

# **Sure Start Thurnscoe (Year 1 Evaluation)**

## **Final Report**



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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Section 1 – Introduction

The introduction presents an overview of the background to this research project. This section also outlines the research objectives of the evaluation and the structure of the report for Year 1 of this evaluation.

### 1.1 Background to the research

Each Sure Start programme is required to evaluate their services in order to understand how well they are performing, keep track of progress in meeting the objectives and targets for Sure Start and make changes to the programme as a result of the local evaluation findings.

The National Sure Start Unit states that the purpose of any evaluation is to answer key questions about the intervention: what are we doing, is it working, how well is it working and what helps and hinders its effectiveness? Local Sure Start programmes are expected to search for answers in three main areas:

- Carefully monitoring their progress towards the objectives and targets set for Sure Start in the Public Service and Service Level Agreements (PSA/SDA) and in reaching other milestones and targets identified in their plans;
- Reviewing the working practices and processes through which Sure Start is being delivered;
- Assessing whether the services being provided achieve good value for the public money invested in them.

As stated by the National Sure Start Unit there are three basic types of evaluation activity:

- Formative – looking at how something is put into place;
- Process – looking at the way it works in practice;
- Outcome – looking at the effect it has<sup>1</sup>.

The National Sure Start Unit states that whilst an in-depth evaluation report is required at the end of measurement year three of each programme (considering the achievements and progress of the programme over the first three years); detailed evaluation reports are not expected in the first year. The Sure Start Unit does however require assurance that some evaluation and review has taken place in Year 1 and that this has informed the planning of the programme for the following year<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> NESS (2002), *Getting Started with a Local Sure Start Programme Evaluation*

<sup>2</sup> NESS (2001), *Guidance on Evaluating Sure Start, Delivering Sure Start – 5<sup>th</sup> Wave Edition*

## 1.2 Research objectives

Questions Answered (QA) has been commissioned to undertake a full evaluation of Sure Start Thurnscoe. This will involve three different stages, Year 1 Evaluation, Year 2 Evaluation and Year 3 Evaluation. By the end of Year 3 QA will be able to provide Sure Start Thurnscoe with the in-depth evaluation report required by the National Sure Start Unit.

For Year 1 of the evaluation, we are concerned with looking at how programme activities have been put into place (formative), and also at looking at how things are working in practice so far (process). Although there will be some initial discussion of outcomes, the effect that the programme's services are having, will be something that is covered in more detail in Year 2 and Year 3 of the evaluation process, once the services and the programme are well established. The Year 1 evaluation acts as a tool for informing future planning of the programme.

More specifically the objectives of the whole evaluation process are:

- To understand how well the Sure Start programme is performing so far in terms of their aims, objectives and targets;
- What key influences there are on the effectiveness of the programme and what key influences, if any, are hindering their effectiveness;
- To evaluate and keep track of progress in meeting the National objectives and targets for the programme as set out in the delivery plan;
- To use the outcomes of the evaluation to enable a proactive approach to be taken such that any recommendations made are acted upon as soon as possible;
- To provide a framework for feeding into local and district wide forums to sustain the programme and appropriately re-shape service delivery.

The evaluation process also needs to assess how well the programme is working in terms of the five priority areas for action: support for parents in the home; one-stop parenting centres; early education, childcare and play development; outdoor play and recreation; and support for families with special additional needs.

The specific objectives of Year 1 of the evaluation therefore are to assess:

- Progress towards Sure Start PSA and SDA targets
- Cross-cutting issues e.g. how well the programme is working in practice

### **1.3 Structure of report**

As well as the introductory section, this report has six further sections:

- Section 2 presents a description of the research methodology;
- Section 3 presents the desk research element of the research;
- Section 4 presents the key findings emerging from the interviews with some of the programmes stakeholders;
- Section 5 discusses the findings of the group discussion which took place with members of the Parent's Forum as well as a copy of the full write-up;
- Section 6 presents conclusions and recommendations arising from Year 1 of the evaluation;
- In the appendices you will find copies of the interview scripts which were used and a map of the catchment area.

## **Section 2 - Methodology**

The methodology for Year 1 of the evaluation has consisted of the following:

- Desk based research;
- Key staff and partner interviews;
- Focus group with members of the Parent's Forum.

### **1. Desk based research**

QA completed a desk based research exercise to help to set the project into context. This exercise gave QA a better understanding of the programme, and the area and helped to inform the interview script design. This process included gathering statistics on the area, examining the delivery plan, examining results of consultation already completed with parents, as well as examining minutes of meetings and M4 forms as well as publicity material. Some of the factual information presented in this section of the report arose from the interviews that were completed with stakeholders as well as from the group discussion with parents.

### **2. Key staff and partner interviews**

QA undertook thirteen telephone interviews with stakeholders in order to review the programme so far and to determine what has worked well, and what hasn't worked so well to date. The respondent's were asked to detail and give their opinions on the following aspects of the programme:

- Roles and involvement with Sure Start;
- Success of services provided;
- The planning process;
- Sub-groups;
- Success of the programme thus far;
- Areas for improvement;
- Parent and community involvement;
- Partnership working;
- Communication;
- Support / guidance;
- Possible threats to the success of the programme.

### **3. Focus group with member of the parent's forum**

Also, in order to review the programme thus far and to examine what is working well, we undertook one focus group with parents/carers who were part of the Parents' Forum. Sure Start Thurnscoe provided QA with a list of members of the Parent's Forum, QA then randomly selected twelve parents /carers to invite to the group discussion. This was because the optimum number for a group discussion to work well is between eight

and twelve people. In total, eight parents took part in the group discussion and were given an incentive of £10 for their time. During the group discussion parents / carers were asked for their opinions and experiences of the following:

- Involvement with Sure Start;
- Awareness of Sure Start within the community;
- Feelings about the area;
- Support and advice whilst pregnant / with their children;
- Awareness of and attendance at information sessions;
- Drop-in sessions;
- Early Services;
- Early education, childcare and play development;
- Outdoor play and recreation;
- Support for families and children with special / additional needs;
- Employment and training;
- Impact of Sure Start Thurnscoe;
- Future evaluation work.

## **Section 3 – Desk based research**

This section begins by providing an outline of the government policies that have shaped the Sure Start initiative, since its introduction in 1998. This is followed by a description of the Sure Start Thurnscoe programme and the catchment area. The final part of this section examines material provided by Jenny Foulstone at Sure Start Thurnscoe including M4 forms, results of parental consultation and promotional material.

### **3.1 Outline of the Sure Start Initiative**

Sure Start is the government's programme to support children, parents and communities through the integration of early education, childcare and health and family support services. The Sure Start initiative was introduced in 1997, as part of the Labour governments aim to reduce child poverty by half by 2010, with the aim of eliminating child poverty completely within a generation.

It was felt to be a priority that public services be improved for those living in disadvantaged areas, and in particular services relating to children under the age of 4. By investing heavily in early childhood development, the government is aiming to make a difference in the most disadvantaged areas of the UK and increase the lifetime opportunities that are available to the children who come from such areas. The first Sure Start programme began in 1998 and by 2004 there should be 500 local programmes in operation, helping up to 400,000 children aged under four.

Following the government spending review in 2002, a further £1.5 billion has been allocated as the budget for childcare, early years and Sure Start by 2005-6. This review once again highlighted the value and importance of available and affordable childcare (following on from the National Childcare Strategy introduced in 1998), with the result that the government has pledged to double the spending allocated to childcare in real terms by 2005-6. The review report showed that by enabling parents to work, notably lone parents, childcare can reduce child poverty, improve children's performance and behaviour.

The overall aim of Sure Start is the following:

“work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children”

Sure Start aims to break this cycle of disadvantage through each of the following:

- increasing the availability of childcare for all children;
- improving health, education and emotional development for young children;
- supporting parents in their role and in developing their employment aspirations;

- helping services develop in disadvantaged areas, while providing financial help to enable parents to afford quality childcare;
- rolling out the principles driving the Sure Start approach to all services for children and parents.

Each Sure Start programme now has five clear national objectives to work towards and measure success against. These are as follows:

### **Objective 1: Improving social and emotional development**

'By supporting early bonding between parents and their children, helping families to function and by enabling the early identification and support of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties'.

Target: To reduce by 20% the proportion of children aged 0-3 in the Sure Start areas who are re-registered within the space of 12 months on the child protection register by 2004.

Delivery targets:

- All local Sure Start programmes to have agreed and implemented, in a culturally sensitive way, ways of caring for and supporting mothers with post-natal depression;
- One hundred per cent of families with young children to have been contacted by local programmes within the first two months of birth.

### **Objective 2: Improving health**

'By supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth'.

Target: Achieve by 2004 in the 500 Sure Start areas, a 10% reduction in mothers who smoke in pregnancy.

