

The University of Sheffield
School of Education



**EVALUATION OF GLEADLESS VALLEY
SURE START PROGRAMME
March 2003 - August 2004**

FINAL REPORT

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Report dated: September 2004

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Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers

Amanda Boughton-Brown, Anne Davies, Sally Fellows, Gwyn Fields, Wendy Kettleborough, Jean Kidner, Paula Williams, Jo Zasada.

Workshop Participants

Sure Start programme staff, parents, Partnership Board representatives, Community Group representatives, Partners who have Service Level Agreements with the programme.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This report is the product of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* staff, SLA partners, Partnership Board members, community group representatives and local parents who have shared their expertise in order to make the evaluation as practically-based and useful as possible.

The report is organised as follows. **CHAPTER 1, THE RESEARCH** provides background to the evaluation and the research team's objectives. **CHAPTER 2, OUR APPROACH** briefly explores the impact of past events on the *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* programme so that the focus of the evaluation can be fully understood, before moving on to establish the research team's approach to the project. In **CHAPTER 3, DESCRIPTION OF THE TEAM, PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES & SERVICES** is presented. **CHAPTER 4, KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS** explores the detail of the data we have collected linking 'Headline Findings' to national objectives and local issues. **CHAPTER 5** discusses **WAYS FORWARD FOR THE PROGRAMME** which is still evolving and has clearly been experienced positively by some stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on the importance of reassuring parents and agencies who support them of the merits of a more transparent and inclusive approach to *Gleadless Valley Sure Start*. Action and Implementation Plans are provided to ensure there is something of importance to all stakeholders in the report that can be worked with to support the programme's continued development and make a greater success of *Sure Start*.

CHAPTER ONE

The Research

Background to the Evaluation

- 1.1 Gleadless Valley Sure Start is one of eight Sure Start programmes in Sheffield which are part of the Government's strategy to improve health and social well-being, raise educational achievement and strengthen families and communities in the context of disadvantage. The programme is committed to promoting the best start in life for children under four through the integration of early education, childcare, health and family support.
- 1.2 Sure Start is described as a 'cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion' (<http://www.Sure Start.gov.uk>). Further context is provided by the Government's Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* which set out proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children and young people. Against this backdrop, Gleadless Valley Sure Start seeks to ensure that children and families in its local area have access to services, opportunities and practical support which can help to break cycles of disadvantage and improve the lives of all children. The programme is expected to contribute to initiatives in health, education, social and emotional development and community support which will have a major impact on the well-being and aspirations of all young children, their families and the communities within its reach.

Requirements for Evaluation

- 1.3 Gleadless Valley is a Round 5a Sure Start programme. In common with all Sure Start programmes Gleadless Valley Sure Start is obliged to evaluate the service it provides. Therefore, in 2003 the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme committed itself to an evaluation to assist in

planning further development of services and provide independent and objective feedback from the full range of stakeholders.

- 1.4 The Programme Manager for *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* became a key driver setting up, and centrally involving *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* in a Combined Evaluation of Six Sheffield Sure Start programmes. At the end of 2002, Six Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers came together to constitute themselves as a community of Sure Start practitioners whose programmes would undergo parallel evaluation and shared development.
- 1.5 It was envisaged that evaluating *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* as part of a combined evaluation of six Sheffield Sure Start programmes would offer many advantages to the individual programme and to the city of Sheffield and its environs more widely. A combined evaluation would open up opportunities for forging new insights into the respective concerns of service providers, build awareness relevant to negotiation over the roles and responsibilities of various agencies in fulfilling the Sure Start delivery targets and move all stakeholders along the road to the reconfiguration of children's services. That the Programme Manager for *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* was willing to enter in to this process of open evaluation alongside other programmes, reflects the commitment to transparency that *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* programme has brought to working partnerships based in the community.
- 1.6 In March 2003 six Sheffield Sure Start programmes jointly commissioned Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn to undertake their evaluations through the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. The evaluation of *Gleadless Valley* was thus set alongside evaluations of five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes to bring added value to the process of individual programme evaluation by maximizing scope for mainstreaming good practice.
- 1.7 The emphasis on rolling out the principles driving the Sure Start approach to all services for young children and families tasks individual Sure Start programmes with a significant duty. Participation in the combined evaluation of Sheffield Sure Start programmes helps to ensure that *Gleadless Valley* is mindful of the extent to which it must meet the challenge of this work and locates a specific resource through which to support it.

- 1.8 It was agreed that the evaluation would take as a key objective an in depth focus on process and be designed to improve understanding and practice by building on the knowledge and experience of participants. The evaluation would be approached as a process of learning, not of inspection and the role of the evaluators was interpreted as to help those involved with Gleadless Valley Sure Start think through what they are doing.
- 1.9 This emphasis is complimented by the view of Naomi Eisenstadt, Director of the National Sure Start Unit, that Sure Start providers already know a great deal about what benefits children's development ~ what remains to be determined is how to pull together services and how to work together as a team in pursuit of this (Eisenstadt, 2004).
- 1.10 It was established that the Gleadless Valley Sure Start evaluation would comprise a drawing together of work undertaken by the programme and a positioning in relation to challenges ahead.

Research Teams Objectives

- 1.11 Our objectives for specific evaluation of the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme were to:
- **evaluate the functioning of the programme in relation to Sure Start aims**
 - **engender open discussion** of concerns, tensions and anxieties which affect the work of the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme and make recommendations about how these may be usefully addressed
 - **highlight good practice and develop thinking** in relation to possible directions in which the programme may move to accommodate new changes and operationalise the priorities it has established
 - **consider strategies to promote inclusion** of groups the programme is finding 'hard to reach'

- **identify relevant training and new challenges** - and identify the role of *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* in both acquiring training and providing it for different groups within the communities it serves
- **clarify who are the most appropriate people/agencies to develop particular aspects of *Gleadless Valley Sure Start's* work**
- **promote collaborative and mutually beneficial evaluation practices.**

CHAPTER TWO

Our Approach

Recognising context

- 2.1 The Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme has grown considerably since its Delivery Plan was approved in September 2002. There are approximately 530 children under the age of four in the area. There are five or six languages spoken, with a small but significant black and minority ethnic community, the largest component of which is of Somali origin. There are also a small number of asylum seekers who often only transiently resident for six to eight weeks. In the main the community is white working class living on long established council estates. The valley itself has poor transport links.
- 2.2 The programme received a very positive six month assessment and so its planned future expansion will take place in favourable circumstances. The programme is, nonetheless in an early stage of its development and all stakeholders agree that any problems identified through evaluation should be seen in this context.
- 2.3 There is very strong commitment to moving the programme forward in the service of local people. In this report, we feel it should be clear what steps must be taken to enable this to happen.

Research Process

- 2.4 We wished to conduct an evaluation based on transparent processes so that people could see the different perspectives of a range of stakeholders and understand how impressions are made and conclusions are drawn, in order to promote positive engagement with recommended processes of change. You will see that like our research approach, this report is also structured to further processes of engagement. Stakeholder perspectives are positioned alongside each other to show how taken for granted assumptions about particular practices are open to a range of interpretations. Action and Implementation Plans have been constructed to suggest practical steps that might usefully be taken on the basis of views put forward.
- 2.5 We use, in all of our work, a *partnership based action research approach* to both develop and implement a model of participation which aims to be of use to all those involved in the research process. The principle methodological tool chosen in consultation with the Programme Manager was the *Process Evaluation Method [PEM]* (Dunn and Moore, 2003), which places emphasis on enabling open dialogue of issues prioritized by participants, including informal, covert and contested issues which often militate against developing inclusive practice. In this way we set out to engender cross stakeholder debate in order to help promote change and accelerate the Sure Start agenda of supporting children, parents and communities through the integration of early education, child care, health and family support services.
- 2.6 This way of working often throws up more than the data one is aiming to get at. For example, criticism of the programme on one hand is complemented by numerous expressions of gratitude and admiration for the efforts and practices of particular agencies, individual staff and workers on the front line of service delivery. The data reported below therefore is most usefully engaged with in a discursive way - with a view to thinking about how further opportunities can be created for the views of different stakeholders to be brought into open debate.

PHASE ONE - SETTING UP

- 2.7 Throughout the Project our main link has been with the Programme Manager for *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* who briefed us on the scope and aspirations for the work and facilitated the participation of Sure Start stakeholders in this study. The Programme Manager and administrative staff have acted as liaison and provided us with all relevant background information to the work. We wish to record our appreciation of their support.
- 2.8 In addition we have attended regular meetings with Programme Managers from seven Sheffield Sure Start programmes to keep abreast of citywide issues as reported and experienced by Programme Managers that have a bearing on evaluation issues.

PHASE TWO - INFORMATION GATHERING

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

- 2.9 We undertook a documentary analysis of written materials provided by the programme including all aspects of the *Delivery Plan* and *Hard to Reach Strategy*. In addition, the *Sheffield Sure Start Mainstreaming Services* document (Davies 2003) has helped us to locate the programmes work within the context of the national early years agenda. Analysis of all of this information was used to build up a background picture of the programme's work and to help us formulate questions to be asked at data gathering workshops.

SETTING AN AGENDA

- 2.10 An initial interview was held with the Programme Manager, who as the key person involved in the development of the programme provided an overview from her perspective. On the basis of this preliminary meeting we then constructed and agreed a workable, realistic agenda for information gathering that would add value to practice as it unravels and make transparent all aspects of the process, including our emergent thinking.

Evaluation Workshops – Process Evaluation Method

- 2.11 For four key stakeholder groups the central data gathering exercises conducted took the form of exploratory workshops designed to take stock of their perspectives. Groups involved in exploratory workshops were
- Programme Staff
 - SLA partners
 - Partnership Board Members
 - Community Group organizations (city-wide)
- 2.12 The Programme Manager was tasked with identifying named individuals to participate in workshops for each of the stakeholder groups. All programme staff were invited to attend the Staff Group workshop. Although the Programme Manager recognized the importance of encouraging attendance at workshops, and stressed the importance of evaluation for the programme, optimum participation was not always possible. Those who could not attend workshops had their comments given consideration and factored into our analysis when these were either put in writing or communicated directly to the Research or programme team.
- 2.13 The aim of workshops was to encourage stakeholders to self assess, in broad terms, ways in which from their perspective the Gleadless Valley programme meets user and potential user needs. Participants were asked to explore what works well in their view in relation to delivery of services and what might be needed to develop and enhance the programme's functioning in the future. We also talked to people individually during workshops if they wished, to provide an opportunity for individual perspectives from 'within stakeholder groups' to come forward.
- 2.14 An initial working document was compiled to outline and review the perspectives gathered from each group. This was circulated to all contributors who were invited to feedback on any matters of accuracy or interest. Account was then taken of numerous, often detailed written and oral submissions from respondents giving feedback or providing further information.
- 2.15 We found across the city that community group representatives had difficulties meeting together and were not available in sufficient numbers to participate in programme specific workshops. We therefore invited representatives of 41 community groups identified either by

Gleadless Valley Sure Start staff as working locally, or by Voluntary Action Sheffield as working with families with young children across the city to an evaluation workshop designed to gather the views of community groups on their relations with, and aspirations for, Sure Start in Sheffield. We extracted points of relevance to the Gleadless Valley programme from this information.

- 2.16 A document was produced which was, as far as possible agreed by contributors, to give a fair and accurate account of discussions held with each stakeholder group. Agreed documents for each group were then collated into a single publication, along with additional data on parent perspectives, (see below) and circulated across the groups to enable each of the different stakeholder groups to gain insight into the perspectives of others. The compilation of different perspectives on the programme was then used as the focus of a workshop for representatives from all of the contributing stakeholder groups who came together to discuss key issues arising.
- 2.17 This event, called the 'Mixed Stakeholder Workshop', allowed for responses to the data emerging from different viewpoints to be shared with a view to maximizing collective thinking on the development of the programme. Our objective was to develop a future agenda for the programme based on the emergent and collective priorities of those who contributed to the evaluation.
- 2.18 The workshop structure was also intended to ensure that those who have taken part in the evaluation process are supported in their capacity to respond to what is learnt from each other.

Picking up Perspectives of Parents

- 2.19 Following the lead from the national Sure Start evaluation team our work with parents was designed to focus on how parents feel about involvement with the programme, how convenient Sure Start services are for parents in the area, any barriers preventing parents accessing services and how satisfied parents are with the services they use.
- 2.20 To gather this information in ways which would be easy and comfortable for parents, members of the programme team suggested activities which

a roving researcher could attend to observe and talk with parents. The focal activities chosen for *Gleadless Valley* were a SMILE Meeting (Parent's Forum), a Stay and Play session and a meeting for teenage parents. Getting alongside parents in their everyday encounters with Sure Start turned out to be hugely informative, offering many more benefits from research enquiry than we had imagined. A spin-off of the contact between parents and the roving researcher has been that many parents we met indicated that 'next time' they might feel confident enough to be actively engaged in producing 'Sure Start snapshots' themselves and in developing their role as community researchers for subsequent evaluations.

- 2.21 As a direct result of the Programme Manager's commitment to an open process of evaluation and to mainstreaming good practice, we have been able to produce a Training Resource, based on the data collected alongside parents, over and above the requirements of our original tender document (see Annex). This resource entitled 'Maximising Inclusion in Sure Start' provides 'snapshots' of everyday practice in the delivery of Sure Start activities drawn from across the six programmes looking at delivery issues together as part of the process of shared evaluation. We have presented this data separately, in descriptive format, in order to try to give readers - in as brief a space as possible - a feel for what delivery of a Sheffield Sure Start programme is actually like and to illustrate a variety of approaches to working towards Sure Start objectives and promoting participation and involvement. The material is drawn partly, but not exclusively, from *Gleadless Valley* Sure Start and identifies many issues of central concern to the programme. The Training Resource can be used to engender further self assessment of programme's delivery. Data which relates specifically to activities delivered by *Gleadless Valley* Sure Start has been incorporated into our analysis.

Telephone Survey with Community Groups

- 2.22 A telephone survey was conducted to gather perspectives of local community group representatives operating in the *Gleadless Valley* area. Working in partnership with the programme, a list was drawn up of local groups in the *Gleadless Valley* area. In total 13 groups were identified, including local toddler groups and pre-school providers. Each of these was contacted by a member of the research team in order to set up an

interview. In some instances there was no response to the initial telephone call, in these cases, a further two attempts were made to access views. In total seven groups were consulted by telephone. One group refused to take part in the survey. The remaining groups provided a valuable insight into the interaction between Gleadless Valley Sure Start and local community organisations.

Supplementary data on the Partnership Board

2.23 A postal questionnaire was distributed to Partnership Board members to elicit individual perspectives on partnership working in the programme. In addition, a Partnership Board meeting was observed. In order to explore in further detail the elements of parent participation, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents from the Board. Parent respondents elected to be interviewed in their homes.

Other Research Activities

2.24 In addition supplementary interviews were conducted in response to specific requests and when Research Directors felt it appropriate to explore particular view or opinion.

2.25 To further supplement the data, Research Team members appraised documentation provided by the programme including Risk Assessment documentation. We attended Regional Evaluation Workshops and Sure Start Conferences in Sheffield, York and London for further background.

Mainstreaming Activities

2.26 The Programme Manager was invited to take part in four additional research workshops aimed at making connections between issues raised by the data within the Gleadless Valley programme and issues raised across the five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes participating in the Combined Evaluation. These 'Air and Share' workshops for Programme Managers focused on:

- issues raised by programme staff
- issues raised by SLA partners
- issues raised by Partnership Board members and
- issues concerning parents.

- 2.27 The aims of the city wide Air and Share sessions were to
- identify common areas for development
 - develop awareness of obstacles to making a greater success of Sure Start which might persist for structural reasons rather than programme specific ones
 - explore possibilities for Programme Managers of evolving a shared response to emergent issues where appropriate and
 - initiate first stage development work around mainstreaming activities and good practice.

These activities have also been analyzed in terms of new avenues they offer the programme.

Qualitative data

2.28 It is important to note that the methodology on which the majority of data gathering has been based is a qualitative one. This means we have been interested to understand people's experiences of how the programme works from their necessarily subjective positions in order to bring these into relation with each other. Qualitative method does not however mean that data collected around individual views is not interrogated and 'triangulated' against those of others. We have used Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1998; Moore 2004) as a well-established method of ensuring that ideas and recommendations which we develop and make *emerge from*, and are *grounded in*, what Gleadless Valley Sure Start stakeholders say, perceive and experience.

2.29 We knew that due to the newness of the programme, its systems for gathering quantitative data were in their infancy as this evaluation began to get underway and that quantitative data available to the evaluators would be embryonic at best. We therefore decided to prioritize a focus on the way that the programme is perceived and valued by those involved and to address issues surrounding the production of quantitative data as part of this process.

Participants

2.30 More than 50 stakeholders made sustained and in-depth contributions to this evaluation over an eighteen-month period. Many others were involved

in a less intensive way and we wish to acknowledge and thank everyone who participated in the evaluation process for their constructive and committed approach to this enquiry. All stakeholders made us welcome and gave of their time in a thoughtful and open way. They were considerate of each other's views and perspectives and raised matters of concern in a positive and respectful manner which has enabled us to gather a wealth of information. Some difficult issues surfaced but were always appropriately attached to deeply held values and very real concerns about the quality and impact of the programme.

- 2.31 We have been impressed by a strong sense of shared commitment to getting 'best value' from the evaluation of *Gleadless Valley Sure Start*. We have been particularly impressed by the willingness of the Programme Manager to be responsive to issues raised throughout the course of the evaluation.
- 2.32 Given the limited time and resources available, it was not possible for us to talk with everyone we would have liked to nor indeed to meet with everyone who wished to meet us.

Report Production

- 2.33 It was established that work undertaken would lead to a report with recommendations for the future development of the programme and suggestions for improvement in its current functioning and remit.
- 2.32 This document comprises our **Final Report** on the evaluation. In June we presented our analysis of *Headline Findings* to a mixed group of *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* stakeholder and took feedback. The Programme Manager then collated and submitted further feedback in writing during the course of July, bringing focal information as up to data as possible. In August 2004 we presented a Draft Report to the Programme Manager for feedback on matters of clarity and technical accuracy of the draft report. This final report takes full account of feedback received on the Draft Report.

CHAPTER THREE

Describing the Programmes Work

- 3.1 This chapter outlines the nature of the Sure Start team operating in Gleadless Valley and the range of activities they and partner agencies are involved in providing. Information is given to describe to the best of our knowledge each of the services delivered by the programme as the evaluation draws to a close in August 2004. This helps to illustrate how the programme seeks to work towards Sure Start objectives.
- 3.2 It should be noted that the nature and scope of activities in any Sure Start programme is likely to be continually evolving, so this chapter also details planned future activities as far as these are known. Again, as the programme must be flexible to meet local needs, the activities detailed in this chapter will change and be adapted as new interests evolve and new groups of people develop their links with the programme.

THE GLEADLESS VALLEY SURE START TEAM

The programme is delivered by a group of professionals to cover a number of specialisms; early years, family support, health, parental involvement and management and administration. At the time of writing of this evaluation (July 2004), the Sure Start team consisted of the posts outlined below. These posts are full time unless otherwise indicated.

- Programme Manager
- Health & Social Care Co-ordinator (2 p/t posts)
- 2 Outreach Workers (2 x 21 hrs)
- Midwife (4 days Sure Start, 1 day PCT since 04/04)
- 2 Breastfeeding Workers (1 x 16 hrs, 1 x 21 hrs)
- Safer Care Worker (3 days per week)

- 2 Family Support Workers (1 x 30 hrs, 1 x 21 hrs)
- 1 Home Care Worker (21 hrs)
- Parent Involvement Co-ordinator (4 days)
- Early Years Co-ordinator - not yet appointed
- Development Worker (through SLA 28 hrs)
- Community Teacher (0.5 SS)
- Community Teacher Supporter (14 hrs)
- Admin Co-ordinator (35 hrs)
- Admin Worker (15 hrs)
- Finance Officer (2 days)
- Domestic Assistant (11.5 hrs)
- Monitoring Officer (2 days)
- Volunteer/Training Co-ordinator (16 hrs)
- Food Development Worker (1 day)

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES OFFERED THROUGH GLEADLESS VALLEY SURE START

These are described under the following headings: health, early years, parental involvement and supporting families and communities. All of the core services are for all families, although some are universal and some are referred services. The Programme understands that hard to reach families need to be accessing core services and this is the long term aim, although it is likely they will need additional support to enable it to happen. In practice, many of the services cut across more than one category.

HEALTH

- [Antenatal and Postnatal Support Group](#) - Wednesdays at Gleadless Valley Methodist Church 1-3pm. Thursdays, drop in at Newfield Green Clinic, 1.30-4pm. Each session has a discussion topic, e.g. 'weaning', 'benefits & housing advice', and has local midwives and health visitors attending. Funded by Sure Start .
- [Antenatal Education](#) - As above. In addition, through working alongside other initiatives such as Sure Start Plus, the Sure Start midwife is working on ways of engaging with local primary and secondary schools.

- [Breastfeeding Advice](#) - Breast Feeding Café Fridays 12.30-2.30pm at Pemberton Block. Weekly activities and talks such as a walk to the Sure Start allotment, baby massage and a weaning party cooking demo. Funded by Sure Start.
- [La Leche Breast Feeding Peer Support Training](#) - the first round of training has run for 10 parents over 10 weeks. Funded by Sure Start.
- [Sex Health Advice](#) - co-ordinated by the Sure Start Midwife, and with the support of the Breast Feeding workers, advice and samples are provided through appropriate groups and activities.
- [Regular Health Visitor Contact](#) - Health Visitors are working alongside the Sure Start programme to ensure (and record) all contact with pre-8-week children. In addition they are working with the team to support new group initiatives such as the postnatal support group.
- [Healthy Eating & Food Preparation](#) - the Healthy Eating worker has piloted a number of ways of engaging parents in these activities - including one 2 one support, 'curry cooking' groups, exercise classes, and weaning groups.
- [Weaning Advice](#) - Weaning Parties in the home, the Sure Start food worker visits and provides all food and equipment. Sessions include advice on what to give a baby from 4 months onwards and which foods to avoid. Also what to look for when shopping for ready made baby food in jars. Funded by Sure Start.
- [Aqua-natal Swim Sessions](#) - Swim sessions at Springs Leisure Centre, term time only, mum and baby aqua sessions, 10am-11am at £1. Subsidised by Sure Start.
- [Aerobics Class](#) - Starting Friday 17th September 10-11am at Tenants' Hall, term time only. Creche provided and funded by Sure Start. Course funded by Adult Community Learning (ACL).

- **Stop Smoking Support** - Joint funding between Sure Start & city-wide service to address Sure Start target. Home visits from smoking cessation-trained staff.
- **Baby Massage** - Funded by Adult Community Learning (ACL) / Sure Start, regular courses. Minimum of 2 courses a year run at a locally accessible and suitable venue.
- **Teenage Parent/Pregnancy Group** - 1 to1 care by the Sure Start Midwife (option of delivery). Peer group runs on a weekly basis and includes transport both to and from the group. Co-ordinated by a joint approach between Sure Start family support, midwifery and community teaching teams it focuses on a balance between encouraging peer support, ensuring physical health and providing information on parenting etc.

EARLY YEARS

Services of the Outreach Team are divided between universal and referred services:

Universal includes:

- **6-8 Month Home Visit** - Play based around natural household resources. Funded by Sure Start.
- **1st Year Birthday Party** - 4th Wednesday in each month at Newfield Green Library. (All children who are 1 in that month are invited). Funded by Sure Start.
- **18-20 Month Home Visit** - Visit based around language development. Funded by Sure Start.
- **2½ Year Home Visit** - To start in November 04. Based around foundation stage activities. Funded by Sure Start.

Referred services involve more intensive and focused support over a period of up to 6 weeks on specific elements of child development.

