



THE UNIVERSITY
of **LIVERPOOL**

NORTHWOOD *Sure Start* **EVALUATION**

**Year One: Evaluation of Processes and Mechanisms
in Place to Support Delivery**

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1. Aims and Methodology

1.1. Aims

This first year evaluation is a short piece of work with the following aims:

- Initiate the process of evaluation and the practice of two-way learning between the Sure Start practitioners and community and the external local evaluation team from Liverpool University.
- Carry out an initial evaluation of the capacity of the processes and systems set in place as part of Sure Start to deliver the outcomes and outputs desired.
- Feed back on initial findings regarding these in order to enable Northwood Sure Start to deliver in the most effective way
- Build the longer-term relationship with Sure Start and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) so that a fuller evaluation plan can be designed in partnership.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1 For this purpose the Year 1 evaluation comprised examining evidence from documents and strategies produced by the Sure Start partnership and conducting brief interviews with manager and monitoring officer. The evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the programme to deliver through looking at structures and processes in place and using the six key principles from National Sure Start plans as a guide:

- Co-ordinate, streamline and add value to existing services in the Sure Start area;
- Ensure lasting support by linking Sure Start to services for older children;
- Involve parents, grandparents and other carers in ways that build on their existing strengths;
- Avoid stigma by ensuring that all local families are able to use Sure Start services;
- Be culturally appropriate and sensitive to particular needs;
- Promote the participation of all local families in the design and working of the programme.

(from Sure Start website: <http://www.surestart.gov.uk>)

1.2.2 These will be assessed under the following areas:

- i. Working in Partnership: Partnership working with other agencies and programmes to ensure streamlining and sustainability across the area and age ranges.
- ii. Ensuring Access for all: Ensuring access for all by avoiding stigma and providing culturally appropriate and sensitive services

- iii. Promote participation of local families and community: Promote participation of local families and community in the design and working of the programme in such a way as to build on their strengths.
- iv. Ensure quality service through monitoring, management and evaluation

2. Working in Partnership

- 2.0.1 Reflecting the origins of Sure Start in the recognition that tackling the multiple causes of social exclusion requires 'joined-up thinking' involving co-operative joint working between multiple government and other agencies these principles require a well-embedded and supported partnership approach to delivery of the local Sure Start. In addition the introduction of Children's Fund and Connexions as well as initiatives such as New Deal for Communities and SRB and the even more recent Street Crime Initiative requires strong links and good communication between delivery agencies in order to avoid duplication at a community level.
- 2.0.2 In the case of Northwood Sure Start the area covered is also the recipient of a number of other new initiatives in the public and voluntary sector. Key ones of note are: Northwood into the Millennium (Northwood SRB), Knowsley Children's Fund and Knowsley Connexions, as well as being a Health Action Zone and Pathways area under Objective 1 with European Social fund finance. In addition Knowsley also has three other Sure Start areas at present, including one on the neighbouring estate of Tower Hill.

2.1 Partnership Working in the Consultation and Planning Process

- 2.1.1 Northwood Sure Start was set up with partnership an integral process from an early stage, as reflected in the composition of the planning group which represented the local health agencies: local health authority, community health trust, PCG and midwifery department, the social services, leisure and community services departments of the metropolitan borough council, as well as voluntary sector agencies and groups who have a community, development or child focus. The Sure Start Partnership lead body is the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), which also is leading on delivery of Children's Fund in Knowsley and two of the other Sure Start areas (the remaining Sure Start is led by Barnados, also represented on the Northwood Sure Start Planning Group).
- 2.1.2 All partner agencies made a commitment to "maintain current levels of resources (in real terms) for each of the services being delivered within the Sure Start area for the lifetime of the programme" and to "work on integrated, inter-agency basis to enhance the support available to children under four and their families to sustain such co-ordinated service delivery arrangements." (Delivery Plan; 5)
- 2.1.3 Analysis of minutes of Planning Group meetings show that the level of commitment to partnership working implied in the strategy plan was in evidence in practice as there was consistent attendance of a good range of partners including health professionals, local authority representatives and voluntary sector agencies and community groups and local parents.