Delivery targets:

- Parenting support and information to be available for all parents in Sure Start areas;
- All local programmes to give guidance on breast feeding, hygiene and safety;
- A 10% reduction in children in the Sure Start area aged 0-3 admitted to hospital as an emergency with gastro-enteritis, a respiratory infection or a severe injury.

### **Objective 3: Improving children's ability to learn**

'By encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promote early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with special needs'.

Target: Achieve by 2004 for children aged 0-3 in the 500 Sure Start areas, a reduction of 5% points in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring specialist intervention by the age of 4.

Delivery targets:

- All children in Sure Start areas to have access to good quality play and learning opportunities, helping progress towards early learning goals when they get to school;
- Increased use of libraries by families with young children in Sure Start areas.

### **Objective 4: strengthening families and communities**

'By involving families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty'.

Target: To reduce by 2004 the number of 0-3 year olds in the Sure Start areas who are living in households where no one is working by 12%.

Delivery targets:

- 75% of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support;
- All Sure Start programmes to have parent representation on the local programme board;
- All Sure Start programmes to have developed local targets for ensuring links between the local Sure Start partnership and Employment Service jobcentres;
- All Sure Start programmes to work with their EYDCP to help close the gap between the availability of accessible childcare for 0-3 year olds in Sure Start areas and other areas.

### **Objective 5: Improving the Availability, Accessibility, Affordability and Quality of Childcare**

This national objective was introduced in July 2003.

Delivery targets include:

- Double the number of users of local Children's Information Services and the Childcare Link website;
- To create new childcare places for children in disadvantaged wards;

- To create new high quality out of school club childcare for children of school age.

Whilst each Sure Start programme is unique, all programmes include the following **core services**:

- Outreach and home visiting;
- Support for families and parents;
- Support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children;
- Primary and community health care, including advice about family health and child health and development;
- Support for parents with special needs, including help getting access to specialised services.

Further to the aims and objectives of Sure Start, as set out above, all Sure Start programmes are expected to adhere to a set of shared principles, these are to:

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

It is hoped that the long-term impact of Sure Start programmes will include the following:

- Improving physical and emotional development;
- Improving performance at school;
- Reducing truancy;
- Reducing ill-health;
- Reducing in teenage pregnancy;
- Reducing the risk of unemployment;
- Reducing anti-social behaviour;
- Reducing drug abuse;
- Reducing crime.

Local programmes are also responsible for the recording of monitoring data, as set by the National Sure Start Unit and for ensuring the production of a number of evaluations at pre determined key moments.

### **3.2 Development of Sure Start Thurnscoe**

Sure Start Thurnscoe is a wave five programme and was approved in July 2001. Thurnscoe is one of the most deprived areas in the Barnsley Borough and as such was identified as potentially benefiting from a Sure Start programme. Thurnscoe is one of five Sure Start programmes in Barnsley. Other programmes in Barnsley include Kendray and Worsborough (wave two), Athersley, New Lodge and Smithies (wave three), Hoyland and Jump (wave five) and Bolton and Goldthorpe (wave six).

The programme was launched in October 2001 when a celebration / awareness raising event was staged. Approximately 500 people attended this launch and it was deemed to be very successful. The event included a firework display and colouring books and balloons were given to the children etc. This event was also used as a means of consulting the community prior to completing the delivery plan for the programme.

The programme became operational in January 2002 when they started to deliver early services. Staff have been recruited on an ongoing basis, although most members of staff were not in post until December 2002. The Barnsley Dearne Community Partnership is the Lead Agency for Sure Start Thurnscoe. The BDCP was established by local people in 1997, and their role is to *'assist with the social, economic, educational and environment regeneration of the area'*. Barnsley Local Education Authority operates as the Accountable Body.

Sure Start Thurnscoe has developed programme aims appropriate to the local population as well as striving to meet nationally set targets and objectives.

### **3.3 Location of Sure Start Thurnscoe**

Thurnscoe is a very insular former coal mining village, situated within Barnsley LAD. According to the 2001 census, the population of Dearne Thurnscoe is 10,538. A higher than average proportion of the population is aged under 16 within Thurnscoe (23.8%), compared to a figure of 20.2% for England and Wales. Dearne Thurnscoe is ranked 94<sup>th</sup> on the index of multiple deprivation and ranked 281<sup>st</sup> in the child poverty index. There are approximately 445 children under the age of four years living within the area of Thurnscoe and as such it can be viewed as quite a small catchment area compared with some programmes<sup>3</sup>.

The Thurnscoe ward covers two distinct areas divided by a railway line, Thurnscoe East and Thurnscoe West. The economic, social and health problems are experienced to a greater degree within the east of the village due to the impact of large-scale pit closure which was formerly based in this area of the village, and which had employed a large proportion of the local population. Thurnscoe West also experiences economic, social and health problems, but comprises of mostly privately owned households and council

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<sup>3</sup> A map of the catchment area can be found in Appendix 2

property. According to statistics provided by BMBC in 2002, 76% of the population of Thurnscoe were living in deprivation (unemployment, social deprivation, health matters).

Despite a high level of social deprivation being evident within the community, and there being a sense that everything has been taken away from them, there is nevertheless said to be a strong sense of commitment within the community. Many of the local residents are actively supporting regeneration within their environment. Indeed the BDCP are pro-active in sustaining and regenerating the area, they have been working closely with regeneration programmes to develop service provision to attract funding such as SRB, Neighbourhood Renewal, Children's Fund etc.

The following table highlights particular strengths and weaknesses of the area as stated in the programme's 2002 delivery plan.

Strengths of Thurnscoe	<p>Small close-knit community (good 'village life')</p> <p>Community that is dedicated to projects (e.g. social support groups)</p> <p>Local churches and schools are very supportive</p> <p>8 community centres providing support</p> <p>Strong community forum</p> <p>BDCP takes its role seriously and has good links in terms of bringing in regeneration projects to Thurnscoe:</p> <p>Thurnscoe Family Service Development Project</p> <p>Thurnscoe Consortium</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Job Search</p> <p>Community Development</p> <p>The Local Action Plan</p> <p>Coalfields Regeneration Trust</p> <p>Neighbourhood Renewal</p>
Problems facing Thurnscoe	<p>Above average rates of poor health</p> <p>Above average rates of poor literacy and numeracy</p> <p>High levels of poverty</p> <p>High levels of unemployment</p> <p>Low car ownership</p> <p>High rates of crime</p> <p>Below average Key Stage 2 results</p>

Particular areas of concern for Sure Start Thurnscoe are indicated by the statistics in the following table, taken from the 2002 delivery plan, and the 2001 census.

Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70.8% of children aged 0-3 in Thurnscoe living in households on means tested benefit</li> <li>• 5.1% of the population is unemployed in Dearne Thurnscoe, 33% of these are long-term unemployed (2001 census)</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52.1% of Dearne Thurnscoe residents do not have any qualifications, compared to 29.1% as an average</li> <li>• 49% of Key Stage 2 scores in English below Level 4 (2000), compared to average of 25%</li> <li>• 52% of Key Stage 2 scores in Maths below Level 4 (2000), compared to average of 28%</li> <li>• 33% of Key Stage 2 scores in Science below Level 4 (2000), compared to average of 15%</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 321/1000 emergency admission rate for 0-3 year olds 1998-2001 in Thurnscoe, compared to 232/1000 for Barnsley as a whole</li> <li>• 139.1/1000 conceptions for 15-17 year olds in Thurnscoe compared to 63.3/1000 for Barnsley</li> <li>• 19.3% of residents describing their health in the preceding twelve months as being 'not good', compared to a figure of 9.2% for England and Wales overall (2001 census)</li> <li>• 2001 census revealed that 33% of residents in Dearne Thurnscoe have a long-term illness, compared with an average of 18.2%</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Sure Start Thurnscoe – Population

The table below presents some key data about the Thurnscoe area. As can be seen, Sure Start Thurnscoe has a very small minority ethnic population.

	Data	Source
Total Population of Dearne Thurnscoe	10,538	Census 2001
Population under Four in Sure Start Area	445 children under 4	Barnsley MBC Statistics, 2001
Families with Children under Four in Sure Start Area	N/A	N/A
Live Births to mothers in Sure Start area per year	122	Barnsley MBC Statistics, 2000
Ethnic Breakdown of Dearne Thurnscoe population	White	99.7
	Mixed	0.2
	Indian	0.1
	Pakistani	0.1
	Other Asian	0.1
	Chinese/other Ethnic	0.1

### 3.5 Sure Start Thurnscoe – Consultation

Sure Start Thurnscoe engaged and consulted with parents and the community early on. Initial consultation involved accessing parents through parent and toddler groups that were already running in the area. Parents were told about the programme and were encouraged to get involved in the initial meetings that took place regarding what people would like the programme to cover, and discussions surrounding how to engage more of the community. Although the initial consultation sessions were quite formal at first these were soon adapted so as to be less formal, and to be more inviting to parents, meals were laid on for the meetings for example. At these consultation events they put up display boards, made suggestion slips and questionnaires available. Also, parents who were involved right from the onset of the discussions were there to support and inform other parents. A worker for Sure Start Thurnscoe also undertook consultation with parents to ensure parental involvement and representation.