- Stay & Play sessions are facilitated at 4 venues around the area, on a weekly basis. Each group is co-ordinated by the PLA Community Play Worker.
- The Sure Start Community Teacher provides advice, planning guidance and practical support to all eligible providers, Stay & Play groups, etc in the area. In addition she provides training workshops for providers and parents (e.g. Story Sacks) and promotes the use of activities which positively value diversity of communities in the locality.
- Bookworm Babies Scheme - aims to encourage library use by providing parents with tokens each time they use the library (and they receive a reward of a free book after 6 tokens).
- Play & Say sessions - are facilitated through the contract with the Speech & Language Service, and provide opportunities for parents and professionals to examine ways of promoting speech & language development pre-nursery.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- **SMILE** (Surestart Meetings In a Local Environment) Group - Held 1st Monday of the month at Gleadless Valley Methodist Church. The group consists of local parents and is now constituted, meaning Sure Start supports rather than runs this group. Funded by Sure Start and group's own funds.
- **Coffee Mornings (Coffee Capers)** - To be re-launched at various venues throughout the valley, the first to be held at Valley Park Community School in September. The aim is to broaden the basis of parental consultation which can feed into the SMILE group. Funded by Sure Start.
- **Day Trips** - e.g. Flamingoland, Cleethorpes. Funded by Sure Start primarily, with one contribution by SPICE.
- **Publicity** - Leaflets, produced in ten different languages, newsletters sent out twice a year. Funded by Sure Start.

- **Volunteering** - parents are provided the opportunity to work alongside either Sure Start staff or funded partner agencies as a volunteer. This supports aims of increasing confidence and skills and may assist in securing employment in the longer term.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- **Day Trips** - as before, e.g. Flamingoland, Cleethorpes. Funded by Sure Start primarily, with one contribution by SPICE.
- **Access to Family Support Team** - referral process in place for either professional or parental self referral. The team offer group and individual support on parenting, boundary setting, routines etc and aim to reduce the social isolation of families by encouraging engagement in universal services.
- **Benefits Advisor** - through a SLA with a local provider both one 2 one and drop in service support is offered on a wide range of issues including housing and benefits.
- **Home Start Sheffield** - Home start provides a befriending service to families in the area who have been identified as needing short term befriending support. Also supports facilitation of parenting courses and run follow-on groups to offer longer-term support.
- **Cot-age** - through a SLA support, advice and the fitting of key safety equipment is provided for Sure Start families at a greatly subsidised cost.
- Equipment loan i.e. electric breast pumps, video - items are available for loan from the Breast Feeding support team.
- **Advertise Courses** - training provided and facilitated by the local Life Long Learning Co-ordinator and other providers is circulated via the team to local parents. Information boards will aid this in the future. The Sure Start team also facilitate a number of courses themselves -

focused upon the skills of team members (e.g. breast feeding, first aid).

- [Sure Start Allotment scheme](#) - This includes working with 5-a-day Scheme and Woodlands on the clearing and development of a community garden and allotment space for families to use. Currently this project is in the early stages of development.

LIST OF SLA PARTNERS

Gleadless Valley Sure Start has Service Level Agreements with the following partners:

- **Pre-School Learning Alliance**

Providing a Community Development Worker who facilitates Stay & Play sessions.

- **Home Start**

Home Start provides a befriending and support service to local families. In addition, Home Start recruit local people onto Home Start volunteer training courses and co-facilitate parenting groups and follow-on groups.

- **Heeley Advice Centre**

Based at the Heeley Advice Centre an advice worker is able to respond to referrals passed on from professionals within Sure Start and the surrounding area for advice on financial, housing and other related issues. Home visits and drop-in sessions are available.

- **Cot-Age**

The provision of advice, equipment and fitting of safety equipment

- **Speech and Language Services**

Three sessions a week are provided by this service. This work has included a drop in service at the local Stay and Plays, work with family learning and story sack sessions, 'Stay and Say' session at Newfield Green Stay and Play and training for staff on speech development.

- **Tiddlywinks**

Provides crèche services to Gleadless Valley Sure Start groups / activities.

- **Sheffield Hallam University / Sheffield University**

Undertaking 18-month evaluation of the programme.

- **Early Years Education and Childcare Service**

Contract in place for 3 year jointly funded post of the Community Teacher.

- **Dietician Services (Community Food Worker)**

1 day a week for group / 1-1 work on aspects of healthy eating / exercise and weaning.

COSTS AND RESOURCING APRIL 2003 - MARCH 2004

Sure Start Expenditure	
Outreach & Home Visiting	£ 55,864.00
Support for Families & Parents	£131,522.00
Play, Learning & Childcare	£ 59,342.00
Community Healthcare	£ 60,979.00
Premises	£ 28,024.00
Salaries Management	£ 44,045.00
Salaries Administration	£ 26,696.00
Other Admin Costs	£ 34,057.00
Evaluation of Programmes	£ 4,362.00
	£444,891.00

PLANNED FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- Aqua natal groups (facilitated by a trained midwife - JAN 05)
- Support for parents who are drug misusing (OCT/NOV 04)
- Aerobics classes (SEPT 04)
- Exploration of piloting other options for Health Visiting 2 year contact visits - possibly similar to the Sure Start 1st birthday party contact. Currently in discussion.
- Workshops for parents re: volunteering process & general job / training applications. (OCT 04)
- Sure Start toy library is currently being set up and will be operational by Christmas 2004.
- Re-drafting of the Parent Involvement Strategy may extend the current SMILE group with more venues and more meetings. (SEPT 04)
- 3rd newsletter to go out after the summer
- New notice boards in key locations (surgeries, clinics, shops, housing office etc.)
- Programme leaflet finalised and available by September
- Training for parents / professionals / community groups is various and ongoing (no definite dates as yet).

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary analysis of stakeholder perspectives

- 4.1 This section presents a thematically organized drawing together of the data that shaped the development and key messages of the report. What can be seen from our analysis of the data collected from various stakeholder groups is that key themes emerge, albeit often with different emphasis, which have a bearing on the programme's progress to date in meeting long-term Sure Start objectives. Sometimes these present as consensus or as debate that is constructively underway between groups. At other times they reveal conflicts and possible tensions between different groups and in relation to constraints groups experience. We have been candid with our presentation of the data because we feel there are a number of matters which the programme needs to confront 'head on' and on which consensus needs to be arrived at promptly and in an open forum so that it can make the most of the excellent work set in place.
- 4.2 Within the thematic discussion reference is made to the four Core Sure Start Objectives, plus an important fifth dimension:
1. Improving social and emotional development
 2. Improving health
 3. Improving young children's ability to learn
 4. Strengthening families and communities
 5. Mainstreaming
- 4.3 In the context of Sheffield Sure Start programmes 'mainstreaming' is interpreted as transferring policy lessons, securing funding to continue particular activities, ensuring that mainstream agencies adapt and reproduce examples of good practice

- 4.4 Thematically focused feedback is intended to provide the *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* programme with the following:
- a comprehensive mapping of issues uppermost in the minds of all stakeholder groups currently involved with the programme
 - evidence of good practice in the programme's work
 - suggestions and guidance on where attention needs to be paid in thinking about future programme developments and delivery
 - material which can be used to engender further self assessment of services
 - a document which can be used by the programme to evidence to all stakeholder groups how it currently works towards each of the *Sure Start* long-term objectives and its plan for development in relation to them
 - a snap-shot which the programme can be 'measured against' in terms of its own development as a key player in the *Children's Centre Plan*
- 4.5 In addition, in accordance with our original tender document, in Chapter 5 of this final report we have put together **Action and Implementation Plans** for each of the Stakeholder domains we have worked with. These include our suggestions for training, support and development within each area, but also set out in simple terms the actions we feel at this stage in the evaluation each stakeholder group could usefully prioritize and progress in order to play its part in facilitating the growth and success of *Gleadless Valley* in making life better for children, parents and communities in the area.
- 4.6 Some of the *Sure Start* work we have witnessed in *Gleadless Valley* is immensely powerful in challenging understanding of what is involved in delivering local programmes. The programme faces many challenges to 'get it right' and our analysis of contrasting stakeholder perspectives identifies areas of provision where good practice is seen and also areas where improvements could be made, to encourage reflection on and re-conceptualisation of, current thinking and practice.
- 4.7 It is important to make clear at this point that, in line with the rationale for the qualitative approach to our work which we outline earlier, we are not making our recommendations on the basis of the imposition of arbitrary external judgments but on the basis of what we were told or shown by service users, providers and partners in workshops, interviews

and observed settings. The issues we are representing are firmly 'grounded' in the data we collected throughout the report.

4.8 Discussion of the data is based around the following emergent themes:

Establishing the Programme

Involving Parents

Developing Targeted Services

Programme Team Working

Communication and Team Working with SLA Partners

The Partnership Board and Accountability Matters

Monitoring and Evaluation

Developing a Community Presence

Mainstreaming

4.9 Findings which emerged from our analysis of the data we collected. These are presented firstly as '**Headline Findings**' in respect of what we learned from key stakeholders. There then follows a more detailed discussion of findings under which we integrate the perspectives of different sets of stakeholders in relation to the key Sure Start principles. What is evident is that there are some areas of clear convergence - where all sets of stakeholders agree on particular difficulties or strategies for improvement. Other experiences and impressions of the functioning of the programme are clearly at odds and need careful consideration if maximum benefit is to be gained from this report.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

- The consensus from respondents who contributed to this evaluation is that Gleadless Valley Sure Start is making a positive difference to the quality of life of families living within its area.
- Strong leadership and effective team working are clearly identified as central to the programme's success.
- Lack of suitable venues is identified as impacting at the sharp end of the programme's work. There is a lack of suitable and adequately available venues for parents' training and other stakeholder meetings. Inadequate accommodation for the staff team hinders effective working.
- The evaluation suggests three priorities regarding the programme's premises: having an administrative base, the health centre extended and the provision of child-care in at least two sites as crucial to becoming more established in the community.
- All stakeholder groups commend the high quality of work aimed at parental involvement and community development by Gleadless Valley Sure Start. The importance of developing the capacity of local parents as key players in planning for and delivery of the forthcoming Children's Centres is clearly recognised.
- There are tensions between the strong dominant culture of the Gleadless Valley and parental ownership of, and engagement with Sure Start and the programme's targets. This is important because parental involvement is at the heart of the programme's improvement efforts.
- The extent to which imaginative services are provided around all four central Sure Start objectives is impressive and affirm the programme's

capacity to involve parents in the pursuit of these objectives.

- Despite a very positive track record of strong parental involvement in the programme a key problem is that a limited group of parents are involved in the Partnership Board and satellite groups. The programme needs to widen participation of parents who are currently peripheral in terms of programme governance.
- There is scope for further development of targeted services. Further attention to developing creative services which will support groups not yet engaged with the programme is required.
- The staff team is made up of a wide range of highly committed individuals with relevant experience. The breadth of staff experience is already proving invaluable in work with other statutory, voluntary and community agencies that is central to the goal of mainstreaming.
- Communication between Gleadless Valley Sure Start and its SLA partners is good. Gleadless Valley is clearly an effective Sure Start programme, as the large number of referrals to the majority of the partners demonstrates; the positive problem of becoming 'victims of our own success' arises for the team.
- SLA partners have contributed considerably to the initial successes of Gleadless Valley Sure Start. Both sides of this working and professional relationship have co-operated in a 'ground-up' community based, parent and child centred endeavour. There have been, and remain some teething problems. Not one of them seems to us to be beyond either management or resolution, with good will on all sides. And that, as the SLA respondents have established, is a commodity in plentiful supply.
- Gleadless Valley Sure Start is still in the early days of the development of established systems and protocols relating to the functioning of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with partners who provide

contracted services for the local Programme. We recommend that the Partnership Board considers ways in which it can support the Programme Manager and her team in improving Service Level Agreements and contracts.

- Inconsistent Partnership Board representation membership militates against optimum partnership working. Where agencies have been given representation at Partnership Board level the efficiency of the Partnership Board is undoubtedly undermined if they then do not participate.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems require strengthening. At the time of the evaluation problems with the collection, storage and accessibility of data for target evaluation and programme planning were identified. Further, timely collection of crucial data from other agencies, particularly midwives and Social Services leaves room for improvement. Action is being taken in respect of these issues.
- Links between the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team increasingly seeks to maximise opportunities to engage with the local community.
- The Programme Manager has demonstrated willingness to engage in city wide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services. In so doing she blends defence of the Gleadless Valley programme with a recognition of challenges it faces and the imperative for change.

The data which has informed these findings is now explored.

Establishing the Programme

The consensus from respondents who contributed to this evaluation is that Gleadless Valley Sure Start is making a positive difference to the quality of life of families living within its area.

Strong leadership and effective team working are clearly identified as central to the programme's success.

- 4.10 Respondents made many favourable comments about the Gleadless Valley Sure Start Programme of which the following are typical:

'We work with about six different Sure Starts, and I think the relationships that we all have within the Gleadless Sure Start has been the most positive and most productive.'

SLA Partner

'We feel working relations with the project are excellent'

SLA Partner

'It's a well organised, informative programme - they identify issues well and their planned action is successfully managed.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.11 The consensus from respondents who contributed to this evaluation is that Sure Start is making a tangible difference to the quality of life of families living within Sure Start areas. Impact is realised to be influenced by the short length of time the programme has been up and running but positive outcomes are observed to be accruing already:

there's a massive variety of training offered by the programme. It's really enjoyable for the mums. And the programme is providing some excellent training which is doing wonders for meeting breast-feeding targets.

SLA Partner

the work with teenage parents teenage parents - I hear all the time how successful it's been in supporting them and also in recruiting other Sure Start members

Parent

- 4.12 Strong leadership and effective team working are seen as crucial to the programme's success:

Our leadership is really strong. I think we've excellent leadership.

Member of staff

The team is extremely supportive.

SLA Partner

- 4.13 There is consistently positive assessment of the Programme Manger's role by staff. We will not embarrass anyone by citing further quotations from individual interviews. Suffice to say that the manager is clearly accountable, approachable, prepared to listen, takes on board what she hears, is supportive and acts appropriately on information received. The Programme Manager is, however, well aware that there is no room for complacency :

'we have a brilliant team and our 'strap line' so far could be 'brilliant so far' but we could still do better. We started with a plan that couldn't ever be afforded and couldn't be realised but now we've prioritised things and worked things out and that's taken some thought ... now we've done that we must make a greater success of the programme and think about how we can fit with the Children Centre initiatives .. we are proud of what we have achieved so far but very anxious as to what is going to happen next given the changing climate of the Children's Centre plans'

Programme Manager

Lack of suitable venues is identified as impacting at the sharp end of the programme's work. There is a lack of suitable and adequately available venues for parents', training and other stakeholder meetings. Inadequate accommodation for the staff team hinders effective working.

The evaluation suggests three priorities regarding the programme's premises: having an administrative base, the health centre extended and the provision of child-care in at least two sites as crucial to becoming more established in the community.

4.14 Lack of suitable accommodation is a structural problem identified by the programme team that would affect any similar initiative operating in the Gleadless Valley area. Staff realise that with judicious and timely intervention these problems may be overcome or, at least, ameliorated in the normal course of the programme's development. Failing this they could become chronic and intractable and have increasingly negative consequences as time moves on.

4.15 The Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme mainly operates from two maisonettes which are far from ideal in terms of enabling the programme's day-to-day work. This situation is an improvement on when the programme first started and operated from only one maisonette. Use of the second maisonette has meant the team can be split across the two buildings and there is now room for a Team Meeting room. However staff have limited space for families who need a quiet area in which to articulate their need, and cannot provide a suitable fixed base where people can easily drop in for advice. The maisonette accommodation is difficult for parents pushing buggies or carrying little ones to access. Use of another room at Callow Towers means the programme can have a crèche room to support the running of activities at Pemberton Block which has proved invaluable.

4.16 Needless to say, most stakeholders identify a lack of suitable and adequately available venues for parents', training, and adult learning activities and other meetings as impacting at the sharp end of the programme's work. We are mindful of the appeal made by Naomi Eisenstadt for local programmes and their evaluators to avoid constructing the lack of a suitable base as an explanation for limited

Sure Start delivery (Eisenstadt, 2004). Nevertheless the struggle which Gleadless Valley Sure Start has encountered in the process of attempting to secure fit for purpose premises has undoubtedly limited the programme's ability to both establish its physical presence and work in an optimal way towards meeting its targets. This must be noted.

- 4.17 A great deal of effort has been made over a two year period to acquire suitable vacant properties. The programme would like to use shop fronts which are not in use but the Housing Department find their hands tied due to not being able to easily give information on who has the lease or not being able to revoke the lease so that Sure Start can put the property to good use.
- 4.18 The Programme Manager has recently reported very positive discussions with the PCT about the possibility of the programme moving in to Newfield Green Clinic but at the time of this evaluation going to print no final decisions have been reached and the programme remains without satisfactory premises.
- 4.19 Local schools are said to be slowly coming around to the idea of opening up their sites to Sure Start. There is a feeling that slow progress in respect of this may have been fortuitous given the programme's changing commitments to the newly emerging Children's Centre agenda:

'we possibly wouldn't have included everything we now need if progress had been made earlier with schools - we would probably have gone for child care and parent rooms and we might not have thought about also needing a room for health and health activities and family support and all the kinds of things that the Children's Centre initiative now requires us to think about. Now we are having to think bigger about what we need on school sites'

Programme Manager

- 4.20 Innovative ideas are now being formed about how the Capital Plan will look in terms of the Children's Centre Plan; where staff will be based, developments in other sites and so on. In the meantime space has now been negotiated within one of the local schools for use of a room for Sure Start activities and access during school holidays. For example, during a recent half-term provision was made for activities involving a local artist in creative activities on the topic of 'Africa' for the Lord Mayor's Parade.

- 4.21 Resolution of capital issues has been described as *'very very stressful'* for the programme and its partners. It is acknowledged that changes of plans for *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* have impacted negatively on other local groups - notably jeopardising *Tiddlywinks* provision at one stage - and a great deal of effort has gone in to maintaining positive relations in this difficult context.
- 4.22 The mapping of suitable venues in the area in *Gleadless Valley* has been completed. Work already carried out to broaden ideas on venues could be extended to investigate and consider possible suitability of adjacent out of area or city centre venues.
- 4.23 Planned provision of new buildings will help resolve the programme's problems with accommodation. The Hub for the Children's Centre is on schedule to be ready for January 2005 and satellite premises in two local sites, possibly schools, are planned for March 2005 to coincide with implementation of the Children's Centre plans for Sheffield.
- 4.24 Staff have expressed some frustration at delays in dates for moving to suitable buildings as well as at difficulties in influencing developments given the different agencies and people involved. They are particularly hard-pressed because current accommodation does not allow for adequate ICT facilities. Partly this is about costs, and there are also limitations because the programme hasn't yet moved onto broadband but this will come in next year with the new recording structures being implemented through the NCH Aspire project. Not all members of the team currently have access to email however, and this will present difficulties in terms of how the programme responds to the requirements of NCH Aspire.
- 4.25 Staff are well aware that getting infrastructure right is critical at this stage of the programme's development. The need to acquire and develop an appropriate ICT system with general access to PCs, the internet and intranet as well as personalised email addresses for everyone is clearly identified. This will be vital in the future, when the team no longer works from one site and face to face communication becomes more difficult. The Information Officer is therefore already looking at how a linked network could function across multiple sites.
- 4.26 Commentators often mention the *'cultural mindset of local people'* as

something which makes venue issues difficult to determine. In the words of one local person :

*'people around here see themselves as completely different sets of people who have been raised not to mix - they won't come together
'it's like West Side story and it's being going on for donkey's years'*

Parent

- 4.27 Traditionally people living in one part of the Sure Start area are known to be reluctant to travel to another part and this has demanded some very creative thinking about how and where best to site the programme. Venue issues are further complicated by poor transport throughout the Gleadless Valley Sure Start area. The area's housing estates are built on the sides of a steep valley and bus services are limited making crossing the valley and access to services very difficult. Local people are campaigning for an improved bus service.
- 4.28 Thus there evaluation suggests 3 immediate priorities for the programme regarding venues:
- o to establish a fully operational administrative base,
 - o to move into the Newfield Green centre and
 - o to consolidate the presence of Sure Start in at least two sites as part of the process of getting the programme more established and accepted in the local community
- 4.29 The securing of high quality premises for Sure Start in Gleadless Valley is not seen as a one-stop solution to problems the programme has had operating locally. Much of the programme's work is out in the community and not location dependent. But representatives of all stakeholder groups stress the significance of a high quality base for helping to identify the nature of Sure Start provision and to build a sense of stability around Sure Start in the area. When the programme moves into planned new premises, 'all that will remain' for the programme to do 'is deliver!' (Eisenstadt 2004[b]).

Involving Parents

All stakeholder groups commend the high quality of work aimed at parental involvement and community development by Gleadless Valley Sure Start. The importance of developing the capacity of local parents as key players in planning for and delivery of the forthcoming Children's Centres is clearly recognised.

There are tensions between the strong dominant culture of the Gleadless Valley and parental ownership of, and engagement with Sure Start and the programme's targets. This is important because parental involvement is at the heart of the programme's improvement efforts.

- 4.30 Parent involvement is a key Sure Start commitment and considerable effort has been put into making the community aware of the presence of Sure Start within the Gleadless Valley area.
- 4.31 Staff have stressed that Sure Start is still relatively new and unknown in Gleadless Valley, especially compared to more established agencies. Even so, a lot of publicity and programme '*selling*' has already been done to reach local families. The six month assessment confirmed that the staff are to be congratulated on the way that they have managed to encourage parental involvement:

I think that in a short space of time we've done very well getting parents involved. When I spoke to other Parental Involvement Workers from other Sure Starts, they may have been running longer than we have, but some have not yet got a Parents' Forum started or parents on the Partnership Board, so I think in that sense we've done very well very quickly.

Member of staff

- 4.32 Strenuous efforts to increase parental involvement continue to be made, for example two recent newsletters have been distributed, one to all houses in the area and the other to every household with a child under 4

years. The programme is doing well in terms of the numbers of families registered with the programme. A review of reach over the last 12 months to August 2004 showed that 73 % (399) families have been registered with the programme. The team have, in the last 12 months, had contact with 92% of children under 1 year of age; 80% of 1-2 year olds; 67% of 2-3 year olds; and 52% of 3-4 year olds. These figures are what we would expect for a programme having completed it's first year of service delivery and shows that strategies for contact with new births are working. Staff realise there is only so much that can be achieved through conventional advertising methods, though these must be sustained and expanded. All stakeholders agree that word of mouth is vital in promoting the programme and although this is in part spontaneous, staff realize it can also be deliberately fostered.

- 4.33 Traditional community boundaries, as previously mentioned, do make it difficult for the programme to bring families from across the Gleadless Valley Sure Start area together. This situation does have a positive side because it is indicative of strong pockets of community feeling and identity. Inclusive inroads are being made within these local communities but it is hard for the programme to work across them as the following jokey comments reveal :

'When the world cup was on we were all having barbecues outside together and loads of families and children were out playing - everyone together .. we'll have people from Jamacia and Somalia and Pakistan any part of Sctoland or Wales ... but not people from Hemsworth and Herdings - absolutely no!' And they feel the same about us!

Local parent

- 4.34 There can be tensions between the strong dominant cultures in parts of the Gleadless Valley area and parental ownership of, and engagement with Sure Start and the programme's targets:

Some people feel there's almost an automatic conflict where, through consultation, parents have been told 'this will be your programme. It has to be driven by the community. Parents will make decisions, have choice' - which they will, but it has to be in our particular framework. So it's like but we've got all these government targets and we've got professional morals and ethics.' I think some of the parents find that a bit challenging and that's where we get conflict.

Member of staff

- 4.35 Indeed the dominant culture of the area was also noted as a challenge in two other important respects. Very high levels of smoking in the presence of young children is identified as a pervasive health problem, and:

'there's such a strong bottle-feeding thing going on in Gleadless .. it really is a very strong culture... breastfeeding is not the norm..'

SLA Partner

- 4.36 The Programme Manager emphasises the importance of dealing openly and positively with issues of cultural diversity in interventions with the majority population. While work around breastfeeding appears to be an important and successful focus of intervention, smoking cessation was not mentioned as a target, despite expressions of concern regarding its prevalence. The latter is likely to be a very challenging and difficult issue.
- 4.37 There have recently been concrete clashes in respect of the tensions between aspirations of some local parents versus the programme's aspirations when during canvassing for local elections local people were targeted by the British National Party. The Programme Manager and her team are determined that the Sure Start philosophy of improving the life chances of all children in the Gleadless Valley area will not be undermined.
- 4.38 All stakeholder groups commend the high quality of work aimed at parental involvement and community development by Gleadless Valley Sure Start. The importance of developing the capacity of local parents as key players in planning for and delivery of the forthcoming Children's Centres is recognised and the programme plans to specifically advance this. The programme is working ahead of the agenda in respect of already considering ways of bringing parents into meaningful partnership around the Children's Centre initiative.
- 4.39 For parents involved with Sure Start, in the words of one local mother, there is an element of *'being on their own personal journey for them and their family'*. This is tied up with parents wanting a clear progression route:

'parents want to first do taster sessions, then they might want to move on'

- 4.40 The staff team have made great and productive efforts to develop parent training in the face of two very frustrating barriers: the already mentioned shortage of suitable local venues compounded by 'competition' between different agencies for training 'customers':

'There's more than one person looking after training, so that's a problem in this person has four people and this person has four people, but they might not talk to each other, so they cancel the course because they think there's not enough people... that's probably the most frustrating aspect for me because I'm actively seeking people to go on the courses and then get complaints about them not happening.'