2.2 Partnership Working in Management and Commissioning

- 2.2.1 Northwood Sure Start Partnership is managed by the Partnership Management Board, which includes representatives from Knowsley MBC, the local CHT and PCG as well as voluntary groups and local community groups and parents.
- 2.2.2 Of the twelve services commissioned by Northwood Sure Start to date (Aug 2002) eleven are run by external agencies, many are extensions of existing services in the area.
- 2.2.3 The model of service commissioning used is to follow up on areas identified as gaps in the initial research and to work with existing organisations to target these gaps. This includes both commissioning of new services but also putting time and support into streamlining and adapting existing services. The overall aim is for a seamless service that adds value to existing services as well as extending them and innovating. In this model for example a health visiting service with midwifery has been established that:
- develops the extension of a Home Safety project previously operating outside the area,
 - develops additional Post-Natal Support,
 - provides outreach drop-in support as part of other Sure Start work
 - provides Baby Massage training to be cascaded down to other (non-Sure Start funded) health visitors and
 - forms an integral part of a Skills Mix team that links all Sure Start services and outside services together.
- 2.2.4 In a similar way all Northwood Sure Start funded services have as a requirement to contribute the development of the skills mix team and work to build links with other agencies in the area. In addition the workers meet regularly through shared work - e.g. Family Literacy officer attending other services sessions, joint presence on Teenage Health Bus, a shared base in the Sure Start office for many of the workers and more formally in quarterly meetings for all services. The majority of services also have built in partnership working with services in a wider area or age range and most workers take part in regular practice worker meetings (both Sure Start and non-Sure Start workers) and Skills Mix groups within the Sure Start team and other teams that cover the area.

2.3 Conclusions

- 2.3.1 In terms of built in processes and design it is clear that Northwood Sure Start has a strong framework in existence for partnership working that will co-ordinate with existing services in the area through joint working, diverse partners and clear briefs. It aims to streamline services through the element of joint working and the skills mix teams which allow case sharing and information exchange and avoid compartmentalising issues as health or education etc. The consultation and design of services to fit gaps ensure that the Sure Start services add value to existing services in the sure start area.

2.3.2 Again in terms of built in processes and design it is clear that Northwood Sure Start aims to link in to services for older children. This is evidenced in the presence of a member of the head teachers committee on the planning group, the joint management of Northwood Sure Start with Children's Fund by the EYDCP for Knowsley and also by the decision to jointly commission evaluation of the three EYDCP Sure Starts and EYDCP plan and the Children's Fund from the same research team allowing comparison across ages and locations in the borough. Links with Connexions have allowed the referral of teenage parents with Connexions workers able to bridge the gap of initial unwillingness to attend. Similarly there are links with Children's Fund including a few examples of when the respite service of Sure start has discovered older children in the family also need services and have been able to refer to Children's Fund for after school care.

3. Ensuring Access for all

3.0.1 This is a particularly important criterion in assessing likely success of programmes which address a traditionally sensitive subject like parenting. The perceived stigma of social service or other agency intervention can lead to people avoiding services such as those provided by Sure Start. In addition it is necessary to take into account the historical patterns of childcare arrangements in an area before designing new services. Different ethnic groups may have different requirements or sensitivities in terms of what intervention they will accept. For this reason it is necessary that any new programme undertakes considerable baseline research to ascertain existing services and their take-up and gaps, social and ethnic composition of the area and residents views on what is and is not needed or acceptable.

3.1 Identification of existing difficulties in access

3.1.1 As part of the development of the programme consultations were carried out in a number of ways with the local community to ensure that statistical data (e.g. from the Borough Council) was matched with qualitative data from local residents, parents, voluntary and public sector workers. This was gathered using a number of methods including questionnaires and interviews by health practitioners, voluntary sector workers and community sector representatives as well as consultations on current provision and gaps carried out by a local research group made up of parents from Northwood who were already active in the community. This consultation was carried out in a transparent and inclusive manner (evidenced in the community consultation report) and it is likely that gaps and potential access issues identified in the consultation match the reality on the ground. The use of the local research team and the mix of methods to allow triangulation of results is particularly positive in this regard. Hard to reach groups such as ethnic minorities, the homeless, teenage parents and families at risk were specifically targeted and represented in the consultation. Ethnic community numbers are apparently very low with figures from the 1991 Census showing that out of 8,271 residents only 65 classified themselves as anything other

than white. (with 0-4 yr olds at 8.4% of population in Northwood according to 1995 survey figures this gives approx 5 ethnic minority children).¹