The BDCP also undertook research and consultation to identify needs within the area prior to the delivery plan being put together<sup>4</sup>. They undertook focus groups with local people, parents as well as voluntary and statutory agencies to gather people's views on the area and the services that were being provided at the time. Sure Start also contacted statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure participation in consultation with

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately this data is no longer available.

the community and on a one to one basis. Sure Start tried to ensure that they were reaching the hard to reach families in the area, through giving leaflets to organisations that support families in the home to pass on<sup>5</sup>.

The launch event (October 2001) provided a good opportunity to consult with parents, as over 500 people attended the event. Parents that were already involved with the programme approached local people to complete a questionnaire, which amongst other things, asked them about their perceptions of the area. In total 50% of people who attended this event completed a questionnaire (250 people), which has provided the programme with some concrete baseline data. The questions that were asked at this stage will form the basis of what Questions Answered will measure against when completing customer satisfaction surveys with parents later on in the evaluation process.

In order to make sure they were also gaining the views from as much of the community as possible, Sure Start placed suggestion boxes for the programme at certain frequently visited locations across the village (e.g. post offices, schools, fish and chip shop). In total, the consultation exercises revealed that 28% of residents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of services providing family support in Thurnscoe at the time, and parents were more positive regarding voluntary providers as opposed to statutory providers.

The consultation exercises helped to engage stakeholders and develop the specific aims and objectives of the programme, identifying which types of provision were most in demand.

### **3.6 Sure Start Thurnscoe - Aims & Objectives**

Vision Statement:

“We visualise a better start for the children in our community, the community and authorities working together ensuring that the voices of parents are heard, families helping families, a safe and happy environment for our children to play and learn. The opportunity of advice and support from approachable people” (By Sure Start Thurnscoe Parents)

The programme has agreed three main aims for its work within the community:

- To reshape services for families in Thurnscoe to meet the needs of the community and the area;
- To encourage and set standards for all service provision in the area into being more child and family friendly;

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<sup>5</sup> Sure Start Thurnscoe have compiled a comprehensive document which details the extensive consultation with parents, *Sure Start Thurnscoe – Diary of Parent and Community Consultation and Involvement, August 2001-December 2002*.

- To exchange and share information with other services to disseminate best practice and modernise services as identified by parents.

For Sure Start Thurnscoe, the driving force of reshaping the services will emerge as a result of the following:

- The parents will have a voice in all issues to ensure their comments are listened to and taken on board;
- Parents and community members will have an active role in the effective developments of future services and evaluation;
- The Stakeholder Forum will play an important role in the identification and direction of service delivery;
- Services will be evaluated to identify what impact they have.

Sure Start Thurnscoe aims to help to reshape services by linking into other service providers to clarify the position of Sure Start and its place in the reshaping of services and ensuring there is no duplication. The programme has also stated that all Sure Start funding will be used to finance new activities, not current ones, unless it is 'top up' provision.

The core services for Sure Start Thurnscoe, and who it was anticipated would be delivering these services at the delivery plan stage were as follows:

1) Outreach and Home Visiting	1 Sure Start Co-ordinator 1 Outreach worker 1 Family Support Worker A team of childcare workers 1 Social Support worker 1 Education Psychologist
2) Support for Families and Parents	1 Administration worker
3) Support for Good Quality Play, Learning and Childcare	Two NNEB childcare workers 1 Book Start Worker 3 Community based libraries
4) Primary and Community Healthcare, including advice about family health and child development	1 Community Health Worker
5) Support for children and parents with Special Needs, including getting access to specialised services	1 NNEB/Equivalent with special needs expertise

### **3.7 Sure Start Thurnscoe – Partnership & Management**

Sure Start Thurnscoe is governed by the Stakeholders Forum, which exists to plan and implement a 7 – 10 year programme of high quality services for children under 4 in the programme area. The main focus of the Stakeholders Forum is to achieve Sure Start objectives whilst ensuring community involvement remains central to a process of open decision-making. Members of the Stakeholder's Forum include representatives from the local schools, businesses and community representatives, the statutory and voluntary sector and parent representatives. There appears to be a good variety of involvement within the programme.

The Management Board consists of elected Stakeholder Forum members who are involved with delivering and leading the programme. The board meets on a monthly basis. Parents were given support sessions in preparation for attending these meetings.

The Parent's Forum exists to ensure Sure Start Thurnscoe listens and acts upon parent's views and concerns. Issues that are discussed in The Parent's Forum are fed back into the Stakeholder's Forum.

The aims of The Parent's Forum are as follows:

- Discuss Sure Start;
- Supplement consultation;
- To act as a reference group for the delivery of Sure Start services;
- Consultation on the Services and Provision;
- Feed into the Stakeholder's Forum;
- Negotiate decision making structure;
- To act as a reference group to additional newly formed sub-groups.

The following sub-groups also currently exist:

- Buildings and Finance sub-group;
- Health and Education sub-group;
- Social.

The programme also holds Operations Group meetings. As well as this all the Sure Start managers in Barnsley meet on a quarterly basis to share best practice and look at their strategies and discuss issues which affect all of the programmes. They also invite representatives from various organisations to these meetings so as to all benefit from the discussions at once.

**Table 3.7.1: Members of the Sure Start Thurnscoe Partnership**

Name	Representing
George Horner Cllr Gardiner	Chair, BDCP BMBC
David Donnelly	BMBC, Early Years Education
Dave Ramsay	Barnsley PCT
Jenny Foulstone	Sure Start Programme Manager
Jean Carr	Secretary, BDCP
David Williamson	The Hill School
Julie Saxelby	Gooseacre School
Albert Rose	Thurnscoe Housing Co-operative
Kim Shanker	Kiddie Winkles
Angela Cannon	Health Visitor, Great Houghton Clinic
Hilary White	Social Services
Lesley Walton	Local Action Team / Credit Union
Sylvia Burden	Smoking Cessation
Deborah Blewitt	Right Start / Book Start
Peter Williams	Social Services
Janice Hancock	Family Development Worker
Delma Evans	Health Visitor, Thurnscoe Health Centre
Natalie Price	Parent's Forum
Susan Thompson	Parent's Forum
Stephen Rolfe	Parent's Forum
Tanya Cook	Parent's Forum
Danny Cook	Parent's Forum
Steve Greaves	Parent's Forum
Joanne Greaves	Parent's Forum
Amanda Potts	Parent's Forum
Kerry Potts	Parent's Forum
Joanne Russell	Parent's Forum
Nicola Derrick	Parent's Forum
Andrew Revitt	Local Solicitor
Gail Townsend	Accountable Body, BMBC
Nigel Wright	BADAS
Tony Mancini	Education Psychologist

### 3.8 Sure Start Thurnscoe – Team

Most of the key staff were recruited by December 2002. Most staff work on a part-time basis and some staff are on secondments. The team is comprised of staff from various fields and is detailed below

**Table 3.8.1: The Sure Start Thurnscoe Team**

Name	Position
Jenny Foulstone	Programme Manager
Joanne Grant	Administration Officer
Andrea Mellor	Sure Start co-ordinator
Ian Traynor	Family Support Worker
Jackie Wignall	Deputy Manager
Janice Hancock	Family Development Worker
Janet Cook	Receptionist
Anna Whitehurst	Receptionist
Cheryl Cooper	Senior Family Support
Denise Robinson	Bookstart
Julie Hollinson	Nursery Nurse
Tony Mancini	Education Psychologist

The above team are supported by a variety of others including smoking cessation specialists and health visitors for example.

### 3.9 Sure Start Thurnscoe – Service Provision

The activities and services provided and set to be provided by Sure Start Thurnscoe have developed following extensive consultation with local parents, community representatives and agencies. As stated in the 2002 delivery plan, the provision most in demand was identified through the consultation process as being the following:

- Healthy eating advice;
- Friendly home visitors to support and listen;
- Buddy system;
- Welcome information packs for new parents with contact numbers and advice;
- Time out for parents, with childcare facilities;
- Parent classes and courses to highlight health and safety;
- Parent's stress management in the form of time out for parents;
- Relaxation for parents and children;
- Social support;
- Peer support groups;
- Parents advocate;
- Parents helping parents;
- Childcare provisions;
- Safe play areas indoors and out doors;
- Reading initiatives working with parents;
- Temper training advice;
- Children and family learning;
- Play group structured learn and play;
- Physical movement and co-ordination sessions;
- Stay and learn and play;
- Better equipment and resources;
- Praise for children and parents not criticising;
- Issues on alcohol and substance misuse to be addressed;
- Support for parents with children with special needs;
- Better communication in services.

