SURE START CHELMSLEY WOOD:
REPORT OF THE LOCAL EVALUATION 2004

Section 3 (of 4)
SUPPORTING ADULTS RETURNING TO LEARNING
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary is presented in three main sections:

• Headlines
• Summary of key points
• Recommendations.

At the end, a brief account of the local evaluation 2004 is appended.

1 Headlines

• The adult tutor role increased participation and supported retention in adult learning.
  ➢ Providing personal support to adults considering returning to learning, and continuing that support as needed during adults’ learning journeys, proved to be an effective means of increasing participation in learning and of retaining new adult learners. With this support, adult members of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood were able to use their motivation to learn in order to realise their aspirations.

• High quality childcare provision was essential for increased participation and retention in adult learning.
  ➢ Adult learners’ interviewed regarded consistent, high quality childcare, provided alongside adult learning opportunities, as essential to attracting and retaining learners with young children. The high quality crèche provision at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood gave parents confidence to leave their children there while they participated in Sure Start groups for parents.
Participation in Sure Start groups led on to further learning.

- Parents’ groups run at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, which had all arisen from members’ requests, provided a supportive, non-threatening starting point for parents returning to learning. There was strong evidence that Sure Start members moved on from Sure Start groups to other forms of adult learning.

The partnership approach increased participation in adult learning.

- By working together, Sure Start Chelmsley Wood and Solihull College, along with other operational and strategic local partners, supported each other to achieve their respective aims and targets around increasing local participation and retention rates in adult learning.

2 Summary of key points

The role of adult tutor in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood

- In 2004, Sure Start had one full-time adult tutor seconded from Solihull College. (The College was the sole provider of adult and community learning in Solihull.)
- Using an embedded tutor was an approach previously and successfully used by the College in relation to work-based learning. It was also successful at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood in the view of both Sure Start members and College tutors.
- The secondment arrangement, whereby contractual management was by the head of Community Education at Solihull College and day-to-day line management was the responsibility of the Sure Start programme director, caused some difficulties for the adult tutor, largely due to the very different working environments pertaining in the College and in the Sure Start Centre. The arrangement was, however, seen as of direct benefit to the College, in the view of College staff interviewed.
- By 2004, the role of adult tutor had evolved to include: one-to-one work with adult members of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood; a training role across the Sure Start team and parent volunteer programme; liaison with Solihull College around delivery of courses at the Sure Start Centre; liaison around positively influencing local provision; and liaison around positively influencing lifelong learning strategy in Solihull. The evolution of the role to encompass these aspects was strongly welcomed by the College management.
One-to-one work

- The adult tutor saw her primary purpose as being to work with any Sure Start adult member who wanted to return to learning of any kind.
- All the one-to-one work was underpinned by an approach called Learning Conversations that the adult tutor had helped to develop when she worked at Solihull College.
- The adult tutor found that the Learning Conversations approach accorded well with the Solihull Approach adopted by all Sure Start Chelmsley Wood staff.
- The one-to-one work was time-consuming but benefited the learner through enabling a sense of empowerment and personal agency.
- The eight adult learners interviewed each gave very positive accounts of the one-to-one support they received from the adult tutor. Taken together, these accounts showed the adult tutor providing one-to-one support in a range of ways: listening to adults discussing their hopes and plans; listening to adults discussing their fears; providing information about learning and employment opportunities relevant to individuals' aspirations; supporting enrolment on a course; offering support with coursework; offering reassurance and encouragement; accompanying adults to learning locations; providing practical support around job applications and interview techniques; reflecting back to individuals their strengths and qualities.

Training role across the local programme

- As a secondary aspect of her role, the adult tutor was responsible for co-ordinating training across the local programme.
- This included co-ordinating training for staff, including acting as a NVQ Assessor for Childcare and Education.
- It also included co-ordinating training for parent volunteers and parent representatives on the Partnership Board.

Liaison with Solihull College around delivery of courses at the Sure Start Centre

- The adult tutor role was not to provide adult learning but, rather, to liaise with the existing provider, Solihull College, to ensure delivery of adult education courses requested by Sure Start members.
Facilitated by the adult tutor's negotiation and liaison, Solihull College tutors put on a range of courses for adult learners run at, or supported through, Sure Start Chelmsley Wood. These covered both non-accredited and accredited courses and ranged across family learning, basic skills, exploratory and employment-related courses.

The Family Learning courses offered through this partnership were viewed by the College as helpful in meeting its targets to increase participation in Family Learning and in helping it to provide more accurately the kinds of courses wanted by local people. There was evidence that such courses led to progression to other forms of community education and mainstream learning and to active community involvement.

Some of the Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy courses, offered by Solihull College and validated by the Open College Network, were run at the Sure Start Centre but were also open to non-members who had children at the Foundation stage. These classes were viewed very positively by the adult learners interviewed, and were of mutual benefit to Sure Start and Solihull College as they addressed the targets of both organisations.

The two main employment-related courses offered at or supported by the Sure Start Centre (one by the Children's Information Service and one by Solihull College) both focused on employment opportunities in the childcare sector. Progression from these introductory courses, to related courses offering routes to employment in childcare, was common.