Member of staff

- 4.41 This problem has been noted and training is now discussed within Team Meetings. A 'Training File' is in place for all courses which the programme runs but issues remain unresolved about how to co-ordinate what Sure Start is doing with what other agencies offer.

'there isn't one person in the area to co-ordinate training - and so it feels patchy still'.

Member of staff

This would clearly be an enormous administrative undertaking and needs some further planning.

- 4.42 The team is aware that 'pathways through' need to be developed for parents but assert that this is currently beyond their capacity. Currently the focus is on what can be done to work towards achieving an annual plan for courses and training rather than the current termly plan that current funding structures allow. Although not ideal, the current relatively short-term planning structure has allowed for things to be put on at very short notice which has been successful in the past; a self-esteem course put on quickly in response to parent's wishes was well received and it would be important not to lose this type of flexibility if longer term planning can be brought into practice.

- 4.43 Several stakeholders pointed out that organisational structures and funding streams frequently don't assist ideas on joined up interagency training, for example :

'the money that comes through the LSC funding is very stop - start and its' difficult to get a strategic approach to delivery worked up. At the moment we have the most pragmatic response to a very difficult situation'

City-wide Sure Start Co-ordinator

- 4.44 It is our sense that underlying this confusion there may be a lack of a clearly understood, articulated and executed programme of action, a 'thread' to follow:

'It's been really frustrating so far trying to get the area workers to think of the training plan for a year and look at all these different providers saying 'This is what we can do this year. This is how it could work. Do we want to sell it to parents?'

Member of staff

'[someone] was talking about this yesterday when we met and saying, 'I don't understand what's happening with training and where it's all fitting and what are we supposed to be doing.' And she's right. There isn't a strategy for the area other than 'let's put on the bits and pieces that we can', but there's no thread that then takes it through from the first taster groups that a parent gets involved in up to college. The thread is not there.'

SLA Partner

- 4.45 The programme has established a pathway of training for some parents but with limited resources finds *'there's only so much we can do about wider progression and coordination issues'*. This points to important issues of inter-agency working and has implications for the future prospect of mainstreaming to which we turn later on in this report.
- 4.46 Questions of parent training, continuing education and prospective future employment opportunities, the empowerment and social inclusion of parents and so on, are crucially important for the programme because they potentially create routes to the social inclusion of young children. The programme's Parent Involvement strategy and the temporary role of a volunteer/training co-coordinator are helping to address these questions.

- 4.47 The staff team already recognises that SMILE, the Parent Forum, will be an important part of the solution to this problem of developing appropriate pathways for parents in the long run. Parents have themselves been focusing on these issues for some time:

'last year we talked about a loyalty scheme. Now we have moved on from that and become interested in ideas about the 'Six Stages of Sure Start' that came from a recent conference we went to. These are :

- 1. What is Sure Start ?*
- 2. Starting to attend*
- 3. Accessing training opportunities within Sure Start*
- 4. Growing in confidence, sitting on the board or joining a Parent's Forum*
- 5. Becoming accredited volunteers*
- 6. Chairing meetings, making use of job opportunities and the training you get from Sure Start*

Now we are thinking of something along these lines - with certificates of achievement that people could put in their CVs - it would help our levels of self esteem to have our personal achievement recognized ... it's about making people proud of their achievement that they've made with the help of Sure Start'

Parent

- 4.48 The Northern College provide accredited courses which may be appropriate to the expressed interests of parents and the programme is exploring these further.
- 4.49 Staff and parents say there is a gap between parents involved in programme governance and parents turning up for activities and events.
- 4.50 Despite a very positive track record of strong parental involvement in the programme a key problem, which is common across Sure Start programmes, is that a limited group of parents are involved in the Partnership Board and satellite groups - the programme needs to widen participation of parents who are currently peripheral in terms of programme governance.
- 4.51 This is a vexed issue. Some parents currently involved in SMILE (the Parent's Forum) point out that their participation can be problematic

because *'it's the same people that are doing all the work'*. Parents have themselves tried to encourage more parents to join but have picked up on a feeling that the programme team is starting to expect parents to do more than they want to. In one parents words *'some people just want to have their say'*. Now that the parents group has been formally constituted parents feel there is an expectation that the group will do things for themselves, without staff input. An example cited referred to a perceived expectation that staff expect the SMILE group to raise the money to pay for a trip to Pets Corner. It was planned to raise this concern for open discussion at the next parents group meeting.

- 4.52 For the purposes of maintaining parent involvement in programme governance staff know there is bound to be a cyclical process of circulation of personnel and that it is important to form a pool of parents as a reserve:

'Part of the remit is to have the parents being more involved, but as parents get skilled up they don't necessarily stay. They tend to move on to paid work, to working in schools or whatever, so that's one of the battles with the whole sort of aim of Sure Start that we've got to keep on, three years and you've lost them! So, its brand new parents with all different issues.'

Member of staff

- 4.53 In the first instance the reserve group of parents who may commit to programme governance is those who participate in the Parents' Forum. Beyond this, it is those parents participating in Gleadless Valley Sure Start provision, and finally as yet uninvolved parents. This brings the discussion full circle, to potential and real conflicts which staff illuminate between aspects of the state, welfare and professional culture of Sure Start and the culture of the majority of the intended recipients of its services.

- 4.54 In terms of accountability to this its client group, Gleadless Valley Sure Start professionals are duty bound to be honest with parents:

'To have some influence on Sure Start programmes via the Parents' Forum and particularly the Partnership Board you do not have to agree with every aspect of Sure Start, but you will have to be prepared to work within the broad framework of its philosophy and targets. Of course you have every right to reject that philosophy as a whole and therefore to refuse to participate.'

- 4.55 The entitlement of parents to say 'No!' right from the first contact with the programme, has been frequently asserted throughout the evaluation process and the principle is accepted and put into practice. Here we feel that staff exercise their professional autonomy appropriately by getting the balance right between provisionally accepting refusals while continuing to offer support and services at a later date:

I have just got to the point with one family where I've done 3 visits and not gained access for now. I've learnt my lesson, saying that 'I've done that and if you want any of our services then contact us. If not, we'll contact you again in 6-8 months, which will be the next visit.'

Member of staff

However, at some point parental refusal must become absolute, assuming there are no safety issues.

- 4.56 The issue of moving management on in a way that will bring in new parents to engage with the full range of parents who represent the area is a tricky one. It is recognised that the development of the programme to date owes much to the commitment and enthusiasm of individual parents who came together to develop the delivery plan and shape the programme. These parents have the capacity and confidence to engage with and govern the programme but represent only a small proportion of the total families in the catchment area. Therefore the programme team is conscious of the need to constantly seek more diverse parental representation. The current group of parents most centrally involved in the programme understand this and are keen to continue to support the programme team's efforts to widen participation.
- 4.57 To this end, training to assist new parents to take part in meetings is being provided through links with VAS.
- 4.58 The attention Gleadless Valley Sure Start has focussed on nurturing parental involvement and community development has been picked out for praise:

'there was parental involvement right from the beginning, even before the early money was allocated. Every meeting I went to there were always parents there and there was a real sense of community around what was going on which I don't think I picked up when I went to

some of the other Sure Start areas. I think Gleadless has got, for me, quite a community feel to ownership of the Sure Start...'

SLA Partner

'staff working with parents have not been afraid to muck in and help with things, so I think there's been a lot of encouragement there as well and perhaps just good two way communications'

SLA Partner

'encouragement to get the mums and dads signed up with Sure Start in order to get them onto the database in order to get them the information they need has really improved things. And I also think the information system that circulates among the parents is really good.'

SLA Partner

- 4.59 SLA partners put forward the view that this nurturing approach, is part of a shared culture which they and Gleadless Valley Sure Start wish to promote:

'there's been a lot of nurturing. You know, a member of staff will bother to spend a whole afternoon even if there's only one mum there ... that makes a difference doesn't it? That's what we do to start people off.'

SLA Partner

This common, shared work ethos is likely to form an excellent foundation for future collaboration.

The extent to which imaginative services are provided around all four central sure start objectives is impressive and affirm the programme's capacity to involve parents in the pursuit of these objectives.

- 4.60 Throughout the evaluation process we have been impressed by the extent to which imaginative services around all four central Sure Start objectives are evidenced . The following paragraphs illustrate the programme's capacity to involve parents in the pursuit of these objectives, though they capture only a fraction of the programme's achievements. In some cases although it is the programme's achievements which drive our analysis, scope for implementation of

change can be discerned which we believe convey something of the challenge the programme is faced with in its delivery.

- 4.61 Parents outside of the Gleadless Valley Sure Start geographical boundaries are missing out on what Sure Start can offer. For instance, parents arrive at sessions who are new to the area, have seen the Sure Start posters and are keen to sign up. Unfortunately some of these parents find they live just the wrong side of the Sure Start boundary for the area and so are not able to register for the full range of Gleadless Valley Sure Start activities. Such parents are made to feel welcome to join the sessions they turn up for, but nevertheless are experiencing exclusion from what Sure Start is offering on their doorstep:

'I'm from one of the poorest areas in Sheffield but because I live 2 streets away I can't actually register with Sure Start for this area. I come to Stay and Play but I'm not allowed on the trips or the activities and I feel really fed up about that when I hear the other mums talking about what they've been up to.'

Local Parent

Out of area parents are indeed welcome to attend open groups, or fill places on courses, however they miss out on the home visiting aspect of what the programme can provide. The problem is exacerbated because the programme cannot count these parents in its monitoring figures for the Sure Start Unit.

- 4.62 Locally parents find out about Gleadless Valley Sure Start through posters or through their G.P., midwife or health visitor:

'I've been coming to this for 11 months now, I saw the poster while I were out shopping and thought I'd try it. I've met people through coming and its nice when people from here say 'hello' to you down the shops, best thing is getting away from the telly.'

Local Parent

Clearly families excluded from any aspect of what their nearby Sure Start programme delivers are marginalized and will experience isolation. This is a universal difficulty for Sure Start, not restricted to the Gleadless Valley situation, and collective action will be needed to seek appropriate modifications.

- 4.63 Several observations of Gleadless Valley Sure Start activities bring into view the importance of making certain all Sure Start professionals are sensitive to parent's own priorities. Much of this builds up over time, as parents and staff get to know each other better. For example, there was criticism from parents of the Gel Nail treatment laid on at a Pamper Day. It turned out that the nails could not be removed with acetone and that it would cost £5 to have them professionally removed, or £15 to have them redone, and that they would need to be redone at least every three weeks. *'Now that's not right for Sure Start parents round here is it?'* one mother asked to universal agreement. The 'Virgin V' make-up stand came in for similar criticism: *'it's too pricey that stuff, not right for this Sure Start area'*. In fact these events were put on in response to demands expressed by parents against the programme team's inclination which shows the team's willingness to experiment with, and learn from, specific ideas from parents.
- 4.64 A similar tension was observed in another setting when mothers were discussing going out more and saying that they never felt like going out anyway, even if they could find a baby-sitter. When a worker remarked *'but you don't just have to go out at night - wouldn't it be nice to have a day out shopping at Meadowhall?'* a mother replied *'yeah, and wouldn't it be nice to have plenty of money in your pocket to do it!'* Our research evidence is very clear that programme staff and partners do pay careful attention to these concerns.
- 4.65 Parents involved with the Gleadless Valley programme do assert their views when they feel there is a clash between what they think and what Sure Start workers feel would be best. For example, young mothers have asked that their partners or the babies fathers are not present at a group they attend even though the view expressed by staff is that *'it's important to try to stay in touch with them all the same'*. This provides testimony to the respectful and autonomous relationships the team is building with its clients.
- 4.66 Wherever we have come across parents involved with Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme voicing criticism they have been at pains to stress that they are only critical because they are determined that what they clearly regarded as *'a good thing'* could be made even better and benefit even more parents. Our observations of staff responding to different points of view has also been unfailingly positive. The atmosphere at all events observed has been very friendly and relaxed and the relationship between Sure Start workers and the parents we met seems sound.

4.67 Our observations show that in one way or another, child development and parenting issues do come to the fore at Gleadless Valley Sure Start sessions. Endless conversations about the merits of particular types of nappies, getting over baby vaccinations and how to get hold of benefits can be heard during the course of everyday activities and encounters revealing evidence of much more of a parenting and child care focus than can be quantified.

4.67 Free gifts are popular with clients and characteristic of involvement with most Sure Start programmes; Gleadless Valley is no exception, using free gifts to boost its healthy eating initiative:

'If you attend 4 sessions you get a free hand blender and it's a great little thing. And we'll show you how to use it to do stuff that's not jarred because you never know what's in jars - preservatives and all sorts.'

Sure Start Provider

4.69 Occasionally workers steer the conversation around to parenting, in an uncontrived and relaxed manner, for example, mentioning a new parenting group that is starting up:

'It's very informal .. nothing heavy and you might find it helpful, after all you don't get any training to be a parent do you?'

Sure Start Provider

On this occasion, the mothers agreed and said they might give the group a try. One mum then mentioned her *'mate who has five children'* and said she might tell her about the group, which provides testimony to appropriateness of a discreet intervention strategy and also evidences the value of a 'word of mouth' communications strategy.

4.70 A great deal of information is shared during Gleadless Valley Sure Start sessions in ways which pick up on parents immediate concerns. Some mothers for example, were observed asking about 'needles' and saying they were not sure what to expect. The worker chatted away to them, explaining and then mentioning a baby massage session which will be taking place, dropping the idea of a weaning party into the conversation and reintroducing the Sure Start theme of healthy eating. Clearly staff are focussing innovative efforts simultaneously on Sure Start objectives and parent agendas within a supportive context.

- 4.71 In all Sure Start activities we have attended parents certainly value the provision:

'It provides good interaction for us parents and if it weren't a good, a successful session, people just wouldn't come back next week'

Local parent

- 4.72 Frequently Gleadless Valley parents say they are *'lucky to live in a Sure Start area'*.
- 4.73 Parents support of each other is extended through their Sure Start contacts, for example, while playing with their babies at a typical Stay and Play session mothers could be heard asking questions about an absent member of the group known to have just had a very difficult birth and working out what support they could themselves offer her.
- 4.74 At a session where more parents hung about outside than went in, Sure Start objectives were still being met. On this occasion, young mums might have been outside smoking instead of eating the healthy things on offer inside, but they were giving tips about how they had coped with birth to someone just facing delivery and offering each other crucial support. Through these observations we can see that the link between formal Sure Start objectives and the actuality of young people's lives is being made effectively.
- 4.75 There is also evidence that networking through Sure Start enables some parents to work as evidenced by keen interest in an Avon catalogue at one session.
- 4.76 Childcare makes all the difference to involvement in Gleadless Valley Sure Start. A recurring complaint concerns the lack of childcare available to mothers who wish to attend adult oriented Sure Start activities and courses. On occasion it has been reported, for example, that though several crèche workers have been required and booked, in the event, only one has turned up. The programme has responded to this by signing a new contract with 'Tiddlywinks' (a childcare organisation) and parents hope that this situation will improve. It has also been agreed that Tiddlywinks will work with the programme's community teacher on quality issues and planning of sessions (including training workshops) which provides a creative solution to several difficulties that have been identified in respect of parent participation. We observe that limited

childcare often seems to put a block on parents getting involved, or receiving services - this problem is not unique to *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* but it needs attention. When parents have to miss out on an interesting event enthusiasm can easily be lost.

INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Despite a very positive track record of strong parental involvement in the programme a key problem is that a limited group of parents are involved in the Partnership Board and satellite groups. The programme needs to widen participation of parents who are currently peripheral in terms of programme governance.

- 4.78 Parent board members had plenty of positive things to say about their involvement in the Partnership Board. They feel it is supportive and inclusive:

'A member of staff mentioned something at the SMILE meeting and that's what made me come along. I thought, 'I'll come and have a look.' 'I felt so welcomed in and you're treated so specially for being involved because they're struggling to get parents involved I think. I get the impression that down at the office they do talk about which parents are involved because I've had people come back and say, 'I just can't believe what you do'. I think that's really nice. I think they talk very positively about us who are involved. I think it's really nice that they do really appreciate you which, encourages you, doesn't it?'

Parent Board Member

- 4.79 Inevitably there are some barriers to parental involvement in the Partnership Board:

'perceptions of what the meeting's going to be like, who's going to be there and if people may feel intimidated'

'it's not any actual barriers. It's what someone's perception is.'

Parents

- 4.80 It was mentioned a couple of times that there are *'strong personalities'* in the group of parents who are currently most involved in programme governance which might be off-putting for prospective parent members who may feel less self-confident. While this requires sensitive handling, it also gives a sense of the real evolution of parental involvement that participation facilitates.

4.81 There are questions to ask about speed with which parent members are asked to take on governance responsibilities and about the scale of these responsibilities. When Partnership Board membership spills over into a requirement for the same parents to participate in sub-groups, the pressures of membership are soon felt. Many parents find that Gleadless Valley Partnership Board membership becomes too taxing when their involvement in satellite groups is necessary as we have already discussed.

4.82 The inclusive nature of the Partnership Board is not merely a matter of welcoming words, and parents also recognise the importance of action taken to enable their participation - such as attention given to the time and place of Partnership Board meetings:

'there was a specific example when [a parent] had a difficulty with the actual timing of the meetings because of her childcare needs and the professionals were quite prepared to go along with changing the time so that the time of the meeting suited parents best.'

Partnership Board Member

4.83 It was reported that timing of the meetings does still present parents with some difficulties and parents have lobbied for further changes to make their participation easier:

'There is a problem with the meeting time 9.30-11.30 because nursery finishes at 11.20am. I have asked [the programme] if they will discuss it with nursery, to hold on to the children for a bit, like 15 minutes later, to let us finish the meeting and then go and get the children. That is a bit of a problem. I have said this again and again because it is one of the things that puts people off coming to the SMILE meetings because they have got to dash up to nursery. I was quite annoyed about it all at first because like one Sure Start lady said 'We can't do everything for everybody'. But it discourages people because of the timing. I went to a conference and you see the Sure Starts in Leeds they have an extra couple of Sure Start staff that they pay just to go and sit in with the kids for another 10 more minutes.'

Parent

4.84 The strategy being suggested by the parent above would appear to potentially widen participation of parents in both Parents Forum and Partnership Board activities without complicating the arrangements of other members and could usefully be examined further. The issue needs

further exploration because it emerged several times that parent members find childcare is difficult:

'some children don't like crèches and nursery pick ups are not taken into consideration' [original emphasis].

Parent

Having said this, we note that in the early days parents had the option of childminders aswell and it was their choice to go move to crèche provision. It may well be that no 'one solution fits all' response is possible here. Over and above this, Gleadless Valley parents assert that it is vital child-care back up covers their participation in the whole of a Partnership Board meeting, plus time to deliver and collect their children. Some changes are needed in respect of present childcare arrangements to maximise Partnership Board participation for Gleadless Valley parents. Paying travel costs for parents is also helpful.

- 4.84 The above comments notwithstanding, there is much evidence of good practice to ensure the effective inclusion of parents in the Partnership Board. One example relates to Partnership Board oversight of Risk Assessment. It begins with parents discussing how Sure Start staff have adapted the way Partnership Board written material is circulated, disseminated and assimilated by members:

'We do get handouts at the meetings sometimes, where relevant.'

'We've had the odd things in the post with our Minutes from the last meeting. I think we've had the odd report because it says, 'Please bring,' and 'Please read.' I think that they find that if they're sending anything out early, the majority of the time it's not read and it's not brought, so they find it easier just to go through it with us at the meeting.'

'They're big [documents] aren't they that come? But [the Programme Manager] does go through them all.'

'Yeah. When we talked about Risk Assessment it was more like a workshop that meeting wasn't it?'

'Yeah, there are nine sections, aren't there to a Risk Assessment. Huge.'

'Oh, it was very huge. It was pretty tricky for us as well. Well they said, 'Have they fulfilled this? Have they fulfilled that?' And we were like, 'Well we don't know do we? We're not in that office. We haven't seen a lot of the background stuff.' It was only because we all had a Sure Start member on our team who said, 'Well yeah they've done this ...'

'Yeah, they like split all the parents with all like other people, didn't they, so they knew what were what.'

Parents talking together.

4.85 This account of Partnership Board business in action evidences documents being circulated in good time, but where they are long and complex they are worked through carefully with individual members; points raised by members are listened to by staff; an innovative workshop style Partnership Board is adopted in which discussion and decision-making was facilitated in small groups by individual Sure Start members. This amounts to a model of good Partnership Board procedure which maximises parent participation and is worthy of wider dissemination.

4.86 Some parent members see their participation in the Sure Start Partnership Board as potentially opening up opportunities for them to enter the children's workforce. They value opportunities to operate more independently of the views and support of the Sure Start staff team. We are sure staff members themselves endorse this attitude and would see it as one of their own objectives. Other Partnership Board members are more reticent though fully engaged:

'parents do play a very vital role and do communicate very well within those meetings, although there are quieter members who don't actually say very much at the Partnership Board, but do listen'

Partnership Board Member

'I sit quiet in a corner.'

'But you actually do listen and feel able to ask questions, so I think that says something there as well.'

Parent Partnership Board Members

4.87 A number of parents expressed admiration for a Local Authority member's experienced input into Partnership Board meetings, and

particularly their ability to ask searching and relevant questions of the Sure Start staff team:

'We need to just learn to ask as many questions as [the named councillor] does.'

Parent Partnership Board Member

4.88 Again Sure Start staff members have to strike a difficult balance: what is, and appears as, helpful support to a relatively new and inexperienced parent member can feel like an inappropriate influence to the older hand.

4.89 Several examples of positive Partnership Board decision-making processes were mentioned which highlight good practice. First, a discussion and decision relating to Speech and Language Therapy is of interest showing extra time allocated for discussion in response to members need:

'Sometimes we need to vote on whether we agree to the funding to do this thing, or to get this activity, or to join this other group, or whatever. And we have been able to say, 'can we take it away and we'll think about it and come back next time?'

Partnership Board Member

4.90 Parent Board members are clearly assertive in their engagement with the business agenda:

'once when there was something to put your hand up about I said, 'I'm not. I'm abstaining from the vote because I don't know what I'm voting on.'

Parent Partnership Board Member

GOOD PRACTICE ON INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

4.91 The Gleadless Valley programme has made considerable efforts to involve parents in the Partnership Board. This is a very positive finding because parent involvement is at the heart of the development of genuine partnership in the local Sure Start programme and community. Nevertheless, involving parents in Partnership Boards is not an easy matter and the Gleadless Valley programme would, as discussed elsewhere, like to have more parents involved.

4.92 Parents say their participation in Partnership Boards is maximised when efforts are made to make sure all information about the board and going to the board to presented in accessible ways. This is the progamme's current practice and should be commended. Sure Start parents from across the city agree that short papers are preferred, sent well in advance, clearly written in plain English, marked as for (a) discussion, (b) information or (c) needing a decision. Parent board members feel most comfortable where they know they can ring a named member of the board or programme staff for advice or clarification to find out what things mean if they don't understand the documents and this is the case at Gleadless Valley. Parents appreciate being supported to 'catch up' if they miss meetings and not made to feel uncomfortable about non-attendance.

4.93 Positive suggestions from Sure Start parents about how participation of a wider group of parents in Partnership Boards could be encouraged include:

'have parents in to photocopy or sort papers so that they start to get involved and get a feel for what we do'

'the school PTA has 'once-only' membership and I think this would help people to get involved in the board without feeling they're suddenly going to be roped in for ever'

4.94 There is unequivocal evidence that Gleadless Valley parents feel included as equals on the Partnership Board. They feel able to ask questions and contest issues. All Gleadless Valley parent Board Members spoken to feel there has been a tangible pay-off for them in terms of personal development that has made their investment of time in programme governance worthwhile.

4.95 The thoughts of one Gleadless Valley parent illustrate the extent to which being a parent member of a Partnership Board has significant and positive outcomes:

'On these streets there are people walking about who've got nothing. They've got no two pennies to rub together, they don't know how to parent their kids, they've got no self respect and no respect for their children or their families or anybody else. If they can realise that their lives can personally be improved and their personal achievement

can be changed through getting involved with Sure Start then they might start getting involved and coming along. I know, because that's what being involved with Gleadless Valley Sure Start has done for me.'