What follows is a list of services/programmes that either have been or are currently being provided by the programme as well as details of what is involved in each service/programme. As can be seen in the following table, much of what parents mentioned as being priorities for the programme, is already being covered as of October 2003.

**Table 3.9.1: Services provided by Sure Start Thurnscoe**

Service/programme	What is involved
Bumps2Babies	Antenatal parent craft for mums-to-be. This started in September 2003.
Book Start Plus	Information packs given to parents containing age appropriate books and information about sharing books with children.
Substance misuse advice	Provided by BADAS
Variety is the spice of life (drop-in)	Activity sessions at both Houghton Road and St Hilda's Community Centres once a week. Structured crèche facilities are provided. Parents can go along for a coffee and chat, or can get more involved in various activities and courses that are available. Guest speakers attend drop-in sessions.
Parenting course	Course for parents on dealing with children's behavioural problems etc.
Safety Booklet Home Safety pack	Gives tips on various aspects of child safety: travel; car; fire; garden; bathroom; bedroom; general. This includes a safety gate, thermometers, table corners etc. Currently evaluating the pack.
Thurnscoe Dads group	Launched in February 2003. A group for dads and their children. Those running the group have found it difficult to engage fathers and they are now looking at examples of best practice from other dads groups and reassessing how they could engage more fathers.
Toddlers learn to swim	Weekly swimming sessions take place in Goldthorpe. A Sure Start worker teaches the children to swim and swimming certificates are now provided.
Come stay and learn	Parents have undertaken numerous courses through the drop-in sessions. Parents choose which courses to run. They have included health and hygiene, childcare, computers, Cook and Eat sessions etc. In November 2003 a number of parents were due to start an NVQ Level 2 in Childcare.
Healthy Teeth campaign	Sure Start provides health visitors and district nurses with a toothbrush pack to give out to parents to promote dental hygiene.
Weaning pack and parties	Spoon, bowl etc
Bottle to Cup Exchange	Leaflet and cup are provided to parents, highlighting the health implications of using a feeder bottle for too long instead of a cup. Booklet also gives general dental hygiene advice.

Baby welcome home pack	Given to parents shortly after they've given birth. Includes baby talc, toiletries for the mother etc.
Fun in the Sun pack	Consists of a pack being given out to parents at an event during the summer. Contains a t-shirt, hat and sun cream for the children.
Breast Feeding Pack & Buddy System	Produced in conjunction with the health authority. Highlights the health benefits of breast feeding to babies, includes a breast pump etc. Buddy system introduced to support mums who are new to breast feeding.
Literacy and numeracy	Family Development Worker helps to develop individual literacy and numeracy skills.
Debt counselling	Family Development Worker helps to counsel parents on their debt problems, accompanying them to the CAB etc.
Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative	Identified as a need by Barnsley Choices, Sure Start is supporting the two local schools to provide neighbourhood nurseries. The schools cater for 3-4 year olds, whilst Sure Start will shortly be catering for 0-2 year olds. Sure Start intends to buy in places at a local nursery until the Sure Start building is ready.

### 3.10 Monitoring Information

QA examined copies of M4 forms which have been completed by Sure Start Thurnscoe. The data showed that a large proportion of the milestones have been achieved at the necessary time. When milestones have not been achieved, or have partially been achieved, these tend to relate to difficulties with engaging fathers (although not through a lack of trying) and the slow process of recruitment and problems with engaging with the health authority, and in particular in recruiting a health worker. The programme is resolutely committed to these areas though; they now have all their key staff in place. They have been gathering best practice from other dads group and are now considering how to develop the dads group in the future. The programme has also now managed to recruit a midwife (secondment) to join the programme in December 2003. The programme has found it difficult to compete with the salary and benefit packages of the health authority. The fact that not all the core members of the team were in place when originally hoped does not appear to have had a major detrimental effect on the programme. It has however meant that not all families that would have been reached by Sure Start have been. This is something which the programme is now working towards amending.

### 3.11 Service Evaluation & Promotional Material

#### Service Evaluation

Sure Start Thurnscoe recently conducted a small-scale service evaluation survey with parents involved in the programme to establish how they felt about Sure Start and non-Sure Start services. The following figures illustrate the results of this research. Although the base figures are small (ranging from 7 to 21 for each service, those that have not accessed a particular service have been excluded from the results), those that have used Sure Start services are generally very positive about them, most notably the work regarding breast feeding and the work the education psychologist does. This confirms the findings of the telephone interviews and the group discussion.

#### Sure Start Services

**Table 3.11.1 Opinions on Sure Start services**

	Very good (%)	Good (%)	Good & very good (%)
Breast	100	0	100
Education Psychologist	88.9	11.1	100
Baby	85.7	14.3	100
Safety	80	20	100
Fun	80	20	100
Weaning	71.4	28.6	100
Transport	71.4	28.6	100
St Hilda's	64.7	35.3	100
18 month	64.3	35.7	100
Pre Nursery	57.1	42.9	100
Library	45.5	54.5	100
Previous	73.3	20	93.3
Family	73.3	20	93.3
Swimming	84.6	7.7	92.3
Crèche	50	41.7	91.7
Bottle	75	16.7	91.7
Houghton Rd	42.1	47.4	89.5
Courses	58.8	29.4	88.2
Home	63.6	18.2	81.8
Book	42.9	38.1	81.0
Dads	66.7	11.1	77.8
Support	41.7	33.3	75.0

**N.B The base figure varies for each service**

## Non-Sure Start services

**Table 3.11.2 Opinions on non-Sure Start services**

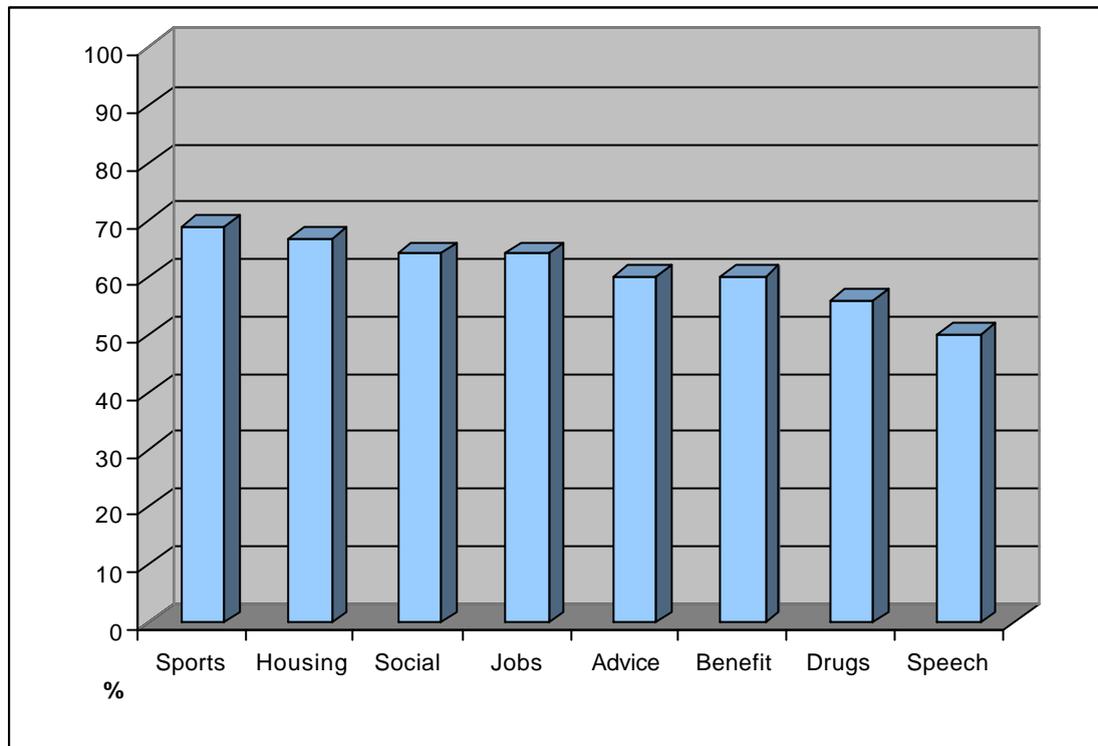
Levels of satisfaction with non-Sure Start services were not as good, as the following table highlights. Whilst more than three-quarters of parents thought every Sure Start service was either good or very good, only one statutory service is viewed that highly.