3.1.2 Key findings from local consultation in terms of access issues include:

- The very positive feeling regarding accessibility of the local health centre.
- Parents feel uninformed about what is available from professional and community services
- The main source of information on service availability was word of mouth
- There is a lack of support for male parents
- The sense of community and identity within the area and relatively low migration meaning that there is a tradition of inter-generational childcare and thus grandparents are very important factors in the lives of under 5s.
- There is a split between the northern and southern ends of the area and some unwillingness to travel into the other area
- Low car ownership and poor public transport make hospitals and other services outside the area hard to access.
- There is a lack of child-friendly community centres and spaces
- There is a lack of safe, supervised play areas
- There is a lack of affordable, quality childcare
- There is a disparity in terms of provision with some having spaces while others have waiting lists.
- There was also expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of current provision, with people going out of the area for services, complaining about staff attitudes and in particular about the quality of buildings.
- From hard to reach groups the key needs and issues identified were similar to the above but with added emphasis on the need for confidence building both in the parent and between the parent and service provider.

From the consultation it was clear that Northwood Sure Start had four main areas to address in terms of ensuring an accessible service:

- i. The lack of resources, in particular buildings and play areas
- ii. The lack of information /knowledge about what services are available
- iii. The lack of confidence in existing providers and ensure a quality affordable service is provided across the area.
- iv. Target difficult to reach groups such as teenage parents, male carers, homeless, at risk, ethnic minorities and disabled parents and children.

¹ This calculation is purely illustrative. All numbers for under 5s are being recalculated by the Northwood Sure Start at present.

3.2 Providing accessible play areas and child-friendly community spaces

3.2.1 This responsibility is being met by Northwood Sure Start with one of the services specifically aiming to address this with parent and child centres. In addition there is recognition of the need to provide reliable childcare in locations where training or work placements are offered and the mobile crèche amongst other services offers this.

3.2.2 The success of these in overcoming the lack in the area will not be able to be evaluated until a later date.

3.3 Providing information through accessible routes.

3.3.1 Sure Start partnership recognises the importance not only of the manner in which information on services is presented but also in the methods of dissemination used. An attempt to raise awareness of the range of services offered has included the use of:

- newsletters to every venue in the area (though not door to door)
- leaflets, posters and articles in the local free papers
- the benefits of multi-disciplinary team working (e.g. at the pamper days there are other services or information on them offered, teenage mobile health bus has midwife, sexual health workers, smoking cessation workers and youth service together)
- positive referral and notification of services from and to other providers in the area through good working relationships
- passing information on a regular basis to the health visitors and midwifery team who give out information to new and expectant mothers.
- concerted effort to spread awareness through word of mouth through presence on partnership board and in consultation and evaluation process of local residents, parents and workers.

3.3.2 Though probably hardest to evaluate and achieve it is the last mechanism in terms of access that is most likely to make a lasting difference in this area and it is only through personal experience of quality services that local parents are going to become convinced of the effectiveness of the programme.

3.4 Build confidence in service providers and ensure a quality affordable service is provided across the area.

3.4.1 Work is being undertaken in terms of building self-confidence on a number of levels; there is Northwood parent presence on the Building Hopes, Building Futures capacity building course and these parents will play a key role in the evaluation of the Sure Start programme; the joint working with youth and other services mean that accessing Sure Start services is about more than simply receiving the service you initially seek out but instead allows access to a range of welfare opportunities; a number of services specifically target post-natal depression and other mental health related areas. For this and other reasons of accessibility and transparency Sure Start has included information on non-Sure Start services that are relevant to local

parents in their newsletters and leaflets and ensured that they are promoted in a parent-friendly way (at times in contrast to the original publicity!).

- 3.4.2 Presence of parents and local residents on the partnership board alongside service providers should go some way to overcoming the power imbalance between providers and users of services, both Sure Start and wider. The current chair of the partnership board is a local parent and other local parents and other residents appear to feel able to comment in board meetings (ref: partnership board minutes).
- 3.4.3 Effectiveness and quality control of services will be governed by the quality and effectiveness of the monitoring and management, which is discussed further below.