**Liaison to seek to influence local provision**

As part of her efforts to improve the range and quality of adult and community education in north Solihull, the adult tutor instigated the creation of a Family Learning Network, bringing together a number of operational-level people. This made it possible to plan and advertise family learning in a co-ordinated and mutually supportive way and was a good example of the added value arising from the role of the Sure Start adult tutor.

At the time of the research, the three main ways in which the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood adult learners, supported by the adult tutor, had influenced other adult education provision locally were by: creating a demand for a wider range of local
adult learning; modelling respectful interaction between staff and learners; and creating a demand for high quality childcare offered alongside adult learning courses.

- The crèche at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood was the standard by which members judged other local crèche provision. Solihull College, and other local crèche providers, were willing to listen to the constructive criticism of Sure Start adult learners and to learn from the childcare workers at Sure Start.

- Sure Start members, including some of the adult learners interviewed, were successful in raising the issue at strategic level within Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council with the result that agreement was reached that consistent, high quality childcare was to be developed in a co-ordinated way across the Borough.

**Liaison to seek to influence lifelong learning strategy in Solihull**

- The adult tutor regarded it as part of her remit to seek to mainstream what was being learned through the local programme. She therefore joined two local strategic level committees in order to ensure the views of Sure Start adult learners were heard.

- In the longer-term, it was hoped that adult learner representation would be secured on these committees.

**Impact of support for adult learning: case studies of learning journeys**

- Case studies of the experiences of the eight adult learners interviewed were used to illustrate the impact of the adult tutor role. From these, it was possible to provide an overview of the typical steps of their learning journeys - finding out about Sure Start Chelmsley Wood; deciding to engage with Sure Start; using the Sure Start Centre; engaging with a Sure Start group; making friends through Sure Start; engagement with groups snowballing (often as a result of friends offering each other mutual support to join in); returning to adult learning provided by Solihull College; accessing support for returning to work; planning next step in learning and/or employment; having a longer term plan involving learning and/or employment.
The learning journey (steps taken, supports and barriers)

- Summaries of the learning journeys of each of the eight adults interviewed provided evidence of progression in learning and/or employment outcomes, as well as evidence of progression in level of involvement at Sure Start and in the local community.

- The support of the adult tutor was used by learners for different purposes and at different points on their learning journeys.

- The adult learners interviewed were able to itemise what it was about Sure Start that had supported their learning journeys. A summary of these supports included: support from the adult tutor, high quality childcare at Sure Start, confidentiality within Sure Start, supportive friendships formed at Sure Start, supportive staff across the Sure Start team, learning through groups offered at Sure Start, information about other local learning opportunities displayed at Sure Start, lack of pressure to engage with learning or to return to employment.

- They also highlighted other types and sources of support, including: information about job opportunities in childcare provided by the Children’s Information Service; information about local learning opportunities displayed in the local library; local venues for adult learning provision; supportive adult learning providers who were willing to be flexible; crèche provision alongside adult learning opportunities; local job opportunities and their own self-help and motivation.

- The barriers experienced by the adult learners interviewed, or by their peers, and identified as such by them when interviewed, included barriers related to provision and to attitudes.

- Issues related to provision included: courses run at times that did not fit in with timetable of parents with children at school; the requirement to have a minimum number of students on a course; unattractive quality of some crèche provision (this was raised as a very big barrier both to returning to learning and to employment).

- Attitudinal barriers included: fear of returning to learning and employment because of loss of confidence due to time out of that environment; perceived stigma attached to doing qualifications, such as GCSEs, when older; resignation about existing lot in life; negative pressure from some peers who regarded going to college as “getting above yourself”.


The adult learners interviewed also had a whole range of ideas about how the learning journeys of others in the area could be improved (Figure 3.16 in the full report).

**Hopes for the future**

- Each of the adult learners interviewed had hopes for their next step on their learning journey and longer-term plans, including continued first-steps learning, accredited learning and return to employment. To support the achievement of their hopes, they wanted a College campus in Chelmsley Wood, local job opportunities, a range of adult learning opportunities offered at suitable times, and access to work-based training courses.
- The adult learners' hopes for their children growing up in Chelmsley Wood mapped on to the five key outcomes of the Every Child Matters framework: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

**Cost-effectiveness**

**Costs**

- Annual costs of providing support through an adult tutor were in the region of £47 000 to £53 000 (the variation was due to different ways of apportioning overheads).
- Additional costs borne by Solihull College were minimal and some of these costs were defrayed by Learning and Skills Council funding for Family Learning courses.

