

## SECTION 3 SUPPORTING ADULTS RETURNING TO LEARNING

### 3.1 Introduction

The third strand of the 2004 evaluation of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood was a service evaluation of the support provided for adult members interested in returning to learning and, in particular, the role of the adult tutor seconded to the local programme. The evaluation was, therefore, somewhat unusual in that it focused on a single role. However, it was hoped that it would have relevance both within the local programme and beyond, by highlighting for readers the potential that such a role could have within other Sure Start local programmes and Children's Centres.

The national Sure Start local programmes' objective of '*strengthening families and communities*' included a specific target to reduce the number of 0-3-year-old children in Sure Start areas who were living in families where no-one was working. In the revised bid for a Sure Start local programme in the area, the adult tutor's role was set out as contributing towards support for that target (NCH, 2001).

At a Sure Start Chelmsley Wood team meeting, it was agreed that the aims of this service evaluation would be two-fold:

- to quantify the take-up of adult learning in the Sure Start area, comparing this with take-up prior to Sure Start Chelmsley Wood;
- to explore, with a number of adult learners, their learning pathways and the role of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood in their learning journey.

These aims reflected the local programme's view that the target to increase families with at least one parent working could most appropriately be supported by ensuring that individuals were, "*skilled-up to return to work when ready*", as one interviewee put it.

As agreed with the team and the Partnership Board, this service evaluation combined qualitative and quantitative information and was based on analysis of the information summarised in Figure 3.1.

### **Figure 3.1 Information on which this service evaluation was based**

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#### *Interviews with adult learners who were members of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood*

- 8 semi-structured interviews with adult learners

#### *Interviews with relevant professionals*

- 1 in-depth interview with adult tutor
- 4 semi-structured interviews with Solihull College staff

#### *Information drawn from other interviews*

- relevant information was extracted from 10 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

#### *Information about outcomes*

- qualitative data drawn from interviews
- quantitative data - some provided by Solihull College for this evaluation, some published by the Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC Birmingham and Solihull, 2004).

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#### *Selection of adult learners to be interviewed*

A list of all the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood members who had accessed one-to-one support or had attended Early Start, a Family Learning course, during the period 2001 to October 2004 was provided by the adult tutor (158 individuals).

From this list, four learners per year who had participated in Early Start and 11 learners per year who had had one-to-one conversations with the adult tutor were selected (i.e. a total of 15 per year). All males on the list were selected as there were so few. A random selection of women was made, covering those for whom outcome information had been provided and those for whom it had not. This list was checked by the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood office administrator who excluded those for whom Sure Start no longer had contact details. A personal invitation letter with named reply

slip and reply-paid envelope was sent to the 51 people on the list, via Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, where addresses were added.

As with the service evaluation of the speech and language development work (Cullen & Lindsay, 2005b), the invitation letters described the purpose of the interview, offered a face-to-face interview (with crèche place, if necessary) or a telephone interview and included a reply slip and reply-paid envelope. The adult tutor commented on the draft letter and agreed it was worded appropriately. After a reasonable period of time, reminder letters were sent to those who had not replied.

Of the 51 people invited to take part in the service evaluation, 14 replies were received, with a further three being returned by the Post Office stating, 'addressee unknown'. Of the 14 replies, four said they did not wish to participate (one adding, "*on this occasion*", suggesting that requests to provide views were familiar.). Of the 10 positive replies, eight interviews were held. With the remaining two, various attempts were made to arrange and re-arrange times for interviews but in the end these did not take place. The high number of people who did not reply (34 out of 51) suggests that an unsolicited letter is not an effective way to recruit parents' participation in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood local evaluations. This lesson has been taken on board for the 2005-06 local evaluation.

The eight interviews held included adult learners from 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004; for four of them, a next step was known to the adult tutor, but for the other four this was not known until the information was shared during the interview. No interviews were held with male adult learners - although one had initially agreed to be interviewed, the interview did not take place due to his other commitments.

In reading the report, it is important to remember these limitations in the evidence-base - no male learners' views, and only a limited number of female ones, are represented. On the other hand, the views expressed do 'ring true' in that they accord with the views and experiences of a wide range of Sure Start members who evaluated groups run at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood during 2001 to the end of 2003 (Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a).

## **3.2 The local context: adult education opportunities in north Solihull**

In this section, the context of adult education opportunities available in north Solihull up to the end of 2004 is described, in order to understand better the role of the adult tutor in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood (described in section 3.3).

### **3.2.1 Non-accredited Adult and Community Learning**

At the time of the research (2004), and for the duration of the strategic plans then available (i.e. up to 2007), the sole provider of adult and community learning in Solihull was Solihull College (Ward & Hutchings, 2004). The funding was provided by the Learning and Skills Council to the local authority, which sub-contracted Solihull College to provide, *“informal, personal development and non-accredited adult learning programmes”* (Ward & Hutchings, p4).

In 2004, Solihull College had a campus in north Solihull - a 1960s building that was described by College staff variously as, *“crumbling apart”, “fitting the Chelmsley Wood profile of a lack of investment”, “awful ... it’s a totally unpleasant place to go; you wouldn’t want to go there”, “difficult to get to”* and contrasted negatively with provision in the much more affluent South of the borough. (For information on the relative affluence of the north and south of the Borough, see SMBC, no date a, p 4). On the other hand, one adult learner interviewed spoke about the Chelmsley campus as being, *“handy for me. It was local. I didn’t want to go all the way to Solihull when I’d got one on my doorstep”*.

A key part of the 2004-07 strategic development plan (Ward & Hutchings, 2004), was the closure of the Chelmsley campus and the development of a new Learning Village, as part of an Excellence in Communities initiative. The Learning Village was designed to provide vocational courses for 14-19-year-olds, as well as adult learning opportunities. According to interview information, the Learning Village in north Solihull was to be based around 14 pods, each of which would provide adult education with the intention of improving employment prospects. About six of these pods would be built in the Chelmsley Wood area. The plan was that the learning pod to be developed closest to the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood area would specialise in learning leading to employment within the children’s workforce (for details of the national Children’s Workforce Strategy, see H M Government, DfES, 2005). In interviews, some scepticism was expressed about the plans ever becoming reality:

*“There are plans for a new site but these plans have been in discussion for years, at least five years”*. On the other hand, when this development is realised, it is likely to have a major impact locally.

‘Adult and Community Learning’ (ACL) was one directorate at Solihull College, comprising Skills for Life, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), and Learning and Additional Support. According to interview data, community education involved about one third of all learners at the College. (About 33 000 students enrolled annually at Solihull College.) Most community education took place in around 70 outreach locations, such as schools and churches, across the borough. The College also put on some weekend and holiday programmes for families.

There were three strands to the Family Learning opportunities (part of Adult and Community Learning) provided by Solihull College:

- Family literacy, language and numeracy - these were courses based on the Basic Skills model and funded by the local authority (Basic Skills have been defined as *“the ability to read, write and speak English/Welsh and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general”*, Basic Skills Agency, no date.);
- Wider family learning - courses for families where literacy and numeracy were not the sole focus - also funded by the local authority;
- Basic skills courses aimed at helping adults to help their children with literacy and numeracy - funded directly by the Learning and Skills Council.

According to an interview with a college tutor, much had been learned about supporting and developing adult and community learning locally from the experienced gained through a European Union Single Regeneration Budget project that had been funded in north Solihull in the late 1990s. Figure 3.2 summarises what the project, ‘Learning to Learn as a Family’, had reportedly taught college staff about how to reduce barriers to adults returning to learning.

### **Figure 3.2 Reducing barriers to learning: knowledge gained from experience of offering a Single Regeneration Budget family learning project**

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To reduce barriers to adults returning to learning, providers should:

- find out what local people want;
- provide childcare;
- provide courses that local people want;
- provide these courses quickly;
- provide desired courses in a location that allows children to be dropped off and adults to go straight in to class;
- include lots of internal and external celebrations of achievements;
- raise awareness of adult learning opportunities on offer;
- create a head teachers' forum where posts and responsibilities for parents can be agreed and opportunities for parents to gain school-based experience be created;
- acknowledge the importance of working in partnership.

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Source: interview with Solihull College tutor

Interestingly, one of the eight adult learners interviewed had extensive experience of community education prior to engaging with Sure Start. She had discovered that the area was classified as eligible for priority funding through the European Union and that therefore community education was available free of charge. However, as the quotation in Figure 3.3 illustrates, her view was that:

- adult education opportunities were not well-publicised;
- in particular, the availability of free learning opportunities was not well advertised;
- there was a deep divide between the north and south of Solihull that was not being addressed by continuing to differentiate opportunities according to where a person lived.

### **Figure 3.3 One learner's views about lack of publicity and differential opportunities in the north and south of the borough**

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'I don't think it's very well publicised at all, adult learning. The reason I'm saying that is, when I did the learning, prior to having [my child], I did four years free college, and that was because of the European funding for the area. They class it as a deprived area, and because of that there was free European funding, and all night school classes for anyone within our postcode was free. I did four years of dressmaking, and feng shui, interior design, just personal subjects, which I just thought, "Oh these are free. I'll have a go at this". And it was quite sad, I did all these years, and I was telling people, and they were saying, "Oh, that's fantastic", and I was saying, "It's free at the moment", and nobody knew about it! And it was such a shame that we had that funding in place for so many years, and it wasn't known about, and people in the area did not know what they were entitled to.

I think, from that point of view, it was only because I had an interest, and went to college, and was reading the books up, and I just saw it, initially, written in a little tiny font you could hardly see, that it was available to us. I think it is a shame, when things like that have been available, that the college don't advertise it, and perhaps put it in their local papers.

I did it one year in Solihull, but when I came to enrol in the second year, they said, "No, you get free funding because you live in the north. You can only do your courses in the north", and I was told I wasn't allowed to go to college in south Solihull. And I was on my second year then, and I had to go and find another class to do my second year in. I think it goes back down to this north/south divide in Solihull, which is a shame. So, I think, sometimes, Solihull doesn't really help itself, but I don't know who is to blame for that. It's one of those almost political things.'

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Source: Interview with adult learner

#### **3.2.2 Accredited learning at Solihull College**

In addition to the contract with the local authority to provide all non-accredited adult and community learning in the borough, Solihull College also ran about 1 000 *accredited* adult learning programmes in schools and community centres across

Solihull, some during the day, some in the evenings. These Level 2 and above courses had to cover costs through enrolment fees. Courses available included a Foundation Degree for classroom assistants and teaching assistants, validated through Oxford Brookes University, and covering the primary, secondary and further education sectors.

One of the eight adult learners interviewed had prior experience of doing a Level 2 course at the Chelmsley campus of Solihull College and had then gone on to a Level 3 course through a work-based route (see section 3.2.3).

### **3.2.3 Accredited work-based learning**

For those in employment in north Solihull, there were also opportunities to undertake work-based, accredited learning. One adult learner interviewed had experience of this, prior to her engagement with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood:

“I started doing the NVQ Level 2 at the Chelmsley campus, and then my company asked me if I wanted to do an NVQ, and I said, “I’m already doing one”. They got paid so much money if you were doing it, so they were pushing for doing it, and they said, “Would you like to do the Level 3 through the company?” I thought, “Well, if I’ve got the chance of doing the Level 3, I might as well do it”, so my assessor used to come into my workplace, and I think I completed it just before [my child] was born.’

### **3.2.4 Review of ACL provision, 2003**

In 2003, the Adult Learning Inspectorate undertook a review of *funded* ACL provision in Solihull (for details, see Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership, 2004). Overall, “*quality of provision*” was graded as “*adequate*” but individual aspects of provision received varied gradings from 2 (positive end of scale) to 5 (negative end of scale). Family Learning provision was one area that gained a positive Grade 2.

In 2003 also, the Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council conducted a Provider Performance Review in the area (for details, see Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership, 2004). Overall, the assessment was that provision was “*acceptable*”.

The findings of these two inspections suggest the overall accuracy of the way the local context for adult learning was summarised by one interviewee:

‘The [adult learning] provision, traditionally, in the North of Solihull has been thin on the ground. The adult and community provision has been better than the other stuff from the College, but it’s been of pretty variable quality. There’s been some really good stuff going on but it’s really what the College wanted to put on, rather than what people are asking for, or the way that they’re asking for it. You know what Education is like - the funding comes down for a particular project so that’s what the College put on, rather than being a bit more creative about how they did things.’

### ***3.2.5 Local ACL objectives and targets for 2004-05***

The adult and community learning (ACL) strategic development plan for 2004-05 (Ward & Hutchings, 2004) set out four key objectives for the development of ACL in Solihull, objectives developed in the light of the 2003 inspections. These are reproduced in Figure 3.4.

### **Figure 3.4 Local adult and community learning (ACL) objectives, 2004-05**

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#### ***Overall objectives***

1. widen participation in ACL, especially working to engage non-learners and raise participation levels within under-represented client groups and priority geographic areas of the Borough
2. improve the quality of the learning experience
3. establish a policy and planning framework that reflects the value and role of adult and community learning and family learning within wider community planning, and rationalises existing groups and plans
4. establish and maintain effective management arrangements for the delivery and monitoring of adult and community learning in Solihull

#### ***Learner targets***

- 4 000 - Adult and Community Learning
- 400 - Family Learning (adults)
- 100 - Family Learning (children)
- 288 - Family Learning, Literacy and Numeracy

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Source: WARD, Nigel and HUTCHINGS, Gill (2004). *Solihull Adult and Community Learning; strategic development plan, 2004/2007, including operational review (2002/2003) and summary (2004/2005)*. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull.

These local objectives and learner targets formed the context for the work of the adult tutor in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood in 2004.