	Very good (%)	Good (%)	Good and very good (%)
Playgroup	30.8	46.2	77
Antenatal	30	25	55
Baby	18	34	52
Dental	18	41	59
Health	15	50	65
GP	14	30	44
Speech	12.5	25	37.5
Library	5.9	76.5	82.4
Sports	0	12.5	12.5
Advice	0	20	20
Drugs	0	22	22
Housing	0	13.3	13.3
Social	0	21.4	21.4
Benefit	0	20	20
Jobs	0	14.3	14.3

### **N.B The base figure varies for each service**

The services most in need of improvement according to this consultation are therefore all statutory services. The following chart shows the services which were rated as 'poor' by 50% or more of the parents who were questioned, these were sports (68.8% rating sports services as poor); housing (66.7%); social (64.3%); jobs (64.3%); advice (60%); benefit (60%); drugs (56%) and speech (50%).

**Figure 3.11.1 The statutory services which parents are least satisfied with**



**N.B Base varies from 13 to 21 people rating each service.**

### **Promotional Material**

QA were provided with examples of promotional material produced by Sure Start Thurnscoe. The leaflets and booklets are all very enticing; they are made up of bright colours which are attractive to both parents and children (the parents have helped design these materials). They also capture the eye due to the characters which have been created to help promote certain services, such as George the Dragon which helps to promote Bookstart Plus. The association of a character with a service helps bring the leaflets, and the whole service to life and people and children will begin to associate the dragon with books and reading. The material also contains graphic images to display the health implications of using a feeder bottle for a prolonged period for example. The leaflets also contain handy hints for parents.

## **Section 4 – Summary of Telephone Interview Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section examines the key findings from the thirteen telephone interviews that were completed with stakeholders. QA undertook interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including key partners, Sure Start employees and parents in order to gather a variety of experiences and opinions. QA undertook interviews with the following stakeholders:

- Jenny Foulstone (Programme Manager)
- Jean Carr (Secretary, BDCP)
- Julie Saxelby (Headteacher of Gooseacre Primary School)
- David Williamson (Headteacher of The Hill Primary School)
- Albert Rose (Thurnscoe Housing Co-operative; Director of BDCP; Chairman)
- Peter Williams (Social Services, Children and Families District Officer)
- Hilary White (Social Services)
- Sylvia Burden (Smoking Cessation Specialist)
- Janice Hancock (Family Development Worker)
- Natalie Price (Parent Representative)
- Sharon Delaney (Parent Representative)
- Tony Mancini (Education Psychologist)
- Jane Kahler (Finance Officer for BMBC Finance Education)

The findings that are represented in this section portray the main themes and issues that were discussed, although opinions and experiences that were felt by a minority have also been included. All comments remain anonymous.

### **4.2 Roles and involvement with Sure Start**

As can be seen in the introductory section stakeholders came from a variety of backgrounds and had a variety of roles within and involvement with the Sure Start programme. This ranged from purely attending partnership meetings as representatives of statutory and local bodies, through to those that were employed by the programme therefore involved in the delivery of services, through to parents that were attending meetings and receiving services. Not all of the respondents were clear about which meetings they attend. Some of those people who were providing Sure Start services were doing this as part of their everyday role, such as the Smoking Cessation Worker, whereas some developed their role to meet the needs of the community (Family Development Worker).

Most interviewees asserted that they had been very enthusiastic about becoming involved with Sure Start and some saw it as building on the work they were already doing in the area in their other working roles. A majority of respondents discussed how the programme was very much needed in the area and this made them keen to get involved. Involvement with the programme was a way for people to feel that they were

working towards tackling the problems in the area and working towards a better future for Thurnscoe:

- *"I was delighted. It's just an extension of what I was doing before. I've always wanted to get more involved, it's just in a different way than what I was doing."*
- *"Being a family man I saw the future for Thurnscoe."*
- *"I realised it was just what Thurnscoe needed."*

One person stressed that Sure Start provided an important opportunity for service providers to get together and think more thoroughly about how they could meet the needs of the community. Parents who were involved mentioned their wishes to help children through their involvement. It was also felt by one parent that by becoming involved they would be able to develop skills which would help them in the future.

Some respondents didn't really know what to expect from Sure Start, they knew little about it before becoming involved and one person expressed that they weren't sure whether the programme would achieve what it set out to initially (although they said they'd been proved wrong). A lack of awareness of Sure Start however didn't prevent people from wanting to be able to offer their opinions and expertise to the programme.

Respondents who had been allowed to develop their role as a Sure Start employee as they saw fit appreciated and embraced this opportunity. It has enabled them to carve their own role according to the needs of parents.

Whilst many of the respondents said they didn't foresee any difficulties for the programme when they first got involved, some felt it would be difficult to allocate time to the programme due to other commitments. One person explained that this difficulty had arisen, but that they were able to send someone else to attend the meetings when they couldn't make it.

Others had felt that it was going to be difficult to engage the community and statutory bodies, which was so important to success as a community based programme. A few respondents noted that this foreseen difficulty has materialised somewhat as the programme has experienced difficulties engaging the health authority. It was expressed that because of the local knowledge of Sure Start workers however, (for example the programme manager had worked as a development worker in Thurnscoe) they felt better equipped to deal with the foreseen difficulties of engaging with a community that is renowned for being quite divided by the east and the west, they were able to plan their projects and the location of the building accordingly.

Due to the fact that most people were able to use their existing skills and knowledge for their roles within the programme, people were happy with the support and knowledge they had from the beginning. Parents expressed that they were made to feel that their opinions counted and meetings were not intimidating and everyone's opinion is valued. Those respondents who weren't involved from the beginning of the programme explained that their colleagues had offered them sufficient support and guidance surrounding what they were expected to bring to the programme. One person who became involved with the programme at a later stage stated that their involvement was an easy process because the programme is so well organised. One person explained that they were still finding their footing within the programme, but that the team were being very supportive and they felt valued.

### 4.3 Success of Services provided

A list of services provided by Sure Start Thurnscoe can be found in section 3.9. All of the services were generally viewed as quite successful by those who were in a position to comment. The members of the Sure Start team that were interviewed discussed how they had successfully engaged parents in their services, the parents found them useful, and the workers themselves were reaping the rewards of this.

The programme is doing well at attracting parents to the drop-in sessions, initially there was only one drop-in session per week but this was increased to two (at two different centres) due to demand. It was however discussed that attendance is now better at one centre than the other.

Parents do not just use the drop-in sessions as a crèche facility, it was explained that parents have been very keen to get involved with the activities at the drop-in sessions. Parents have undertaken a variety of courses such as health and safety, Cook and Eat sessions, childcare, beauty, keep fit sessions etc. It was explained that some parents would shortly be starting an NVQ Level 2 in childcare. Parents that were interviewed were full of praise for these courses *"brilliant, really good"*. It was explained that not only do Sure Start arrange these courses for parents, they also provide transport should they require it and childcare. Also at the drop-in sessions parents have been given talks from a variety of people and organisations including the employment service and sessions on speech development which have received positive feedback.

It is clear that members of the Sure Start team are viewed as very approachable and are very reactive to the individual needs of parents. Examples were given of help being given to parents to develop literacy and numeracy skills (parents approached Sure Start for this help), and helping parents to sort out their debt problems, by accompanying them to the CAB for example.

Respondents discussed how the success of the services provided comes down to the fact that the workers go out into the community rather than just sitting in the office waiting for people to come to them, they are visible and approachable and make the effort to become people's friends first and foremost. It was also stated that success also boils down to listening to what parents want, which this programme does effectively, if the programme cannot help, they can point parents in the direction of someone who can.

*"You have to make it your priority to constantly talk to the parents. It's all about having a bottom up process. You've got to get the issues right and getting to know the parents and building a good relationship with them."*

In terms of the various packs the programme gives to parents, these were deemed as successful, and the programme is now starting to evaluate what parents think of these. Two respondents mentioned that the sun protection event that had been held in the summer had been particularly successful. It was felt that it had really made an impact on local parents:

*"That really got through to the parents, they didn't realise the dangers of the sun."*

It was however stated that the services currently provided would benefit from having more input from representatives from the health authority, especially in terms of their work to do with weaning and breastfeeding.

The importance of all the services provided by Sure Start Thurnscoe was emphasised, especially because Thurnscoe has a high proportion of young mums who may perhaps need the extra support provided. The services are also said to help prepare children better for school, in terms of helping children learn to interact and get to know each other, and helping develop parent's skills in order to develop their children's literacy skills.

Interviewees that had delivered services were asked what advice they would give to someone about to undertake such a project. One interviewee commented that they would tell others to definitely become involved because their experience had been extremely positive. Another interviewee asserted that they would suggest that anyone embarking on a project should ensure that the service they will be providing is definitely needed by asking the parents what they want.

One important point which was stated was that the programme is continually learning as it develops, therefore they're always learning ways in which they can improve their services, for example the way they organise events.