**Ways of measuring effectiveness**

- In Solihull College, the effectiveness of the secondment of the adult tutor was discussed in terms of outcomes and external funding sources available to defray some costs. The range of outcomes mentioned in this context by interviewees from Solihull College is summarised in Figure 3.17 of the full report.
- Interviewees from Sure Start (staff and adult learners) also mentioned some additional outcomes, such as improved mental health and general well-being among the adult learners.
Illustrating effective outcomes

- Between October 2001 and October 2004, 158 different individuals had received one-to-one support and advice through conversations with the adult tutor.
- In addition, 67 adults had attended Early Start groups and 21 adults had attended Family Literacy.
- At Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, all staff were adult tutors in that all were engaged in supporting adult members one-to-one, through groups, or by signposting them to an appropriate next step. Being part of an integrated team that was supportive of adult learning added value to the post of adult tutor.
- The adult tutor ensured that information about local learning opportunities was readily available in the open access area of the Sure Start Centre. This area was open to non-members as well as to members and so the potential was there for information to reach a wider audience than those in the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood patch.
- In 1999, there had been 25 families from the Chelmsley Wood area involved in Family Learning. By 2004, this had risen to over 300 families.
- College interviewees made particular mention of how effective Sure Start Chelmsley Wood had been in recruiting its members into Family Learning and in contributing to an increased take-up of Level 2 courses at the College.
- A particularly successful progression route was from first steps learning at Sure Start to Foundation Degree courses at Solihull College and into employment in the childcare sector.
- Figures from Solihull College showed a markedly increased level of enrolment from the Chelmsley Wood postcode areas. (Although requested from the College in order to look at year-on-year trends, figures for previous years were not provided.)
- The Adult and Community Learning Review of Birmingham and Solihull (Birmingham & Solihull LSC, 2004) included maps of all the wards in Solihull, showing the percentage of adults in learning. Areas (in units of 250 people) where less than 5% of adults aged 20-74 inclusive participated in learning were highlighted in red. There was only one such area within the Chelmsley Wood ward and none within the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood area.
- The same ACL Review showed that there were roughly 7.5 times as many learners in the Chelmsley Wood ward as in either of the nearest two wards, Smithswood and Kingshurst-and-Fordbridge.
• This evaluation found that the number of adults seen by the adult tutor who progressed on to adult learning was greater than previously known.

• The case studies of learning journeys provided individual stories and showed clear evidence of progression from one level of learning to the next, and/or progression from learning on to employment. Other examples of learners’ progression were given by other interviewees also.

• As well as the testimonies of the adult learners interviewed, the role of the adult tutor in enabling this progression was readily acknowledged by interviewees from the College.

Making a judgement about cost-effectiveness

• Having an adult tutor embedded in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood achieved outcomes that accorded precisely with the visions, objectives, aims and targets of key local government documents.

• There is a strong argument to be made that the costs of sustaining the adult tutor provision, and of mainstreaming the lessons learned, will continue to be set off by the reduced costs to society as individuals improve their skills and knowledge, resulting in improved confidence, greater levels of community involvement and higher levels of employment, and as families thus improve their long-term prospects.

• The adult tutor’s work has enabled many parents to take up learning, personal development and employment opportunities and has supported parents in organising to press for improvements in local learning provision and in their local community.

• In the view of the Solihull College manager interviewed, part of that success has been due to the post having been funded for a number of years: "What has made it so successful is the sustainability of it".

• The challenge for Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, now responsible for the local delivery of the national Sure Start agenda, is to ensure that this provision is sustained in the longer term so that the learners in north Solihull are not deprived of this enabling support.
3 Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence presented in this Section of the 2004 local evaluation report, it is recommended that the Partnership Board and its mainstreaming sub-group discuss the evidence presented in this service evaluation with the Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership and other relevant people and agencies, including the North Solihull Regeneration Team, and use it to:

- argue for continued funding of an embedded adult tutor within the Sure Start Children’s Centre, Chelmsley Wood;
- explore the potential for embedding adult tutor work within the other Children’s Centres across north Solihull;
- explore how the model of support, based on Learning Conversations and supported by the Solihull Approach, and including the supports identified by the adult learners interviewed, can be mainstreamed throughout adult education provision in Solihull;
- ensure that consistently high quality childcare is in place wherever adult learning opportunities are provided;
- further address the barriers to participation identified by the adult learners interviewed;
- continue to consult with local learners about the range of courses provided and about where and when courses are run;
- facilitate adult learner representation on to appropriate strategic groups, such as the local Lifelong Learning Partnership.

About the local evaluation of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, 2004

The local evaluation of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood for 2004 had four strands to it:

1. collecting together and analysing all internal evaluation data from 2001 to 2003;
2. conducting two specific service evaluations - a) of the speech and language development work and b) of the adult tutor work;
3. evaluating how the concept of ‘partnership’ was understood and how it worked in practice;
4. working with the Sure Start team to support them in building their capacity regarding internal evaluation.

The work conducted in strands 1, 2a, 2b and 3 are reported as separate Sections which, together, constitute the Report of the local evaluation 2004. A report on strand 4 has not been produced.

**Service evaluation of the adult tutor role in supporting adults returning to learning**

The service evaluation, of which this is the Executive Summary, was one strand of the local evaluation of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, 2004. It was based on: eight interviews with adult learners who were members of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, four interviews with staff from the local college (the sole provider of adult and community education in the area), an interview with the adult tutor, relevant information from ten other interviews conducted as part of the 2004 local evaluation but not specific to this service evaluation, information about costs provided by the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood Finance Officer and quantitative data provided by Solihull College and published by the Learning and Skills Council Birmingham and Solihull.

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