### 3.3 The role of the adult tutor in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood

In Sure Start Chelmsley Wood's original Delivery Plan document (NCH, 2000), the identified gap in relation to the local services provided by Solihull College was described as, *"a need to provide training programmes for local parents to assist them in developing the peer support role which is envisaged"*. The planned new services to be provided by the College were to be, *"a range of accredited training programmes to promote the self-esteem, confidence and new skills for local parents, both generally and specifically to enable them to develop peer support services"*. In order to achieve this, 1.5 full-time equivalent (fte) staff were envisaged.

In practice, Solihull College seconded one full-time, experienced tutor to the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood local programme and then worked through her to enable other College tutors to provide training and education to parents. Having an embedded tutor was an approach the College had already used successfully in relation to work-based learning, as one College interviewee explained:

'I thought having an adult trainer in Sure Start would work well. I've found it has worked well to have someone employed by the College but *embedded* in the institution because people see them around and see them as non-threatening. I've used that model with industry, too.'

The success of this approach in enabling other College tutors to work closely with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood in providing for parents was clear from interviews with College staff. The following quotations give a flavour of the comments made:

'A colleague is seconded to Sure Start. I'm not sure of her title but she signposts and tries to organise courses for parents and families that will meet their needs and that they have requested. She is the link between Sure Start and the College and her boss is head of Community Education here. She is the link.'

'Linking with Sure Start has been made easy because of the adult tutor being seconded from our team. That has meant there was no need to make new links. It was easy to start working together through Family Learning and also because I have prior experience of community education, too.'

'When Sure Start was first set up, it was based in Coleshill Heath School. I had links with that school because I was co-ordinating the adult and community learning classes there and therefore it felt natural that I'd have a connection in encouraging *their* users to use our facilities. Then when my colleague [the adult tutor] was seconded, I felt we really had a connection then. We already had a firm relationship that we could build on.'

As a seconded member of staff, the adult tutor's contract was managed by the head of Community Education at the College while day-to-day line management was the responsibility of the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood programme director. This arrangement caused some difficulties for the adult tutor, largely due to the very different working environments - the new, innovative, well-funded Sure Start local programme compared to the under-funded, pressured further education sector ("*colleges are so working to their absolute limits; just functioning in a knee-jerk way*") versus "*Sure Start has protected me to do what I am doing here*").

On the other hand, College colleagues welcomed the fact that the adult tutor at Sure Start remained within the line-management structure of Solihull College as they saw direct benefits. One College tutor described these in some detail:

'[The adult tutor] is still under [the Community Education] Directorate so she has knowledge of how the College works and is still involved in staff development here. She herself [...] has had the Early Start training. As far as this Directorate is concerned, we try to underpin most of our adult learning with Basic Skills. It really helps us with that strategy, having the adult tutor who absolutely embraces that and has trained in that. Not only are they [i.e. Sure Start staff] receptive [to the College] in being host and recruiting for us extremely well (and not just for classes at Sure Start but for the whole Sure Start patch - our provision across Chelmsley Wood), it's also the way that they have embraced our Skills for Life strategy.'

The College's vision for the post of adult tutor in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, as expressed by a college manager, was that the post holder, "*would facilitate and signpost people to learning opportunities in the community education and mainstream provision of Solihull College*".

It was hoped that the person appointed would have knowledge of the Early Years area and would be flexible enough both to signpost to existing College provision and to enable the development of curriculum programmes at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood. The adult tutor appointed fulfilled these criteria and was viewed by the College management as *“the person for the job”*.

‘It’s also to do with the calibre of the person we’ve employed. [...] she was the person for the job. She was very, very good. A very strong candidate and I’m so pleased it was her.’

The adult tutor appointed had trained first as an infant school teacher and had then moved into the further education sector as a child care tutor and had subsequently worked at Solihull College, teaching Early Years Care and Education. Her job at the College had also involved teaching on the Equality of Opportunity and Inter-personal Skills and Communication courses and running the Advanced Diploma in Childcare and Education. In her view, this grounding in the Early Years proved *“ideal”* for working at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood: *“I don’t get involved in childcare here on a day to day basis, but having that overview is ideal”*.

In practice, by 2004, when this service evaluation was undertaken, the adult tutor’s role had evolved to include the aspects summarised in Figure 3.5. Each of these is considered in turn in the sub-sections that follow.

### **Figure 3.5 Elements making up the role of adult tutor**

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- one-to-one work with adult members of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood (3.3.1)
  - training role across the Sure Start team (3.3.2)
  - liaison with Solihull College around delivery of courses at the Sure Start Centre (3.3.3)
  - liaison to seek to influence local provision (3.3.4)
  - liaison to seek to influence lifelong learning strategy in Solihull (3.3.5)
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This evolution of the role was strongly welcomed by the College management: *“It’s been a real joy to me to see how it’s evolved”*.

### 3.3.1 *One-to-one work*

The adult tutor viewed the main part of her role as being “*to work with any adult who wants to return to learning of any kind*”. She explained that this help could take a variety of forms:

‘There’s no particular way that would happen because every person I meet has different needs. It might be somebody wanting information or to know where to go for the information. But mostly it’s people who want to talk over their ideas about what they might want to do and to get an idea of how they could move forward with that and then to have some help to access whatever learning they think is for them.

It could be something like taking somebody down to show them the place that the learning is happening and introducing them to the tutors. Or it might be taking them down to the College to get them signed on. It could be anything, really.’

Sometimes Sure Start adult members approached the adult tutor “*because they know I am here*”; other times, she would go to groups, such as Play and Stay, to “*have a natter with people*” about their interests and their fears about re-engaging with learning:

‘I talk to people to find out if they are interested in doing a course. And I do a lot of reassuring people about what it’s going to be like and how it’s not going to be like school and helping people to get over their barriers about learning.’

The discussions included addressing barriers to learning. For some, barriers included prior negative experiences of learning, for example, at school. Discussions also covered motivations for learning; often these included the person’s desire to support his or her child/ren:

‘They have quite high expectations for their children and I think a lot of them want to go back to some kind of learning to support their children.’

## *Learning Conversations*

All of 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. (For further information on Learning Conversations, see, for example, NCSL, 2005; GTCE, 2004; L'Aoreaux, 2005) In Figure 3.6, the adult tutor describes what she meant by Learning Conversations.

### **Figure 3.6 Learning Conversations, as described by the adult tutor**

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'A Learning Conversation is [used] when you are working as a Personal Tutor, working one-to-one with a student. ... It's to encourage students to become self-organised learners. The way you do it is by having a conversation with them and getting them to work out:

- what the problem is;
- strategies for overcoming it;
- what will be the outcome if they use these strategies;
- how will they know when they've arrived at where they wanted to be.

It's getting them to think it through, but building on their *strengths* rather than what they can't do. So, for example, somebody might come to you and say, "Oh, I can't do this assignment". "OK, what is it about the assignment you can't do?" "Oh, I can't do any of it." and gradually it might come down to, "Oh, well, I'm not very good at writing". "OK, what can you do about that?" - You're not telling them anything; you're getting *them* to work it out and it's brilliant. [...]

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The adult tutor realised that the Learning Conversations approach to supporting adult learners used at Solihull College could be appropriately transferred to her work at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood. In her view, it accorded well with the Solihull Approach (discussed next) adopted across the local programme, and with the partnership between parents and professionals built in to the vision for Sure Start Chelmsley Wood:

'[The Learning Conversations approach], to me, embodied the difference in how we work because that was based on a power model - power down, completely equal. You're tipping it [power] towards the students by giving *them* the power, the control, the choices, but you're also, at the same time, asking them to accept the responsibilities for their own choices. So it is very empowering for the learner and I think that is what we're trying to do here. You're not trying to keep control of people; you're letting people make their own choices and not stopping them making inappropriate choices because the only way you learn is by making mistakes. [...] You could say, "Well, that's not going to work" but that's not helpful. Let them carry their plan through, then, when they come back and say, "That was awful", say, "That's fine. What went wrong?" Then it's much more positive for people. And it works fantastically in education and I think that describes the difference here [at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood].'

The adult tutor acknowledged that the Learning Conversations approach took time:

'It can take a long time to start with, especially for students that have a lot of barriers.'

'I might talk to them on a lot of occasions before they decide to do something. They keep coming back and asking a bit more and a bit more.'

On the other hand, in her view, the benefit for the learner was, in the end, a sense of empowerment and agency:

'After they have got the bit between their teeth, they don't need you any more. They just come to say, "I'm thinking of doing this." And you say, "Oh, yes, fine. Off you go!"'

### *The Solihull Approach*

The Solihull Approach was adopted across the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood programme from the beginning (see Cullen & Lindsay, 2005c). The adult tutor was able to describe how she used it in her one-to-one work with adult members. She saw a coherence in using Learning Conversations and the Solihull Approach:

‘The Learning Conversation approach is a bit like the Solihull Approach. So, when I came here and started finding out about the Solihull Approach, it all fitted together.’

For her, the key aspect of the Solihull Approach was the concept of containment which she described, in relation to adults, as “*making them feel OK, making them feel very comfortable and connected with you*”, and as enabling them “*to feel you’ve got space in your head for them*”. The process of establishing this rapport, in her view, required:

- having respect for people;
- spending time listening carefully;
- establishing two-way communication;
- not jumping to immediate judgements about any given situation;
- being alert for cues that issues other than the spoken one may be involved;
- not offering solutions;
- being prepared to signpost to other professionals.

#### *Adult learners’ experiences of one to one support*

The eight adult learners interviewed each described the kind of support they received on this one-to-one basis from the adult tutor. Some examples, including some extended quotations, are given to illustrate something of the range of their hopes and intentions and of the range of ways the adult tutor supported them:

#### **Example 1 - Adult hoping to go to college:**

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‘After Christmas, I’m going to look for vacancies and hopefully, I’ll get in to college. I’ve talked to [the adult tutor] about it and she helped me a lot. She gave me lots of material about the college because I’m not quite sure about how the English education system works (ours in [home country] is so much different from over here). So she helped me quite a lot, gave me a lot of information.’

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### **Example 2 - Adult looking for informal learning opportunities:**

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'[The adult tutor] got me fixed up on the flower arranging course I did, the Christmas one.'

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### **Example 3 - Adult hoping to change career direction:**

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'I've had individual conversations with [the adult tutor], just to discuss [my future]. Prior to becoming a parent, I worked in [specialised sector]. I've decided, since having [my child], I don't really want to go back into that type of career now, but, of course, I've been in that type of industry for over 13 years now, and, what will I do now? I've had some discussions with [the adult tutor], because I said I wouldn't mind going into, probably, child related work, and she's been really good. She's given me loads of information about what's available. She's given me dates, and possible venues to go to, to listen to talks that are taking place. And I've discussed it with her, about being a childminder, and she did give me the leads for all those, but I decided not to follow them up, but that was my own personal choice in the end. [...] If you ever raise anything with her that you're interested in, she goes quite out of her way to [help]. She comes back with armfuls of information and leaflets and brochures.

And she's also said to me, an issue when I started the Teaching Assistants' course, because I thought I'd be able to cope with it because of my background before, that I wouldn't have a problem. But, when I first started, I was really overwhelmed because everybody had already done a 12 month course on Classroom Assistants before going onto the Teacher Assistant course. I was the only one walking in without any knowledge at all. When I went in and said to [the adult tutor], "I think I've cut too much off here", she said, "Don't worry about it. If it goes too much over your head, just come in and see me, and I'll sit down and go through your coursework with you". She's been really good, I haven't taken that up. I have found that, now I'm getting used to the terminology that's used, it's making it easier for me, but initially, when I was quite alarmed, she was, like, "No, don't worry, you can come in and sit down with me". And it's that kind of support that she's offering to *all* of the mums down there. I know that there are quite a few mums now that have either done courses or are currently doing them now. There's quite a lot of parents down there doing work. It's really good.'

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#### **Example 4 - Adult hoping to return to work:**

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'I've got computer qualifications and things, but it's been so long since I'd used them, I was worried about it. I think the very first time I mentioned it to [the adult tutor], I think it was before I got the job here, I said, "I'm worried about being out of work for so long, and when I do go back, I might have the skills but I won't remember how to use anything". So I was just asking [her] about the different courses I could do, and she said to me, "If you're a bit worried about going down [to the course location] on your own, I'll come down with you and show you round the crèche'.

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#### **Example 5 - Adult seeking temporary, part-time employment:**

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'But the most recent thing we done -she helped me -I wanted to go back to work for Christmas, just for a bit, because I fancied something for me - and she helped me fill in the application forms because I was - I said, 'I'm filling them in and I know I can do a job' It was only something silly like Asda's or something. I said, "I'm not even getting an interview!". She said, 'You're not selling yourself'. So she helped me to write, not a CV, but a covering letter to explain things and stuff, which I've kept as a template, because I did get offered that job but I didn't actually go for that one in the end.

And she told me a few interview techniques because I said I do get quite nervous. And she said, "All you've got to do is simple things like convince them that, all right, it's a shop but you want to really, really work in that shop!" You know, she said, "You've got to sell yourself." And that worked really well and I did get my job so I am working weekends, just up till Christmas and I love it!

But, I must admit, just a few things that she'd said had stuck in the back of my head when I had the interview. It's hard because I didn't really, really need the job. That's sounds bad but it was for me that I did the job. So, really, I wasn't over the top with it. But she said, "You've got to point out good things that you probably don't even think about like that you are really patient". She said, "That's just experience from having children but you are very patient. You're considerate. You know how to deal with awkward situations". She said, "You're a volunteer. You've had your training. You

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know how to listen to people; you know how to deal with things". She said, "I'll write them down for you." But you don't think of those things when you're thinking about yourself, it's only when someone else says to you, "Read that before you go in", and it tells you a few more things about yourself.