3.5 Targeting difficult to reach groups

- 3.5.1 From the results of the consultation Northwood Sure Start has recognised the need to specifically target hard to reach groups in the Northwood area. As with all information dissemination, the main barrier to overcome is perceptions of services and the best route of contacting is by word of mouth. In addition there is the need to ensure that services are sensitive to needs and cultural differences. More thorough evaluation of this will be an important component of later research but it is worthwhile to note that all service level agreements have mention of the need to be sensitive to cultural needs.
- 3.5.2 The Sure Start partnership aims to ensure that all parents are contacted and encouraged to take up services through asking for referrals from a variety of sources. These include:
- Following up all notifications of birth in the area from information passed by the Midwifery and the Primary Care Trust.
 - Aiming to access these groups at the ante-natal stage with attendance of ante-natal clinics and offering 'pamper days' to expectant mothers
 - Keeping good working relationships with health visitors and midwives generally through seconded posts having responsibility to Sure Start while still attending group meetings within Health Authority.
 - Work with and enhancements to Portage service targeting children with special needs at earlier stage than traditional intervention
 - Funding of Additional Health Visiting service offering drop-in and outreach service that specifically targets homeless mothers and other at risk or difficult to access groups.
 - The respite service is often brought in for parents in particular need to sort out a specific problem but through being involved with respite service the parents hear about other options and so get wider support.
- In addition the Sure Start partnership has support from the borough council in accessing difficult to reach groups.
- 3.5.3 In practice there has been evidence of information being passed between local parents in difficult to target groups and this being a common route of

self-referral. This would be the most effective way of accessing these groups long-term and the success of this 'snowballing' referral method should be evaluated at service and partnership level.

4. Ensuring Local Participation

- 4.0.1 Ensuring the participation of the local community and in particular parents and other carers is a key element in making any development project successful and is a central target of Sure Start and other recent governmental social inclusion initiatives. The importance of participation of parents in Sure Start from the very early planning stages right through the implementation requires a targeted and thought out approach as participation cannot be effective and 'real' without parents having the capacity and voice to input into decision making at the highest levels.
- 4.0.2 For this reason an important part of the longer term evaluation of Northwood Sure Start will be to consider the quality and level of parent and child involvement in decision making and service delivery. With the particular character of the community in Northwood this will require capacity building in areas of board membership and monitoring and in particular in evaluation of outcomes. However it is recognised that there are a great many skills and a lot of experience embedded in the local community and positive use of these resources will be a prerequisite for 'real' participation.

4.1 Participation in the Planning and Consultation Process

- 4.1.1 From an early stage the Sure Start partnership recognised the importance of involving local people in the consultation stages of the programme, commissioning a local evaluation group to carry out the consultation and visiting community and health centres, churches and local voluntary organisations as part of the consultation. It is well recognised that the use of local people and qualitative approaches is the most participative way of carrying out consultation.
- 4.1.2 Local parents were involved closely in the consultation process in particular in the two day-long planning conferences and also the consultation meeting on the final bid. A video of these meetings shows very positive involvement of parents and other community members in this and the part they play is recognised in the final bid which includes names of all involved. (Northwood Sure Start consultation and planning process: video, Sure Start Northwood Delivery Plan, 2001)
- 4.1.3 There is also a capacity building service as part of Sure Start delivery training 3 local parents (alongside 3 other local residents using SRB funds) in evaluation methodology. These parents will play a central role in the longer term evaluation of Northwood Sure Start as well as undertaking research and monitoring work for the partnership and being enabled to seek permanent jobs.

4.2 Participation in the Management and Evaluation

- 4.2.1 The participation of parents on the management board is of particular importance in ensuring that the voice of local parents is heard in terms of development and delivery. The aim is that there should be 6 local parents or carers in addition to other community representatives on the management board. At present there are 3 parents on the management board of the partnership of which one is the Vice-Chair. They play a role in proceedings: at least one parent has attended every meeting and have spoken or been involved in some way including Chairing one meeting (from minutes of Partnership Board meetings).
- 4.2.2 Parents' attendance has been supported with briefings in advance from the programme manager and she has followed an approach of specifically involving the parents on the management board in specific areas in an attempt to include informal information sharing and capacity building. She also makes it clear that she is open to suggestions for increasing parent and carer input to the partnership board. This is an appropriate method for capacity building amongst a small group of people as formal courses can be off-putting and also management of projects is something that is best learnt in action. In future years, evaluation of the success of this method and attempt to encapsulate it in a 'tool-kit' for community empowerment will be part of the evaluation.
- 4.2.3 Parents on the partnership board are there as representatives either from community organisations (2) or from a parent group that was set up specifically to increase parent input to Sure Start in Northwood. This was not seen as a success in that it only elected one representative to the partnership board and felt that it had no real purpose. Participation is best ensured as a part of all services rather than being confined to small 'user groups' unless these form organically in response to a specific need. It is felt that the Sure Start partnership is correct in feeling that it is better investing time and resources in ensuring that participation is a function of all services and that parents and carers input to partnership decision making in that way. It would be hoped in the longer term that parents who feel able to comment and contribute to individual services will gain the confidence to use this as a route into the higher levels of the partnership.
- 4.2.4 In addition positive experiences of current board members will inevitably encourage them to suggest new members and enhance community participation. To date one of the parents on the management board has suggested a new board member who is a parent of a Sure Start target group so the partnership should be encouraged in the success of their approach.
- 4.2.5 This process will not happen without a great deal of support and emphasis on empowering both the local parents and carers and also the service level workers in enhancing participation. Evaluating the level of support for this and the success in bringing parents more into full participation will be a key element of the local evaluation process.