Partnership Board Member

Developing Targeted Services

There is scope for further development of targeted services. Further attention to developing creative services which will support groups not yet engaged with the programme is required.

- 4.96 The Gleadless Valley programme focuses on ensuring that *all* children and families in its local area have access to services, opportunities and practical support which can help to break cycles of disadvantage and improve the lives of all children. Meeting the needs of targeted groups is therefore crucially at the centre of the programme's concerns. This is evidenced through the programme's recently implemented 'Hard to Reach Strategy' which acknowledges that:

'Sure Start has always been intended to reach parts of the community, which other initiatives and services do not reach, to ensure that all children in disadvantaged areas get a good start in life.'

Gleadless Valley Sure Start 'Hard to Reach' Strategy, 2004

- 4.97 As is the case for Sure Start programmes all over the country, the Gleadless Valley programme knows there are groups of individuals who do not access services or who are reluctant to get involved.
- 4.98 The focus of the 'Hard to Reach' Strategy needs to be broadened out to encourage consideration of 'Targeted Services'. This is because people with additional needs who are not engaged with the programme are not always 'hard to reach'. Nevertheless some families with additional needs require services that are beyond what's currently on offer through Gleadless Valley Sure Start 'core universal services'. Thus it can be helpful to think about families the programme is finding 'hard to reach' in terms of the development of specifically targeted services.
- 4.99 Part of the programme's response to setting up appropriately targeted services is determined by the effectiveness of partnership working with statutory services. Currently the 'Tier 2/3 boundary' which statutory

services are working with creates ambiguity for the Gleadless Valley programme. Sure Start is located in 'Tier 2' which is seen to be confusing for some services because the programme frequently finds itself doing 'Tier 3' work where pressures on statutory social services lead to

'a farming out of pressure which the programme picks up'

Member of Staff

The programme finds there are still battles to be had with statutory services over what they as opposed to Gleadless Valley Sure Start should be doing - this is stressful because Sure Start staff can feel that as a Tier 2 service they are not best equipped to undertake Tier 3 responsibilities. This all suggests that work is needed to monitor the conditions that create additional pressures for the programme.

- 4.100 The Gleadless Valley team recognises that there is work for the programme to do to add clarity about *'what vulnerability means'* and *'what children's needs are'*. Important questions have been posed:

'there are so many kinds of vulnerability - what targeted services can we develop? How do we support families that are vulnerable? Where do we target resources?'

Member of staff

'In October and March Gleadless Valley Sure Start saw 50% of local families with children under four but our question is did we see the right 50%?' [original emphasis]

Member of staff

- 4.101 Our feeling is that the evaluation identifies two groups for whom the development of targeted services should be prioritised:

(i) asylum seekers who only remain for 6 to 8 weeks in the Valley and other families in temporary accommodation and

(ii) disabled children and/or parents with impairments, and their families.

- 4.102 Other groups mentioned as in need of targeted services include teenagers experiencing pregnancy, parents with no family support in the

area or otherwise socially isolated, the homeless, people seeking asylum seekers and who are placed in temporary accommodation, children on the Child Protection Register, and substance misusers.

- 4.103 A balance needs to be maintained between focussing on groups of parents and children with particular needs and the majority population in the Valley. Not only does the Gleadless Valley Sure Start team need to tread extremely carefully around local politics, it has also to address deep-rooted attitudes and beliefs with sensitivity.
- 4.104 The programme's 'Hard to Reach' Strategy identifies actions already in place to address the entitlements of missing groups.
- 4.105 Successful and expanded work to develop targeted services will help to involve new parents in programme governance:

'there are loads of families that we need to get to. I think we've done very well in a short space of time ... some parents are very keen to get involved and they're very committed, but that can be a very small number. So it's about how we increase that number and bring others in'

Member of staff

- 4.106 Some stakeholders have expressed the view that it might be most productive for the programme to concentrate on developing targeted services for one or possibly two of the focal groups at any one time. This would mean a short, intensive piece of work could be related to the services needed for different groups. It has been proposed that a Working Party could be set up to move these issues forward and that Gleadless Valley Sure Start has the experience to lead a multi-agency project on this.
- 4.107 There is an openly acknowledged danger that some parents may feel a focus on groups the programme has found 'hard to reach' means they are being ignored or are not important. Programme staff are sensitive to this issue. However it is accepted that it is essential that the programme works to complement existing services and seek out those families who are currently isolated.

- 4.108 The issue of groups the programme is finding hard to reach is central to the delivery and evaluation of the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme. It illustrates the tensions, and very practical difficulties, around the staff's aspiration for Gleadless Valley Sure Start to become both universal and non-stigmatizing, while at the same time accessing the groups of parents and children perceived to be most in need.
- 4.109 We have observed that the programme team would like to address the way in which the services they provide meet the needs of a diverse population. They have particularly found more needs to be done to support families who seek asylum or who live in temporary accommodation. Linked to this, the team is keen to see a more structured approach to their services based on what targeted parents say they would find helpful.
- 4.110 Staff recognise that it is both demoralising and inefficient to be '*wandering around the valley chasing up unwilling parents*' and that it is therefore necessary to prioritise a home visiting policy:

'We're going to do that pretty quickly because we need to sort that out.'

Member of staff

This will help to strengthen the link between the programme and some of the families with whom there is little or no contact at present.

Programme Team Working

The staff team is made up of a wide range of highly committed individuals with relevant experience. The breadth of staff experience is already proving invaluable in work with other statutory, voluntary and community agencies that is central to the goal of mainstreaming.

4.110 The Children's Workforce Reform places emphasis on getting early years services and intervention right by encouraging:

- integrated and coherent working
- teams that are stable, yet flexible and responsive,
- skilled, trusted and valued team members and
- well led, well managed, properly supervised working (Pugh, 2004).

4.111 Stakeholders working both within the Sure Start team, and those seeking to work with Gleadless Valley Sure Start from other agencies in the interests of children and their families, have placed considerable emphasis on the above-mentioned requirements for effective working. It is widely agreed that there is work to be done on getting communication and team working right both within the programme and beyond the programme in relation to its links with other agencies in order to best equip the programme to meet its key objectives.

4.112 This section assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the Gleadless Valley programme in respect of its capacity for communication and partnership working with staff and we then consider similar issues in relation to SLA partners. It is evident that stakeholder views discussed below and shared at various intervals during the process of this evaluation, if properly engaged with, will provide instructive insights to help the programme as a whole make a better success of Sure Start and translate service provision successfully from an area based focus to a generic mainstream approach.

4.113 It is clear that the staff team itself, although relatively new, growing and changing its personnel, contains a wide range of individuals with

relevant experience. This expertise feeds directly into work with parents, children and families. The breadth of staff experience is already proving invaluable in work with other statutory, voluntary and community agencies that is central to the goal of mainstreaming. Lately the programme has been able to recruit people living in the area and this will further support the growth of links with the local community.

- 4.114 The staff team have conveyed a very positive overall view of their working relationships, both horizontal and vertical, involving both partnership and mutual support. It would be easy to fill pages with quotations, but we shall let a few represent the rest:

'We're a team that gives 110%. Everyone. In an approachable way. Everybody gives more.'

'I love working for Gleadless Valley Sure Start! It's a lovely job. There's a strong ethos on looking after staff and staff development. I think it's a very healthy place to work. The Programme Manager really does support us.'

'We're confident to share and we're not pressured with what we're doing. We're a 'yes' team. It's about how can we do it, rather than about the problems stopping us doing things'.

Members of staff

- 4.115 A culture of open discussion and collective decision-making joined to effective management has obviously been a pleasant change for some team members:

'One of the nice surprises of working here is having the opportunity to develop and explore the way forward and plan things.'

Member of staff

- 4.116 Staff are committed to moving Gleadless Valley Sure Start towards the realisation of the programme's vision as this corresponds to in its targets. All members of the programme team are well aware of the complexities of the task ahead.

- 4.117 The staff team identify informal communications as a strong point :

'we're good at sharing knowledge and skills between ourselves.'

- 4.118 But on the other hand some tentative propositions have been made about strengthening formal aspects of communication. For example, staff feel individuals often do not know about new team events, projects and initiatives early enough:

'We were thinking of some kind of Time Table Notice Board that's got the week on it ... that kind of structured thing is something we've started to talk about ...'

Member of staff

'we were talking about how we can get some sort of 3D look at what's happening each week, each month, each day and where things are happening. We talked about how we would plan that, and especially when we're going to divide into our new Centres because then sharing information is going to be crucial.'

Member of staff

'Team Meetings have included (for quite some time now) an element of team update, also there is a 'Team Wall' at the administrative base where staff update services their team is offering. It's much clearer now who has responsibility for linking with which agencies.'

Member of staff

- 4.119 A staff training day in February involved the whole team in evaluating progress so far, and developing personal and team milestones for the coming year. Each team reports on these milestones on a quarterly basis which has encouraged clarity on what members of staff are doing and why they are doing it. The team has also started to cascade an action learning process of 'evidencing outcomes' which will be further expanded on the next team day in September which is planned to involve the Partnership Board. All members of the staff team are now attending the Board meetings between once a year and ten times a year (depending on reporting) so they get a better understanding of it's functioning.

- 4.120 Staff are keen to have a plan of training over a year to know what they are aiming for and where they want to be in five years time. Typical of the Programme Managers concern for her staff and her programme is her wish for staff to focus on their personal development as she is aware that this will benefit the programme.

Communication and Team Working with SLA partners

Communication between Gleadless Valley Sure Start and its SLA partners is good. Gleadless Valley is clearly an effective Sure Start programme, as the large number of referrals to the majority of the partners demonstrates; the positive problem of becoming 'victims of our own success' arises for the team.

SLA partners have contributed considerably to the initial successes of Gleadless Valley Sure Start. Both sides of this working and professional relationship have co-operated in a 'ground-up' community based, parent and child centred endeavour. There have been, and remain some teething problems. Not one of them seems to us to be beyond either management or resolution, with good will on all sides. And that, as the SLA respondents have established, is a commodity in plentiful supply.

4.121 Good communication between Gleadless Valley Sure Start and parents has also clearly been extended into positive informal links between the Sure Start team and its SLA partners, who show an appreciation of the personalities and skills in that team, as well as of its management:

'I think there's a good mix of personalities in the management team as well. You know, I think again, we work with a lot of different Sure Start areas and I think there's a good mix. I always feel very comfortable whomever I deal with, whoever I talk to, I've always felt very confident in having a conversation with whomever it might be.'

SLA Partner

'They're all very approachable.'

SLA Partner

4.122 The SLA partners mentioned a number of Gleadless Valley Sure Start workers, both by name and post, with whom they had regular contact. The programme team ensures that appropriately placed individuals are in contact with the respective partner. At the partner contract meeting this is further systemised when each partner is allocated a 'key' contact at Sure Start with regard to negotiation of contracts.

4.123 On the ground the crux of this system of communication involves referrals from the Sure Start programme to SLA partners, without which the latter could not hope to achieve the area's contracted targets. One representative commented:

'I think the referral system is working - which is really good because that's what we wanted. We might become victims of our own success, but at the moment it's manageable, so that's fine.'

SLA Partner

4.124 Other stakeholder representatives also feel that they are receiving more than enough referrals but worry about capacity in the longer term:

'The referral system is definitely working but it must be going into overload soon - we could be getting to saturation point before long.'

SLA Partner

4.125 One representative felt there had been fewer referrals to their agency from Gleadless Valley Sure Start, compared to other Sure Start areas, and that this shortfall is linked to difficulty recruiting volunteers. It is recognized that the area staff are addressing the issue proactively:

'We're really struggling with recruitment of volunteers within the area and really struggling for referrals within the area at the moment. We've been very open and honest about that and [the programme has] been fine with it. It's been a case of 'well, as long as you're doing your best ..'

SLA Partner

4.126 These difficulties need to be put into perspective: Gleadless Valley is clearly an effective Sure Start programme, as the large number of referrals to the majority of the partners demonstrates, and hence the positive problem identified of becoming 'victims of our own success'.

4.127 Some agencies accept they need to improve their links with the programme:

'I realise that me and my team need to start becoming more part of what's going on with the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme - we must start getting more involved. I've always been invited along but there's always been something else to prioritise ... the work that is being done by the programme in this area is really important'

SLA Partner

4.128 Willingness to participate in the programme can be compromised by the everyday reality of running services on the ground :

'There's a real difficulty creating windows for people to work together - the possibility of creating those windows for people to get together is so limited .. that's the reality'

SLA Partner

4.129 Regular meetings are held with organisations with Service Level Agreements to try to optimize communications.

4.130 SLA partners have contributed considerably to the initial successes of Gleadless Valley Sure Start. Both sides of this working and professional relationship have co-operated in a 'ground-up' community based, parent and child centred endeavour. There have been, and remain some teething problems - none seems to us to be beyond either management or resolution, with good will on all sides. And that, as respondents have established, is a commodity in plentiful supply.

Some of the real obstacles to joint working, which need to be dismantled, are identified next.

Gleadless Valley Sure Start is still in the early days of the development of established systems and protocols relating to the functioning of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with partners who provide contracted services for the local Programme. We recommend that the Partnership Board considers ways in which it can support the Programme Manager and her team in improving Service Level Agreements and contracts.

4.131 SLA partners need there to be a streamlining of Sure Start procedures for the issuing and monitoring of SLAs. It is asserted that there will difficulties with streamlining procedures involving Speech and Language Therapists, nonetheless there are clearly lessons be learned from the experience of SLA partners working with Sure Start for Children's Centre initiatives coming on stream in the city. The evidence from partners working with Gleadless Valley Sure Start suggests that a streamline citywide approach to contracting responsibilities is most likely to advance joint working and mainstreaming agendas in the interest of children under four and their families.

4.132 Annual, that is relatively short-term, SLA contracts constitute a major headache for partners. There are two perceived major drawbacks. First, short duration contracts limit recruitment and long-term planning as uncertainty prevails over the future of the SLA and associated funding. Second, (and consequentially) considerable stress regarding the position of staff, and even about organisational survival is imposed upon SLA partners, particularly those working from small agencies. A number of partners expressed similar views:

'well, we usually know about Christmas whether the Service Level Agreement will be continuing but uncertainty doesn't help when you're recruiting ...'

SLA Partner

'you worry that your funding might suddenly stop and you've got this member of staff that's doing good work and you think, 'Oh, if we don't meet those targets, what's going to happen to him or her?' That's always at the back of your mind. Even for me, it funds the vast majority of my salary and it's like, 'God, if we don't meet these targets, what's going to happen to me at the end of March?' And you think about the families and everything else, so the question of continuity is always at the back of your mind'

SLA Partner

'from our point of view, the contracts for the Sure Start kept the charity going, it wouldn't exist without them. Two years ago we had a major problem with whether it survived or not in getting the funding'

SLA Partner

'uncertainty and the way it undermines continuity is the biggest worry'

SLA Partner

4.133 A 'Partner Contract Meeting' was held during the course of the evaluation which gave partners some scope for believing that these understandable and legitimate worries could be addressed in the near future. It has been made clear that Gleadless Valley Sure Start is looking to discuss with individual partners how best to meet Sure Start objectives by developing a three-year plan for targets. This is to be in conjunction with clarification of long-term plans for mainstreaming funding in the future.

4.134 Clearly from the SLA representatives position three-year contracts corresponding to these plans would be ideal, as long as, of course, they can satisfy NCH and Gleadless Valley Sure Start that they have the necessary personnel, structures and skills in place for what amounts to ambitious expansion. In our view, three year contracts could be viable but the programme would have to factor in strategies for decreasing the budget within the three year period. Short term contracts do give Sure Start some control because it is known 'year on' how targets are being met and how much of the budget the programme may potentially have to move. There would clearly have to be close scrutiny of SLA provision involving three year contracts.

4.135 Progress on improving the SLA contract situation is likely to involve the clarification of some important issues for both sides involved in SLAs. Particular agencies have experienced difficulties with the fact that every Sure Start area has a different SLA contract negotiated on its behalf. As small organisations they find this situation time consuming and as already said, it gives rise to service provision problems. These agencies feel that they would prefer uniform SLAs and if this is not possible then there could be standard and common elements in all SLA contracts, the need for systematic audit along with M3 forms amply demonstrates the urgency attached to this.

4.136 It is worth emphasising that respondents feel improvements have been achieved over time:

'now we're all more clued up about everything, I think the contracts will be a lot more tight.'

Partnership Board Member

We note the confidence in the above remark and suggest it is now timely for the Partnership Board to consider ways in which it can support the Programme Manager and her team in improving Service Level Agreements and contracts.

- 4.137 It is likely that an imperative for standard contractual elements across areas and partners will grow as the programme develops towards mainstreaming. The Programme Manager has specifically sought to advance this issue through collective action involving seven other Sure Start programmes across the city. However, owing to several factors including different Sure Start accountable bodies; different areas with different, and increasingly better assessed, needs; highly autonomous Sure Start area teams and management; different partners providing different services; there is clearly some necessity for the service provision element of partner contracts to be adaptable to local conditions. This provides all Sure Start programmes, including Gleadless Valley with a considerable challenge. There needs to be an emphasis on continuity for programmes to be able radically transform relations with SLA partners and to sustain continuous development efforts that result in improved outcomes for young children and their families.
- 4.138 SLA stakeholders are realistic that they going to have to live with the consequences of this diverse reality and adapt their systems and personnel to it. This requires - in their view - an understanding approach from Gleadless Valley Sure Start and NCH, towards the problems of smaller organisations that often provide a unique service to the area. In this respect the openness and frankness of the Partner Contract meeting bodes well for the future, and we cite it here as an example of good practice.
- 4.139 Good practice is seen in the concerted efforts the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme has made towards building relationships with statutory agencies. Two innovative vehicles for building relationships have been identified:
1. staff members seconded from a statutory agency to Gleadless Valley Sure Start - for example the post of midwife
 2. staff members fully or partially funded by a statutory agency - as in the case of the community teacher at Gleadless Valley

The programme benefits enormously from the community links these arrangements generate.

4.140 The Sure Start requirement for full audit trails is putting new pressures on partners and quite reasonably, some stakeholders wonder if it would be easier for the programme to just employ staff and have everyone working in house. What is particularly impressive about the commissioning strategy adopted by the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme however, is that it has focussed not only on the meeting of day to day targets but also pays attention to the development of the programme itself. There is a significant amount of evidence embedded in stakeholder comments to suggest that the links the programme is establishing with statutory agencies add to the likelihood that the programme can advance long-term sustainable improvements for young children and their families in its reach.

4.141 The effectiveness of partnership working with statutory services is illustrated with reference to the programme's work with teenage parents which has been successful in supporting young people and their babies and also in recruiting new Sure Start members. Local parents draw attention to the importance of extending this provision to include all young parents, not just those in the teenage years. The need for the programme to think ahead to ensure that:

'the teenagers we've got now aren't dropped [make sure that the programme] carries on supporting them through Sure Start'

Local parent

has also been highlighted.

4.142 Good relations with statutory and other agencies are not easily come by and sometimes programme team members feel '*conspired against*' by the pressures of monitoring and evaluation in terms of possibilities for working with partner organisations' .

4.143 Examples of positive work being undertaken by Gleadless Valley Sure Start partners are strongly in evidence. The use of extended quotations is important here because they illustrate, in detail, the way in which Sure Start targets around parental involvement and development, as well as child welfare are at the heart of the partners' work. We feel the

quotes do not require summarisation or repetition but 'speak for themselves':

'part of our service level agreement was to provide parenting courses around making parenting more fun and more interesting for parents with children and then to have a group that moved on from that parenting course which started off being called the Follow On Group, but its now called the Smartie Group. That group started with three mums three years ago who'd accessed the parenting course, moved on to it. We've now got a group of nine committed mums, all of whom have done the parenting courses at different times and the difference in those mums is absolutely amazing. For me that's our success.'

SLA Partner

'The mums are all very different in themselves. We've got single mums, we've got very young mums. We've got some that are in partnerships or are married etc. I think it's about watching them with their children. It's looking at the different boundaries they now have with their children. It's the different types of discipline that they use. It hasn't worked with all of them, but with a lot of them it has. They've actually taken that step back and thought, 'No, I'm not going to clout them. I'm going to say something to them.' It's about... the questioning that they use and the respect that they have for their children.'

SLA Partner

'Allowing these parents to actually play has made a difference in my view. The play dough workshop was one of those where you get goose bumps on your arms just looking at these mums using play dough and being allowed to be children in ways perhaps they hadn't been in their own family environment for whatever reason and they then took it home and played with their children. We've got a photograph of some of the models that the mums made out of play dough and the pride those mums have in those. So, that was really good. I think it's about allowing them to access things that they can't afford. We've been ice-skating, we've been bowling. We've paid to have Aroma Therapists come in, Reflexologists, so it's about them having time for them to be adults and then go home and think, 'Well, I've had a couple of hours now. My children are in a safe crèche environment', and just the difference that that's made to them!'

SLA Partner

'We had one mum that went on and did a GCSE in human biology. I've got a mum that's doing a beauty therapy course. I've got another mum that did the Home Start volunteer preparation course and got the accreditation. Another one who actually recognised that her relationship wasn't right... wasn't safe to be in and found the courage to say, 'No you're going,' and I'm not sure that would have happened without Sure Start. Another situation where we were going down the 'child protection' route and we were able to work with a family support worker and move that down to a 'child in need' route which was so important because potentially you could have had two children there that weren't going to be with their birth parents. We had a debate about school actually and going to nursery with that family a couple of weeks ago and I thought 'they wouldn't have done that six months ago'.

SLA Partner

- 4.144 The programme has a good track record of working with other agencies to deliver a consistent approach to parenting initiatives. Following joint attendance at externally run training for parents and families a small group of trainers, co-ordinated by a Sure Start worker, has set out a ten week structure that all agencies have agreed and contributed to. In this way a range of agencies have joint ownership of the provision. The courses will be evaluated by the group and then rolled out to further groups of parents. The group are developing links with the Open College Network and exploring a range of creative ways of accrediting the course.
- 4.145 SLA representatives feel inter-partner co-operation holds the key to further successful development of SLAs with the Gleadless Sure Start programme. Indeed the evaluation workshop events opened up discussion about how various agencies with SLAs could carry each others publicity and begin thinking about cross referral processes.
- 4.146 SLA representatives note that better contact with some groups of parents is required :

There are a lot of young parents, quite a lot of parents with English as their second language, a lot of parents in transient housing and quite a lot of refugees and asylum seekers coming through the area who again are fairly transient. We are starting to improve our links with them but it's a long slow haul.

- 4.147 On a less positive side, SLA partners unanimously agree that too much of their time is taken up with Sure Start administration. Monitoring tasks are viewed as onerous and were typically described as 'a right nightmare':

'there seem to be so many competing monitoring and evaluation systems, requiring endless reformatting all of which is very time-consuming for partners'

Member of staff

- 4.147 Previously mentioned audit trails are known to be overly burdensome for some SLA partners and not conducive to their involvement with the programme.

- 4.148 Quarterly 'Partner Meetings' have been set up to try and help the situation - partners can bring forms and work them out with the programme's Finance and Monitoring Officers. Partners who do not attend these meetings are observed to struggle most with monitoring procedures. It is for this reason that we summarize that very useful support is provided through the Partner Meetings and we would strongly advise their continuation.

- 4.149 Health agencies have engaged with the programme in different ways. Health Visitors feel working relations within the programme are excellent, however they stress there are resource issues which mean Health Visitors cannot be as involved with Gleadless Valley Sure Start as they would like. Health visitors currently feel under threat from many quarters yet are vital to the future success of Sure Start:

Our health visitors are such a crucial link with mainstream ... hopefully the evaluation will help endorse this message.

Member of staff

- 4.150 Issues are further complicated because the programme crosses 2 PCTs and thus involves different Health Visitor teams. In respect of these matters, emphasis has been placed on the importance of noting that in other parts of the country there has been a better strategic partnership around the implementation of Sure Start programmes than in Sheffield. Therefore Health Visiting services across the city are currently going

through something of a 'catch up' in order to realign their services to the Sure Start programme areas:

'it's the strategic response that has been the issue; there's a spectrum of responses from Health Visitors services nationally to their attachments to Sure Start and in Gleadless Valley what you've got is currently unreformed and unresourced'

City-wide Sure Start Manager

4.151 Health Visitors did ask for Health Visitor time when the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme was in the Delivery Plan Stage, however it did not materialise and this has subsequently been a source of difficulty. Even so, though Health Visitors continue to be arranged in different teams, most are working well with Sure Start, though staffing shortages have meant less progress than might otherwise have been the case and at times the Health Visitors have felt '*stretched to breaking point*'.