She did say, because she is doing some workshops downstairs and she said would it be helpful if we done one and I said, 'Well, to be honest, yes'. Because, like me, I know a couple of the other mums who have been out of work, well, we left work and because we've had the two children, it's nearly four years and it's quite frightening then, to go back. It really is, you know. I'm quite lucky because [where I work now] they're quite friendly and everybody knows everybody so it has worked really well but I just think actually getting back in to - well, I don't really want to go back into offices now, but into that sort of environment, I think would be quite daunting.

[...] And I tend to come across better face-to-face than I do on a piece of paper because obviously I had my one child and then I went back to work and then I left again so I have two quite big gaps which doesn't look very good on paper. [The adult tutor] said, "No! You're a full-time parent. You're a volunteer. Don't let them think you've sat at home doing nothing because you've not." So, it was good.'

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The quotations from adult learners given above show the adult tutor providing one-to-one support in the following 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.

### **3.3.2 Training role across the local programme**

As a secondary aspect of her role, the adult tutor seconded to Sure Start Chelmsley Wood was responsible for co-ordinating training across the local programme. This included training for staff and for parent volunteers.

#### *Co-ordinating training for staff*

As part of her role as co-ordinator of staff training, the adult tutor gained qualified status as a NVQ Assessor for Childcare and Education. At the time of the research in 2004, she had two candidates undertaking NVQ qualifications.

#### *Co-ordinating training for parent volunteers*

All parent volunteers at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood were checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and then undertook induction training. The volunteer scheme was planned and run jointly by the adult tutor and two other staff members. The adult tutor was primarily responsible for the training aspect.

Having done the induction training, parent volunteers could then access continuing professional development training, such as the training to become peer supporters for breast-feeding mothers. One of the adult learners interviewed had done that course and said: *"It gives me a nice perspective and the training was good"*. (Further information and parents' evaluation comments about Breast Feeding Peer Support Training can be found in Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a.) One staff member, interviewed for the partnership theme strand of the local evaluation 2004 (Cullen & Lindsay, 2005c), spoke about some of the developments that came out of that peer support training course, specifically, the plan to accredit it through Solihull College, to mainstream it beyond Sure Start, and that one trained volunteer had gone on to set up a group for new mothers, Baby Cafe:

'We're hoping to develop it further to link with the College to get some accreditation so I've linked with the adult tutor here who has made links with the College. What we're planning to do is to mainstream it so that we'll access health visitors working in the clinics who are interested in breast-feeding and involve them in the planning and then include mothers outside of Sure Start in the breastfeeding training so there would be some from here

and some outside as well. [...] Some of the mums that have been on the course, the skills they've learned on the course have been transferable. We had a big focus on their ability to communicate and receive emotional communication. That's containment and reciprocity. One of the mums is heading the Baby Cafe now, with another mum, who didn't come on this course but had been in lots of groups. They're doing that with support from the Breastfeeding Counsellor, who was part of the training. So it's been really positive.'

The same staff member, when asked about working in a multi-agency team, went on to talk about how much she had learned from colleagues, twice using her links with the adult tutor as an example of this:

'I've found it a fantastic experience being able to work with some professionals I wouldn't get access to normally, like the adult tutor and the childcare workers.'

'Working with the adult tutor has been interesting. Thinking about how education works which is in some ways the same [as what I do] and in other ways very different and how, to get to the same goal, you've got to take different routes sometimes. So it's recognising that you've both got restrictions but that you can still work with those restrictions to form something new.'

#### *Co-ordinating training for parent representatives on the Partnership Board*

The adult tutor also co-ordinated training for the parent representatives on the Partnership Board. (See Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a, for evaluation comments and details of one such day training event that took place in 2002.)

One College tutor interviewed reported that some of her College students had told her about the positive impact of the training given to them as parent representatives on the Board. (More information about the experiences of parent representatives on the Partnership Board are given in Cullen & Lindsay, 2005c.)

### **3.3.3 Liaison around delivery of adult education courses for members**

The adult tutor was clear that her role was not to seek to become a provider of adult learning. Instead, she saw her role as liaising with the existing provider, Solihull College, to deliver adult education courses that Sure Start members wanted:

'With Sure Start, part of the deal is that [...] you don't actually [deliver the services] yourself; you try to get the people that are already out there delivering the services to make the services fit the customer.'

Facilitated by the adult tutor's negotiations 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.

#### **3.3.3.1 Family Learning**

Family Learning courses at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood were offered in partnership with Solihull College. One College tutor interviewed saw this as a good example of *"how the College can link up with other partners [i.e. Sure Start] to benefit the learner"* and regarded this as supporting the College in meeting its targets: *"it makes it easier to tick our boxes"*. At the time of the interview, additional money had recently been provided to the College to support Family Learning through Children's Centres and this money was linked to targets to increase the number of families involved: *"This new money will be to recruit 42 new families"*. Thus, any activities that supported an increased take-up of Family Learning were welcomed by the College.

Family Learning offered in partnership with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood ranged from single workshops to 10-week courses.

#### *Workshops*

Single workshops focused on particular topics or activities of interest to members were offered at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood and delivered by the relevant tutor from Solihull College or another invited tutor. For example, two Poetry Workshops were held during 2004, one in May and another in October. They each lasted two hours.

Eleven female Sure Start members and one staff member participated in the May workshop, while four females (of seven originally signed-up) attended the October one. In each case, crèche places were made available for those who required childcare in order to attend. In each case, collaborative poems were written by the participants, facilitated by the tutor. Evaluation comments from both workshops are given in Appendix 3.1B.

### *Just for Us*

Just for Us, a series of taster sessions for courses available at Solihull College, arose out of a Women's Group when members expressed a desire for such a course. (Details about the Women's Group and parents' evaluation comments on it can be found in Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a.) For these young women, Just for Us was seen as a stepping stone towards going to college. As one Sure Start staff member interviewed explained, *"Going to college was too big a step."*

The Family Services Co-ordinator and the adult tutor negotiated with Solihull College, resulting in the first offering of Just for Us being focussed around the expressed interests of the Women's Group members. Topics, drawn from the College's courses booklet, included relaxation, aromatherapy and home decoration. The short course provided a space for these mothers to enjoy themselves in a sociable situation while also learning new skills. Later, according to one Sure Start staff member, these women went on to other forms of adult learning, including becoming trained volunteers with the local programme, going on to college courses and, in two cases, setting up local playgroups.

The popularity of Just for Us went beyond this initial group. By the end of October 2004, 23 Sure Start members, a mix of males and females, had attended. When it was offered again in November 2004, it attracted seven members for the first time, as well as five who had done it before. It took place at the Sure Start Centre but was taught by tutors from Solihull College. Crèche places for those requiring childcare were provided by the Sure Start childcare team. Two of the adult learners interviewed had attended Just for Us, describing its value to them as the opportunity to *"try different things to see what your interests are. [...] It was nice. It gives you a few tasters."*

## *Healthy Eating*

Healthy Eating was a six-week short course planned and delivered jointly by Sure Start and Solihull College. It involved the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood health visitor and adult tutor, plus a College tutor, a dental therapist and a nutritional adviser. By the end of 2004, it had been offered twice with six Sure Start members attending each time. It remained available as a course to be run as and when appropriate.

A College interviewee cited this Healthy Eating course as an example of how working with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, through the adult tutor there, *“helped us to plan more accurately”* for courses that local people wanted; as a result of Healthy eating, the College offered a six-week course in Practical Cookery.

One of the eight adult learners interviewed had done the Healthy Eating course and then gone on to do the Practical Cookery course at Solihull College. Her account of the positive impact of these courses on her day-to-day cooking for her family is given in Figure 3.7.

### **Figure 3.7 Impact of Healthy Eating course: one mother’s experience**

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‘I also done the Healthy Eating course. That was useful, especially with having the two younger children. That covered everything - healthy eating, obviously, but it was also to do with dental hygiene, for us, for the children, easy meals.

It actually led on, we done one at the old Chelmsley Campus (I think it’s shut now), we done a practical there, six weeks of cooking. And [the tutor] showed us all the ways to cook without - and I’m terrible for it - you know when you make Shepherd’s Pie, and you use packets? Well, it was everything without using packets. Spaghetti Bolognese without using jars -so that you cut down on all the salt and everything that you were giving the kids. So that was, really, I must admit, that was brilliant.

So I do all them now. No packets and everything. It’s just something else that you’re giving the kids, isn’t it, and a bit of peace of mind for me.

The other thing we done was cereals. She showed us in a bowl. She said, “Right, there’s a bowl of cereal. That’s how much you’d give your child”. [continued]

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And then she showed us how much sugar was in that bowl, without you putting any more on. It was horrendous! Even Weetabix! And you think [cereals such as Weetabix] are better - they are, considering the other ones, but it is really quite shocking. And the same with the salt. [Ready made] soup is one of the ones with high salt content. So I did learn a lot off that course.

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### **3.3.3.2 Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy**

#### *Literacy and Numeracy courses*

Family Literacy and Numeracy courses, validated by the Open College Network, were run by Solihull College as part of the adult and community learning provision funded by the local authority (see section 3.2). Of these, some were offered at the Sure Start Centre but were open to non-Sure Start members. These were for parents with children at nursery or in infant school (Foundation stage). They focused on how young children are taught maths and English at school. The courses were accredited and informal. Between six and twelve parents made up a class and attended one two-hour session per week, with the crèche provided by Sure Start who, in turn, charged Solihull College a nominal fee. Started in 2003, they had been so successful that parents had requested they continued in 2004.

These classes were of mutual benefit to Sure Start and to Solihull College as they addressed the targets of both. One College tutor interviewed described the delivery of Family Literacy at Sure Start as “*a good example of partnership*”. Marketed as a way of helping children learn, this tutor regarded the courses as “*an effective inroad to addressing the adults’ own literacy and numeracy needs*”, as there was evidence that such courses also supported progression on to more advanced learning. Thus, from the College’s point of view, the literacy and numeracy courses run at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood helped to meet the Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy targets and targets relating to widening participation.

Two of the eight adult learners interviewed had attended Family Literacy and Family Numeracy classes. They both found that the courses helped them to support their children’s learning by explaining the teaching approaches currently used in schools:

'I've done the numeracy and the literacy courses at Sure Start. It's really good because it's an insight into what is going to be in front of me for [my son]. They focus on the learning structure in the schools [...] so that you know what the current expectations are of your child. It shows you how they now teach them [in schools] which is really good because, of course, it's changed so much from when we were doing it ourselves.'

'I'm doing literacy here [at Sure Start] on a Wednesday afternoon. My little boy's just starting nursery so I did Rainbow Tots, which is a group that gives an insight into how children learn as they get older. I was really interested in that and [the adult tutor] said to me, "Well, you might enjoy the literacy because that shows you what they're going to be doing at school and how you can help, not hinder them". So that's what I've done and that's has been really interesting, as well. [...] I mean, they've just changed it [the school approach to teaching literacy] again. Apparently it used to be taught using Letter Land but they don't use that any more. They use Jolly Phonics and Sure Start has that in the Toy Library here so that will be helpful. Everything changes so fast within the schools that I just thought, "Well, if I'm going to be able to help [my children], I need to know a little bit".'

The second quotation above also shows how attending one group (Rainbow Tots) led on to attending another one (Literacy) that allowed a developing interest to be taken further. It also shows how Sure Start Chelmsley Wood's integrated approach meant that the literacy teaching resources discussed in the literacy class were available for borrowing from the Toy Library.

### *Early Start*

Early Start, a Family Learning Programme course funded by the Basic Skills Agency as part of its *Skills for Life* agenda for adult basic skills (Brooks et al.), was piloted in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood in 2001/02 and 2002/03. In 2003/04, Early Start was delivered in partnership with Solihull College, drawing on funding from the Learning and Skills Council. By then, 43 adults and 48 children had participated in the course (Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a).

Early Start involved separate but related sessions for parents and children, followed by a joint play session around practical activities related to the learning. The purpose

was to raise adult literacy and numeracy skills by harnessing parents' desire to support their child's early learning. By fostering positive parent-child interaction, Early Start sought to support children's early communication and language skills and, through these, to support children's literacy and numeracy skills. The course could be accredited but Sure Start Chelmsley Wood had not taken up that option, fearing that it would put some parents off.

Early Start built on what parents were already doing with their children by offering a range of practical ideas to support early learning and explaining how they did so. The response showed that the parents who participated enjoyed learning new practical activities they could do at home with their children. The adult tutor also noted that participants formed friendship groups, thus creating additional social benefits. Parents' evaluation comments from 2001/02 and 2002/03 (Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a) showed that Early Start:

- supported bonding between parents and children;
- improved parents skills and abilities;
- improved children's learning;
- strengthened social networks among parents and children.

One of the adult learners interviewed had first come into contact with adult learning through an Early Start pilot course delivered at Geraldine Court, supported housing for teenage mothers. While Sure Start Chelmsley Wood childcare staff looked after the babies, the adult tutor and Early Years co-ordinator offered classes for the mothers:

'[The adult tutor] would come, especially when the groups first started, she came every week. She was usually the one that gave the talks and did the arts and crafts and things with us, rather than looking after the children.'

This is a noteworthy example of how Sure Start Chelmsley Wood sought to draw in potentially isolated and vulnerable young parents by taking adult learning and childcare provision out to them.

For further information about Early Start at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, and full details of parents' evaluation comments, see Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a.

*Employment-related courses - Making Choices and Introduction to Classroom Assistants*

Making Choices was supported by Sure Start but run by Children's Information Services (CIS), a statutory service providing information about early years education and childcare in the local area. CIS had an information stand and a regular presence in the Sure Start Centre reception area.

