting areas of weakness, as this would not impinge on their relationship with the local service co-ordinator.

One participant highlighted the fact that, since the Sure Start programme has come into existence, there has been much greater emphasis on the role of evaluation. As a consequence, parental views have been given much more importance, and some participants felt this was due to the evaluation team's focus upon exploring the views of parents and carers, and the heightened impetus for developing a needs-led service.

7.6 What have been the obstacles to embedding evaluation?

All participants valued the independent approach taken by the evaluation team in exploring parental perceptions. This was seen as performing a valuable tool, as the evaluation team's independence meant that parents were able to be more open about the strengths and weaknesses of project activities. Consequently, all participants were concerned that, with the ending of Sure Start in its current format, the evaluation team would not be able to undertake further focus group activity. Furthermore, the issue of confidentiality regarding parents' unwillingness to be forthright regarding project performance for fear of appearing 'ungrateful', or else, receive worse services was a serious concern. The evaluation team had provided a high level of confidentiality, and yet projects would no longer be able to benefit from this.

Furthermore, participants valued the input they had received from the evaluation team regarding the production of questionnaires. One commented

that undertaking such tasks, and then analysing the data from returned questionnaires was a fairly time-consuming process, and wondered how these activities would be carried out in future, given the regular demands on project co-ordinator's time.

Other participants raised concerns over future evaluation. There were doubts as to what would be done with collated information produced through evaluation activity, to whom should it be disseminated and what process should be put in place for reporting back to parents regarding the findings of evaluation activity. There were no easy responses to any of these concerns.

A further barrier concerned the seriousness with which projects would approach evaluation activity in the future, given the absence of support from the evaluation team. There were concerns that, without any kind of rigour, it could become merely a 'tick box exercise', which would have little value. There was a perceived danger that projects would adopt a highly cynical approach to evaluation, particularly if they were unable (or unwilling) to utilise the data from the evaluation in an effective manner.

Participants who were funded through the NHS highlighted its bureaucratic structures and inflexibility as a barrier toward embedding evaluation. There was a sense that NHS structures were not as culturally appreciative of evaluation and the value that it can bring to service delivery. This could result in less formal kinds of evaluation, which could limit the capacity of projects to develop in more creative ways that were truly mindful of service users' views. Conservatism within NHS structures could also mean that the department responsible for Research and Development (R & D) might be charged with undertaking evaluation activity. There were concerns that a general R & D approach would not appreciate the benefits of effective evaluation, and that it would be 'lost' among the other activities that fall within the ambit of 'R & D'. This concern seemed largely generated by the macro-organisational nature of NHS structures. A narrow approach to evaluation within the context of a general 'R & D' function could mean that any benefits would be lost.

There were additional concerns that attempts to engage with parents in an informal manner, such as focus group discussions, could be called into question by ethical considerations. This could mean that it becomes difficult to speak to service users without first obtaining ethical approval, and this can involve a lengthy process of negotiation. It was argued that some projects, in such circumstances, might feel that it was not worth carrying out.

A further barrier to embedding evaluation was felt to relate to those participating in focus group discussions. There were concerns that the same people could be invited to attend such discussions on a regular basis, which could mean that the same issues were constantly being raised. Participants questioned whether this would produce much value for project enhancement in the long term, and felt that a range of service users needed to be involved.