5. Ensuring a quality service

- 5.0.1 Effective management is the key to ensuring all other targets and aims are met. The correct structures need to be in place from the outset to ensure that appropriate services are being funded, quality provision is in place, there is training and support for people in new posts and situations to ensure that their services are meeting the needs of the community and for the community to be empowered to input into the decisions and development of the partnership at every level.
- 5.0.2 For all project workers the experience of Sure Start is a new one and so time must be given to discussions and self-evaluation both at a service and a partnership level. In addition the programme manager and monitoring officer need to be available on a formal and informal basis to support service delivery, development and monitoring and evaluation.

5.1 Structures

- 5.1.1 The programme manager took a very proactive role in appointment or secondment of all Sure Start staff, being present on panels for their appointment and ensuring that commitment to Sure Start principles as well as professional competency was seen as a key criterion for the appointments of all posts. She feels that this has paid off in a committed team who believe in the principles of empowerment of local parents and children and in innovative and partnership working.
- 5.1.2 Northwood Sure Start team work mainly from the same office, which enhances communication, and there seems to be a good atmosphere of communication and relaxed information sharing. There are quarterly meetings where services feed back on their evaluation of the services and any issues can be raised as well as information shared.

5.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 5.2.1 National Sure Start has requirements for monitoring of progress towards targets and services are well supported in completing this monitoring with the monitoring officer available to answer queries and support completion of forms. Evaluation of user views on individual services is the responsibility of service deliverers and this is collected in processed form by the Sure Start partnership on a quarterly basis. Most of the user evaluation is carried out through use of questionnaire/evaluation forms designed by services themselves.
- 5.2.2 Though there is some support for the design of forms, this is an area that may require more support and training as designing participative evaluation is a complex process and most services are mainly delivered by a very small team with limited resources in terms of time and research experience to carry out this work. As parent user participation at a service level is seen as a route to parent participation at a partnership level, services would benefit from some time to work as a group assessing how they can each enhance participation in their delivery and satisfaction with the service and its outcomes.

- 5.2.3 Some thought must also go into ensuring that services are child-centred and child-friendly and whether there can be child participation in design, delivery and evaluation.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Northwood Sure Start in the first year of operation has built a well-planned structure through which to deliver services to target those parents and young children most at need in Northwood.
- 6.2 There is a very clear recognition of the need for parent and carer involvement at every level and this is supported with positive management and inclusive practices. The initial consultation was inclusive in its design and delivery and effort has been made at every point to involve parents in decision making with some success. With further training this can be passed to all levels of service delivery.
- 6.3 Northwood Sure Start benefits from being part of a very strong partnership in terms of early years provision in Knowsley (EYDCP and voluntary organisations), with strong support in partnership working from health providers and the borough council. It is also part of a strong community in terms of community and voluntary sector organisations that show a great deal of commitment to working together. This was further built on by the multi-sector involvement in the planning group and now in the partnership management board. The skill-mix teams and secondments add to this partnership working and the linked evaluation of Sure Starts and Children's Fund will be able to measure this fully.
- 6.4 Northwood Sure Start recognises the importance of ensuring that all groups have access to services and has built in a wide range of methods to link with difficult to reach groups, in particular the homeless, disabled children and families at risk. There is a very low ethnic minority population in Northwood but this simply means that efforts must be made to ensure that any extra needs they may have are being met.
- 6.5 Longer term delivery and evaluation must bear in mind these key principles and in particular ensure that there is parent and other community user involvement in the design and implementation.

7. Relevant Source Documents

Consultation Report from COMMENT and Insearch, December 2000

Northwood Sure Start delivery plan, 31 January 2001

Service Level Agreements for all Sure Start commissioned services 2001/02

Planning Video, 2001/02.

Sure Start National Guidance for Evaluations

Sure Start Plan

Minutes of planning group meetings

Minutes of partnership board meetings

Reports on partnership events

Leaflets and Newsletters for Northwood Sure Start and its services

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