4.152 Health Visitors involved with the programme have made very positive remarks about their links with Gleadless Valley Sure Start:

'the relief of having Sure Start resources has been great for Health Visitors - also the opportunity to throw away the rule book and create new working relations and practices'

Health Visitor

The Partnership Board and Accountability

Inconsistent Partnership Board representation membership militates against optimum partnership working. Where agencies have been given representation at Partnership Board level the efficiency of the Partnership Board is undoubtedly undermined if they then do not participate.

4.153 It is clear that good organisational procedures and processes necessary to the effective functioning of the Gleadless Valley Partnership Board are all in place. We were told reports and other written documents are circulated among Board members, usually, if not always, in good time for absorption and informed discussion. Agendas are clearly set out and parent members feel able to, and do, add their own agenda items. Good chairing is recognised and seen as 'key' to effective meetings which is a tribute to the parent members responsible, as well as to the support they get from Sure Start staff:

'I think the chairing has been good, whoever it's been.'

Partnership Board Member

4.154 Voting takes place by show of hands, and decisions are taken by simple majority, although most are made by consensus. Minutes are clearly recorded. There is evidence that decisions are fed back to constituent organisations.

4.155 It appears that Partnership Board outcomes rarely come to a vote or a split decision is predominantly and this is viewed as a positive feature of the Gleadless Valley system. Those who contributed to the evaluation indicated that the Board operates on the presumption that members have had the opportunity to broadly agree with Sure Start targets, the local programme's Delivery Plan and the Partnership Board Terms of Reference, the last of which is readily available and subject to Partnership Board discussion and revision at any time. All of this means that Board meetings

feel democratic and consensus is easily achieved. Of course it is important to keep a critical eye on the extent to which consensus prevails. Some members sense it might occasionally be more helpful to have disagreements fully aired than to gloss over different points of view.

4.156 We note the programme has, on occasion, required greater guidance from the Sure Start regional unit than has been forthcoming:

'... problems are pushed back in a way .. they say 'this should be supported through the Partnership Board.'. Now Partnership Boards aren't always at the stage where they can take certain issues on, understand it and support back, so really it comes down to the programme staff team sorting this out for themselves.'

Member of staff

Staff have already played, and wish to continue to play, an important role in building up the Partnership Board as a body to which they can, in turn, become increasingly and more effectively accountable.

DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

4.157 Getting the balance of power right in Sure Start Partnership Boards is a struggle most Programmes contend with at some point. It is an issue that clearly lies at the heart of the present, early, stage of development of Gleadless Valley Partnership Board. Through the evaluation we picked up questions about the relative power and influence of the staff team on the Partnership Board. Having said this, whenever discussion touched on this issue, respondents constantly returned to two important points:

(i) the many strengths and achievements of the Gleadless Valley Sure Start staff team and its Programme Manager; and secondly

(ii) although there are four staff members on the Partnership Board, including the Programme Manager, they have no vote.

4.158 Nevertheless, the 'balance of power' is a matter of importance to some parent Board members who expressed concerns over this. Clearly members of the Sure Start Staff team have a responsibility, indeed a positive duty, to inform Partnership Board thinking. This is part of doing their job effectively. Striking the balance is difficult because staff Partnership Board members might indeed be swayed by their own working interests and this is just why they have no vote. This means, however,

that they can only influence Partnership Board decisions by persuasion, discussion and argument. The question is then, one of how that influence is exercised, and it should be said that most comments were positive in this regard:

'You don't get shouted down. If you expressed a problem, they will say, 'okay,' and will listen. Even if a person doesn't agree they will smile and nod. They will not say, 'Actually, no.' Nobody ever shouts anybody down.'

Partnership Board Member

'from my experience, I would say that people have been encouraged if there's been something that they've wanted to query or question'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.159 Parent Board members say they feel able to ask questions in Partnership Board meetings when they required clarification. They report feeling welcomed and supported, able to air their views and agree that *'nobody is patronised'*. Some have taken a collective decision to stop contributors if they are using jargon :

'I think there's a list of all the jargon. But I said 'You could spend all the meeting just going down it.' I would rather just say 'Right stop, tell me what your saying'.

Partnership Board Member

- 4.160 There is scope for greater clarity concerning the remit of the Partnership Board. For example, uncertainty has been expressed about how people get onto the Partnership Board. The point has been made that Sure Start governance advice is not clearly articulated and it is therefore hard to translate into good Partnership Board practice. However, the programme team has quickly responded to address concerns which have surfaced through discussions held in the exploratory workshops conducted as part of the evaluation process:

'We have relooked at terms of reference, remit and so on since questions came up in the first exploratory workshop - we've already made progress on some points - the evaluation workshop process has allowed us to pick up on issues quickly'

Member of staff

- 4.161 Parent Board members have also raised issues about how information is fed in from the Sure Start staff team to the Partnership Board and fed back from the Partnership Board to staff. They value the participation of staff in Board meetings and recent decisions taken to formalise staff participation are likely to be viewed positively:

'Yeah, I think they ought to come and listen to what we're saying.'

Parent Board Member

- 4.162 Parent Board members confirm that the reporting of Partnership Board Sub-Groups meetings and decisions has been adequate, notably with regard to the workings of the Finance Sub-Group which sends a representative to Partnership Board meetings quarterly, as well as responding rapidly to requests from parent members for more information and oversight:

'If there's anything we want to know as parents regarding another meeting like the Finance or Capital or whatever, then they send a representative from the meeting to our SMILE group and put it in simple terms, to the Partnership Board. So, if you request it then they do it.'

Parent Board Member

This is an example of good inclusive practice.

- 4.163 Parent members, in their turn, make efforts to feed back information both to SMILE and the wider community, with varying degrees of success:

'we've taken things ourselves to the parent's groups and to our neighbours and friends'

'Certain things are confidential so we can't really talk about a lot of things. And to be honest, a lot of it is so confusing that unless you're there it's very hard to go out and explain it to other people. We try and get a bit through to our parents groups - but I don't think the rest of the community have got a clue what we do'

Parent Board Member

REVIEWING PROGRESS

- 4.164 It transpired that more work may need to be done on making known 'who does what on the Partnership Board':

'[a named person] sits ever so quietly in the corner. I've been quite interested to hear how important she is really.'

'It's nice to hear how some of the members seem able to go to a few different people to push our corner, I'm quite interested to hear that.'

Parent Board Members

- 4.165 Some of the Board members have identified the need to constantly update the Partnership Board Terms of Reference:

'I think having a session where we can just all talk is really helpful. Like today [a named person] has talked about how much she does. I bet there are other people on the Board who do a lot, that we just think sit quietly in the corner or whatever. It would be quite nice to take stock more I think.'

Partnership Board Member

'I think it would be nice as a relatively new member to have a refresher session about what we're all about and what our roles and what we're doing and what or who is changing ...'

Partnership Board Member

'If it came to an impasse in a meeting about a decision I don't know if there's a process that's been agreed on how we would follow it through so I think it would be really useful to go through the Terms of Reference again.'

Partnership Board Member

As already indicated, a response was made to this issue immediately it surfaced which is indicative of how quickly the programme can mobilise to respond to parent concerns.

REPRESENTATION

4.166 Partnership Board members have observed a general problem with attendance at the Partnership Board. It was held that members can be categorised in terms of their contribution to the Partnership Board:

*'There's like a hard core and then there's people who dip in and out.'
'That's bang on that, yeah.'*

Partnership Board Members

4.167 There have been consistent problems with representation from social services. This is a familiar problem for Sure Start programmes in Sheffield and is not exclusive to Gleadless Valley. Early Years and Health are reliably represented at the Board. Better representation from social services must be achieved as the following comments make clear:

'Social Services haven't got all their locality managers in place yet. Even so, it's appalling that Social Services aren't coming to the Board. It could only be positive if they did engage - it would help break down that mystique and the feeling families have that they only exist to take your children away.'

Partnership Board Member

4.168 Low attendance is problematic for the Partnership Board:

'the problem we have is we don't seem to get a very high attendance - when a lot of members end up not coming it's very hard for us to know who is represented.'

Partnership Board Member

'there's a list of the members that have signed the agreement in the Delivery Plan, but a number of them just don't come.'

Partnership Board Member

Inconsistency of membership inevitably has an impact on interpretations of what happens and thus militates against optimum partnership working. Where agencies have been given representation at Partnership Board level the efficiency of the Partnership Board is undoubtedly undermined if they then do not participate.

- 4.169 All agency representatives consulted were clearly satisfied with the supportive introduction to the Board given by the Programme Manager:

'From an agency point of view, the introduction I got after being identified as the person from our organisation who would be a member of the Board was very good. The Programme Manager actually made time to see me and go through the remit of the group and what the activities were, and the administrative person sent me copies of past minutes etc., so I felt that that area was covered quite well.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.170 Partnership Board participation was described as '*thoroughly enjoyable ~ everybody's very friendly, helpful and interesting*' and several respondents from a range of agencies remarked on the tremendous contribution they observed parent members to make to the Board.

- 4.171 Some representatives are prepared to take their Sure Start responsibilities very seriously and this is wholly beneficial as the following comments from a member who added on attendance at the Finance Sub-Group of the Partnership Board show:

'I'm not really on the Finance Sub-Group ... I have attended two meetings because I felt that I needed to just understand more and asked if it was all right for me to go. So I've just carried on going really for those two meetings which I've found very useful. I think part of it is taking back information to other teams who work actively in the area in promoting and extending services with partnership organisations etc. And it was about the issues as well, making sure that any issues that are being experienced are taken back into our area so that we can actively try and look at how we could resolve some of them with Partnership Boards etc.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.172 A detailed account of how Partnership Board decisions are fed back into other organisations, as well as how they are acted upon, illuminates concerted efforts to join up responses to Partnership Board matters:

'In terms of taking discussions from the Partnership Board back to the organisation I would pick the appropriate officer to go and see and say, 'Where are we at?' What are we doing in terms of seeing what that position is?' We'd give the issue to the appropriate officer

who would then move it forward and keep a check on where things were and feed back into our senior management team meeting. It's about targeting the appropriate people that that needs to go back to.'

Partnership Board Member

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation systems require strengthening. At the time of the evaluation problems with the collection, storage and accessibility of data for target evaluation and programme planning were identified. Further, timely collection of crucial data from other agencies, particularly midwives and Social Services leaves room for improvement. Action is being taken in respect of these issues.

4.173 How Sure Start staff monitor their success at meeting the targets they are required to meet - and what works well and not so well in relation to this is the core business of any evaluation. We have taken a very process led approach to this in our work with all stakeholders as we are mindful of the many Sure Start evaluation reports already in the public domain that simply state that 'monitoring is problematic' or show by presentation of statistical material that monitoring is in place in relation to targets - but provide little information of how this is happening and little exploration of experience for others to learn from.

4.174 We worked from the baseline, that any casually interested observer of Sure Start as it has run out over the past five years can confirm, namely that monitoring is experienced by the vast majority of Sure Start staff and agencies at all levels as difficult in terms of:

- Collecting data
- Analyzing what that data means
- Interpreting it and acting on the results in manner which adds value to practice on the ground.

4.175 As a way of looking at practice in relation to all of the above in respect to targets which the programme is working towards and at the same time helping to positively input to capacity to 'do' all of these things we have, in our discussions with all stakeholders looked to elicit;

- their perspectives on what they need to monitor and evaluate -

and why

- what helps in this process?
- what hinders?

What follows is a summary of our findings in relation to where the programme is at in getting to grips with monitoring and evaluation and what could usefully be done to improve processes.

4.176 *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* is still in the early days of the development of established systems and protocols relating to the functioning of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with partners who provide contracted services for the local programme. This is the context in which issues presented in this section should be read.

4.177 As we have found is common to many Sure Start programmes in the early stages, it is the case that *Gleadless Valley* monitoring and evaluation systems require strengthening. At the time of the evaluation, as has been noted, problems with the collection, storage and accessibility of data for target evaluation and programme planning were identified. At the time of writing, several improvements have already been made. For example, structures newly put in place to improve M3 data returns are working well for both partners and the team.

4.178 Nevertheless, timely collection of crucial data from other agencies, particularly information held by Midwives and Social Services leaves a good deal of room for improvement.

4.179 In respect of Social Services, reluctance to provide child protection data has constrained *Gleadless Valley Sure Start* and possibly reflects uncertainty about the role of Sure Start in child safety. This uncertainty is, of course recycled by lack of participation by Social Services in Sure Start both within the *Gleadless Valley* area and more widely across the city. Recently the *Gleadless Valley* Programme Manager has secured agreement from the Sheffield ACPC for the information to be provided to all Sheffield Sure Start programmes twice a year which, if reliably supplied, will improve matters considerably.

4.180 Baseline data gathering relating to health remains problematic. Local health services clearly hold the key to the Sure Start programme gaining effective universal access to children and parents, including those it is finding 'hard to reach, through the provision of ante and postnatal data.

However, staff have identified poor and tardy data relating to pregnancies and births as a major stumbling block in this area and ongoing improvements in respect of this are essential. Some progress has been made.

- 4.181 Problems with data pertaining to midwifery are now being tackled city-wide. It is nationally known that Sure Start is finding data sharing from the NHS difficult. Gladless Valley Sure Start has certainly been frustrated by the amount of data midwives can have, not least because the programme's midwife is also a member of Jessop Wing (where most Sheffield babies are born) *'and still can't get information for Sure Start'*. At present, the programme team can only obtain statistics from local health professionals and this does not entail sufficient information about 'start points' and what has happened to the baby in the Jessops stage, for example:

'Jessops have the information on things like the child deaths, terminations of pregnancy and postnatal depression - this information is very hard to get from the Jessop Wing. We are starting to look at a policy to change this because we really need that information passed over. What they're saying at the moment is that they won't pass it over, but clearly we don't want people turning up when there's been a child death at any age, whether its antenatal or postnatal, that we don't know about'

Member of staff

- 4.182 Continuing in this vein, referring to data printouts received from Jessops, we heard of further difficulties :

'We think we get printouts three-monthly. At the end of June we received some, then it stopped and we've just received another printout, but knowing when we'll get them is crucial - we need to know whether we've missed a big gap and how many people might have fallen into that gap that we could potentially miss ...'

Member of staff

- 4.183 Staff are well aware that inadequate data of the type discussed here cannot facilitate early, effective and appropriate Sure Start intervention, particularly with some of its most vulnerable clients. It is imperative that a positive culture of referral direct to the relevant Sure Start professionals is put into place. We regard this as a matter of urgency.

4.184 NPCT has drafted a protocol that is now being checked by the NCH lead body for Gleadless Valley Sure Start which it is hoped could improve data sharing but as a member of staff notes:

'There are still 'hearts and minds' issues to be won with some local professionals who are unclear about why we need the data and what we'll do with it. And there have been difficulties because of the adhoc way in which some health professional's monitor their own performance, for instance, not all midwives are documenting breast feeding rates and some describe their case loads in ways which don't tell us everything we need to know.'

Member of Staff

4.185 Sharing of child health data is improving as a result of sustained efforts to implement change :

'Liasing with the health visitors about how we promote Sure Start services has been helpful because they are getting access to a lot of families that we are probably not.'

Member of staff

4.186 The headache of collecting monitoring data is ongoing for the programme. It is clear that staff and partners recognise and value the contribution of the Information Officer. We are inclined to wonder whether 14 hours a week is enough time for the person in this role to undertake relevant tasks effectively as the programme develops and expands. Recent agreement that there will be additional administrative support to facilitate the inputting of data is prudent.

4.187 Having the Information Officer in place has had a massive impact upon improving all aspects of data monitoring and evaluation for the programme. The Information Officer's next priority is to train the staff on using the database to enable them to access details of families and draw down reports. The programme has bought Crystal Report Software and another package called MapPoint which will enable data sets to be shown in a more visible and accessible way. These packages will particularly assist parents and other individuals unused to dealing with quantitative data.

For example, MapPoint can show a map of the area and flag who is registered and who is not, or indicate where families with young children

live. It can identify which families have been seen by a member of the Sure Start team within the last month and so helps to identify pockets of the population which are not involved in Sure Start and so on. The package is now being reviewed by the other Sheffield Sure Start programmes and this provides another good example of joined up city working pioneered by the Gleadless Valley programme.

4.188 The Information Officer role has evolved so that now the person in post works as an Information Officer across three NCH Sheffield programmes. This creates an excellent opportunity for sharing and developing data practice.

4.189 A number of further activities are being piloted to try and improve data collection. Gleadless Valley Sure Start has developed a database system and is in the process of trialing a system where everyone inputs what they are doing on a weekly basis. If this works the programme hopes to be able to produce monthly information updates and statistics. IT systems which help establish clarity around roles and responsibilities while also gathering data necessary for meeting Sure Start targets have been identified as an example as best practice.

4.190 We have picked up on interesting discussions about SLA provision, and its relation to 'value for money', that demonstrates that a great deal of thought has gone into the issue of monitoring and evaluation. Most SLA partners had the view that the Sure Start evaluation procedure rests on 'quantitative' measurement of 'numbers':

'The emphasis seems to be on numbers of families enrolled'

SLA Partner

'We're not tangible enough, are we? That's the thing. A lot of what we're doing, you can see the benefit but you can't pin it down to a value in monetary terms because it's a qualitative measure that's important, rather than a quantitative measure for a lot of it.'

SLA Partner

4.191 Nonetheless, generally the partners recognise that it is impossible to draw an absolutely hard and fast distinction between quantitative and qualitative evaluation, and noted that the collection of such statistics bears directly on important Sure Start targets and objectives:

'We've not really had much discussion on it. I suppose what might come into it is benefit uptake and that sort of thing which we'd be able to do because we keep those kind of statistics, so I can always put them into a report if they need them. But we've not had a great deal of discussion around that.'

SLA Partner

- 4.192 Not all partners are well placed to collect and collate the necessary data and the following comments put some perspective on why this can be the case :

'I really ought to have got a set of figures to everybody, and I have prepared them, but I just haven't got round putting them in to all the different systems. I've got 16 different contracts at the moment and no Contracts Manager so it's just impossible.'

SLA Partner

Developing a Community Presence

Links between the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team increasingly seeks to maximise opportunities to engage with the local community.

4.193 Community group representatives operating locally and across the city identify a variety of ways in which understanding and relationships can be, and are, being enhanced between their respective agencies and Sure Start programmes, including Gleadless Valley. These are outlined next.

4.194 Representatives of local community groups we spoke to, specifically about the Gleadless Valley programme, were aware of the principal Sure Start aims and objectives. They know that the programme aims to support families with children under 4 as the following comments show:

'it's to improve healthcare, schooling, breastfeeding rates, and the socialisation of 0-4 year olds'

'the programme will give a better chance for under 4's. It will provide quality services, playgroups provisions in the area and outreach groups.'

'to give children a Sure Start.... working with parents ...working with the whole family'

Local community group representatives

4.195 Community groups the programme is working with at present have a clear understanding of the programme's remit. Further work is warranted to consider ways in which Gleadless Valley Sure Start's aims and objectives can be shared with any groups in the community *not* presently involved with the programme.

4.196 Generally, the groups interviewed were positive about their relationship with the programme. A number of representatives said they have been involved with the programme since the beginning:

'we were involved from the very earliest stages of Sure Start...about 5 or six years ago...we helped pull the bid/plan together'

'we were right in there from the beginning'

Local community group representatives

4.197 Over half of the community groups reported that they have regular contact with the programme and representatives from all of these groups had visited the Sure Start offices. The majority of the groups we spoke to could name Sure Start staff and knew of a named person they could contact if they needed to:

'we have very regular contact with Sure Start ... I have just come off the phone from speaking with the Programme Manager'

Local community group representative

4.198 The experience local groups report of 'linking in' with Gleadless Valley Sure Start is however somewhat mixed. A few representatives said they did not have regular contact or information from the programme and one group expressed disappointment about this:

'we used to have more contact but there was a lack of help and it died off. We got really involved in Sure Start - we recommended them to other playgroups, however, they stopped being interested in us'

Local community group representative

So whilst a number of representatives report that Gleadless Valley Sure Start has initiated some contact and begun to encourage links with their organisation, others feel more contact is required.

4.199 Some community organisations have been proactive in building up a relationship with Sure Start as the comments below show:

'we had taken over the running of a playgroup in the area ...and we saw the play bus and thought it would be a good idea to link together'

'we were going to set up our own toddler group and we were advised to get in contact with Sure Start...to link in with them'

Local community group representatives

- 4.199 All of the groups surveyed were aware of and are pleased to receive publicity material produced by Gleadless Valley Sure Start. Respondents are familiar with a number of different types of publicity material including brochures, the Gleadless Valley Sure Start Newsletter, leaflets; advertisements for courses and events, posters; and fridge magnets.

Publicity appears to have been effectively embedded over time:

'Since the Programme Manager came on board things have really taken off. There are plenty of posters, advertisements - it is now absolutely spot on.'

Local community group representative

Gleadless Valley Sure Start publicity is now described as *'everywhere'*.

- 4.200 Community group representatives who have contributed to the evaluation feel the programme is making a good job of establishing parent involvement. Services and activities mentioned as noticeably having a positive impact include: breastfeeding awareness and support, play schemes and speech and language development activities.
- 4.201 Like other stakeholders, community group representatives referred to issues around the capital project and the lack of a permanent base as hindering the programme from their point of view. The programme might wish to address ways of helping local community groups to better understand the ongoing processes it is faced with, and to consider whether local community groups can be supportive in moving shared aspirations further on.
- 4.202 The community groups surveyed recognise that Gleadless Valley Sure Start provides access to services for the communities and families they represent. Most say they do tell the families of children under 4 they have contact with about Sure Start and they expect this to be reciprocal - with Sure Start spreading the word about their agencies and what they offer. Local community groups see the development of information

sharing networks with Sure Start as an important mechanism through which all agencies can understand more about, and respond more effectively to, the local community.

- 4.203 Community group representatives operating across the city of Sheffield have said they are keen to strengthen links with all Sure Start programmes, including Gleadless Valley. They would welcome being asked to provide reports or bulletins to the Partnership Board meetings if this would help create an opening for their involvement.
- 4.204 Involving community groups in Sure Start evaluations is seen as beneficial in terms of facilitating links with local programmes and with other groups operating in Sure Start areas - those included in this process felt it signaled a willingness to take the views of community stakeholders seriously.
- 4.205 All community group stakeholders assert that successful inter-agency work depends upon tried and tested personal relationships. They value open dialogue with the programme which helps also to reinforce personal relationships that underpin good partnerships.
- 4.206 Some community groups operating on a city-wide basis but without specific connections to a named local programme do not receive Gleadless Valley Sure Start publicity materials and consequently do not always have a clear, up to date picture of the services that the programme is offering. A regular city wide Sure Start newsletter would be welcomed.

Mainstreaming – the New Challenge

The Programme Manager has demonstrated willingness to engage in city wide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services. In so doing she blends defence of the Gleadless Valley programme with a recognition of challenges it faces and the imperative for change.

4.207 The Green Paper *Every Child Matters*, places the challenge of mainstreaming best practice of initiatives such as Sure Start at the forefront of strategic planning for all children's services. The mainstreaming agenda for Sure Start in Sheffield is now focused city wide on The Children's Centre Initiative. **Thinking** about mainstreaming services and the impact this will have on Sure Start is fairly well developed in Sheffield and well articulated in the document *Sheffield Sure Start: Mainstreaming Services* (Davies 2003).

4.208 The Sheffield Sure Start programmes see mainstreaming as:

- Policy lessons from the work and experience of Sure Start local programmes having a direct influence on policy process, this to include governance issues and expertise in involving local community (mainstreaming policy)
- Securing of funding to continue particular activities (mainstreaming projects)
- Ensuring that mainstream agencies adapt and reproduce examples of good practice from programme activity so ensuring that successful Sure Start approaches are an integral part of future service provision (mainstreaming good practice)

4.209 **Practice** around mainstreaming is less well developed however. So, whilst our evaluation can evidence many good ideas on what will help and support the programme in constructing a framework for feeding into local and district wide forums to sustain its work, and at the same time help to re-shape service delivery, examples of existing practice which supports the definitions of mainstreaming given above are harder to come by. Having said this, there is evidence to suggest that Gleadless Valley Sure Start both sees the potential in advancing the mainstreaming agenda and has developed a strategic dimension to its thinking which is evidenced by sensible planning for mainstreaming development efforts. Practical examples of the mainstreaming efforts undertaken by Gleadless Valley the programme have been mentioned elsewhere in this report and singled out as exemplars of good practice.