An eight-week course, Making Choices was for adults interested in employment opportunities within the childcare sector. Two of the adult learners interviewed attended this course. Both of them described it as offering a valuable "*insight*" into employment in the childcare sector:

'I also did Making Choices, which is a child care course. It's mainly run by the CIS, the Children's Information Service. It just gives you an insight into all the different varieties of childcare that you may want to go into or that you could go into. Just to help you decide if that is really the way you want to go. Because I did say to [the adult tutor], "I would like to work with children. I'm just not sure how". I don't really want to sit in a nursery all day but I know there is somewhere that I will fit eventually, but where, I don't know! So, that was a good course to do because it did give me an insight into a lot of things I hadn't thought about to do with childcare.'

'Because I was still interested in child work, I did the Making Choices course. It is connected with Sure Start, but it is also with the information desk on the front, Children Information Services. [CIS worker] helped set that up with Sure Start, and they had an outside person come in and speak to us. It was an eight week course, where we had an insight into jobs related to childcare, and the NVQ in childcare. It was good but I think that made me realise [...] how much solitary work you'd need to do on a course, and, at the moment, I didn't really want to put [my son] in childcare, which would rather defeat the object of why I became a fulltime mum, to be with him.'

### *Introduction to Classroom Assistants course*

The Community Education section of Solihull College offered courses for people who wanted to become classroom assistants or teaching assistants. Through the College's Education and Training department, it was possible to do a Foundation degree to become a Classroom Assistant or Teaching Assistant validated by Oxford Brookes University and covering the primary, secondary and further education sectors. Entry to the Foundation Degree required no formal qualifications but students needed to have had two years experience and a current role within an educational setting.

A six-week Introduction to the Classroom Assistant course was offered at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood. One of the adult learners interviewed attended that and progressed on to the Teaching Assistant Foundation Degree. This progression pattern was evidently relatively common, as the College tutor responsible for the Classroom and Teaching Assistant Foundation Degree courses stated that one third of the students worked in Chelmsley Wood.

### **3.3.4 *Liaison with others to influence local provision***

The adult tutor, on behalf of the actual and potential adult learners in the Sure Start area, sought to improve the quality of adult and community education in north Solihull. At first she did this by raising the issue single-handedly, both verbally and in writing so that notice would be taken of the discrepancy in the quality of facilities in the North, including the Chelmsley Wood area (see section 3.2).

Subsequently, she instigated the creation of a Family Learning Network. This brought together a number of operational-level people - the adult tutor, the Family Learning Co-ordinator from Solihull College, the Council's Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator and the local Library's development officer. Through this Family Learning Network, it became possible to plan and advertise family learning in a co-ordinated and mutually supportive way. One member of the Network interviewed said that it had created a space "*where we can help each other to meet the various targets we work to*". This synergy is a good example of the added value arising from the role of the Sure Start adult tutor.

As the Family Learning Network became increasingly established, the adult tutor hoped that it would expand to include the 'Skills for Life' agenda and that its example would encourage efforts towards greater coherence at strategic level also.

Through this Network, also, the adult tutor sought to raise the provision of quality childcare as an issue directly linked to achieving expansion of adult learning. The vision was that the Council's Lifelong Learning Manager would link up with its Early Years Childcare Development Partnership to rationalise the provision of quality childcare alongside adult learning opportunities. The adult tutor saw the potential for developments, such as Neighbourhood Nurseries and Extended Schools, to become "*the perfect places to get in Family Learning*", seeing, for example, that Early Start would "*fit in brilliantly*".

She was also alert to the potential for the Basic Skills Agency's training programme, Step in to Learning, to underpin an expansion of adult and community learning in the area. Step in to Learning was a training programme for nurseries and Sure Start local programmes that taught participants to recognise adult's learning needs and how to engage them in learning (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus>). It sought to increase awareness of barriers to accessing existing provision and to encourage nurseries

and Sure Starts to link in with local providers to offer adult learning opportunities in the early years setting. The Basic Skills Agency thus hoped to meet its targets for improving adult literacy by tapping in to parents' desires to support their children's early learning. The adult tutor had a vision that all workers in contact with families in Solihull Borough should be able to access training, such as Step in to Learning, and that courses, such as Early Start, would be offered in all local Early Years settings. She thought this two-pronged approach would greatly increase the numbers of adults and families accessing learning opportunities.

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 Sure Start staff and Sure Start members and thus creating or increasing awareness of an attitude problem among some College staff towards learners from the North of the Borough;
- creating a demand for high quality childcare to be offered alongside adult learning courses.

The adult tutor supported Sure Start parents in raising their concerns, for example, by encouraging and enabling them to write to the local MP, and other relevant people in positions of power, to explain their concerns and to request that positive action be taken.

#### *Influencing the range of local adult learning courses*

In section 3.3.3, two examples were discussed where demand from Sure Start members led to Solihull College offering new courses - Just for Us and Practical Cookery. This was welcomed by a College interviewee as helping the College to plan and deliver courses that local people wanted.

One of the adult learners interviewed described in her interview how she personally "*kept pushing*" for adult learning classes to be reinstated at her local school:

‘There aren’t enough courses. There used to be one at the school, but by the time I was ready to go to it, it wasn’t running. I did the other course at the school, but I did actually mention to one of the teachers at the school [...] I kept pushing it [about courses].’

The example of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, characterised by providing what parents wanted, was also noted by another College interviewee:

‘One thing that I personally like about Sure Start is that it comes from the parents, the adults in the Sure Start patch. It’s not dictated to them, what they need.’

#### *Creating an awareness of some attitude problems towards learners from north Solihull*

A number of College staff spoke in their interviews about how working with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood had made them more aware of potential barriers to learning at College that were created by the attitudes of some College staff towards learners from north Solihull:

‘There is a lot of stuff we can still learn from each other. For example, when Sure Start students tried to engage with learning at the big campus, the Advice and Guidance wasn’t as accurate, friendly, smart as it could be. These first impressions count.’

‘It’s very ironic, working within an educational establishment [i.e. Solihull College], that notions of discrimination are, to me, prevalent at times. I find that deeply worrying.’

‘Sometimes [the Sure Start members] have not been treated too well when they arrived at College. Some customer service works needs to be done ... ‘

This contrasted with the “*respectful*” attitudes noted by some College interviewees:

‘One thing that I’ve noticed [at Sure Start] is how respectful and how empowering the interactions of Sure Start users are with members of staff there. It’s really, really refreshing to see that.’

‘Working [at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood] with a group of people who traditionally aren’t valued or respected at all because of education, housing, income aspects, [...] there’s an incredibly professional working environment that is supportive of the families.’

*Influencing the quality of childcare offered alongside adult learning courses*

By the end of 2004, the *main* way in which Sure Start Chelmsley Wood’s adult learning had influenced local provision was by creating adult learners able and willing to demand high quality childcare facilities to run alongside courses. This issue was raised by the adult learners interviewed, by the adult tutor, by the College staff interviewed for this service evaluation, as well as by other local professionals interviewed for other parts of the 2004 evaluation. (See also section 3.4.)

Three of the adult learners interviewed described their own part in creating a demand for high quality childcare to run alongside courses for adult learners. Interestingly, each spoke about their negative views of the crèche provision in relation to a different adult learning location, suggesting that the problem was widespread. In each case, by talking the issues through with the crèche providers, the Sure Start members succeeded in making the case for improvements. The crèche at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood was the standard by which the Sure Start members measured other crèche provision. In each case, too, the adult tutor provided support to the parent concerned, for example, by arranging a meeting with the crèche provider so that concerns could be discussed openly and purposefully. In Figure 3.8, one adult learner shared her own knowledge of suitable activities to keep young children happy with crèche workers at the local Leisure Centre and also facilitated them meeting up with the Childcare Team Leader at Sure Start.

### Figure 3.8 Challenging crèche provision at the local Leisure Centre: one adult learner's experience

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'Little Fishes [a swimming group for mothers and babies] was running at the Leisure Centre but it has to be one-to-one so [my older daughter] was in crèche there. When I went to pick her up, she was strapped in a car seat, screaming. They told me she'd been like that for a while. I picked her up and she was soaking and she burped. So I was really not happy with that. But I have been back to them and I asked them to come over to speak to [the Childcare Team Leader at Sure Start]. I've done a few bits with them. They have started doing more with the children in their crèche - for example, getting the paints out and they've started doing singing. The [crèche workers] there all have the same colour of t-shirt now. People say, "Oh, Sure Start has the money" but it's not that; it's having the right person.'

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Interestingly, the parent quoted in Figure 3.8 believed that *"having the right person"* working in a crèche was the key to quality childcare. Her expectation of high quality care for her child, and her challenge of the standard of care offered, was successful in achieving changes in everyday practice in the Leisure Centre crèche - a wider range of engaging activities for the children and a uniform for the crèche workers so that children could identify who was looking after them.

In Figure 3.9, an extended example is presented where a Sure Start adult learner's expectation of high quality childcare led to a successful challenge of quality standards in the crèche provided by Solihull College at a community education venue, Hatchford CARE. In this case, too, the adult learner felt confident enough in the knowledge of child development and childcare learned at Sure Start to challenge the quality of what was provided. This learner, like the previous one, regarded *"the people that are in [the crèche]"* as the key to quality childcare.

### Figure 3.9 Challenging crèche provision at Hatchford: one adult learner's experience

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I've learned a lot [at Sure Start] from the childcare side of things and from doing things with [the Under-4s specialist]. [...] It's just that you learn a lot about how a child thinks and how to see things from a child's point of view and different things like that. Now, when dealing with children, and looking at childcare, my standards that I've got are quite high. A lot of them say, "It's money", which I don't think it is. OK, we've got a lovely building here and the crèche is fantastic but it's still more *the people that are in it*, it really is.

I found that, when I went to Hatchford. I mean, we did have some discussions with them. I just said, "When I walked in, [my daughter] was only very small, [my son] was with me, and no-one came and said hello to him". It was as if you would just leave him there and go. They had no open day where he could go and play with me there and get used to the surroundings. It was just that he was expected to go there, stay there and me go. And I think that's quite a lot for a child. He was only 2 or 2-and-a-half then. That's a lot for a child.

When we spoke, [the crèche provider] did say, "Well, that could be quite difficult because of time, money". I said, "But at the end of the day, if people are going to do the courses and get back to work, you've got to make sure the children are happy because [the adults] won't learn because they're going to get pulled out every two minutes. They're not going to rest". I said, "I was talking to a lady and I said, "Oh, are you on the same course as me?" She said, "No, I'm a crèche worker." I said, 'Well, if I didn't know she was a crèche worker, how would a 2-and-a half-year-old know she was a crèche worker!'

I mean, here [at Sure Start Centre] the crèche workers have all got orange t-shirts. You can't miss them. I think, now, Solihull College's crèche workers all wear purple t-shirts now. They've done that. That worked quite well.

It's just all different things that I've learned. It's things like, I said, "You're sitting on a chair". She was actually sitting on a proper chair and the little ones were on little chairs, which, to me, is a power thing, because you are higher up than them.

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I said, "If the little ones are on a chair, even if they are in crèche, I'd kneel down by the side of them, get down to their level, their eye-level, so that they'll feel the same as you, so they wouldn't feel threatened by you then". I said, 'If I know simple things like that, and they work in childcare, they should know things like that too'.

It's frightening for little children, especially when they're in a place they don't know and they don't know where mum is. Here, at least, especially when we've done PIPPA groups or anything, you could take them and go, "Look, Mummy's there and you're there". And, if ever he wanted to see me, one of the crèche staff would come out and go, "Look, there she is". And he could give me a wave and go back in because he knew where I was. But, with Hatchford, there was none of that. It was just a case of, you bring them in, you put them there and you go. I thought it was a bit cold.

As I say, [the adult tutor] sorted out a meeting and we met up and we had a few ideas.

Researcher: *And were they willing to listen?*

Yes, yeah.

---

The Sure Start parent quoted in Figure 3.9 was at Hatchford to do a course in Personal Development. This fact was used by the adult tutor to encourage the concerned parent to go back to the crèche workers there and voice her concerns. It is to the credit of the workers there that they were willing to listen to the criticism and to respond to it in a positive way.

This positive and responsive attitude to the challenge to the quality of childcare offered to adult learners' children was also displayed by Solihull College. This was a big challenge to the College because, having learned from the Single Regeneration Budget project that community venues and childcare were necessities in order to widen participation in adult learning, it employed its own childcare staff and provided courses in about 70 community venues around Solihull. The College crèche workers travelled around to the appropriate venue with their boxes of toys and equipment. Naturally, this contrasted poorly with the facilities available in the Sure Start Centre.

However, as the examples in Figure 3.8 and 3.9 illustrated, the Sure Start parents were not challenging the facilities so much as the approach of the childcare staff.

The College staff interviewed acknowledged the very high quality of childcare offered at Sure Start:

‘Sure Sure Start has very, very high quality childcare.’

‘[Sure Start] childcare facilities are top-drawer. They have set the benchmark.’

They also realised that for this reason Sure Start parents (and their children) were critical of the childcare offered by the peripatetic College childcare workers:

‘Some [Sure Start member] students then rubbish other childcare in the North and also the wee ones voted with their feet.’

‘The parents at Sure Start have now become such an authority on good quality [childcare] provision that they’ve become quite critical of some of our facilities.’

‘The Sure Start parents have high standards for childcare. I can understand their point of view but they also need to see it from ours. It has created an interesting debate.’