#### **4.4 The planning process**

Those that were involved in the initial planning stages of the programme all felt that it ran smoothly and effectively. It was felt that everyone who attended the meetings was encouraged to offer their opinion; therefore the planning process was not felt to be dominated by anyone in particular.

A point that was mentioned several times was that the programme was very successful in terms of getting parents on board very early on. Indeed one of the parents who had been involved in the planning process stated that whilst the very first meetings had been quite formal, following feedback from parents the meetings became much more informal, therefore parents felt their opinions counted from the initial stages. A parent also mentioned that the parental involvement was so high in the beginning that the number of parents probably outweighed the number of statutory and voluntary representatives. People felt that the programme has got off to such a good start due to this high level of parental involvement.

It was generally felt that the programme had the right selection of people involved in the beginning, people with different opinions and experiences who were able to thrash out ideas and come to an effective conclusion which suited the majority.

It was also explained that they got the sub-groups, building committee and finance committee set-up early on so they were aware of what they could do with the programme and what they couldn't do in terms of financial, political and legal matters and to link this into establishing what the community wanted at an early stage so there was no opportunity for disappointment. It was also expressed that the programme was able to learn from other Sure Start programmes in the area which was an advantage.

Whilst one person mentioned that the programme sorted out the main staffing early on, which they said enabled the programme to have access to the wider community, it was also mentioned that the early stages could have benefited from having the programme manager in place sooner.

#### **4.5 Sub-groups**

Most individuals felt that the sub-groups that they were involved with worked well and undoubtedly the prime strength was felt to be the involvement of parents in the meetings who are very active. One person did however mention that there was a lot of 'rubber stamping' in these sub-groups.

The success of the sub-groups however can perhaps be seen in the fact that through the effectiveness of the Buildings and Finance group an architect is now in place to commence the Sure Start building. The Sure Start building should be ready by October 2004; this is quick progress when compared to other Sure Start programmes in the area.

The sub-groups were decided upon according to the targets of the programme and the interest of parents. The sub-groups have been important in terms of getting statutory bodies involved including social services and local businesses. It was mentioned there will probably be an evaluation sub-group in 2004.

A difficulty mentioned with the sub-groups is in terms of ensuring they are as structured as they need to be, especially the Parent's Forum. The issue of feedback from sub-groups was mentioned more than once. Those that aren't involved in the sub-groups would like to still be given feedback from the meetings rather than hear things on an ad hoc basis. One person also mentioned that it would be useful if one person from each sub-group could feedback to the Management Board what has been discussed in their meetings. Another respondent explained that they are currently working on the issue of feedback and are in the process of appointing someone from each group to give this feedback.

## 4.6 Success of the programme thus far

Interviewees generally felt that the programme has been very successful thus far and has achieved a lot in a relatively short space of time. An aspect most people are proud of is the fact that the design of the Sure Start building is now underway and an architect is now in post.

*"All the personalities and capabilities that they've got there have made it highly successful"*

Some respondents mentioned the fact that the programme has been a point of wisdom for other programmes in the area, in terms of learning from its ability to engage parents and the general speed at which the programme has developed. Indeed the community involvement in the programme is seen as one of the key strengths of the programme, as they have a core group of very committed parents who are heavily involved with the programme. It was mentioned that there is parental representation in all the Sure Start meetings and parents are now chairing some meetings. Some parents have also been involved in interviewing candidates for the architect post.

Another factor which respondents feel has contributed heavily to the success of the programme has been the make-up of the Sure Start team. Members of the team are viewed as friendly, approachable, flexible and good communicators who have first-hand experience of the area. The fact that the team is fully committed to the programme was mentioned, *"they are very professional and create a very good atmosphere"*. The team is felt to be working extremely well together. One respondent mentioned the fact that the programme has an experienced and committed Finance Officer which helps the programme, and they've been using the Softsmart programme which is helping them to be more effective.

The approachable nature of the team has meant that the drop-in sessions have been very successful, which one person described as being the lead into the programme.

One respondent mentioned being proud of the fact that the programme came out as low risk on the six month assessment. This has meant that as a number of the targets were signed off at the six-month stage the twelve-month risk assessment was due to be desk based to the Regional Office.

The programme is felt to be very pro-active in the area of family support. Parents mentioned the fact that the programme has given them insight into new ways of dealing with their children, and has helped them get the support they need, but wouldn't necessarily pursue from statutory bodies. Indeed when respondents were asked whether they felt the programme was performing better in any particular areas than others, most people felt it was performing best in terms of its support to parents and community involvement, the social side of things. It was mentioned that the programme has a good referral system in place, with social services and Barnados; they also have good links with the two schools. It was mentioned by some respondents that the programme needs to make sure it keeps the momentum going, and to keep involving a broader range of

people and improve their work towards other objectives such as developing the ability to learn and outdoor play.

One problem the programme is experiencing in terms of evaluating its success is due to the fact that they haven't had access to much of the start point data that they hoped the health authority would be able to provide them with. This has meant that the programme has had to put a lot of emphasis on the importance of their workers gathering data themselves, although this isn't straightforward.

#### **4.7 Areas for improvement**

Positively, very few interviewees were able to give examples of what they felt were negative points about the programme. However, some common themes did arise.

There have been difficulties getting certain groups involved. For example, doctors and fathers. However the lack of participation of fathers prompted a big push from the Sure Start team to get Dad's involved, something which the programme is committed to. Furthermore, family involvement with programme meetings is low. It was discussed how a core group of parents were involved in many of the meetings at the moment. This could appear "a bit cliquey" to outsiders. There are plans underway to introduce information stands at Houghton Road community centre, to try and increase the number of families involved.

In terms of improvements to the Sure Start communication process, it was suggested that one area for improvement would be for a representative from each of the sub-groups to provide formal feedback to the management meetings in order to ensure that the partnership members have an overall picture of what is taking place within the programme. Information from the sub-groups should also be fed back to Sure Start employees.

It is felt that the programme could benefit from having more senior individuals involved in the management of the programme and on the health and social/education sub-groups. Although there is currently a member of the health authority on the executive board they don't regularly attend meetings. This makes it difficult to address certain issues relating to health.

Certain groups were wary of Sure Start at the outset. For example, some Health Visitors had perceived that Sure Start was taking over their jobs. There is also a concern that individuals might take advantage of Sure Start and attempt to build their own empire within it and that Sure Start has to be careful to prevent this from happening.

Interviewees also mentioned that a major difficulty was finding a suitable location for the new building. However, this is resolved now an appropriate plot has been found.

Difficulties accessing baseline data (particularly from the Health Authority) has meant that it has been difficult to measure the impact of the programme. However, recent meetings with the Health Authority have raised the profile of Sure Start and a midwife

will be joining the board soon. Although it was felt that this should have happened sooner.

Another area for improvement is that staff need to become more used to the importance of collecting data. At present, the Sure Start admin team is currently working on ideas about how workers can gather this information with minimal effort. Related to this point, some interviewees commented that the amount of administration required could be a burden, particularly when what is required tends to change frequently. This can be difficult when there is not enough staff time available for administration and for tracking parents.

Furthermore it was suggested that Sure Start needs to advertise more as some people in the area are still not aware of the service and its purpose:

*"We need to make people understand more because a lot of people just think it's only for very disadvantaged people but it isn't, it's for everyone in the area."*

Finally, one specific issue highlighted was that there needs to be more afternoon sessions available. Although the respondent was aware of the one at Houghton Road, she was reluctant to go there as she had heard that there had been trouble there at the drop-in.

#### **4.8 Parent and community involvement**

When asked about how successful Sure Start had been in terms of getting parents involved it was felt that Sure Start had been very successful at this. Most of the interviewees felt that, other than dads' initially, there had not been any groups that were particularly difficult to access. One interviewee made the comment:

*"Mums, Dads, Grandmas, Granddads' they're all involved."*

Only one interviewee was pessimistic about the community involvement to date and felt that so far Sure Start had only reached a small proportion of the community. They commented that people in Thurnscoe are often wary about trying things that are new. They felt that families with children with special needs were the most difficult group to reach, although increasing Health Visitor involvement in the programme would help to tackle this. Generally, interviewees stressed how difficult it was to develop and sustain parental involvement and that it required ongoing effort and presence within the community. With regard to fathers, it was suggested that they are sometimes reluctant to get involved because such activities are seen as women's work.

One respondent explained that an ongoing concern is whether the programme is engaging with the most deprived families in Thurnscoe, but added that links with Banardos is helping with this, along with group sessions for those parents who are lacking in confidence.

It is also anticipated that the home visits will help to develop more parental involvement. One interviewee commented that quite a few outreach days have taken place but the parents that show interest don't always follow it up. The respondent explained that one reason for this could be the perception that the programme is just for poor people, so there is a stigma attached which needs to be broken down.