4.209 Gleadless Valley Sure Start is not alone in finding mainstreaming an uphill struggle and, as Davies notes, given that Sure Start funding will only just begin to taper for the Trailblazers in 2004, there is has to date been no time imperative to persuade statutory services to accommodate successful Sure Start initiatives. Nevertheless, in meeting the Sure Start objectives effective working practice with other agencies is essential, and the programme will need to direct significant attention to this in the coming year. Below, based on the data we have collected from a range of stakeholders, we set out how this may be achieved - whilst at the same time noting what is working well already to take the programme in this direction.

4.210 All stakeholders consulted as part of this evaluation say they are keen to extend and develop two-way relationships between Gleadless Valley Sure Start and other local agencies.

4.211 At the heart of mainstreaming for the partners is the Children's Centre plan:

'for us, because of the way Children's Centres are going to be run area-wise, what we need to be doing is getting a foot in the door of every Children's Centre to promote the work we do and try and get more money to deliver that work in those communities'

SLA Partner

'I'd like to see Sure Start perhaps pushing some people forward from the families to come and be volunteers at the Children's Centre and then it would be making it a bit more sustainable within the area'

SLA Partner

- 4.212 It can be very hard for people who have worked in organisations which have had to constantly fight for resources, to actually drop an entrenched 'combative' way of thinking and look at 'working in partnership'. Yet partnership working can be the key to survival as a viable agency. How Gleadless Valley Sure Start engages with this process - and what are the most appropriate channels for doing so - requires further reflection and discussion. As the programme and its partners know, 'Sure Start can't do everything' and the Partnership Board will need to support the staff team in building into its strategic planning mechanisms for working out how other people or groups can fulfil the roles which are currently outside the Gleadless Valley Sure Start Partnership's remit, but which their own services and efforts are often very connected to.
- 4.213 Mainstreaming of services is fundamental to the Sure Start vision. Time for a sustained practical focus on mainstreaming issues is limited and the staff team have had few opportunities to stand back and take a medium to long-term view on where services are going in Gleadless Valley. But, as we noted earlier, work on mainstreaming is regarded as a priority; it is clearly at the front of the Programme Manager's mind even though the conditions for its advancement are limited at the moment. The problem of how relationships with other agencies can be fostered to ensure mainstreaming of key services and initiatives is key and the programme is already addressing the difficult questions of who - specifically can help forge mainstreaming links and how to advance this agenda.
- 4.214 The rapidly changing environment in which the programme operates, and especially the introduction of the Children's Centre initiative, bring the mainstreaming agenda clearly into view for Gleadless Valley Sure Start. One of the most impressive features of the discussions held with staff for the purposes of this evaluation was their willingness and ability to focus on important Sure Start long term goals and wider objectives. We particularly have in mind everyone's expressed commitment to building the foundations of mainstreaming in the here and now. It is also clearly recognised that at the heart of this, given the programme is at an early stage of development, is the effective expansion of working partnerships with other agencies: Health, Education and Social Services.
- 4.215 The Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme has two important advantages here. Firstly, it has a midwife and two ex-health visitors in as staff members, and the midwife and the community education teacher

are joint appointments with statutory organisations thus enabling them to take very strong inter-agency roles in the programme. Secondly, staff members have already done much groundwork partnership working with their peers that exemplifies good practice:

'I encourage the referrer to do the initial home visit because it puts families at ease to be introduced to Sure Start by someone who already knows them and who they're comfortable with. We both go to meet families within their own home where they feel totally secure. So the purpose of the initial home visit is to introduce myself to the family and to share some information about Sure Start, basically how we work and what we do ... I think in terms of practice, that's really good in working in partnership.'

Member of staff

- 4.216 The programme has made considerable inroads towards the effective expansion of working partnerships with local schools and educational establishments in a short space of time. It has found that in the context of rapid change heralded by the Children's Centre initiative it is necessary to concentrate in the initial stages on creating relationships with schools that will facilitate future development in a climate of uncertainty :

'Impact so far? In principle schools locally have agreed to work in partnership in terms of integrated provision. They understand that this will involve issues around quality and perhaps restructuring how they will include children from birth up into their primary foundation classes. We are starting to establish that schools will have to have different things on school sites and be open all year round. They understand in principle that youth clubs will use their premises, health visitors and social workers will come in ... we have established all this and agreed 'Part One' in principle. Now we have to move on to some sort of formation of action. That's the next task but we're not there yet. Remember though, that in terms of impact on school's Gleadless Valley Sure Start has only been here a year

Programme Manager

- 4.217 Work with schools is necessarily limited until the conditions are in place to cement initial links. What is particularly significant about the connections Gleadless Valley Sure Start is making with schools is that a

range of stakeholders are focussing directly on the importance of strong links between early years provision and children's experience of school:

'Sure Start seems to be making a difference in Gleadless Valley. We need to make sure that 'the great Sure Start start' is not diminished when children move through school'

Partnership Board Member

4.218 Discussions are concentrated on the importance of links between Sure Start and secondary schools, as well as with the more familiar Sure Start territory of links with the primary sector:

'We want to get into secondary schools to offer support on teenage pregnancy - and to make links here between primary and secondary schools. We are making inroads - we have high expectations and local schools are quite excited about what the changes could be.'

Member of staff

CHAPTER FIVE

Ways forward for the programme

ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

- 5.1 In developing Action and Implementation Plans for respective stakeholder groups we have tried to provide realistic and practical guidance grounded in the experiences and perceptions reported to us. Action and Implementation Plans are working tools and need to be negotiated and agreed on within and across stakeholder groups - so what we have detailed is not intended to be directive or exhaustive but rather meant to guide the commitment which is already clearly in evidence to get the most out of the programmes work and support its continued development.

- 5.2 We envisage that it will be the role of the Programme Manager with the Partnership Board to facilitate discussion and agreement about actions to be implemented as part of the development planning process which the evaluation will hopefully feed into. We hope you will consider the recommendations below and think about who might be charged with taking them forward. We have included actions for each stakeholder group that we feel we could usefully be undertaken.

Action and Implementation Plans for Programme Staff

During the process of this evaluation, programme staff demonstrated understanding of each other's views and perspectives and raised matters of concern in a positive and professional manner. They are clearly committed to providing a high quality service and keen to develop working practices that will affect positive change for children and families in Gleadless Valley.

It is our view that the staff group of any effective Sure Start programme must also be robust enough to engage actively, creatively and constructively with all stakeholder groups. They should continually reflect on and review all aspects of their own practice, with a fixed focus on enhancing the position of parents and children and young people as key drivers of every aspect of the programme's work. We strongly encourage the Gleadless Valley programme Staff Group to continue the collective process of critical self-reflection in which they have become engaged through participation in this evaluation process.

Based on the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews the following activities are recommended for the programme Staff Group to help ensure that the programme continues to go from strength to strength. The suggestions outlined below entail a continual review of working practices. We emphasise here that these suggestions do not infer criticism of existing practices but rather signal the potential for staff to develop their own expertise and the service offered.

The Staff Group could

- Monitor their experience of attending Partnership Board meetings to maximise the usefulness of this newly formalized link. As new systems have been brought in to strengthen participation of staff in the Board it would be timely to develop a clear strategy for reporting to the Board in which staff can take pride that will raise the profile of individual and collective staff efforts and increase confidence in the report process.
- Review strategies for systematically taking account of staff training needs. Training should continue to enable individual and team development and respond to the wish expressed by staff for long term progression.

- Set up further systems to compliment the 'Team Wall' which will improve and formalize information sharing and effectively serve the team's needs for managing information as it develops, and particularly, when it moves to new premises.
- Work towards increased clarity on how events and activities can become the building blocks for sustainable target-oriented service delivery in order to identify ways in which staff can take part in assessing the sustainability and the potential for mainstreaming of services.
- Review strategic plans for engaging with families with under 4's who have marginal or no contact with Gleadless Valley Sure Start with the aim of addressing the specific blocks to participation.
- Encourage strategic alliances with local schools to promote working together on changing priorities for the programme and related providers. SENCOs are keen to extend their links with Sure Start programmes.
- Persist with the need to lobby collectively with other Sure Start programmes for more appropriate information from the Jessops Hospital and from Social Services. The City-wide Sure Start Manager should be centrally involved in this on behalf of the programme.
- Carefully monitor (i) the workload of the Information Officer and (ii) anticipated increasing referral rates.

Action and Implementation Plans for the Partnership Board

On the basis of the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews the following activities could be undertaken by the Partnership Board to help ensure that the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength. In respect of each suggestion we recommend the identification of a named person to be responsible for driving the action forward.

- Undertake to clarify the Partnership Board's shared vision for the programme in the context of the Children's Centre Plan. We suggest this process is initiated through a dedicated series of away days and specifically involves representatives from the Accountable Body. There is a shared feeling that the Partnership Board does need time for development.
- Clarify all roles, responsibilities, purposes and functions with all members of the Partnership Board.
- Develop, disseminate and implement a clear Strategic Plan detailing activities that the Partnership Board wishes the programme to prioritise through the next planning cycle. Specifically we would expect these to include
 - a review of the key needs for service planning and delivery for reaching and consulting with currently underrepresented children and their families,
 - identification of appropriate mechanisms for consulting with parents and children.
- Take a firm lead on the acquisition of appropriate premises for the programme. Specifically we would expect this to include
 - action to progress the securing of a high quality administrative base with first class ICT facilities,
 - active support to assist the programme's need to move into Newfield Green Clinic as soon as possible
 - practical support for the programme's efforts to link with schools

- Identify a named person to monitor the effectiveness of the revised Terms of Reference.
- The Board must find ways of ensuring attendance of a member from Social Services and a collective strategy to pursue this with other Sure Start programmes and the City-wide Sure Start Manager would be assistive.
- Monitor and make public activities which are undertaken to optimise links with targeted groups currently under-represented on the Partnership Board.
- Set up new opportunities for parent involvement in the Partnership Board - for example following the suggestion that some parents are willing to help out with administration on a flexible or one-off basis. Work with parents to evolve practical ideas for ways forward on this.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of SLA Partners

The Gleadless Valley Sure Start Programme has a key role to play in eliciting and responding to initiatives and ideas for service development put forward by SLA partners and prospective partners. Based on the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews, the following activities could be undertaken by programme Staff in collaboration with the Partnership Board in respect of SLA partners to help ensure that the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength. In respect of each suggestion we recommend the identification of a named person to be responsible for driving the action forward.

- Review strategic plans for encouraging SLA partners to develop their relationship with the programme. This will involve reviewing contracting arrangements. The review should be set up to enable SLA partners to help the programme team to shape and fine tune services that they provide to meet Gleadless Valley Sure Start targets. A review of how SLA partners would like their work to be monitored and evaluated in line with Sure Start requirements and also to show 'added value' would be timely.
- Retain the Partner Contract meetings as these have proved invaluable to local partners.
- Establish joint initiatives to ensure the experiences of individual SLA providers working with the team and with the client population feed back into the process of reviewing activities and also inform the process of reviewing the SLAs themselves. In relation to this it is important to set up systems that enable SLA partners to ensure they can identify and respond to client needs which do not 'fit' into existing patterns of service provision. All of this is crucial for sustainability and expanding targeted services.
- Convene discussion with local community groups of ways in which joint work can be undertaken to reach and include children and families who persistently fall outside of the reach of the programme. In Gleadless Valley, families seeking asylum or refuge, and disabled children and

parents, have been identified as groups currently missing out on Sure Start provision.

- Regularly update information on *Gleadless Valley Sure Start's* provision to avoid duplication of activities (particularly with reference to training).
- Establish a network of *SLA* partners who will work in consultation with the programme to promote links into local schools.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Community Groups

The Gleadless Valley Sure Start Programme has a key role to play in eliciting and responding to initiatives and ideas for service development put forward by Community Groups working in the area. Based on the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews, the following activities should be undertaken by programme Staff in collaboration with the Partnership Board in respect of Community Groups to help ensure that the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength. In respect of each suggestion we recommend the identification of a named person to be responsible for driving the action forward.

- The overarching question of interest to Gleadless Valley Sure Start and Community Groups concerns how to 'join things up' to make the most of hard-pressed resources and expertise already available in the area, to enhance the experience of disadvantaged families and young children. In respect of this, a review of participation and involvement of community groups in the work of the programme and of existing co-operative arrangements the programme has with the voluntary sector, should be set up. It could be worthwhile to launch a strategic plan for widening participation of community groups in the work of the programme.
- Take stock of the programme's existing communication strategies to ensure that its aims and objectives are communicated clearly and concisely to all relevant local groups. Check that all known local groups do receive publicity material and are engaged in a strategy for making those in their organisations aware of what Gleadless Valley Sure Start is doing.
- Identify systems for effective development of links with local groups wishing to strengthen existing relationships with the programme. This could include the development of strategic alliances through which, *at the invitation of the Partnership Board*, community groups can have a direct input to programme issues.
- Involve community representatives and local people in discussions concerning new sites as part of the process of getting the programme more established and accepted in the local community.

- Contribute to setting up a citywide strategy to facilitate interaction between Sure Start programmes across Sheffield and community organisations that work across the city with families with young children. Identify a named person to participate in this process for *Gleadless Valley*.

- Convene discussion with local community groups of ways in which joint work can be undertaken to reach and include children and families who persistently fall outside of the reach of the programme. In *Gleadless Valley*, families seeking asylum or refuge, and disabled children and parents, can be identified as groups currently missing out on Sure Start provision.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Parents

The Gleadless Valley Sure Start Programme is required to elicit and respond to aspirations and ideas for service development put forward by local parents. Based on the data we have collected through meeting with parents involved in the programme, the following activities should be undertaken by programme Staff in collaboration with the Partnership Board to help ensure that the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength.

- Clarify strategic plans for maximising the participation and involvement of parents in the work of the programme at all levels. Specifically we would expect this to include review of plans to raise the profile of new parents within the organisation and to further position family members as the principal architects of Gleadless Valley Sure Start.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for maximising the participation and involvement of children in the work of the programme.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for maximising the participation and involvement of men in the work of the programme.
- Strengthen contact between the Gleadless Valley Parents Forum and parents groups from other Sure Start programmes in the city.
- Work with parents to tackle the issue of developing targeted services.
- Set up fact finding to identify new information counters for promoting the programme in Gleadless Valley. Parents could conduct this enquiry.
- Continually learn through maximizing the input of parents, caregivers and young children into training throughout the organization.

CHAPTER SIX

Concluding observations and Recommendations

- 6.1 *Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme is still evolving and has clearly been experienced positively by many stakeholders. Imaginative services around ALL 4 targets are evidenced. At the time of going to print, the Programme is making great strides in advancing its agenda in relation to the city-wide Children's Centre Plan. Networking, publicity and information are clearly crucial in respect of these issues and the programme is using these means to advance the programme's interests to good effect. There is scope to further develop innovative approaches to widening participation in the programme and we have made recommendations in respect of this for all stakeholders in the section on Action and Implementation plans of this report.*
- 6.2 *Stakeholders who have contributed to this evaluation are unanimously agreed that the work of the Gleadless Valley Sure Start programme is highly valued by the local community. Aspects of its delivery, including parent relations and imaginative services which support the four sets of Sure Start objectives provide useful 'best practice' exemplars for other programmes to utilise. It is agreed and evident that processes of achieving consensus about future directions for the programme increasingly feel genuinely open to those who are involved with the programme.*
- 6.3 *As discussion has developed through this evaluation reflections on key processes have been forthcoming and clear ideas have emerged about what might improve practice. There are many strong features of the programme which have been discussed. Yet what is communicated about what the programme achieves in terms of outcomes is what its work will ultimately*

be judged on and there is work to be done on enhancing monitoring processes and consolidating the training and development portfolio for staff. Since the programme was launched in Gleadless Valley, it has coped with a great deal of change and uncertainty. Nevertheless we are confident that the programme is on track and that structures are firmly in place for the programme to go from strength to strength.

- 6.4 We hope the programme and its allies will consider the recommendations and Action and Implementation Plans provided and think about who might be charged with taking them forward.
- 6.5 We have 4 recommendations for the next evaluation of the programme, these are that:
- Progress on following through Action and Implementation plans is a key focus of evaluation - because these plans have emerged directly from the expressed aspirations of the programme's key stakeholders.
 - Parents are supported in developing a central role as community researchers - because Gleadless Valley Sure Start has a nucleus of committed group of parents ready to take on this role and staff well-equipped to support them.
 - A strong focus is placed on thinking about child development outcomes - because building an evidence base will build confidence in the provision and position some of the imaginative services being provided through Gleadless Valley Sure Start at the leading edge in terms of being able to provide practice pointers for other providers
 - The programme continues to align its evaluation with that of other Sure Start programmes - because the headway made through the Programme's willingness to work collaboratively towards advancing the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services in this way has been impressive.
- 6.6 The Programme Manager is clearly asserting proper methods of consultation. This, combined with her willingness to work through difficult issues has impressed us as evaluators. A useful step to engage with next will be for the Programme Manager to write an open response to this evaluation which will set in motion the process by which the programme will move beyond some of the challenging messages outlined in this report. This will position Gleadless Valley Sure Start as a programme capable of making

a pivotal contribution to the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services which is now focused city wide on the Children's Centre initiative.

Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn, July 2004.

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ANNEX A - TRAINING RESOURCE

**MAXIMISING INCLUSION IN
SURE START**

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

Looking at everyday practice in the delivery of Sure Start

At the request of the Programme Manager we have included this Annex as a training resource which can be used to engender further self assessment of programme's delivery. The production of this resource has been made possible by the willingness of six Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers to commit to a model of transparency for the purposes of this evaluation.

What's in the Training Section

The Training Section contains stories of everyday Sure Start events followed by a series of themed 'Thinking Points' around the general topic of 'Maximizing Inclusion in Sure Start'.

Stories of Sure Start delivery were collected by a roving researcher whose brief was to focus specifically on how parents feel about involvement with the programme, how convenient Sure Start services are for parents in the area, any barriers preventing parents accessing services and how satisfied parents are with the services they use. To gather this information in ways which would be easy and comfortable for parents, programmes suggested activities the researcher could attend to observe and talk with parents. Getting alongside parents in their everyday encounters with Sure Start turned out to be hugely informative, offering many more benefits from research enquiry than we had imagined.

As a way of finding out about parents experiences, the roving reporter strategy turned out to be a process which parents felt comfortable with and very willing to contribute to. A spin-off of this contact between parents and the roving researcher has been that many parents we met indicated that 'next time' they might feel confident enough to be actively engaged in producing 'Sure Start snapshots' themselves and in developing their role as community researchers for any subsequent evaluation.

Stories provide a scope for describing what works well in terms of raising participation and involvement in Sure Start settings which bears immediate relation to the actuality of everyday experiences. They validate the day-to-day struggles which make the process of widening participation both a difficult and necessary business. They are clearly subjective and impressionistic, presenting only one person's viewpoint, but nevertheless have great potential for transferring both user and provider experiences of participation in Sure Start

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into this report. Narrative description brings alive a sense of the essential ingredients which facilitate participation and involvement in a range of settings.

The stories offered as snapshots put forward examples of practical ways in which Sheffield Sure Start programmes, including Burngreave and Firvale, are working to bring young children and their parents into what the programme can offer. The snap-shots do not always make for easy and comfortable reading; they sometimes reveal thorny issues which need to be explored. 'Thinking points' to assist in this process follow the set of stories. The 'Thinking Points' are by no means exhaustive and many others will occur - however they signal that there is no room for complacency in the delivery of Sure Start programmes and will generate a range of practice indicators for Burngreave and Firvale and other Sure Start programmes alike.

As readers attempt to draw out 'the key points for successful Sure Start delivery' it will be clear that Sheffield programmes are carrying out deeply impressive work to take forward the project of improving outcomes for young children in the city. Yet even within the snap shots, similarities and differences between practices and interpretations of what Sure Start can achieve can be seen. All, however, evidence an understanding that the following are vital components:

- Commitment and enthusiasm of staff
- Provision of a varied range of creative activities and opportunities for children and their parents to encourage them to become involved in services which are for them
- Planning and preparation for raising participation and involvement
- Enabling children and their parents to feel safe and supported
- Commitment to inclusion in principle and practice - viewing 'problems' in supporting the participation and involvement of children and parents as 'problems for service providers' and not 'problems which individual children and families have'
- Learning from experience

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We hope that in the snapshots provided readers will see how - in very different ways - Sheffield Sure Start programmes achieve the above and much more, during the course of 'ordinary everyday' delivery. The stories put forward examples of practical ways in which children and their parents are being brought into partnership with local programmes. They suggest many ideas about how all programmes can make further headway with the task of making certain services support the Sure Start objectives.

Snapshots evidencing the facilitation of children and parents in Sure Start

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STAY & PLAY April 2004

The day is now very hot and very sunny. Two minutes before the start of the session there was torrential, monsoon, cartoon-style rain but it's over now like somebody just turned off a tap.

The waiting room where everyone is meeting up is bright and well laid out, there's a large green tray populated with plastic dinosaurs, a blanket strewn with 'Babies Big Bright Board Books'. Toys litter the floor and at a craft table by the doorway a solitary child in a Pop Idol T-Shirt, Lucy is in the process of embalming herself in what Rebecca, Sure Start Parent Involvement Worker, cheerfully refers to as 'the wiggly glue'.

'You mustn't mind' Rebecca reassures Lucy's mother, 'they need to get messy sometimes'. The conversation turns to just exactly how big an area you can cover with a chocolate cake if you spread it out thinly enough.

Two more mums arrive with pushchairs; they're soaked through with rain and steaming from the sunshine,

'Christ' they say, 'It's like some bugger just turned tap off' and their children join Lucy at the craft table. Rebecca steers the conversation around to parenting, she does it in an uncontrived and relaxed manner and mentions a parenting group that is starting up at a nearby school,

'It's very informal' she says 'nothing heavy' and you might find it helpful, after all you don't get any training to be a parent do you?'

The mothers agree and say they might give the group a try. One mum mentions her mate who has five children 'Ah can cope wi' one' she says 'but not wi' five!'

The room is filling up now; parents are chatting away and children are playing together. The atmosphere is very friendly and relaxed and the relationship between Sure Start workers and the mums seems very good. Two grandparents who are out shopping poke their heads through an open window to say hello to their grandson.

'It's alright this' says Clare, mother of a three-year old boy, 'I've been coming to this for 11 months now, I saw the poster while I were out shopping and thought I'd try it. I've met people through coming and its nice when people from here say 'hello' to you down the shops, best thing is getting away from the telly'.

Rebecca says the turnout can vary wildly - some weeks there are 26 families on others only 7.

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Rebecca puts some music on. It's the theme from Robin Hood and as bold Robin and his Merry Men go riding through the Glen, two three-year-old children decide this is the ideal time to eat the 'wiggly glue'. This turns out to be a feature of nearly every Sure Start session where glue is made available. Apparently it tastes 'a bit salty.'

Rebecca circulates and records parents details on an attendance sheet and introduces a new mother to everybody in the group, meanwhile there's a certain amount of Avon catalogue business going on in one corner of the room.

'They're not monsters' one mum says to no one in particular, 'they're dinosaurs' and it takes a moment to realise she's not talking about her children. She says she's been coming to this group for 18 months - pretty much since the start - and she's obviously picked up some of the Sure Start buzzwords.

'It provides good interaction for us parents and if it were crap - sorry if it weren't a good, a successful session, people just wouldn't come back next week.'

There's another mum here who describes herself as 'a regular' and she's brought her sister-in-law with her today who is visiting from Liverpool and has decided to bring her child along. One mum is happy but feels that Sure Start could do more. Not this Sure Start, but Sure Start in general:

'I'm from one of the poorest areas in Sheffield she says but 'coz I live 2 streets away I can't actually register with Sure Start for this area. I come to Stay and Play but I'm not allowed on the trips or the activities and I feel really fed up about that when I hear the other mums talking about what they've been up to.'

There's a break for toast and juice, then everybody sings a song. It's raining hard outside now and everybody disperses.

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PLAY & STAY

April 2004

‘Sometimes I feel like I’m the Pied Piper’ Margaret says ‘and everybody’ else is the rats!’