To the great credit of the College management and staff, the College’s response was, firstly, to meet with the Sure Start parents to discuss the issue and then to work with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood and the local Early Years Childcare Development Partnership to improve standards:

‘I’ve been to one *awful* meeting at Sure Start and the parents really had a go but *they’re right*. [...] I’ve had to listen to it and, as a person who is open to criticism, that’s been fine. It’s certainly kept me on my toes of striving for higher standards across the board. I’ve learned a great deal from it, as well as hopefully facilitating learning. It’s also facilitated working with what was the Early Years Partnership but now has adopted the Sure Start name. [We] work

very closely with them and we're trying to improve all the time. It's not about taking things as a criticism; it's about learning from it.'

One important way of *"learning from"* the criticism was that the College asked Sure Start Chelmsley Wood to *"support us to be as good"*. The College had thus begun to *"tap in to Sure Start's really good induction programme and on-going training"* and Sure Start had begun to employ some of the College crèche staff as part-time casual childcare workers so that they could experience the Sure Start approach firsthand.

From an interview with a local professional conducted as part of the local evaluation of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood (but not as part of the service evaluation of support for adult learning), it was clear that the demand for consistently high quality childcare had been successfully taken to the highest level by Sure Start members (including some of the adult learners interviewed):

' [...] the agreement, that's been confirmed by Sure Start, by the Parents Action [Community] Team, it's not just me saying this, but the Parents Action Team has made it clear, the parents' viewpoint to the Chief Executive [of Solihull Borough Council] is that we want high quality, consistently. And that's what they say. So that's going to be developed in a co-ordinated way using the funding that we've got for Extended Schools childcare, and that's also in conjunction with the Early Years Partnership. So, it all joins up.

The same interviewee also understood how vital this issue was to supporting local efforts to increase adult learning and employment:

'[The demand] to ensure that crèche facilities across north Solihull are of high quality consistently has come through the [Partnership] Board, has come through everywhere, through the school sites where there is community access, or FE courses, or the Accessing Learning courses. The fundamental reason why [adults] won't come is that if the crèche facilities aren't good enough they won't come. If they come once, and they are upset about their baby [child], they're lost. And, Job Centre Plus, they won't reach their target if people aren't happy with the childcare.'

### **3.3.5 Liaison with others to influence lifelong learning strategy in Solihull**

As well as seeking to influence adult learning at the operational level (see section 3.3.4), the adult tutor saw it as part of her remit to seek to mainstream what was being learned within the local programme. She therefore sought to join local strategic-level committees in order to *"feed back the voice of the learner"*:

'What I've tried to do, because the whole deal with Sure Start is to mainstream [the work], is to worm my way on to strategic committees so that I can feed back the voice of the learner. [...] I see that as fitting in with the whole Sure Start ethos about sustainability and tailoring services for the needs of the community. So that's a major part of my role.'

The desire to become a member of the relevant local strategic committees arose, in part, from an awareness of the awkward situation of Solihull College as the sole provider of adult and community education locally. Although sub-contracted by the local authority to make this provision, adult and community learning was only one small part of what the College delivered. As an incorporated college it *"operated as a discrete business"* and, at this corporate business level, the adult tutor thought, it was hard for the College to work in partnership with Sure Start for the benefit of one small area of its work - adult and community learning. For the adult tutor, seeking to influence mainstream provision, it was more effective to become a member of a strategic committee that could use its power to influence the College than it was to try doing so, simply as one local practitioner, albeit one who had information about learners', and potential learners', views and needs that would help the College meet its targets. She, therefore, joined two Borough Council committees: Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Local Area Planning Group jointly with Solihull Borough Council's Lifelong Learning Partnership; and the Local Strategic Partnership's Learning and Inclusion sub-group.

*Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Local Area Planning Group and Solihull Borough Council's Lifelong Learning Partnership*

As a result of the Adult and Community Learning Review 2003, the local LSC's Local Area Planning Group and the Council's Lifelong Learning Partnership had joint activities in local area planning and partnership work (Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership, 2004, p4). It met as one committee because, as Solihull is a small

borough, both groups involved the same people. It was to act as the "*learning arm*" of the Local Strategic Partnership's Learning and Inclusion sub-group and to feedback its outcomes to that sub-group (Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership, 2004, p4).

At the time of the research, the adult tutor had only attended two meetings and was still finding her feet but she was hopeful that it would be very useful. When asked to describe her role, the adult tutor informed the committee of what she could offer them:

'What I said was, "I can bring you the voice of the learner. In this group, I can be an advocate for learners. I can't see the point of having a group about lifelong learning if you haven't got the learner's voice represented."

Eventually, the adult tutor hoped to:

'get some learners on to that group. That's my goal. I've got a couple [of people] lined up who would do that. That will tick boxes for [the group]; that is something that they have got to have - consultation with the learners.'

#### *Local Strategic Partnership's Learning and Inclusion sub-group*

Aware of the important role of the Local Strategic Partnership's Learning and Inclusion sub-group, the adult tutor wrote to the committee, explaining why she would like to join and was accepted as a member. She regarded this committee as particularly "*useful at strategic level because you are talking to people who are not on the ground at all*". Thus, in that forum, acting as "*the voice of the learner*" was a powerful way of feeding in the views of Sure Start members to strategic planning.

#### *Impact of strategic work*

From the adult tutor's point of view, it had taken a long time to convince the sole local provider, Solihull College, that, by virtue of her role in Sure Start, she had a contribution to make that would be of benefit:

'[...] it's taken me a long time to convince people [at the College] that I have information that can help them to achieve their targets. I know what their targets are - of course it's about bums on seats but, with all the regeneration

going on in the area, more and more their targets are about public consultation and [the contribution of adult learning] to regeneration.'

Nevertheless, by the time of the research, she believed that there was *"a lot more interest"* in what she could offer and much greater understanding of what could be achieved by the College working in partnership with Sure Start and others:

'[...] not only could we serve the expressed needs of our families (because I knew what they were asking for, through the project) but also [Sure Start has] potentially 1 600 bums that could go on seats!'

This view was reflected by one of the College tutors interviewed who emphasised the potential market of students for Solihull College arising from its links with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood:

'There is an absolute whopping market out there of people who, traditionally, have often left school with few formal qualifications, [and who] find themselves with families. It would seem that this is the time that learners who've found themselves in that position, it's the time when they are most likely to engage in adult learning. [...] It seems to me there is an enormous market ...'

The growing awareness among Solihull College staff of the potential benefits of working in close partnership with Sure Start was, in part, linked to the adult tutor's proactive approach both to networking at operational level (see section 3.3.4) and to joining and working with two relevant local strategic committees.

### **3.4 Impact of adult tutor role: case studies of learning journeys**

#### **3.4.1 Learning journeys (steps taken, supports and barriers)**

In this section, the focus is on the learning journeys of the eight adult learners interviewed. In Figure 3.10, an overview of these journeys is set out.

#### **Figure 3.10 Overview of the case study adult learning journeys**

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- finding out about Sure Start Chelmsley Wood
- deciding to engage with Sure Start ("to give it a try")
- using the Sure Start Centre
- engaging with a 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

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Source: interviews with eight Sure Start members/adult learners

In Figures 3.11 to 3.13, this outline is used to describe the learning journeys of three of the adult learners interviewed, chosen at random from the eight case studies. (For layout reasons, the learning journeys of the remaining five are set out in Appendix 3.1C. The reader is encouraged to examine these examples also as they too provide illuminating evidence of the impact of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood and of its adult tutor role on the learning journeys of individuals.)

**Figure 3.11 Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 1**

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	From the midwife when pregnant.
Deciding to engage	After receiving a letter from Sure Start
Using the Sure Start Centre	<i>"I came to have a look around and it was really, really nice and I really liked it."</i>
Engaging with a group	"I went to the ante-natal classes to start with."
Making friends through Sure Start	<i>"I got to know a few people ....</i>
Engagement with other Sure Start groups	<i>... and I carried on from there."</i> Baby Massage, Baby Start, Early Start, Little Communicators, Childhood Matters
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	After Early Start, with support from adult tutor - applied for and completed short course at Solihull College
Next step in plan	Applied for childcare course at Solihull College
Longer term plan	Job in childcare sector

**Figure 3.12 Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 2**

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	From nursery staff just before oldest grandchild started at nursery
Deciding to engage	<i>"Because it gave [my grandchildren] more opportunities."</i>
Using the Sure Start Centre	Bringing grandchildren to use the walk-in facilities - i.e. the coffee area and ball pool
Engaging with a group	Baby Massage ( <i>"It was great. I enjoyed it. They give you really good, handy tips [...] and the kids love it. I thoroughly enjoyed it and the kids do. I have passed it on to a couple of friends."</i> )
Making friends through Sure Start	Meets up with friends at the Centre - <i>"For me, it's sharing with all my friends. ... It's our own personal chill time."</i>
Engagement with local community arising from engagement with Sure Start	Set up a new play group for local children, along with a friend and supported by Sure Start
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	Support from adult tutor. Flower arranging course.
Next step in plan	To do the literacy course
Longer term plan	To continue learning in order to support grandchildren's education.

**Figure 3.13 Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 4**

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	Met a member of Sure Start staff when oldest child attended Welcome to Nursery; told she could sign up as she was again pregnant
Deciding to engage	Encouraged to join by local midwife during pregnancy but <i>"it wasn't until she was about six months old I started using it. [...] When you've never heard about it, you feel a bit wary."</i> Decided to join based on word of mouth from <i>"listening to other people talking about it"</i> .
Using the Sure Start Centre	Used the drop-in service. Went on the organised trips.
Engaging with a group	Life in Mind
Making friends through Sure Start	Made friends with staff in crèche.
Engagement with groups	Just for Us
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	With support from adult tutor, applied for and was successful in obtaining a casual hours, part-time administrative job
Next step in plan	Further courses in IT using open access IT facilities on Chelmsley Shopping Centre
Longer term plan	Permanent part-time office work

*Supports for the journey*

The *"snowball"* effect, whereby initial engagement in a Sure Start group led to making friends with others in the group which, in turn, led to mutual support to engage in further groups, was common to most of the learning journeys and was succinctly expressed by one of the adult learners interviewed:

'It just snowballs. You do one thing and then somebody else goes "Oh, come and do this with me". Then we go and do that one and then, once you know a few faces, you just seem to go round all of [the groups].'

It was also clear from the interviews that Sure Start *staff*, as well as other Sure Start members, were instrumental in encouraging further engagement with groups and activities offered.

The Sure Start support network continued outside the Sure Start Centre. For example, one adult learner interviewed spoke about the way in which the continued support of two friends from Sure Start had helped her to continue with short courses the three of them took at Hatchford CARE.

'They were great. We all supported each other. It made you want to go [to the course] to see them because you'd got such a friendly relationship going. Even now, not very often because of work, we see each other. It was good. We all supported each other and we were very confidential with everything with each other. And they felt the same way [as I did] about learning new things. [...] That we wanted to move forward, learn new skills, that sort of thing.'

This learner also talked about being "*really impressed*" with the tutor who ran the courses attended at Hatchford CARE. In addition, she was aware that her own motivation made her experience her return to adult learning in a different way than she had experienced adult learning prior to the birth of her children: "*this time I really wanted to do something*".

In the interviews, the eight adult learners were asked about what had supported them in their 'learning journey', with prompts asking about support from the adult tutor, from themselves and from others. Figure 3.14, provides a summary of the support mechanisms identified.

**Figure 3.14 Supports for the learning journeys**

**Support provided by Sure Start Chelmsley Wood**

- support from adult tutor (see section 3.3, esp. 3.3.1)  
*“She helped me a lot.”*  
*“Mainly [the adult tutor]. Mainly her role. If you ever raise anything that you’re interested in with her, she goes out of her way to - she comes back with armfuls of information and leaflets and brochures.”*  
*“[She] is really friendly. She’s lovely. Knowing that you’ve got someone who can take you down there [to the course]. ... Knowing that [she] had the connections there, that she could sort it out made me feel more at ease.”*
- high quality childcare in the Sure Start crèche  
*“The first thing is obviously the childcare [...]. I’d never left my children anywhere [before]. They are supportive on how you left them in the crèche and if I wanted to go back at any time. They’ve got phones [in all the rooms] and you know your children are in the same building. You get to know the crèche staff which gives you confidence to be able to come upstairs and sit and do a course without worrying.”*
- confidentiality within Sure Start  
*“For a lot of people, it’s quite difficult to admit that, ‘OK, I didn’t do very well at school’. When you fill in applications forms, [...] it can make you feel a little bit small. So the confidentiality thing is quite a big issue. [...] Whatever you say, it stays within the two or three people in the room.”*
- supportive friendships formed through Sure Start  
(e.g. see text above)
- supportive staff at Sure Start, for example:  
*“The staff are really nice. If they were looking down their noses, you’d think, ‘I’m not going back there’, but everyone is really nice.”*  
*“If people are willing to think about [returning to learning], the [Sure Start] staff support them fully.”*
- learning opportunities provided at Sure Start  
(see summaries of adult learning journeys)
- information about other local learning opportunities displayed at Sure Start  
*“Sure Start make [information] available to the parents that are willing to take the opportunities. They have days when the College come in and, leading up to new terms, we have the college stand in there and there’s normally a couple of members of staff who are stood there, willing to talk to anybody about it. ...*

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*... There's always the College information in the information stand [in reception]."*

- lack of pressure to engage with learning  
*"Sure Start don't push people that don't want to do [adult learning]. They wait for the lead to come from them."*

#### **Others types and sources of support**

- Children's Information Service (which has a stand and a part-time worker in Sure Start Centre reception area)  
provided information about jobs in childcare
- local Library  
source of information about local adult learning opportunities
- local adult learning provision  
*"[The course] was at one of the schools [...] which was in walking distance and it was easy.  
"I started an NVQ. That was at Chelmsley Campus. That was handy for me. It was local. I don't want to go all the way to Solihull when I've got one on my doorstep."*
- supportive local adult learning providers, willing to be flexible  
[course at local school] *"They were really flexible which was really good. If I couldn't make it one time, it was OK because they would help me catch up the next time. [...] They're trying to see if they can put on a course at more suitable times for next year which I thought was really nice. if you've got a problem and you explain it to them, then they are quite adaptable. They do try to find a solution."*  
[course at Solihull College] *"I expressed my concerns and they were really nice and worked round it and said, 'I'm sure we can do this', which was great. [...] My tutor has worked round it."*
- crèche provided alongside adult learning opportunities  
*"The college offered to crèche [my son] while I went out and did [requirements of course]."*  
*"The fact that they provide childcare and crèches in most of the [adult learning] places I've heard of, that helps a lot."*
- local job opportunities  
local job opportunities encouraged a return to learning and to employment

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- self-help and motivation

*“I’ve never given up on learning [...] but, prior to my baby, they were never work-related course.”*

*“I just decided it was about time I looked into what I can and can’t do so I started ringing round different universities.”*

Source: interviews with eight Sure Start members/adult learners

College tutors interviewed also spoke of the support Sure Start Chelmsley Wood provided to its members that facilitated their participation in adult learning. Interestingly, one expressed this in terms of support for mental health, linking this to the very different *“attitude and ethos”* at Sure Start, compared to elsewhere:

‘Through [the adult tutor], I’ve got to know a couple of members of staff there and been interested in the mental health work that they offer. So, you know, in terms of a shift in attitude and ethos that is often lacking - . A lot of people will have experienced agency support, whether it’s through Education or Health or Social Services, that is dictatorial and patronising simultaneously. I’ve seen plenty of examples of that within this College and plenty of, “Ooo god, you’re working at Chelmsley! Ooo dear!” So the [Chelmsley students] that you work with, what they must come across beggars belief really in terms of [that attitude] being a life-long experience of theirs. One thing that I’ve noticed [at Sure Start] is how respectful and how empowering the interactions of Sure Start users are with members of staff there. It’s really, really refreshing to see that.’