#### **4.9 Partnership working**

Respondents were asked about how well the programme links with statutory and voluntary organisations in terms of whether there is a good mix of people involved and whether these links have helped people with their everyday work. Respondents were also asked whether they thought any improvements to partnership meetings were required.

When considering partnership working most interviewees felt that there is a good balance of people involved with the programme and that parents were given the same opportunity as professionals to contribute to meetings. A couple of interviewees mentioned that health professionals are not involved in the programme as much as Education and that this was particularly apparent because of the appointment of the Educational Psychologist.

Overall, attendance was felt to be good and one interviewee in particular mentioned that the 'key players' always attend meetings, the frequency and size of meetings was also perceived to be good by the majority of interviewees. It was felt that the finance team had done a good job in ensuring that they presented information in a way that was accessible to individuals from a non-finance background.

There were mixed opinions as to whether the level of parental involvement was low or high. One interviewee asserted that the parental involvement is not as good as it could be although it was felt that this would improve as the parents gained confidence, whilst another thought that parental attendance at meetings was high.

*"You need to have committed people because some parents only turn up sometimes and only when their mates are there."*

With regards to how respondent's roles within the programme could be made more efficient, overall there were no major improvements suggested although three interviewees made comments about the time they were able to commit to Sure Start and that the programme would be more effective if they could commit more time to the programme.

For improving the efficiency of meetings some general improvements were suggested:

- Meeting participants should receive any reading material prior to meetings so that this doesn't take up time during meetings;

- Sometimes self-interest can take over at meetings and people can digress. Therefore it is important that the chair makes the objectives of the meeting clear at the outset and ensures that the discussion remains focused;
- One interviewee felt that the quarterly management meetings should be held more frequently;
- More representation of health visitors / midwives is required;
- One interviewee would like the Partnership Executive Board to have more of an input, e.g. to offer constructive advice to the programme.

When asked whether the term `partnership` was applicable outside of meetings as well as in meetings, most interviewees that were able to confirm that they had developed some good relationships through Sure Start and that they had become more aware of what other professionals are doing locally. Some strong links with local councillors have been developed.

#### **4.10 Communication**

Communication within the partnership was also felt to be good by most interviewees and minute taking of meetings and the distribution of these to staff was felt to be efficient. One interviewee suggested that communication needed to be more of a priority, e.g. more posters and leaflets; however it was suggested that the new Sure Start building would make communication easier. Another comment made was that more information needed to be fed back from the sub-groups.

Overall it was felt that the executive board and the stakeholder forum were willing to respond in a pro-active way to the changing needs of the community. One interviewee highlighted the fact that individuals were heavily involved when it came to deciding the venue for the new building. In general, it was thought that Sure Start was doing a good job in terms of consulting with the community, e.g. asking people to fill in forms about what they would like from the programme.

One community need identified as still requiring attention was the lack of supervised parks. It was explained that at the moment there are two parks within Thurnscoe, however these are constantly vandalised, the swings are not fit to go on, and there are syringes and glass on the floor. The nearest decent park is said to be four miles away by car. However, it is hoped that the new park (as part of the new Sure Start building) will help to alleviate this issue.

#### **4.11 Support / guidance**

Respondents were asked to describe their overall experience of being involved with the Sure Start programme and if they have received enough support and guidance.

Half of the interviewees commented that their involvement with Sure Start to date had been straightforward and a very positive experience, due to the good planning and communication from the Sure Start team. The remaining respondents asserted that although they did not feel their involvement with Sure Start had been straightforward, because there had been problems to overcome, they had learnt a lot so far.

Most interviewees felt that they had received adequate support and guidance for their role within Sure Start, in particular from Jenny.

#### **4.12 Possible threats to the success of the programme**

*"I do work with other Sure Start programmes and Sure Start Thurnscoe is the most solid."*

The interviewees were asked whether they felt there was anything that might threaten the short term or long term success of the programme. The most frequently mentioned threat was a lack of parental involvement in the future.

Although the programme has been very successful in engaging parents from the beginning, parental involvement is starting to wane according to some respondents. Indeed some mentioned that it is the same core group of parents who are involved in the various meetings, and whilst these people are very much valued by the programme, it is felt that they need to be thinking more about the ways in which parents are involved. It is felt that this can be off-putting to other parents. One respondent mentioned that they are trying to match parent's skills with the meetings they attend, rather than pure interest, as this will help with their own development. It was also mentioned that the programme needs to be making sure that they are reaching all parents; one person mentioned this as being important because the local population is quite mobile.

What is clear however is that people feel the programme is already trying to engage with more parents. An issue mentioned was the fact that when they have event days parents express interest in getting involved, but they then don't show up for meetings. Another point mentioned was the need to ensure that they keep on top of the delivery of projects so that they reach their targets.

A threat also mentioned was if the programme does not manage to improve relationships with the health visitors there could be problems further down the line. Another matter which was mentioned was the need for everyone to be clear about what their roles and responsibilities to the partnership are, as this can lead to uncertainty and possibly disaffection. More than one interviewee also mentioned the fact that the building could potentially cause problems if the timescale were to go off course. One

respondent also mentioned that problems could potentially occur if parents had false expectations of the programme.

## Section 5 – Focus Group Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

*"I find it's made me more aware around how important the first few years of your kids lives are, because with all the different aspects we've been looking at, from health development, psychological, it makes you realise how important these issues are and makes you take more of an interest"*

Sure Start Thurnscoe Parent

Questions Answered conducted a focus group with eight members of the Parent's Forum. Six participants were female and two were male, all participants were White British.

The group discussion allowed us to explore Sure Start Thurnscoe from a parent's perspective. As we conducted a group discussion we were able to generate qualitative information about perceptions and experiences of the programme and the area rather than gathering pure statistical data.

The main topics discussed were:

- Involvement with Sure Start;
- Community Awareness and Involvement;
- Feelings about the area;
- Support and advice;
- Early Services;
- Childcare;
- Employment and training;
- Impact of Sure Start Thurnscoe.

What follows is a summary of the key points which were raised during the group discussion under each of the above headings. A full write-up of the group discussion follows on from this summary.

## 5.2 Involvement with Sure Start

Most participants had become involved with Sure Start Thurnscoe through parent and toddler groups that they had been attending in the area, or through friends and family. Most of the parents had been actively involved with the programme from the very initial stages, ranging from offering their own opinions as to what they would like from the programme through to helping Sure Start to consult with other members of the community, to establish what a wide range of people would like from the programme. Therefore parents in Thurnscoe were given a sense of ownership of the programme very early on.

It was mentioned that right from the beginning Sure Start Thurnscoe has listened to parents and has acted on what people have had to say. An example was given by one parent (through a telephone interview), stating that the initial consultation meetings had been quite formal which didn't suit some parents and was off-putting, Sure Start arranged for the meetings to become much more informal, laying on meals and coffee etc to make the meetings both enjoyable and events which parents felt comfortable with and wanted to attend. This ability to listen to parents and engage a core group of parents who have been involved with the programme from the very beginning has resulted in continuous involvement from the parents as the programme has developed.

Reasons for becoming involved with the programme generally centred upon the fact that people have the time available to be involved (a couple of parents mentioned that it has been difficult for working parents/carers to get involved with the programme). Reasons also included a genuine interest in learning more about their child's development and that there were programme activities enabling their children to interact with other children. One participant described their reasons for getting involved with the programme:

*"For me I wanted to get more involved with the community and put something back into it. Also it's really good on a social level because you get to meet other parents and you make new friends."*

The eight participants were all quite heavily involved with Sure Start activities, most notably attending the drop-in sessions (weekly) and attending Parent's Forum meetings (monthly). Many of the participants were involved in a number of other partnership meetings and thus were highlighting their enthusiasm and commitment to the programme. Some participants were involved in chairing Sure Start meetings. Many of the parents were also involved in helping out at the activity sessions, by helping out in the kitchens, tidying up after the children etc. The male participants expressed how they had been working to develop a dads group, although they had been experiencing difficulties with engaging fathers they were nevertheless resolutely committed to this idea and were working with Sure Start to think about what to do next. Generally parents said they were spending between four and five hours a week on Sure Start activities.

Participants discussed a wide range of activities that they had been involved in through Sure Start, all of which the parents have a say in. Activities ranged from undertaking courses on childcare and health and hygiene, through to sports days and day trips to the seaside during the summer. They also explained that some of their children have swimming lessons once a week through Sure Start. It was also mentioned that they

have information sessions at the drop-in centres; parents are given talks on a variety of useful topics including developing children's speech. A number of the participants had also been involved in fundraising activities.