Margaret, Parent Involvement Worker for the Sure Start Programme, has seemingly limitless enthusiasm for the project.

The Centre we are in has a lovely newly refurbished Sure Start room. It’s bright and warm with spring pictures on the walls and a variety of toys and games ranged across low-level tables. Within the next few weeks it will also have a purpose-built outside play area ‘just in time for the summer.’

There are 5 Sure Start workers here this morning, one of whom is a trained volunteer, and eventually 8 adults and 6 children. A couple arrive who are new to the area; they’ve seen the Sure Start posters outside and are keen to sign up. Unfortunately they live just the wrong side of the Sure Start boundary for this area and so are not able to register for the full range of Sure Start activities, nor eligible for a welcome pack, but Margaret says they’re welcome to come to Play & Stay.

Margaret explains the Welcome Packs.

‘I stole the idea from another Sure Start group she says ‘and now other Sure Start’s have copied the idea from me.’

Margaret has put together 4 separate packs, each one tailored to a specific age range, some of the packs originally contained a lullaby tape, but these are no longer included, as Margaret has concerns that the songs may not be appropriate for certain minority ethnic groups.

Pack One - Age 0-1yr.

Bath thermometer

Bedroom thermometer

Book suitable for age – a soft book

Sure Start bib

Bottle & Cup

Sure Start information pack

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Pack Two - Age 1-2 yr

Plug protectors x2
Book suitable for age
Textured 'sensory' ball
Bottle & Cup
Sure Start info pack

Pack Three - Age 2-3yr

Play Dough
Pastry cuttersx2
Book suitable for age
4-piece jigsaw
Bottle & Cup
Sure Start info pack

Pack Four - Age 3-4yr

Play Dough
Pastry cuttersx2
Textured 'sensory' ball
Book suitable for age
Bottle & cup
Sure Start info pack.

The session itself is pretty much a carbon copy of other Play & Stays I have been to across the City.

The children play together, parents chat, the children eat the glue, and its all very relaxed and low key. Margaret and her team are friendly and enthusiastic and two of the 'parents' turn out to be registered child-minders who regularly bring their charges to this session.

None of the parents I spoke to seemed to know much, or even to particularly care about the wider aims of Sure Start, they were just happy to have something to get them out of the house which allowed themselves and their children to see new faces.

Margaret says that although Sure Start information is provided with the Welcome Packs, it rarely comes up in conversation with the parents. 'In fact' she says 'It seems like they'd rather talk about anything else than parenting, but sometimes you can judge a lot from what they don't say.'

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PLAY TOTS May 2004

There are 4 mums here and 8 children this morning. The session takes place in the kind of cavernous high-ceiling 1930's-style classroom that was purpose-built to put the fear of God into little children. The room has been decorated and adapted for the needs of modern under-fives; there are Barney posters on the walls, toys and activities litter the floor and a section of the room has been fenced off to provide an area where later the children are given their juice and toast.

Pinned to the notice board by the door there's a photo montage of the Mum's Christmas 'do' at the local skating rink. They're all sporting foam antlers and hysterical grins.

Sharon introduces herself. She is a Pre-School Learning Alliance Support worker. 'I'm a kind of trouble-shooter really' she explains. 'I have about 40 of these groups on my books and I go round, give support and advice where its needed. Recently I've spent a lot of time with this group.'

Sharon explains that until recently the group was being operated without any proper constitution or structure. The group now has a leader, Anthea, a treasurer, Jacky, and a chairperson, Hayley, all of whom are here this morning. Sharon explains 'that usually the room's a lot nicer than this. Soon as we get the new carpet down it will be lovely.'

The session is noisy, not to say a little rowdy, but the workers and the mums get on very well and there's a tangible sense of 'fun' here, rough and tumble, enjoyable boisterous play is going off here, something that has not always been a feature of other Sure Start sessions. The children play together, run around and fall spectacularly from time to time. The mums chat, keeping half an eye on their charges and the workers prepare cups of tea, coffee, juice and endless plates of toast. There's an in-depth analysis of the merits of different brands and styles of disposable nappy. It's generally agreed that Huggies used to be the best. Formerly Huggies were Undisputed Lords of the Kingdom of Disposable Pants, but according to these mums their latest offering, the new, the improved, the innovative Huggies Superflex - is 'rubbish'.

I speak to a mum. She says she's been coming to this session for about 6 months. She found out about it through bringing her older son to nursery elsewhere in the building, says it gets her out of the house, is something to do and a good place to meet other mums.

'Is there anything else you'd like to see them do, or any changes?'

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'No it's great!'

This session runs three times a week. Sharon says that Wednesday is usually the busiest day and that they've up to 16 families in.

'We've just been round delivering a new lot of leaflets' she says ' So that should bring a few more in – plus we do a Bumps & Babies session as well as trips out and Fun Days.'

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

TIME FOR YOU

June 2004

'Tony Blair says that only 50% of childcare workers need to be qualified ' Debbie says, 'but he also states that everybody who works with food must have a certificate, so how much sense does that make?'

Debbie has very strong views about what Sure Start needs to provide a proper service.

'Good early years workers are what Sure Start really needs' she says 'people think anybody can look after kids, and that training's not needed, but it's not true, you wouldn't ask just anybody to cut your hair would you? Everything we do, all the courses, the training, the events, need to be underpinned with good childcare and food'.

Christine, Parent Involvement Worker, introduces herself. She's a very down-to-earth, pragmatic person and later during the session itself her attitude and approach pays dividends. She shows me around. This morning's session is split across 2 rooms.

'We're trying to build confidence and give people a good place to come' she says as she shows off the new crèche, then leads me into the parents room where she introduces the mums. This room is light and airy and laid out with easy chairs. On a big table under the barred window there's an array of magazines; Red, Practical Parenting, OK, Inspirations For Your Home, and all the usual Sure Start literature. Notably there's a feed back leaflet 'Praise or Grumble' which encourages parents to make comments about how they feel Sure Start is performing in their area.

This morning's session is mainly concerned with getting the Clothes Bank into some sort of order. Parents bring in surplus summer clothes in the winter and vice versa and today the mums are sorting through the summer clothes, which will be sold for a few pence each.

The atmosphere in the room is very friendly and sorting through baby clothes provides the perfect setting to talk about everything and nothing. The conversation ranges from Big Brother to wasps and almost every item of clothing that's pulled out of the bags provokes a barrage of 'oohs' and 'aahs' followed by a discussion about an aspect of parenting or child growth and behaviour

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Christine is very friendly with the mums; she looks like them, she talks like them and there is no sense whatsoever that she is lecturing or talking down to them.

One mum says 'This is supposed to be 'Time For Me' and you've got us slaving away'.

'It's a break from home, that's all, so get on wi' it lady!' Christine replies and everybody laughs.

Christine mentions the First Aid course that will be starting in a couple of week's time. One mum asks if it involves lots of writing, and it's obvious from the tone of her voice that she's very apprehensive about this. Christine and the other mums pick up on this immediately and all reassure her that she'll be Ok – a really nice, ordinary example of friendship and support.

The conversation veers toward potty training and once again the manufacturers of disposable nappies come in for a fair amount of stick. Christine's theory is that they're too 'good'.

'The old-fashioned way' she says 'was to wait after your child had weed itself and let it go cold, but modern nappies are so good at keeping the liquid away from the skin that you can't really do that anymore –so it's made our job harder'.

Christine goes on to suggest other techniques and then, only a few minutes before the end of the session, one mum puts into words what's probably been playing on her mind for the last two hours.

'Since she's 'ad the grommets in she's just stopped talkin'. She seems to understand but she just points. She will not talk.'

'Do you respond?' Christine asks 'When she's pointing are you responding?'

'Yeah we do. Always. She's going backwards, we're really, really worried.'

It turns out that the mum has made an appointment for her daughter at Northern General Hospital for tests but that it's not until August. Christine suggests that she attend a hearing drop-in session run in conjunction with Sure Start partly as way of reassuring herself and also as a fast track to advice and possible treatment for her child.

The parents go into the crèche where they are reunited with their children. They read a story and everybody sings a song.

Christine managed to steer a two-hour conversation around almost every aspect of parenting, diet, behaviour and housing and provided the mums with the opportunity to discuss their own experience in a supportive and friendly environment. Which all sounds a bit formal. It didn't seem like that at all and that's what was so good about it.

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YOUNG PARENTS GROUP APRIL 2004

It's 11.00 on a very wet Tuesday morning. Maureen, Sure Start Home Care Worker, and her driver Chris are sheltering in the council mini bus parked outside a tower block on the estate.

'It's good is this group' Chris says 'coz they get their veg.'

The group runs from 12.00 'till 2.00, which gives Maureen an hour to 'round up' her girls. The group started six months ago and has 14 girls on its books, the most they've had at any one session is 9 and the least, 3. There are 10 'possibles' this morning and as the bus weaves its way through the estate, Maureen tries to contact her girls in advance by mobile 'phone. In the event she only makes three successful pick-ups, two mums and one mum-to-be. Maureen greets the mums cheerfully, then fusses over their babies as she straps them into the minibus's child seats.

'Starting next month you'll have to do this bit for yourselves' Maureen says, 'it's to do with the insurance.'

None of the girls seem too bothered about talking to me, so I try to reassure them by saying that their real names will not be used and ask them to pick an alias from Corrie instead. Instantly there's a friendly argument about who's going to be Candice and who is definitely not going to be Deirdre. 'Candice' tells me that she's been coming to this group for 9 months now and that her baby 'Alex' is 15 weeks old.

We arrive back at the block and find another mother and baby waiting outside. Maureen opens up and the girls troop into a common room at the base of the tower. There are posters up everywhere, Craig David on the ghetto blaster, toys and books on the floor and two big comfortable sofas. The room has a separate kitchen with a serving hatch and there's a selection of 'healthy' sandwiches (plenty of salad) on offer, plus grapes and some less healthy crisps and chocolate mousses.

The girls go for the crisps first, then two of them, Fizz and Katy slope off for a fag. I follow them out.

Fizz is very pregnant and very fed up.

'Ah just wanna get it over wi' she says, puffing on her fag.

'Ah know ' says Katy 'and it's right boring, they keep yer in for three days if it's yer first, ah'll come and see you though.'

'Would yer?'

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

'Yeah let me know when yer go in'.

'So that's a result for Sure Start' I thought, 'the mums might be outside smoking instead of eating the healthy things, but they are offering each other support'.

Back in the room Sammy is talking to Helen the midwife. Her baby is having what Sammy describes as its 'needles' tomorrow and she isn't sure what to expect. The girls all seem to like Helen, she chats away to them, mentions a baby massage session which will be taking place at a local church, chats a bit more, drops the idea of a weaning party into the conversation and reintroduces the Sure Start theme of healthy eating.

'If you attend four sessions' she says, you get a free hand blender and it's a great little thing. And we'll show you how to use it to do stuff that's not jarred – coz you never know what's in them - preservatives and allsorts.'

The mothers have asked that their partners/ the babies fathers do not attend this group but Helen says that it's important to try to stay in touch with them all the same. The conversation turns to the finer points of bottle feeding, Maureen turns the music down while Helen demonstrates with Katy's child and explains about 'spit-up' (posit), Fizz looks blank and turns the music up again.

Maureen also has an excellent rapport with the girls. She is enthusiastic, pragmatic, brusque and her non-Sheffield accent is a source of constant amusement. The girls instantly pick up on difference in age, class and outlook amongst Sure Start workers.

Later in the session when Helen talked about what a 'Post-natal' involved, the conversation shifted around to contraception, which in turn led to comments from the girls that they never felt like going out anyway, even if they could find a baby-sitter.

'But you don't just have to go out at night' Helen said, wouldn't it be nice to have a day out shopping?'

'Yeah' Candice added sharply. 'And wouldn't it be nice to 'ave plenty of money in yer pocket to do it!'

Later on a Community Teacher, Karen, joined the group. She was just brilliant with the children and as she played a peek-a-boo game with Candice's baby everybody was soon smiling. But as she produced story-sacks and started talking brightly about finger-puppets, songs and rhymes the atmosphere in the group began to freeze over. The killer moment was the singing.

'Do you like singing?' she asked.

'Naaah'

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'Well neither do I really, but it's great for your kids and you should try to get a bank of songs together for when you just don't know what to do with them!'

'Ah just sing'im that shurrup song' Sammy said

Karen ignored that, and put on a nursery rhyme tape.

The transition from Craig David to Bobby Shaftoe was never going to be smooth, but as the singer on the tape managed to sound posh, pained, folksy and patronising all at the same time you could see the steel defence shutters dropping down behind the girls eyes and you could almost hear them thinking 'what has this got to do with us?'

The tape seemed to come from another universe and one which bore as much resemblance to these girls lives as an episode of Little House on the Prairie or a day- trip to Walton's mountain.

The girls found out about this Sure Start service through the usual channels, G.P midwife or health visitor and their comments about its success were the often heard ones:

1. it gets us out of the house
2. if it was rubbish we wouldn't come back.

Towards the end of the session a Sure Start Advice worker appeared and took Fizz into the kitchen to explain about what benefits she would be entitled to and how best to obtain them.

All in all it was a very successful session and (Bobby Shaftoe aside) it was quite a surprise that Maureen and her team had been able to impart so much information in such a short time and even more striking that they'd made hardly any of it either daunting or pedagogic.

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

BABY MASSAGE

May 2004

'You'll have to take your shoes off before you come in here' Ryka says.

Ryka is a Home Visitor and Outreach worker who has recently trained in baby massage and this session will be last of the second block of four-week courses that she has run so far. She hands me a folder, which all the mums who attend are given at the beginning of the course. It contains clearly written fact sheets about baby massage, sleep and colic, songs and rhymes to sing whilst doing particular massages and a step-by-step guide -with diagrams- of the entire 'Gentle Touch' baby massage programme.

The room at the rear of the Sure Start office has a brand-new laminate floor, is very warm, light and beautifully decorated. There are six purple massage mats laid out with pillows towels and a few toys, a lavender scented candle is burning in one corner of the room and soft music is playing on the stereo. It's all very relaxing, so relaxing in fact that the first baby to arrive promptly falls asleep.

In the event only 3 mums turn up, but in terms of cultural and social mix the clientele couldn't be more diverse. One is a very 'posh' well-spoken lady who talks excitedly about the new house she is having built, the second is reet Yorkshire and the third is quietly spoken and Afro-Caribbean. They all coo over each other's babies and begin to discuss which colour clothing the infants look best in; one looks good in green, one in blue

'and you, you lucky thing' the posh lady says to the black baby 'well you just look gorgeous in anything!'

Ryka greets them and makes them all a drink. She asks a few general questions about health/ welfare and how the previous week has gone in terms of parenting, and then turns off the music tape. The parents have all filled in health check forms at the beginning of the course.

'This week we'll be doing a full body massage – if the babies will let us!' she says 'so if you just want to undress your baby.'

Only one baby gets undressed as one is still asleep and the other is being breastfed.

Ryka runs through the massage programme. She demonstrates the various techniques and movements on a very lifelike doll and in between each stage there is a great deal of relaxed conversation about children, parenting and life in general.

'We'll do the tummy next' Ryka says 'you might want to loosen the nappy a bit as this one often gets things moving'

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

She explains that this massage is good for colic, then tells a cautionary tale about a mother who foolishly failed to slacken the nappy and performed this manoeuvre upon a baby which had been constipated for three days. It was a poo-based disaster in the making.

'It just exploded everywhere!' she says with relish, and everybody laughs.

This session was very relaxed, friendly and loving. There was a great deal of information being passed on, but in a completely natural manner.

There was one wonderful moment where all the mums sang 'I love you' to their babies. This was perfectly natural and unforced and also very moving in its own way.

As the session drew to a close, Ryka thanked the mums, asked them all to stay in touch, made them aware of a wide variety of other Sure Start activities and handed out evaluation forms for them all to complete

'And don't forget' she said finally 'please call in whenever you're passing'.

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

Parent Forum Meeting May 2004

'I've just had to grab a box and run this morning' Gaynor says, struggling with cups, milk, coffee, tea and biscuits. Attending this meeting is not really part of her usual job, but as the Parent Involvement Worker is off sick, Gaynor's had this meeting passed on to her at very short notice.

Parents Forum is an individually constituted group of parents set up in June 2002. This group was originally formed as a way for parents to air their views about Sure Start and to comment upon the service it was providing for them. Since then it has evolved into a much more autonomous group of parents, with links back to the Partnership Board, and was formally constituted by Sure Start in April 2004.

One by one the mums arrive and take their children downstairs to the crèche. There's a lot of general conversation about their own, and their babies health and concern over an absent member of the group who has just had a very difficult birth. Top topic of conversation is a recent drunken Hen Night.

'I were like sponge' says one mum 'It were just all soakin' in!'

Eventually there are 8 mothers sitting in a circle, one has kept her child with her, some have a lot more to say than others, but they all seem relaxed and friendly and as the meeting begins they become cheerfully businesslike.

Gaynor isn't quite sure how this meeting goes, so she asks a mum, Maria, to chair the meeting and offers to scribe instead.

'Ok ' Maria says, and they begin.

An agenda is quickly drawn up. Gaynor writes it up in purple felt-tip on a flipchart, she's reusing the backs of church stuff and turns over a page that reads

'Thou shalt not covert thy neighbours possessions'

'oh yeah' says a mum to anybody prepared to listen, 'ee's got a great big four be four!'

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

Agenda

1. MOT day
2. Table Top Sale
3. Treasury
4. Summer Trip
5. AOB 'if things crop up'.

The meeting lasts two hours. The mums run through the agenda, sometimes going off at tangents before being put firmly back on course by Maria who turns out to be a natural born chairperson. When they are critical of the way some Sure Start events have been organised Gaynor sometimes defends Sure Start and sometimes agrees with the mums, saying that she welcomes their feedback, but the tone of meeting remains friendly and enthusiastic.

The mums seem to have a very clear picture of what they feel is appropriate for their area. When the MOT day is discussed they are critical of some of the 'treats' on offer.

The MOT day also known as 'The Pamper Day' offered free hairdressing, manicure, beauty and makeover treatments. The mums saw this day as a 'reward' for the work they'd done and were disappointed that lots of people had turned up 'for the freebies' who they'd never seen before. There was widespread criticism of the Gel Nail treatment. It turned out that the nails could not be removed with acetone and that it would cost £5 to have them professionally removed, or £15 to have them redone, and that they would need to be redone at least every three weeks.

' Now that's not right for Sure Start parents round 'ere is it ?' one mother asked and was greeted with universal agreement. The 'Virgin V' make-up stand came in for similar criticism.

'It's too pricey that stuff, not right for this Sure Start area, its more like Rimmel round 'ere or that bloke down the market wi' stall outside Bodycare!'

A recurring complaint was the lack of childcare available to mothers who wished to attend Sure Start activities and courses, quite often several crèche workers being required and booked, but in the event, only one arriving. Gaynor responded by saying that Sure Start have just signed a new contract with a local childcare organisation and that the situation was set to improve.

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At several points during the meeting Gaynor would introduce a point by using a phrase like 'I'm just going to play devils advocate here' or ' Sorry if this sounds contentious...'

When she used these phrases there was always a universal 'No, no go for it Gaynor!' response from the mums - they certainly were not just complaining for the sake of it, they wanted services and events to improve and were keen to hear any counter-arguments.

When the mums said what a disappointment the table-top sale had been, Gaynor used her 'contentious' phrase and suggested that as an individually constituted group, the Parents Forum mums should have played a greater part in organising the event, especially as it was intended to raise funds for Parents Forum and not Sure Start.

'Julie's role in Parents Forum is now a supporting role, perhaps that has not been made clear?' Gaynor said, and there was a pause, followed by the realisation amongst the mums that this group - nurtured by Sure Start, developed by it, encouraged by it, and finally constituted by it - had just been officially released into the wild.

This realisation lead to a very positive discussion instigated by the mums. About:

- how they could carry it forward,
- who would do what (and when)
- how they needed to organise and
- how they should get together 'and sort things out between ourselves more.'

From this description of events it sounds as if the parents were very critical of what Sure Start had to offer, but they were not. The entire meeting was good-humoured, friendly and robust. The mum's criticism was unfailingly incisive, constructive and pragmatic - and they were only critical because they were determined that what they clearly regarded as 'a good thing' could be made even better and benefit even more parents.

At the very end the mums said;

'Thank you Gaynor, thanks for taking all the flak!' and there was a real sense that in 2 hours a tremendous amount of progress had been made.

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HOME VISIT May 2004

It's difficult to go anywhere fast with Josie, she seems to know everybody on her 'patch'. 'This is the worst housing in the area we cover' Josie says as she pulls the car over to check her A-Z, 'even I still get lost around here!'

The Sure Start has recently conducted an extensive mail-out and as a result of the response that this has triggered, Josie has been out and about for the past two weeks, making dozens of home visits. She explains that not all Sure Start Parent Involvement Workers do this, and that the visits are her personal policy. 'It's a way of easing people into involvement' she says, 'it helps build up that initial rapport and sometimes I find the parents will talk to me more easily than they would outside the home.'

Josie's client for this morning, Cheryl, is on her way out of the house as we pull up outside.

'Oh sorry' she says, 'I thought it were in afternoon.'

Cheryl shows us through to her front room.

Cheryl lifts her baby out of its pushchair and hands it to her mother who's sitting in one corner of the room. Josie begins by asking what they know about Sure Start, and when they say 'not much' she explains that Sure Start aims to 'give kids a better start in life, to provide training and support, it's about supporting families.' Josie adds that Cheryl is lucky to live in a Sure Start area.

Josie presents the Cheryl with a welcome pack and then helps her fill in the Sure Start registration form. Cheryl has also expressed interest in becoming a Sure Start volunteer and Josie tells her about a forthcoming open day where she can 'come and have a look and see if it's really for you' unfortunately the crèche is fully booked already so Cheryl says that maybe she'll come to the next open day instead.

'Can I have a hold?' Josie asks and picks up Cheryl's baby 'Oh he's strong! Oh look at those little Nikes! Oh what a little porker!'

Suddenly, and for the first time this morning every body is smiling.

'Mine's a bit older now,' Josie explains 'I just have to get that broodiness out of me!'

The visit lasts for 15 minutes and as we leave Josie reassures Cheryl.

'Phone me if you need anything or don't know where to turn, and if you see me in the street don't dodge me!'

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Back in the car I ask Josie if she often picks up the babies.

'Always' she says 'I always do it. Coz then its me as mum talking to the mothers and not just somebody knocking on the door with a load of forms for them to fill in.'

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Breast Feeding Session May 2004

It's 9.30 on a bleak Thursday morning and the shop on the corner is already doing a brisk trade in Super Strength Lager. The first wave of customers crack open their initial 440ml can of the day, drink deeply, then amble down to The Chemist to collect their methadone scripts. It's a Grade A grey day. (This is true, I followed them, they each drink a little plastic beaker of methadone in the chemists).

The breastfeeding session is being held only a few doors up from the beer shop but it might as well be on a different planet. Inside its bright and warm, the air is filled with world music and the scent of fresh coffee, and above all it feels completely safe. This place is instantly appealing, an isolated, insulated cocoon, a good place to take your baby and spend some time with other mums, a secure haven from the traffic and all the other assorted craziness rushing past outside.

'It's not just about breastfeeding this morning' Elaine who's a midwife explains, 'its about breaking into the community - and this is a very, very diverse community.'

There are three staff on this morning, Elaine, Shilpa who introduces herself as 'Community Food Worker', and Pam who is Breastfeeding Support Worker. The session runs on an informal drop-in basis and nearly an hour passes before anybody informally drops in. Eventually there are 5 mums, 5 babies and one-mum-to-be.

Again this is a very relaxed affair, the workers circulate, the mums chat, the kids pull faces at each other and the conversation centres around diet, parenting, behaviour and which supermarkets offer adequate baby-changing facilities. A new mum signs up for Sure Start; she says she found out about this session through her midwife. Elaine chats to her, asks her if any of her friends have babies, then tells her about other Sure Start activities and presents her with a welcome pack.

'We're not particularly here to increase the number of mums breastfeeding' Elaine says 'Just to point out that its an option, and maybe encourage the mums who are doing it to keep doing it longer.' As I left, I noticed a sign in the window

'Mums & Babies Only this morning.

Thank you.'

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And that in itself must give some indication of just how relaxed and friendly the session really was. As a bloke with a pen and a notebook, I really shouldn't have been there, but no-one had mentioned it and there was never the slightest feeling of any suspicion or resentment. In fact nobody looked twice at me or batted an eyelid.