### *Barriers in the way*

The adult learners interviewed were also asked about what barriers or obstacles had prevented them from taking part in adult learning prior to their involvement with Sure Start Chelmsley Wood. As illustrated in Figure 3.15, these were both provision-related (for example, timing of courses, minimum class sizes) and attitudinal (for example, fear of returning to learning).

### Figure 3.15 Barriers to adult learning experienced

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#### *Issues related to provision*

- timing of courses - difficult to fit around childcare responsibilities
- minimum number of students requirement - some courses did not start; others were pulled after a number of weeks because attendances dropped
- unattractive quality of some crèche provision
- having to apply for free crèche place/s
- particular course requirements (e.g. resulting in child having to be put in crèche which cost money)

#### *Attitudes of self and others*

- fear of returning to learning (and employment) because of length of time out of that environment
- questioning whether it was possible to study and look after baby at the same time (*"I didn't want to neglect [my daughter] in any way"*)
- employer and work colleagues not supportive of pregnant employee seeking to complete work-related qualification
- stigma attached to doing qualifications (such as GCSEs) when older
- pressure from peers that returning to learning was *"getting above yourself"*; that going to college made you *"not one of the girls"* (*"It's so easy to click in to that group and think 'I'll have this as my life'"*)
- sense of resignation that life is not going to offer more than living on benefits, tied in to fear about returning to learning and/or work

#### *Personal circumstances*

- working full-time - wanted to spend free time with husband/family
- caring responsibilities - *"I couldn't have studied until my daughter started sleeping"*

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Source: interviews with eight Sure Start members/adult learners

It is noteworthy that the issue of a lack of local childcare of a quality that matched provision at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood was raised again in this context as a barrier both to returning to employment and to learning:

'At the moment, I would only work at weekends or in the evenings (when my husband can look after the children) because I don't trust [the childcare] anywhere yet, except at St Patrick's wrap-around - the lady there is Sure Start trained so I would leave them there. To me, it's second nature how Sure Start think about childcare and how they treat children.'

'At Chelmsley Campus there is a nice nursery on the same site but once you've seen the crèche here [at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood] you are spoilt.'

'I couldn't actually do that course because the children wouldn't settle in the crèche there.'

'Crèche facilities are always available but [...] the little one is really fussy about who he stays with. It's easier to leave him with a friend but they have to go out as well.'

The cost of crèche places and the fuss of applying for free crèche places were also raised as barriers to adult learning. For example, one adult learner spoke about being put off doing an employment-related course that required voluntary work experience one day a week:

'I then pay to crèche [my son] when I don't have no income to go and look after other people's children. It just doesn't make sense.'

Another spoke about *"all the forms you have to fill in to apply for free crèche places"* and compared that to the free crèche provision at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood where *"it's provided without extra forms"*.

The interviewees from Solihull College also had views on the barriers faced by adults from north Solihull who wanted to participate in adult learning. They, too, talked about lack of access to high quality childcare and the discouraging effect of courses being pulled due to not attracting the designated minimum number of students. In addition, they raised issues such as:

- a lack of public transport links to the former Chelmsley campus and to the main Solihull College campus (this latter they regarded as preventing students continuing on to courses at Level 2 and above which were only offered at the main campus);
- a dearth of appropriately pitched, validated, funded courses for first steps learning "that would hit the level for people who are very tentative about being in education";

- a historic lack of investment in the College buildings and infrastructure (such as the library) at the Chelmsley campus which had made the learning environment unattractive;
- a general perception that College was for 16-19-year olds, not for adults.

*Ideas for improving the learning journey*

The adult learners interviewed were asked for their ideas about what needed to be done to improve the opportunities for, and experience of, adult education locally. Their views are summarised in Figure 3.16.

Interestingly, there was a keen awareness that, of the barriers summarised in Figure 3.15, it was the attitudinal ones that were hardest to address. As one adult learner explained:

'The people who run the local colleges are aware of the difficulties in getting people back in to education. It's a more deep-seated problem than can be dealt with by open days and leaflets. It's a case of trying to get the word out, like through Sure Start. It needs to be done through talking to people one-to-one to say there is no harm in trying to better themselves. [...] To change attitudes and opinions, that's the hardest thing.'

**Figure 3.16 Ideas for improving opportunities for, and experience of, local adult education**

- more provision like Sure Start Chelmsley Wood (*"Children's Centres will be great. It's a shame that [currently] others are out of the [Sure Start] catchment area. We need more facilities like this so that everyone can benefit."*)
- Sure Start should advertise the role of the adult tutor - for example, posters saying, "If you need help in getting back in to learning ..."
- continue - and increase - local access, for example, in local schools
- continue - and increase - availability of English courses, maths courses, literacy courses
- courses run at times to suit local people (one suggestion was that a questionnaires could be sent round asking what times suited people)

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- access to adult learning opportunities for teenage mothers and fathers
- wide advertising of opportunities and of eligibility for free places
- where information about adult learning opportunities is made available, such as in the library, have someone available for people to talk to about the options available (similar to the adult tutor at Sure Start)
- break down the North/South divide in Solihull (so that, if desired, people from Chelmsley Wood can go to college in Solihull and remain eligible for free places; so that there is no stigma attached to being from the North of the borough; so that the same benefits are offered regardless of area)
- crèche provision which is of such a standard that people can feel confident about leaving their children
- funding to cover crèche and fees for those who can't afford fees and the cost of childcare
- extend the range of work-related opportunities and courses that included work experience so that people could build up the confidence to return to work
- remove the perverse incentives of the benefits system/low wage economy (*"For people who get benefits, sometimes it doesn't balance out for them to go back to work if the pay is low."*)
- support people in building up their confidence and their sense of it being *"OK to learn"* - (*"Chelmsley Wood has been downtrodden for a few years. It's a confidence-building thing. People get stuck in a rut."*)

Source: interviews with eight Sure Start members/adult learners

The College interviewees also offered their views on how the local situation for adult learners could be improved. Their vision included:

- mainstreaming the adult tutor role used in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood across the whole area (because the role had been so successful in recruiting learners and had shown the benefits of working in partnership with organisations such as Sure Start);
- an integrated transport system that would enable learners to access adult learning provision easily via public transport;

- investment in improved quality of accommodation and of facilities for adult learners in community education venues and in maintenance of the learning environment
- a shift in attitude represented by genuine consultation with learners and potential learners about the adult learning offered.

For example, one College tutor interviewed, when asked what educational facilities s/he would like to see in the Chelmsley Wood area, said:

'I'd like to see a dedicated environment. I'd like to see high quality resources. I'd like to see a range and variety of provision. On the whole the attitude of the College is that, "Oh well, the learners of Chelmsley will need engineering and bricklaying as courses". I'd like to see a complete shift in attitude, in the assumptions that are being made about what people who happen to live in a particular geographical location need and want, and some form of relationship and dialogue and communication between [the College and] the families and people who are going to be potential customers. I'm sure there are boxes somewhere being ticked saying that "Yes, that's been consulted on, that's been consulted on" but my feeling from people that I've worked with is that that's not the case, that they're not consulted in terms of what the College provides in the north [of Solihull].'

### **3.4.2 Hopes for the future**

The summaries of the learning journeys of the adult learners interviewed given in Figures 3.11 to 3.13 and in Appendix 3.1C show that each one had hopes for the next step and for the longer-term future. These included 'first steps' learning, accredited learning and return to employment. The supports they wanted in order to achieve these hopes were:

- a college campus in Chelmsley Wood (during 2004, the campus had closed down)
- job opportunities in Chelmsley Wood
- adult education courses offered at times that suited those with childcare responsibilities (for example, that fitted in with dropping off and picking up children from nursery and school)

- work-based access to training courses.

The interviewees were also asked about what they hoped for their children, growing up in Chelmsley Wood. Interestingly, their responses fitted the outcomes framework of Every Child Matters (HM Government, DfES, 2004), as summarised in Figure 3.17.

### **Figure 3.17 Hopes for their children growing up in Chelmsley Wood**

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- Be healthy  
*"to be healthy";*  
*"confident that they have a nice community of friends";*  
*"time out where they can be free and express themselves without you leaning over them (but where they can be safe as well)"*
- Stay safe  
*"to be safe";*  
*"to stay away from trouble and be a good boy";*  
*"somewhere safe to play, a really secure area where they're going to be safe"*
- Enjoy and achieve  
*"to be clever and intelligent";*  
*"to be happy";*  
 a good standard of schooling at primary and at secondary level - *"you just want them to do well, don't you?";*  
*"getting a good level of education"*
- Make a positive contribution  
*"after-school clubs";*  
*"community things for them to do, like Brownies and Guides"*  
*"out of school activities, football"*
- Achieve economic well-being  
*"I just hope there will be courses available for [my daughter] to go on to obtain the qualifications that she'd need for that particular job that she wants to go for"*  
*"for them to be happy in whatever they choose to do [for a living]"*

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Source: interviews with eight Sure Start members/adult learners

Their hopes for their children's future were bound up with hopes for the rising standard of education locally, hopes based on an awareness of the educational

benefits Sure Start had had on its child members, and of news of a new secondary school opening (Grace Academy). Hopes for an improved community for their children were based on the networks of friendships created among adult and child members of Sure Start and on the impact of the Parent Action Community Team (PACT) which was seen as a way in which parents could give voice to what they wanted for their children in the local community.

Overall, there was a sense of optimism:

'I think, perhaps, we are at a stage where we're at the best level with our children growing up, it's developing around them. We're making sure that [what we want] is actually going to be there for them.'

'By the time, [my son] is at senior school age, the new school will be up and running for a few years which is good.'

'Parents are so concerned about what the schooling is going to be like for their children. I think there is more [discussion] about it now. I think it's given me the confidence that the level is increasing and that [my son's] education will be OK.'

There was also a sense of the continuing importance of 'second chance' learning through adult education:

'I think when they are at school, they do sort of get side-tracked with other kids because they are just growing up. Sometimes they don't realise how important [learning] is. I mean, I've been there myself. I left school with no qualifications. I think it would be nice if there were choices for them. It's not until they leave school that they realise, "I should have [worked harder] because now I need [qualifications]." I think that is the case for a lot of people. It certainly was for me. [...] More than anything, I think it would be nice if they had the right courses to go on.'

### 3.5 Cost-effectiveness

In this section, the costs incurred in providing an adult tutor within the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood local programme are explored and set against the outcomes achieved so that a judgement can be made as to whether or not these outcomes justify the outlay of resources.

#### 3.5.1 Costs

The local evaluator and relevant members of the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood team, including the adult tutor, attended a National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) training session about measuring cost-effectiveness at a local level, delivered by the Regional Support Officer for Sure Start evaluation and based on the work of Pamela Meadows (no date) for NESS. Subsequently, however, after discussion with the Finance Officer, it was decided to approach the costing exercise in a slightly different way than that recommended by NESS so that the costings calculations would be of greatest use to Solihull College. Annual costs were calculated as total salary (including all on costs) *plus* indirect costs. Indirect costs were calculated in two ways:

1. by taking the salary (including all on costs) as a proportion of the total salary bill (i.e. £34 596 divided by £560 188 = £0.062) and then calculating 0.062 of each overhead cost (see Table 3.1)

**Table 3.1 Annual costing - method 1**

**(overheads apportioned by salary divided by total of salaries at Sure Start)**

Direct Costs				
	Salary (including all on costs)			34 596
Indirect costs (apportioned by salary divided by total salaries)				
	Premises			
	overheads	84 752	x 0.062	5 255
	Other overheads	184 392	x 0.062	11 432
	Cost of capital	25 140	x 0.062	1 559
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>52 842</b>

Further details and notes are provided in Appendix 3.1A

2. by taking the number of full-time equivalent staff (N = 23.99 fte) and dividing the overheads by that number (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Annual costing - method 2**

<b>(overheads apportioned on basis of number of staff - N=23.99)</b>				
Direct Costs				
	Salary (including all on costs)			34 596
Indirect costs (apportioned by dividing overhead costs by number of staff)				
Premises				
	overheads	84 752	÷ 23.99	3 533
	Other overheads	184 392	÷ 23.99	7 686
	Cost of capital	25 140	÷ 23.99	1 048
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>46 863</b>

Further details and notes are provided in Appendix 3.1A

From Solihull College management's point of view, the costs borne by the College were minimal but included:

- the cost of the appropriate proportion of the salary of the other tutors from the College who delivered courses within the Sure Start Centre;
- the cost of any material resources used for these courses (for example, the cost of ingredients used during the cookery course delivered);
- the cost of providing childcare for those attending the courses.

