

SURE START WEAR VALLEY

ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT: YEAR 2

SUMMARY



Parent views of Sure Start

- 600 surveys were sent out to families within the Sure Start Wear Valley area, of which 117 completed the survey. This gives a return rate of 20%.
- A large majority of respondents (78%) felt that services for pre-school (0-4 years) children and families have improved in Wear Valley. Many people feel that this is due largely to the Sure Start programme.
- Overall parents said that they were happy or very happy with the services provided by Sure Start Wear Valley.
- 23 people who were unable to use Sure Start said that this was because of work commitments. In written comments, parents also mentioned that they didn't know about some of the Sure Start services, and that is why they don't use them.



Quality of play

- The 'Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale - revised' was used to rate the quality of various aspects of the Get Crafty sessions. The overall rating for both Taylor Road and Lighthouse Community Centres was "satisfactory", whilst the Sure Start Nursery was rated "satisfactory to good".
- All parents surveyed were positive about the play sessions, particularly the friendly staff.
- By using a range of approaches, we were able to find out what both a three year old, Harry, (not his real name) and a 22 month old, Natalie (not her real name) thought of their Sure Start playgroups.
- Both children appeared to be happy and relaxed at the sessions, and enjoyed the activities on offer. Both children also enjoyed having their mothers at the sessions.
- Two areas emerged across all four Wave two programmes as needing further development in playgroups: approaches to involving parents and managing difficult behaviour.



Team working

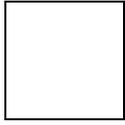
- Overall, the team was positive about their immediate line managers and various aspects of how their team worked together.
- Wear Valley staff thought that their team was positive about new ideas and clear about what it should be doing.
- Staff were most satisfied with
 - Hours
 - Flexibility of hours
 - Relationships with fellow workers
 - Opportunities to use own initiatives.
- They were most dissatisfied with
 - Job security
 - Opportunity for advancement
 - Physical conditions of their work.
- There were also some concerns about communication within the team. Staff felt that this was something that needed to be worked on.



Costs

- All Sure Start programmes have to measure cost effectiveness as part of their contract with the Sure Start Unit.
- At this early stage, we are only able to measure *costs* not *cost effectiveness* because it is too early to find out how effective Sure Start Wear Valley's services have been.
- We have measures unit costs for most of Sure Start Wear Valley's services. The unit cost is how much it costs per user per service session, for example how much it costs for one child to attend one Get Crafty session.
- The following table gives the unit costs for all services at Sure Start Wear Valley in 2001-2002:

SERVICE	UNIT COST
Aqua natal	£45
Baby gym	£3
Drop in	£65
Get Crafty	£43
Home visits (average)	£42
Swimming	£7
Top tots	£2



Flying Start

- 'Flying Start' is the County Durham baseline assessment for measuring children's abilities when they first start school, normally aged four.
- At a County level, schools in Sure Start areas did slightly better than expected for the year 2002, although the difference in scores was small and not statistically significant (i.e. it might have happened by chance).
- We found that children using Sure Start did slightly better in the Flying Start assessment than those who had not used it, although again the difference was small.



Working with Mainstream Agencies

- The views of 17 professionals about working with Sure Start were collected.
- Overall, there were positive views about Sure Start as an initiative, the benefits to parents, and some aspects of joint working such as joint funding for staff, sharing good practice and communication.
- On the other hand, some professionals felt there were certain areas which could be better and there were concerns about dual line management, strain on mainstream services and information sharing.
- These professionals thought that the meaning of mainstreaming needed to be clarified, as it means different things to different people.

Key Recommendations

Parent Views

1. Only 20% of parents responded to the survey. A higher return rate for the survey is needed in the future; National Evaluation of Sure Start recommends that programmes aim for over a 70% return rate, although they suggest that a 60-70% return rate is usable.
2. The programme needs to consider how it might overcome identified barriers to service use. For example, it could consider how best to support families where parent(s) are working.
3. Whilst the majority of parents expressed satisfaction with the range of existing services, 29% of parents suggested that the introduction of other services could be explored, such as more outdoor play areas in Wear Valley.

Quality of Play

4. All sessions need to be structured to ensure that high quality learning opportunities occur in the areas of social, emotional, language and physical development.

5. The programme should
 - provide supportive feedback to staff on their general role in the play sessions, based on regular observations
 - gain children's views as a regular part of its internal monitoring processes
 - consider making play sessions even better, by asking parents about their children's likes and dislikes, especially when they first attend.
6. Staff need to find ways of working effectively alongside parents in the play sessions.
7. A consistent approach to dealing with challenging/difficult behaviour needs to be developed further.

Team working

8. The framework for professional development and advancement could be reviewed. This reinforces the need for the Partnership to work towards permanent contracts for staff.
9. Levels of role conflict suggest that some staff feel they receive mixed messages from line managers. This is something which the programme is looking into at present.

Costs

10. Sure Start Wear Valley needs to review information on unit costs and decide if it is an accurate reflection of provision. Systems for recording who uses which service should be checked for reliability.
11. To ensure that the budget is spent as productively as possible:
 - Staff ratios to service users should be kept under review
 - The most appropriate professional to deliver each service should be kept under review.

Flying Start

12. The Flying Start assessment has the potential to show the difference Sure Start is making to children in the Sure Start Wear Valley area. To make full use of it, we would strongly recommend that all local schools are encouraged to take part each year.
13. Detailed records of families' use of services need to be kept up so that we see how children's use Sure Start services effect their results on the Flying Start assessments.

Mainstreaming

14. The Sure Start Wear Valley programme has started to build strong relationships with mainstream agencies. This type of work must be continued to ensure effective communication between Sure Start and all mainstream agencies.

The full Sure Start Wear Valley Evaluation Report: Year 2 (Draft) is available from the programme.

Feedback about the report is very much welcomed and can be given to Sue Lee, at Centre for Applied Social and Community Studies, University of Durham, Elvet Riverside II, New Elvet, Durham. DH1 3JT. Tel: 0191 3341484.

Contact:

District: Durham

Programme Manager: Carol Newsom

Sure Start Wear Valley

Round 2

St. Helen Auckland Community School

Manor Road

St. Helen Auckland

County Durham

DL14 9EN

Tel: 01388 665665

Mail: carol.newsom@durham.gov.uk

Evaluator:

Sue Lee, at Centre for Applied Social and Community Studies, University of Durham,
Elvet Riverside II, New Elvet, Durham. DH1 3JT. Tel: 0191 3341484.