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LIVELY TOTS, STAY & PLAY

MAY 2004

This group is jointly run by Haleema - who describes herself as a trained bilingual helper - and by Rachel, a nursery nurse.

'We've been running here for 2 years now' Haleema says 'We've had up to 12 families in, but for us 7 or 8 is the ideal number.'

Rachel is sorting through a huge pile of abstract expressionist paintings produced by the children in previous weeks. There's only one mum here so far, and her son is already hard at work on yet another dramatic work of art.

'You doing me another one?' Rachel says 'Your other is on the wall over there, its ever so good!'

Lizzie arrives. Haleema and Rachel greet her like visiting royalty, or maybe Santa, and begin devouring the huge bag of books she's brought with her. It turns out she's from the library – just down the road – and she says 'I've got a whole basement full of this stuff, let me know if there's anything else you'd like.'

The arrival of a new consignment of books has caused genuine excitement. 'Its fine for them to take these home' says Lizzie, 'and don't worry if they get torn, we want to promote the use of libraries, not get parents so frightened of their kids damaging books that they never come in.'

There are now four mums here and four toddlers. Amad is leafing through 'Yellow Lorry' and his mum is trying to get him to say 'Yellow'. Haleema is signing up a new mum for Sure Start and Rachel is cutting up coloured paper into shapes while two children wait patiently to stick them onto sugar paper. In the meantime they eat the glue.

Sofia's son has been pointing at me and laughing uncontrollably for the last five minutes, so I decide to take my chances.

Sofia speaks English to me with a pronounced southern accent and Pahari to the other mums.

'I found out about this through word of mouth' Sofia says 'I've been coming here for 8 months. It's good. I don't do the other Sure Start events; I just bring him to this so he can mix with kids his own age. Stops him being stuck in the house all day with me and the elders.'

More mums (all Asian) arrive and then Barbara turns up. 'I'm actually a child psychologist' she whispers to me later 'but I never tell them that – although I will tell

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people if they have concerns about stuff like that - just to reassure them that it's nothing to be afraid of.'

The rest of the session runs as though it has been secretly choreographed. The mums gather round on a section of raised padded seating in front of a TV/ video unit while Haleema and Rachel take charge of their children. The main focus of this session is definitely mum-based and Haleema and Rachel have now become behind-the-scenes child minders. Barbara asks the mums to introduce themselves - for the benefit of the new member - and then says:

'Tell me something that's gone well, been good, been nice with your child this week?'

'She helped me tidy up, and I thanked her, she liked that!'

'He's been good all week'

'We read a book then had a really nice cuddle.'

'We had clothes sent from Pakistan, and he put them all on and he looked happy.'

'So he was showing off?' Barbara says and every body laughs.

'Yeah, but it were really nice!'

Barbara introduces the video she's going to show today. 'It's about behaviour' she says 'about why children sometimes misbehave and what you can do.'

There followed a series of extremely simplistic video clips featuring children who misbehaved as a way of gaining attention and the remedies that could be applied to control their behaviour. The actors/characters/real people/ commentators/ experts in these films were all clad in a shocking variety of semi-acrylic knit-wear and all talked as if they've just donated their brains elsewhere. This was instructional County Cream TV at its very worst and nothing here seemed to have any connection with the diverse and vibrant minority ethnic group who were now goggling in disbelief at this jaded beige footage.

BUT the way Barbara worked with this unpromising raw material and then worked her audience was inspired, imaginative and above all very impressive. Barbara stopped the tape over and over, drew out the real essence of what was going on, repeatedly asked the women about their own experiences - both as mothers and, if they could remember that far back, about their experiences as children.

The stories on the tape existed in a weird and airless knitted acrylic place, but the snapshots of children's behaviour still rang true and Barbara was unfailingly incisive in getting to grips with the universality of troublesome child behaviour. From time to time Barbara also slipped into a very convincing naughty child/fussy mother routine, that made everybody

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laugh, but which was also uncomfortably accurate, and you could see miniature flashbulbs popping everywhere, tiny flashes of recognition and realisation.

'The first time you say 'no' you will feel a bit funny' Barbara said 'you will perhaps think 'this doesn't even seem like me talking', but you have to try it, small changes can make such a big difference!'

By now there were no children in the room, they'd been taken into an adjacent hall and were playing with either 3-wheeled scooters or big foam balls. Barbara made a few general points about sleep, parenting, going to English classes – none of which seemed the least bit forced - thanked the women for their input, quickly mentioned some other Sure Start events which might interest them, then let them chat.

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CLIMB AND CRAWL

May 2004

'The aim of this session is to provide interactive play for children between 9-18 months and their carers' Hilary says.

Hilary introduces herself as being a 'Play Support Worker on a service level agreement' then goes back to piecing together the large soft play mat that dominates the room. A Little Tykes archway is set up, a fabric tunnel is unfurled and a big rocking shark/dolphin is dragged into the room. 2 parents arrive with their daughter (and I get to speak to my first and only DAD).

Mark is relatively new to the area, and says he's very happy with the range of activities that Sure Start provides in the area. Mark says that being involved with Sure Start has been a positive experience for himself and his partner in terms of the changes they've seen in their son's development and the friendships they've made. (Again and again parents stress the importance of this social side). It transpires that Mark is a trained youth worker himself and has begun to work for Sure Start on a voluntary basis, helping to run a drop-in centre for young dads. Mark thinks that Sure Start publicity could be better and adds that he'd also like to see more 'mixing up' of parents from different areas. His only other criticism of Sure Start is that its services are still not available to everybody, due to the arbitrary boundaries that are imposed area by area, and that families often miss out who are just 50 yards the wrong side of the divides.

40 minutes into the session there are 7 mums, 7 toddlers, two health visitors, and a student nurse who is here to observe (and Mark). A portable ball pool is set up and the children play together happily while the mums chat. At one point there are three mums crawling about on the mat while all the children remain on their feet.

The room has a very smart new kitchen where tea, coffee, juice and fruit are available. Hilary is keen to stress the developmental aims of this session. She explains that the strict age limit (9-18 months) is to allow crawlers to become toddlers without 'getting bashed into'

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by bigger kids. She says that the best part of the session for her is the increased space that can be made available.

'There are several large-scale toys and activities here, the trampoline for instance, which simply wouldn't fit into most of the houses round here' she says. Hilary adds that she'd prefer to run a morning session as well so that mums who have older children at nursery can stay for the full 2 hours without having to rush off to collect them.

A mum I speak to says she found out about Sure Start through word of mouth and that she now attends the Breastfeeding Support Group, Keep Fit, the Toddler Group and Climb & Crawl. 'My partner works and I'm stuck in the house a lot' she says 'its good this, you get to meet new people'

Hilary and the Health visitors circulate, they talk to the mums about children, parenting, life in general and suggest other activities that might be of interest. This is a very sociable, chatty group; it's the only one I've attended where everybody said 'hello' to me and 'good-bye' as I left.

'Swimming next Monday, no excuses, and don't forget your cozzies!' Hilary announces.

'Can ye imagine me in a teeny pair of Speedos Simon?' Mark asks.

'Yeah Mark, I can, I really can. But I'd much rather not'.

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PARENTS NEXT May 2004

There are only two mums-to-be here this morning, Paula and Caz. There are also two staff; Stella, a Health Visitor and Annie, a Midwife.

This session takes the form of an extended conversation, which is all about impending motherhood.

'It sounds a bit daft' Stella says 'but in a way pregnancy is a sort of holiday period, a break before – you know those big swinging boulders they use to knock down buildings? Before one of them hits you. It happened to me, but it did get better, so don't be put off!'

Stella tells Paula and Caz that this is the time to begin to put things in place for when their babies are born.

'We're here to make sure that you're not isolated' she says 'and we'll be with you until your baby is five if you need us.'

She hands out a green booklet 'Health and your Family' produced by Sheffield Partnership For Health.

The introduction reads;

'This booklet is to help you and your family think about your health. You may wish to spend some time looking at it and thinking about each member of your family in turn. Your health visitor can help you to decide what issues affect your family. You may then be able to think of some changes you might like to make. This booklet is for you to keep.'

The booklet has sections entitled;

- Your Family's Health
- Your community
- Bringing up Children
- Forward Plan
- Family and Community Health

Each section is broken down into a series of points, which the mothers are invited to tick if they require more information.

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For example, on page 2 there's a section headed 'Community' which lists such issues as Housing, Dogs, Public Transport, Noise, Crime, Child care, Neighbours, Isolation/Loneliness etc.

This particular section sparks a good deal of discussion. There's a lot about the local area that leaves room for improvement and Stella encourages the mums to think about lobbying.

'Its about getting together, making yourself heard, getting stuff changed and if enough people do it, there's more chance changes will be made.'

Stella goes on to discuss the changes that are happening in the area, the parks that are being redesigned, the money that has been spent and the money that will be spent.

The conversation returns to parenting. Annie the midwife talks about her role, about diet, about birth and about breastfeeding

'I'm gonna try breastfeeding' Paula says with genuine enthusiasm 'Coz I saw a baby at young mums who were on it, and he was right chubby and healthy!'

Annie says that there's a Breast Feeding awareness day coming up soon and says that the two Breast Feeding awareness workers (mums who have had some extra training) will be there to talk to them.

'Yeah they're brilliant them two' Stella says.

The rest of the session covered aspects of first aid, home birth, a suggested visit to a labour ward, and advice about completing the antenatal record.

'Its good to learn through info.' Annie says afterwards 'info and advice helps ease the anxiety, if you know the process it seems less daunting. That's why we like to take them to a labour ward to have a look, so they know they don't need to be scared.'

Advice was definitely the keyword here. Stella and Annie presented a tremendous amount of information in a relaxed informal, friendly, encouraging and supportive manner, there was no sense whatsoever that this was 'lecturing' and the entire session was characterised by a reassuring sense of 'we're all in this together and we're in it for the duration'.

MENS ART PROJECT

JULY 2004

'There's usually a few more here than this' Dave says, 'but we've got some off on holiday.'

Dave introduces himself as 'Men's Outreach Worker'. Dave introduces his 'young dads' (they have a laugh about this as one of them is 40 next week), there are only three here this morning, with their partners, and in total there are five children playing with bricks and blocks and hoops strewn across the Centre's parquet floor.

'It's a good room this ' he says ' and hardly anybody ever uses it.'

Earlier in the session the parents have been taking turns to record 'talking books' for their children on a Tascam Portastudio, but there's been a problem with it, Dave says, and now everybody is sitting a round a big table, sifting through sheaves of photographs.

Mick, the Community Artist introduces himself. He's on a ten-week placement here and is working with the parents to produce pictures of their children. In previous weeks everybody has been given cameras and the photographs spread across the table are the result.

Mick explains the process. Each family will choose the best photographs of their children, these will then be enlarged, transferred onto acetate, projected and then blocked out with colour to produce instant 'art'. In fact Mick will do exactly the same thing to their family snaps with his overhead projector that Canaletto did to Venice with his camera obscura.

'Right. Decision time.' Mick says as he works through the photographs with each dad in turn. 'Which do think? That's quite a good one, if you don't mind being in the picture too.'

'No. No, ah want to be in the picture wi' im' says the dad.

While this is going on there's a lot of general conversation about children, parenting, everything and nothing in particular.

'She's a nightmare' a mum says 'takes after her brother...and her dad!'

As the parents run sift through the photographs with Mick they talk about their kids and Mick demonstrates ably the 'Community' part of being 'Community Artist'. He asks questions, sympathises and he makes jokes. Just this simple process of sorting through photographs instigates a great deal of relaxed conversation about family, behaviour and parenting in general.

Some parents are still taking photographs, chasing their kids around the room and laughing. One dad explains what will happen to the art. Each family will have a photograph of

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their children turned into a portrait painting/drawing and there will also be a big 'compendium' picture of everybody, which will be displayed at a nearby school.

Mick's already produced a few small sketches for the parents, just to whet their appetite and they're very impressed.

'Can we take this one Mick?'

'Yeah, sure.'

'We'll 'ave this in a frame at 'ome. It's good is that!'

A mum asks if its ok to bring her other children along next week, they're over Sure Start age but since she has no where else to take them, it's a case of bringing them along or not attending at all. Dave says that she can. As the session draws to a close the dads begin to talk about music, particularly a computer program called Cubase, which one of the dads says can be downloaded from the Net.

Everyone packs away, somebody offers Mick a lift into town and then everybody says goodbye. It was fun this session, it was relaxed, everybody was very friendly, there was a lot of laughter and Mick was great with the parents.

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PLAY BUS July 2004

'Rick's the biggest kid here' Janice says as her fellow Sure Start worker launches himself into the Bouncy Castle emblazoned with the Sure Start logo.

Janice is Sure Start worker for this area and describes herself as being 'from round here.'

The Play Bus is parked outside 'News 'n Booze' and its contents have been disgorged onto a piece of open ground behind two boarded up, derelict and graffitied houses.

On a patch of short grass, between banks of nettles, docks and rosebay willow-herb, an area has been fenced off with orange PVC mesh. In pride of place there's the Sure Start badged bouncy castle, then slides, sandpits, a ball-pool, tables, rocking horses, play mats and white plastic chairs for the parents.

Janice introduces the parents, there are four mums and one granddad, everybody's very friendly and the overall feeling is one of just having crashed a family barbeque. One mum has five children, each one's Christian name begins with the letter 'J' and she's getting a fair amount of stick for that.

'Ow yer gonna go on when they all start gerrin' mail?' one mum asks.

Janice spots a mum and pushchair in the street, just visible through a gap between the two derelict houses.

'HEEEYYYY!' Janice shouts in a very loud voice, 'hey are you coming over here, come and 'ave a cuppa, come on come an' 'ave a cuppa – no excuses!'

'That's 'ow she got me' a mum tells me, as Janice races off in pursuit of her latest victim, 'ah were just walking past, she shouted me an' next thing ah new ah'd bin signed up for Sure Start!'

A few minutes later Janice returns with a fresh scalp.

' I lost her' she admits 'She got away from me - but I found this one in the shop!' Janice introduces the new mum and puts her child into the ball pool while she fills out a recruitment form. The other mums say 'hello' and one by one put their own children into the pool so they can meet the new child.

'One of the Healthy Living storm troopers will be here in a minute' Rick says and does a cod German accent. ' You vill not eat zee crisps, it vill affect zee future of your children!'

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Rick is definitely not from 'round here'. He's far too well spoken, quite posh really - he tells me later that he's a recent graduate. He's a big hit with the Ladies. The mums all seem to like him, he's funny, he's quite able to become the tallest, most enthusiastic 3-year old on the estate and he plays up his difference, uses it to gain acceptance.

Seeing as the Healthy Living worker is imminent everybody hides crisps, coke and anything else that might be considered 'unhealthy'. A plate of sliced pears is handed round. One mum risks a taste.

'They taste like blinkin' rubber' she says.

'Right, fag break' a very young mum announces. I join her and she answers all my questions without even being asked.

'Its great this' she says. 'Janice shouted me int street. Ah go to the other play bus site on playin' field an ah've started coming to this an' all. Ah go to Take A Break too. It's bin great, ah've met lasses ah' were at school wi' and now ah' know loads of mums. Ah' stay all day, its great.'

Rick asks me how much I'm getting paid to do this. So I tell him.

Janice comes over. 'If you're gettin' that much Simon you can stay a bit longer' she says. Janice's quietly spoken, despite the town crier routine earlier, and you can tell that she's totally committed to this project. She mentions the mum with the five kids all starting with the letter 'J', says that some of them are over Sure Start age but that she's accommodated them anyway, else none of the other 'Js' could attend and she talks excitedly about what she's achieved, about the incidents with jelly, custard, spaghetti, corn-flour, and about all the fun they've had. The mums are all listening by now and they chime in with support and agreement.

Janice goes on and on and on about Sure Start in her area, about what's been done and what she's got planned for the future.

'I love it' she says, 'love it'.

CANCELLATIONS

The first session I arranged to visit was cancelled. There were parents outside and the room had definitely been booked. The mums were not happy, they were not brandishing pitchforks and firing hayricks or anything but they were pretty close to revolting.

Phrases like;

- 'it's just not fxxxin' good enough is fxxxin' this' and
- 'if they were goin' to fxxxin' cancel then the fxxxin' least they could fxxxin' do was to fxxxin' let us fxxxin' know!'

were being used.

I phoned the Sure Start office the following day

'Oh sorry, we forgot, we was having our Make Over Day.'

'Right. It would have been nice if you'd let me know, my car broke down and I had to get a cab out there.'

'We did tell yer, all the other mums knew it were cancelled!'

So they apologise for not telling me, then tell me that they did tell me, then tell me that all the mums knew it was cancelled.

On another programme I'd set up 3 visits in one week. The staff were very friendly and extremely helpful. As the week progressed the plan fell apart. One building closed for asbestos removal, another overrun by ants, people off sick, others are on leave, someone's getting married and since its half-term others aren't running.

**MAXIMISING INCLUSION IN
SURE START**

THINKING POINTS

BREAKING DOWN INFORMATION BARRIERS

Accessible information

Relevant and accessible information is one of the most crucial determinants of families contact with Sure Start and lack of information clearly limits access to the programme - particularly for parents under pressure. How can parents who are not currently accessing Sure Start activities find out more about the services and benefits? All programmes benefit from constantly reviewing their criteria for good provision of information to parents.

SPECIFICALLY

- How can programmes promote themselves to parents who are not literate?
- Who could be involved in a discussion about how to improve communication with families who don't find written information accessible?
- How can programme's assess the usefulness of promotions so that an eye can be kept on unintended exclusion of intended recipients?
- How can the profile of particular activities be raised within local communities? What steps can be taken to proactively encourage wider participation?
- How could parents who do attend be encouraged to promote the activity with particular target groups so that everyone knows that they are welcome?

Inclusive resources

Planning and preparation for raising participation and involvement of children and parents - especially where community languages are not shared - is time consuming and requires detailed attention to what is specifically needed to ensure parents and their children to feel comfortable and relaxed. There is

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scope for attention to the quality of teaching and learning resources used in Sure Start activities - materials aimed at parents are often uninspiring and frequently it is the case that more culturally appropriate resources need to be found to maximise engagement.

SPECIFICALLY

- What ways could be found for programmes to work together on involving parents in the production of training resources that reflect local realities?
- What action needs to be taken to ensure the contents of Welcome Packs and other materials for parents are appropriately tailored to the cultural requirements of different groups living in the neighbourhood?
- Can a fact-finding initiative be set up with local people to assess the suitability of such resources?
- What steps can be taken to produce resources in alternative modalities, for example, Braille, large print, tape or video versions of leaflets and so on?

BREAKING DOWN ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS

All Sheffield Sure Start programmes in the combined evaluation have some experience of delivering well-received activities and services in venues that are less than ideal.

Specifically

- What suggestions for good practice in unpromising environments could be collated to assist others working in less than ideal circumstances?
- Encourage specific feedback on the extent to which use of faith venues might be limiting participation by some members of the community.

INCLUSIVE EVALUATION

Good practice is seen where evaluation is built in to a programme's everyday working practice so that there can be continual learning from experience. Best practice is seen where programmes ensure that the perspectives of children are routinely taken into account.

SPECIFICALLY

- How much does it matter if parents attending Sure Start sessions say they do not particularly think about the wider aims of Sure Start? How can programmes evidence the links between parents saying simply 'I like going to it,' .. 'the people are nice' .. 'I'm lucky to live in a Sure Start area' .. and the meeting of targets?
- How can all Sure Start providers be supported to encourage parents to take stock of their individual and collective circumstances, become critical and to think about their own role in bringing about change?
- How can the 'behind the scenes' benefits of participation in Sure Start events be observed - so that the full benefit of involvement with Sure Start activities can be evidenced? For example, how can programmes capture the value of support parents come to give each other?
- What strategies might help to provide a greater sense of what is actually being achieved through activities which appear relatively free flowing and open-ended? For example, could a few minutes occasionally be taken at the end of a session for parents and providers - and in some contexts young children - to say 'what I got out of today' as a simple way of increasing experience of giving (and taking note of) feedback? How could this be tried?
- What steps can programmes take to involve parents in sharing ideas about ways of finding out what the experience of children involved in Sure Start activities is like from children's own points of view?
- Proactive working to include and consult with parents AND children, including on the nature of their participation and involvement is

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

important, as is recognition and accreditation of parent participation and making sustained use of their feedback to inform future planning.

MAXIMIZING INCLUSIVE DELIVERY

Effective and targeted use of paid and voluntary workers to support planned activities is crucial. All programmes have different approaches to managing the staff who play such an important part in the service delivery. What can be seen in all Sheffield Sure Start delivery is evidence of the commitment and enthusiasm of workers and their skills in welcoming, encouraging and supporting parents and children in very ordinary and practical ways. In everyday practice this service delivery looks informal, relaxed and really like a group of friends getting on with a task together, but this informality belies careful thinking about different roles, responsibilities and the importance of making all aspects of service delivery as inclusive as possible.

SPECIFICALLY

- Best practice is seen where a provider has the skills required to let a conversation run and drop information that gets Sure Start messages across in comfortable and unobtrusive ways. Is it possible to identify the 'ingredients' of such success? How can all of those involved in delivering Sure Start activities become aware of the ingredients of this approach?
- To what extent are rules and regulations for Sure Start events and activities made by parents and/or providers? How can the role of parents in this be maximised?
- Parents have high hopes for Sure Start and, consequently, levels of disappointment can also be high. Parents are clear that promises have to be delivered if their commitment to Sure Start participation is to be sustained. Every effort should be taken to avoid cancellation of events. A good practice strategy should be developed to ensure effective communication with parents in the event of unavoidable cancellations.
- All programmes should have a clear strategy in place for monitoring, managing and responding to constructive discontent expressed by parents. It can be daunting for parents to voice criticism of Sure Start services even when they are well supported by individual members of staff. What structures are in place to enable people to feel secure in this context?

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

- Best practice is found where programmes are seen by parents to respond to feedback - especially if disappointments have occurred.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Widening participation, to bring Sure Start into relation with the greatest possible number of children and families in Sheffield Sure Start areas is a key aspiration for all programmes.

SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO TAKING PART

- Can parents who are involved in activities where attendance is on the low side be encouraged to promote the activity with particular target groups to let more people know their participation would be welcome?
- Parents acknowledge that 'word of mouth is a big thing' and so a positive home visit is a 'quick-win' route to bringing new parents in to relationship with the programme. Beyond the successful home visit however, how are parents supported 'through the next step' to come in to social situations outside the family home, to build their confidence and allow the programme to work towards targets with a wider audience than is seen one-to-one in the home?

SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO GOVERNANCE

- What can realistically be expected of parents in terms of their participation in Sure Start governance?
- What strategies could be tried to involve greater numbers of parents to spread the load?
- What can programmes do to remove any obstacle to participation posed by limited childcare options?
- What role could parents play in encouraging wider involvement in governance? How can the enjoyment, satisfaction and rewards - such as the skills and experiences gained - be highlighted?
- How can programmes plan to ensure that parents will not 'have to wait' to be included to avoid enthusiasm being lost?

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

- Scope for bringing parents into contact with parents from other programmes would enable them, and programme staff, to learn from wider experience of Sure Start delivery and to share opportunities where this would offer savings efficiencies or otherwise be beneficial.

WHO'S MISSING ?

It is vital to take account of which parents and children are under-represented in the day-to-day run of Sure Start provision across Sheffield. The question of 'who is missing?' needs to be returned to constantly.

Specifically

- The problem whereby parents outside of the Sure Start geographical boundaries are felt to be missing out on what Sure Start can offer is common across programmes. What collective action can local programmes take to address the problem whereby parents outside of the Sure Start geographical boundaries are missing out on what Sure Start can offer?
- How can programmes ensure that families with older children are not prevented from having ready and continuing access to Sure Start activities their under 4s would benefit from? It common to find Sure Start staff often have to bend the rules and include older children to ensure that the service can be accessed by their younger brothers and sisters. How can programmes work collectively to secure proper acknowledgement of this issue and to attach a specific budget to dealing with it?
- What action can programmes take to involve men in Sure Start activities and events?
- Can opportunities be provided for men to be involved in activities and discussions that are typically thought of as 'women's territory'. For example, it is well known that women's decisions about breastfeeding are influenced by their partners' views and so it would seem important for programmes to think about how to involve men in supporting and encouraging women to breastfeed.
- The majority of disabled children and their families live in the most deprived areas of the country. All Sure Start programmes should therefore expect to have contact with children and/or adults with impairments. If this is not the case, what must be done to widen their inclusion?