Some of these costs were defrayed by Learning and Skills Council funding for Family Learning courses.

### **3.5.2 Ways of measuring effectiveness**

In Solihull College, the effectiveness of the secondment of the adult tutor in relation to costs incurred 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.

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.

**Figure 3.17 Measuring the effectiveness of the seconded adult tutor: views of interviewees from Solihull College**

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***What to count as direct outcomes:***

- the number of Sure Start members attending the classes offered at Sure Start Centre;
- the number of Sure Start members attending other adult and community education classes offered by Solihull College;
- the number of Sure Start members who progressed from non-accredited to accredited learning;
- the number of adults from the Sure Start area who have gained employment through completing the Classroom and Teaching Assistant training programmes run by Solihull College, after having engaged first with Family Learning groups - *“that really has been a clear route to employment”*;
- the number of Sure Start adult learners who have improved self-esteem and higher aspirations for themselves, their children and their local area;

***Other relevant outcomes to count:***

- the increase in adult learners in non-accredited and accredited learning within the Chelmsley Wood area (‘the Sure Start patch’);
- improvements in children’s levels of achievement in local primary schools;

***Other benefits to take into account when assessing cost-effectiveness:***

- adult tutor had signposted Sure Start members to courses available through Solihull College - *“we don’t have to do a lot now to recruit the right numbers”*;
- at least some College staff had realised that there was *“an absolute whopping market out there”* of adults with young families - *“it’s the time when they are most likely to engage”*;
- adult tutor had provided continuing support for Sure Start members who have gone on to College courses - *“they have someone to check back with and to get support from once on the course”*;

[continued]

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- adult tutor had worked closely with the College to “*review its processes and other qualitative issues*” relating to the programmes that are offered;
- Sure Start members had challenged Solihull College’s customer service ...
- ... standards and have highlighted this as an area for the College to improve - “*sometimes [the Sure Start members] have not been treated too well when they arrived at College. Some customer service works needs to be done ...*”;
- through Family Learning, Sure Start members had become “*a very coherent and positively assertive group of people*” who had, for example, written to the College Principal to ask for an update on plans for College provision in north Solihull;
- Sure Start members have been “*completely committed*” students on the courses offered by College tutors at Sure Start;

**External funding available to defray costs incurred:**

- Learning and Skills Council funding for Family Learning Literacy and Numeracy courses.

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Source: interviews with Solihull College staff

**3.5.3 Facts and anecdotes illustrating effective outcomes**

*Activity levels at the Sure Start Centre*

Between October 2001 and October 2004, *158 different individuals* had received one-to-one support and advice through conversations with the adult tutor. In some cases, these were one-of discussions but in many cases this support involved many conversations and such additional support as accompanying the person to the location of a course (for more detail, see Section 3.3.1).

In addition, *67 adults* had attended Early Start groups (for details, see Section 3.3.2) and *21 adults* had attended Family Literacy (including three non-members).

Numbers were not collated for attendance levels at one-of workshops delivered by the adult tutor or by another College tutor but, for example, the Poetry Workshop offered by a Solihull College tutor in May 2004 was attended by 11 women whilst four

women attended the one delivered in October 2004. (Evaluative comments from the participants are given in Appendix 3.1B.)

According to attendance lists provided by the adult tutor, by the end of 2004, *30 adults*, including both men and women, had attended Just 4 Us courses providing participants with a series of tasters of different courses available through adult and community education at Solihull College. (Some people attended more than one series of Just 4 Us - they have only been counted once.)

Moreover, in assessing effectiveness of the adult tutor, relative to the costs incurred, it must be borne in mind that, at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, all the 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. (The Sure Start groups attended by the adult learners interviewed are listed in Figures 3.11 to 3.13 and in Appendix 3.1C.) The adult tutor's role in supporting this programme-wide work is described in section 3.3.2. In this sense, cost-effectiveness judgements must also take account of the number of adults accessing the local programme. In 2004, this number was *681 families* or 1 666 individuals (including the children under 4 years).

In addition, 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.

#### *Increased attendances at Solihull College provision*

According to one College interviewee, 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*:

'I've seen a huge progression in learners. ... There has been a massive uptake over the last year [2004]'

The interviewee put this increase down to the work done at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood, as well as the work done by the local Library and by the College's Family

Learning tutors. Particular mention was made of how helpful Sure Start had been in recruiting for the College:

‘Sure Start has been very, very helpful in hosting and recruiting for the College within the Sure Start patch, and not just for courses we have put on in the [Sure Start] Centre.’

The same interviewee also reported an increased take-up of the College’s Level 2 provision, stating, too, that:

‘Sure Start [Chelmsley Wood] has been very supportive in that process’.

Another College interviewee reported that one third of all the learners on the Classroom Assistant and Teaching Assistant Foundation Degree course run by the College worked [lived?] in Chelmsley Wood. A different interviewee also talked about the success of that course as a route to employment for women in Chelmsley Wood:

‘One thing that has worked extremely well in Chelmsley Wood and in the Sure Start area is that, from Family Learning, there has been a tremendous amount of people in the North [of Solihull] who have gained employment because we’ve put on a Classroom and Teaching Assistant training programme. That’s been a real success story for the North. It’s one of those main vocational areas that’s worked in the North: that really has been a clear route to employment. And schools are keen to employ people from the local area.’

In Table 3.3, figures supplied by Solihull College for 2003-2004 are given, showing the level of enrolment from the Chelmsley Wood postcode areas.

**Table 3.3 Chelmsley Wood learners enrolled at Solihull College, 2003-04**

<b>Postcode area</b>	<b>No. of learners on accredited courses</b>	<b>No. of learners on informal courses</b>	<b>Total</b>
B36	378	166	544
*B37	891	237	1 128
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 269</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>1 672</b>

Source: E-mail from Director of Community Education, Solihull College, 20 January 2005

\*Note: Sure Start Chelmsley Wood Centre is in B37 postcode area.

One Solihull College manager interviewed, when reflecting on these figures (Table 3.3) expressed pleasure at the improvement this showed compared to previous years: *“That is really very, very strong. That is very good compared to previous years.”*

Although requested from the College in order to look at year-on-year trends, figures for previous years were not provided. However, some sense of context for the 2003-2004 figures for the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood area can be gained by noting that the target figure for the College for adult and community learning for 2004-05 was a total of 4 000 learners, drawn from the whole of Solihull (Ward & Hutchings, 2004).

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. Regarding this, one Solihull College interviewee said:

‘I would be interesting to know how much impact Sure Start Chelmsley Wood has had on that. I bet that four years ago [i.e. prior to Sure Start], that picture would have been very different.’

From the same ACL Review, it was possible to compare levels of participation in adult learning in the Chelmsley Wood ward against those in the nearest two wards, Smithswood and Kingshurst-and-Fordbridge. This showed that there were roughly 7.5 times as many learners in the Chelmsley Wood ward as in either of the other two. The figures are provided in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Participation in adult learning in three local wards, 2003-04**

Ward	No. of learners, aged 19+, all levels	No. who completed courses	No. who achieved accreditation
Smithswood	460	330	152
Kingswood & Fordbridge	463	306	145
Chelmsley Wood	3 488	2 526	916

Source: Adult and Community Learning Review of Birmingham and Solihull (LSC Birmingham & Solihull, 2004)

The reasons for this huge differential are not clear but it is clear from the evidence that Sure Start Chelmsley Wood has had an important part to play in supporting adults in returning to learning.

### *Progression*

Of the 158 Sure Start members who had received one-to-one support from the adult tutor (to October 2004), the adult tutor knew of 72 who had then progressed to various forms of adult learning, including community education courses, Family Literacy, Family Numeracy, Learn Direct, IT courses, personal development courses (e.g. Introduction to Counselling), mainstream courses at Solihull College, NVQ courses, Access to Higher Education courses. This evaluation found that, in fact, the number of adults seen by the adult tutor who progressed on to adult learning was greater than 72 - for example, four of the eight adults interviewed were not listed with a known progression outcome but, when interviewed, all four had indeed gone on to further learning or employment (details of these learning journeys are provided in section 3.4.1).

The case studies of learning journeys described in Section 3.4 provided individual stories and showed clear evidence of progression from one level of learning to the next or progression from learning on to employment. Other examples of learners' progression were given by other interviewees also. For example, College interviewees spoke of individual cases of progression:

- a Sure Start member who had begun adult learning by accessing the College's Family Learning provision had gone on to enrol on a Foundation Degree course;
- a Sure Start member who attended the Skills for Life Centre in north Solihull, went on to do the Classroom Assistants course, then to act as a representative of the student group and to achieve success in seeking support from the College to sort out students' finances
- a small number of Sure Start members who had done personal development work, then progressed to completing an Open College Network accredited course, Introduction to Counselling, and were planning to go on to take a Certificate in Counselling through the University of Warwick

- a Sure Start adult learner who then went on to join a Skills for Life programme, Routes and Rambles, with embedded numeracy work;
- students on Solihull College courses who said, *“Yes, I started at Sure Start”*.

The adult tutor spoke about two Sure Start members who started by doing Early Start and had later gone on to study at University:

‘Two people who did Early Start are now at University. One of them was already on that road but Early Start gave her the support and I supported her by learning conversations through her GCSEs and Access to Higher Education course. The other one already had A levels but was at rock bottom. She did Early Start and I supported her through the application process. We did mock interviews together and she got in. She did it by tapping in to the support available here.’

To give another example: a parent Partnership Board member spoke about her progression into employment having begun with the confidence she gained from her role on the Board. With support and encouragement from the adult tutor, she went on to do the Introduction to Counselling course and then moved into employment.

Another interviewee spoke about witnessing learning journeys from informal to accredited learning:

‘What I’ve seen is people who have been helped through Sure Start go on to set up playgroups and get NVQ qualifications. That can only help to build up the local community.’

As well as the testimonies of the adult learners reported in Section 3.4.1, the role of the adult tutor in enabling this progression was readily acknowledged by interviewees from the College.

‘[The Sure Start learners] have a user-friendly person on the premises to signpost them on to the next level. [The adult tutor] has taken learners to the main College campus.’

### **3.5.4 Making a judgement about cost-effectiveness**

The evidence presented in this section about activity levels in the Sure Start Centre, about increased participation in adult learning, and the numbers of individuals going on to find paid employment and/or active roles within the local community should be used to make judgements about the cost-effectiveness of providing one embedded adult tutor. However this is done, in the end, every judgement about cost-effectiveness in the public sector becomes a political one: the funding choices made by central and local government and the principles on which these decisions are based.

If enabling the lives of individuals and families to be changed for the better through access to first steps learning that results in improved confidence, progression to next steps learning, community involvement, accredited learning and/or employment is accorded a high political value locally, then local government will be able to find the money to continue to fund the annual cost of between £47 - 53 000 to provide one adult tutor embedded within what is now the Sure Start Children's Centre.

In Solihull, there is every reason to argue that this should be the case because the evidence presented in this service evaluation has shown that the role of the adult tutor embedded in Sure Start Chelmsley Wood has achieved outcomes that accord precisely with the visions, objectives, aims and targets of key local government documents, including:

- Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership's Three Year Development Plan, April 2004 to March 2007 (Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership, 2004);
- Solihull Adult and Community Learning Strategic Development Plan, 2004/2007 (Ward & Hutchings, 2004);
- the Community Strategy for Solihull, 2003-2013 (Solihull MBC, no date a)
- the north Solihull Strategic Framework (Solihull MBC, no date b).

There is a strong argument to be made that the costs of sustaining this provision 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.

In this context, it is fitting to report the view expressed by one member of the administration team at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood who, when asked about the overall impact of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood on the local community, made particular mention of the adult tutor's role in this and concluded that turning even *one* parent's life around for the better would count as "*success*":

'And then there is the ethos that [the adult tutor] creates. She encourages the parents to carry on learning and training. You only need one parent to take that up to make it a success!'

As this evaluation has shown, 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 fact that it was written in at the beginning and that it has been sustained - I have a letter from Sure Start saying it will be sustained until 2007. So much of the funding we have from Government is for the short-term and the learners have everything and then it is taken away from them. This person can make a difference, and believe me, *she has made a difference* and that, I must underline, as being an exemplar of future funding opportunities.'

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 this enabling support is not "*taken away*" from the learners in north Solihull.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This service evaluation of the role of adult tutor within Sure Start Chelmsley Wood has presented extremely positive findings drawn from both quantitative and qualitative information. This positive view is an accurate reflection of all the data gathered and of the analysis which triangulated views of learners, of College staff and of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood staff, as well as quantitative information from Solihull College and from the local Learning and Skills Council. Limitations on the data collected were that only a small number of women learners were interviewed and that the views of male learners were not included (see section 3.1). However, the triangulation of a range of information sources gives robustness to the findings. This is further supported by the findings being congruent with the views of a wide range of Sure Start members who participated in groups and training sessions at Sure Start Chelmsley Wood during 2001 until the end of 2003 (Cullen & Lindsay, 2005a).

#### *Evaluation against aims*

In section 3.3, the stated aims of the adult tutor role were set out. These were:

- to liaise with Solihull College to ensure provision of *"a range of accredited training programmes to promote the self-esteem, confidence and new skills for local parents, both generally and specifically to enable them to develop peer support services"* (NCH, 2000);
- to *"facilitate and signpost people to learning opportunities in the community education and mainstream provision of Solihull College"* (interview with College manager).

The evidence presented in this service evaluation has shown that both these aims were being achieved through the adult tutor role. For example, in section 3.3.2, it was shown that the adult tutor ensured that training was in place for parent volunteers (who often play a peer support role within groups at Sure Start) and for those who were parent representatives on the Partnership Board. In addition, evidence has been presented showing that parents who have participated in adult learning opportunities, supported by the adult tutor, had gone on to provide peer support through, for example, setting up two new local play groups, setting up and facilitating a new group, Baby Cafe, and setting up and participating in a new community action group, PACT.

Further, in section 3.3.1 the one-to-one support offered by the adult tutor was shown to have resulted in Sure Start members going on to participate in community education and mainstream provision at Solihull College. This was also clear from the adult learning journeys summarised in section 3.4 (and Appendix 3.1C) and from the statistics presented in section 3.5.3 (for example, in Table 3.3).

#### *Evaluation in terms of cost-effectiveness*

Section 3.5.4 of this evaluation sets out the arguments for stating that the adult tutor role could be regarded as cost-effective. The outcomes included the lives of individuals and families being changed for the better through:

- supported access to first steps learning that resulted in improved confidence;
- supported progression to next steps learning, community involvement, accredited learning and/or employment.

In addition, there was evidence of:

- increased activity levels within the Sure Start Centre;
- increased participation in adult learning;
- increased numbers of individuals going on to find paid employment and/or active roles within the community.

In short, the outcomes arising from the work of the adult tutor accorded with the expressed visions, objectives, aims and targets of relevant key local documents (see, for example, the ACL objectives summarised in Figure 3.4) and the total cost was relatively small - around £47 000 or £53 000, depending on approach to costing.

#### *Evaluation against relevant national objective for Sure Start local programmes*

In Sure Start Chelmsley Wood's revised Delivery Plan (NCH, 2001), the role of adult tutor was regarded as contributing to the national Sure Start objective of "*strengthening families and communities*" and specifically to the target of reducing the number of families with children aged birth to 3 years where no-one was working. No data was available to ascertain whether the role impacted on this specific target.

Indeed, within the local programme, the view was that the target was best supported by enhancing parents' skills and knowledge. There was plenty of evidence that the role of adult tutor was having a positive impact on ensuring that Sure Start members who wished to do so were able to access the skills necessary to obtain a job or to return to work when ready.

*Evaluation against vision statement of Sure Start Chelmsley Wood*

The work of the adult tutor contributed to all three of the sentences that make up the vision statement for Sure Start Chelmsley Wood which is:

'In Chelmsley Wood, the Sure Start Partnership wishes to break the cycle of professionally determined and run services to provide ones that are jointly planned, run and managed by parents in partnership with professionals. These services will help all parents to improve their skills and abilities to ensure that their children thrive and are happy. We wish to regain the sense of community that used to exist in Chelmsley Wood.'

By contributing to the training programmes for parent volunteers and for parent representatives on the Partnership Board, by using Learning Conversations and the Solihull Approach, by bringing the voice of the learner to operational networks and strategic committees, by supporting Sure Start members in their demands for a wider range of courses, for high quality childcare and for courses at times and in locations that met local need, the adult tutor was contributing to breaking the cycle of professionally determined and run services.

The one-to-one work and all the adult learning groups both inside and beyond the Sure Start Centre to which the adult tutor signposted learners contributed to helping parents improve their skills and abilities in general and some, at least, focused on improving skills and abilities that ensured the children of participants were more likely to thrive and be happy (for example, Early Start).

Through friendships formed at Sure Start and in local adult education classes and through participating in volunteer training, which in some cases led on to positive engagement in the local community, the Sure Start adult learners were supported by the adult tutor in contributing to the regaining of a local sense of community.

### **3.7 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.

## **Appendix 3.1 Contents**

A. Data on costs.....	.....
B. Adult learners' evaluation of two Poetry Workshops .....	.....
C. Further case study examples of learning journeys.....	.....

**A Data on costs of having an adult tutor - see section 3.5.1 for discussion**

**Costings and workings provided by Finance Officer, Sure Start Chelmsley Wood**

***Sure Start Chelmsley Wood College Tutor Workings Annual Costs***

<b>1. Costing Based on Overhead Apportioned on salary</b>					£
<b>Direct costs:</b>					
Direct Salary Costs (including on costs)					34 596
<b>Indirect Costs:</b>					
Premises					
	34596	X	84752		5 234*
	560188				
other overhead costs	0.062	X	184392		1 1432
Cost of Capital	0.062	X	25140		1 559
<b>Total</b>					<b>52 821</b>

<b>2. Costing Based on Overhead Apportioned based on No of Staff</b>					
<b>Direct costs:</b>					
Direct Salary Costs College Tutor					34596
<b>Indirect Costs:</b>					
Premises	No of staff	23.99	84752		3533
other overheads		23.99	184392		7686
Cost of capital		23.99	25140		1048
<b>Total</b>					<b>46863</b>

\* For simplicity in section 3.5.1 of the report, this figure is given as the result of multiplying £84 752 by the rounded figure of 0.062, i.e. as £5 255 and the total is therefore given as £52 842.

**Notes on costings**

**Workings**

**1 Cost of Capital**

Total cost of refurbishment £718300

No depreciation charge on refurbishment; however, furniture & equipment would be depreciated

NHS currently using a 3.5% charge on capital after depreciation

**2 Methods of apportionment**

NHS Costing Manual detailing methods of apportionment

activity basis NHS report via reference costs using No of patient contacts include telephone contacts

**3 On costs**

general rule 15-16% for projects to cover on costs

**4 Overheads**

overheads calculated on basis of WTE staff

premises costs based on usage per sq metre

building costs apportionment higher than PCT due to large reception/coffee/crèche area

## **B Adult learners' evaluation of two Poetry Workshops - see section 3, 3**

### **B.1 Poetry Workshop, 21 May 2004 - evaluation comments from participants**

The May 2004 Poetry Workshop was a stand-alone two hour session attended by eleven Sure Start, female, adult learners. It was conducted by a tutor from Solihull College. The focus of the session was enabling the writing of collaborative poems around a theme; on this occasion, the many actions of a mother's hands.

At the end, a sheet of paper was provided on which participants could write evaluation comments. The comments written are presented here according to theme:

#### ***Prior apprehension***

'I was scared beforehand, butterflies in my stomach.'

#### ***Emotional engagement***

'Very emotional.'

'People have been honest and brave.'

#### ***Sense of achievement***

'Brilliant! I didn't think I would be able to write a poem, but I did.'

#### ***Enjoyable session***

'Really great. Enjoyable.'

'Time went quickly.'

#### ***Benefits from the session***

'Good way of releasing feelings.'

'Therapeutic.'

'Clears your head. Less stress.'

'A way of expressing yourself without being physical.'

'Gets your brain working.'

## **B.2 Poetry Workshop, 13 October 2004 - evaluation comments from participants**

The October 2004 Poetry Workshop was a stand-alone two hour session attended by four Sure Start, female, adult learners. It was conducted by an external tutor. At the end, a sheet of paper was provided on which participants could write evaluation comments. The comments were:

‘For the short space of time I was in the session, it made me look at the enjoyable insights to life, love and living. Small crowd, but most enjoyable.’

‘Really enjoyed it again. Made me feel happy about things I would probably normally cry at and how your feelings and thoughts can be put down and written in poetry without rhyming. Please, please let’s have another poetry session.’

‘[The] tutor is fab. A marvellous facilitator. Helps the creative juices to flow.’

‘Disappointed in turn out. Must get the word out. Please can we do it again. Maybe have a reserve list.’

### C. Further case studies of leaning journeys

In section 3.4, summaries were given of the learning journeys made by three of the eight Sure Start adult learners interviewed (Adult learners 1, 2 and 4). Here the learning journeys of the remaining interviewees (adult learners 3, 5, 6, 7 & 8) are summarised.

#### Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 3

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	From local midwife
Deciding to engage	Attended ante-natal classes; Community Development Worker made home visit after the birth
Using the Sure Start Centre	<i>"I have come every week since [my son] was 7 weeks old!"</i>
Engaging with a group	Ante-natal and then Baby Start
Making friends through Sure Start	<i>"The other mums were really welcoming."</i>
Engagement with other Sure Start groups	Pippa, Baby Talk, Rhythm Time, Top Tots, Numeracy, Literacy
Greater involvement in Sure Start	Became parent representative on the Partnership Board
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	Supported by one-to-one conversations with adult tutor. Making Choices short course. Introduction to Classroom Assistants short course.
Next step in plan	Teaching Assistants course at Solihull College
Longer term plan	Qualify to work in schools and then, after gaining suitable experience, go on to study child psychology.

### Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 5

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	Sure Start staff came to housing for young mothers
Deciding to engage	Joined in group run by the Sure Start workers at the housing for young mothers
Using the Sure Start Centre	Used the walk-in facilities (coffee area, ball pool, toilets) - <i>"It was a nice, pretty safe, indoor area to play in which was free."</i>
Engaging with a group	Baby Massage
Engagement with other Sure Start groups	Not applicable (lived outside the Sure Start area)
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	Healthy Eating short course. Supported by adult tutor to continue with plan to go to university. Open University degree.
Next step in plan	Finish OU degree
Longer term plan	Gain PGCE qualification and become a teacher.

### Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 6

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	From health visitor at previous address who told her she was moving into the Sue Start area
Deciding to engage	Phoned Sure Start and Community Development Worker did a home visit, bringing the information pack. When baby was about 6 months, Sure Start phoned up and invited her to join the PIPPA group.
Using the Sure Start Centre	(With second baby used the drop-in sessions.)
Engaging with a group	PIPPA group. ( <i>"That was a nice group. I think we done that for about a year. I found that really, really interesting."</i> )
Making friends through Sure Start	<i>"I made some really good friends [at PIPPA group] which is quite important, as well, because I didn't now anyone with young children."</i>
Engagement with other Sure Start groups	<i>"[PIPPA group] led on to different things."</i> Other groups attended were: Rainbow Tots, (and, with next baby) ante-natal, Baby Start, Baby Massage, Play and Stay.
Greater involvement in Sure Start	Trained as a Sure Start volunteer. Did the breast-feeding peer support training. Attended Solihull Approach conferences.
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	Short courses, such as Just for Us, Healthy Eating, Literacy, Introduction to Counselling, Making Choices. Part-time work in retail (her application process supported by the adult tutor).
Next step in plan	Numeracy short course, to be able to support her child's education.
Longer term plan	Increase working hours as children get older; make decision about returning to IT work or changing career direction to work in childcare.

### Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 7

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	From Health Visitor when child was 1 year.
Deciding to engage	After the Sure Start Community Development Worker did a home visit and brought her the Welcome Pack.
Using the Sure Start Centre	Used the walk-in facilities (coffee area, ball pool) and the drop-in sessions
Engaging with a Sure Start group	[not clear from interview which group was the first one she attended]
Making friends through Sure Start	[This interviewee talked about the friendliness of <u>the staff</u> : " <i>The people at Sure Start are so good. They are so interested in you and your children.</i> "]
Engagement with other Sure Start groups	Other groups and activities attended were: workshops (for example on poetry, card-making, jewellery-making), Women's Group, Baby Start, Baby Massage, PIPPA, Rainbow Tots
Greater involvement in Sure Start	Parent representative on Partnership Board
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	Supported by adult tutor. Flower arranging course at local school. Craft course at Keepers Lodge. Just for Us Short courses at Hatchford CARE, such as First Aid. Family Literacy, Family Numeracy Introduction to Classroom Assistant course
Next step in plan	Level 2 English course at Solihull College
Longer term plan	[no information - had to cut short the interview]

### Example of a learning journey: Adult learner 8

Steps on the journey	Details
Finding out about Sure Start	From health visitor after birth of baby
Deciding to engage	After Sure Start staff visited her at home and brought a welcome pack. <i>"They told me what it was all about and it went from there."</i>
Using the Sure Start Centre	<i>"It's really good that people have a place to go that is safe, friendly and welcoming."</i>
Engaging with a group	Stress Buster group.
Making friends through Sure Start	Yes
Engagement with other Sure Start groups	Other groups and activities attended were: another group run by the Community Psychiatric Nurse, PIPPA group, Baby Massage, Play and Stay
Returning to adult learning and/or employment	Just for Us (twice) Part-time work in retail. Encouraged by adult tutor, did short courses, such as, assertiveness training, Introduction to Counselling. Change in career direction, supported by adult tutor and the short courses mentioned, into part-time work in the voluntary sector ("part-time work that is actually full-time!").
Next step in plan	To complete Foundation Level through work-based route
Longer term plan	To obtain NVQ Level 2 through work-based route

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors would like to acknowledge all the interviewees whose views and experiences are incorporated in this evaluation; without their willingness to contribute their time and to share their views, this service evaluation would have been impossible. Our thanks also to the Sure Start Chelmsley Wood administration team who addressed and sent out all the invitation letters to adult learner members and to the Finance Officer who provided the information on costs. We would also like to thank our colleagues in CEDAR who contributed to the work, especially Stephen Cullen for help with transcription.