### 5.3 Community Awareness and Involvement

Participants generally felt that the programme has been making every effort to ensure that as many people as possible within the community are aware of the Sure Start programme. Several examples were given of those involved with the programme making efforts to publicise the programme through distributing leaflets, putting posters up in key locations, wearing t-shirts with the logo on etc. It was also mentioned that they are about to start developing a newsletter to let people know more about what is going on in the programme and what people can get involved in. It was emphasised however that a lot of the awareness of the programme develops through word of mouth, as one person expressed:

*"With the adverts and leaflets in the local shops some people don't notice them so a lot of people just hear about it through word-of-mouth through friends and family. We all try and develop ways of publicising the services more."*

Parents expressed that the programme is always trying to encourage further parental involvement (most notably through event days that are held), and the issue of ensuring parental involvement is more to do with a lack of interest than lack of awareness. There was also mention of the fact that some people are unable to really get involved because they work. The group generally felt however that there are a good number of parents involved in the Parent's Forum at the present time. In terms of the future of the programme, participants generally felt that more and more of the community would become involved with the programme as it develops and people start to see visible evidence of what Sure Start can do for the community (the building).

In terms of difficulties experienced in engaging the community, once more the male members of the group highlighted how they had found it difficult to gauge the interest of fathers in the area in terms of developing the dads group. One of these participants explained that again this is not to do with lack of awareness, but a lack of enthusiasm for getting involved which could come down to cultural issues, with Sure Start activities being viewed as women's business:

*"Fathers know about the service but I think it just might be in the culture, some do want to get involved but they think it's just a woman's thing and it would make them look bad. It's a cultural thing about dads groups and kid's things; we need to break that mould. We're struggling, banging our heads against a wall trying to get people involved"*

These participants had not given up hope however and were committed to getting the dads group off the ground. They explained that there were currently only four fathers in the dads group, but they were starting to look at examples of best practice from other dads group that were operating successfully in the area in order to decide where they were going from there.

Participants discussed the positive impact that the programme is having upon the children and the community. It was explained that many of them had only got to know each other through the programme and they had developed good friendships with each

other. Participants also expressed the benefits and the *“pleasure”* they got from seeing their children interact and learn to share with other children living in Thurnscoe, this was seen as a particular benefit because these were the same children they would be going to school with. The following quotes demonstrate how people feel about the programme:

- *“it’s nice for them to get to know each other, grow up together in moderation and be friends”*
- *“it’s nice for us to get our kids together on a Wednesday afternoon and talk about stuff and just to be involved in it”*

#### **5.4 Feelings about the area**

Most participants had lived in Thurnscoe all their lives whilst some of them had returned to Thurnscoe after a period away. As a deprived area participants naturally felt there were many ways in which Thurnscoe as a village needed to improve and develop. What came across strikingly through the focus group however was the optimism and enthusiasm that people feel for the future. The following responses were given when participants were asked to describe Thurnscoe as an area:

- *“it’s getting a lot better”*
- *“When the Sure Start building’s built and the Lift building is built it’ll be a lot better. At the moment there’s not much really”*
- *“not a lot for the kids to do”*
- *“we’ve got no parks round here”*
- *“nothing for younger children”*
- *“they are developing a lot of areas, it’s slow, but it’ll get there”*

The lack of activities for young children to do was the major issue that people described. The lack of outdoor play areas and parks was seen as a major problem and existing parks were viewed as too dangerous to use due to vandalism and litter. There were said to be places where they could take their children for walks, but nowhere for them to play. Participants did generally feel the area was starting to improve and they could highlight small changes that had already been made to the area (such as ramps for pushchairs, demolishing derelict houses etc). The fact that people knew that Sure Start was working to develop areas that are lacking in Thurnscoe at present meant that most negatives in the discussion were followed by something positive; the following quotes are examples of this:

- *“The council are always saying that they are doing something about the play areas but nothing ever gets done. They seem to be just building houses and not putting enough money into children’s facilities. It is slightly improving though.”*
- *“not enough for toddlers at the moment, but there’s a lot of money to be spent in Thurnscoe”*

Participants generally recognised that improving the area was going to be a slow process, and that there was only so much Sure Start could tackle within its remit.

Generally people felt that Thurnscoe is becoming a safer place and a better place to live, a place which is concerned with its inhabitants and meeting their needs and wishes.

It was generally felt that the Sure Start building and the development of the programme in general will be a real impetus to change in the area, as two of the parents described:

- *“Once the new Sure Start building has been built it will be much better. There will be much more things available for the children to do.”*
- *“it’ll be a lot better when the building is built, ‘cos then there’s somewhere for people to go if they need to go everyday, they’ll be someone to talk to”*

The fact that an architect is now in place for the new building and people are aware of what Sure Start is aiming to bring to the area has resulted in an optimistic stance of the area in most cases. People also discussed how they are finding services such as the drop-in centres very useful, especially for getting advice and talking to other parents.

## **5.5 Support and advice**

Overall, parents were satisfied with the support and advice available to them; they were particularly satisfied with the support they received from the Sure Start team. The general consensus was that the Sure Start team are friendly, approachable and will make every effort to help them with any enquiry they have, if they are not able to help they point people in the right direction. The following quotes show how people feel able to use the Sure Start team for support and advice:

- *“if anything happens I go directly to Sure Start”*
- *“if we want to find anything out we just ring through to the Sure Start office and probably speak to Andrea or Janice”*
- *“If you have a hospital appointment they’re always obliging to take you. We’ve had a few personal problems that they’ve been more than helpful with”*
- *“If you have any problems or need help or advice you can ring up Sure Start and even if they can’t help you with a particular problem then they can give you a number of someone who could.”*

People felt that the support that Sure Start offer is open to everybody and this is why both mothers and fathers feel able to approach the team for a range of support and advice.

Participants also felt that the drop-in sessions provide parents with a network of family support and possible advice, from professionals, the Sure Start team and other parents who may be in the same situation with the same questions. It was explained that parents are so willing to embrace this support that is offered to them because of the informal nature of the sessions, the following quotes demonstrate the feelings of support from the drop-in sessions:

- *“It’s a really nice place with nice people. It’s a great support network and it’s very relaxed. There isn’t loads of emphasis on support so there’s no stigma attached to asking for help.”*
- *“the drop-in’s like a family support group really”*
- *“everybody helps one another”*

- *"we've got a child psychologist, and a midwife on a Wednesday, there's a nice support network"*
- *"without being too centred on support so there's no stigmatism"*

Apart from Sure Start, participants weren't really sure of the existence of other child and family services in Thurnscoe. It was explained that if they wanted any particular information about a support group for example, they would approach Sure Start for this information.

Parents of older children expressed that they had received adequate support when they'd had their children (before Sure Start was introduced to the area); again there was a definite feeling amongst the group that things would improve in the future. People felt that having a resident doctor in the new building would make things easier; especially as one parent-to-be currently had to travel to Goldthorpe to see a doctor. There was also mention of a midwife joining the Sure Start team from December which would help in terms of offering support to parents. One participant explained that she had been approached to offer counselling to other parents on breast-feeding; this person will receive training for this. Again there is evidence of giving parents ownership of the programme and up-skilling parents who are involved:

*"I was asked to offer advice to other young mothers on breast-feeding so the people at Sure Start offered me more training so that I could."*

When asked about attendance at information sessions parents expressed that they found these really useful. There was also mention of new sessions such as Bumps to Babies which people felt would be very useful to parents:

*"They're setting up a pregnant mums session and mums with young kids. They offer loads of courses and things like baby massage and talks on postnatal depression from midwives. I think its called bumps to babies and I think anyone can use them."*

Not all of the parents were aware of this new service and interestingly one mother-to-be was not yet aware of this.

In terms of support and advice for parents of children with special/additional needs the group felt that Sure Start was very good at being supportive to these parents and there wasn't felt to be a need for a particular support group. It was felt to be the statutory bodies where the support needed improving. One participant explained the plight of her friend who has a child with special/additional needs:

- *"She has to fight for everything, for support at school; she can't get full mobility or anything like that. She has to ask for things herself because there's nobody for her to go to"*
- *"Some parents benefit from being around parents in similar predicaments but others don't, people feel differently about support groups. She gets support from her friends".*
- *"I think that she gets the most support from her friends and I don't think there's enough demand for special needs groups in this area."*

## 5.6 Early Services

Although not all participants were aware of the Book Start programme (this may be due to the age of the child), those that were aware were very complimentary about the gift pack that they had received. They were able to recollect what the packs contained (including a George the Dragon toy) and explained that the books were of good quality:

*"I think it was quite good, they were good quality books and you got a little dragon toy as well."*

All participants explained that they read to their children on a regular basis.

Participants then described various other packs that they'd been given through Sure Start, parents welcomed these packs. Although there was an issue raised surrounding the timing of the packs, this has been said to have been remedied now.

All of the respondents were made aware of the Bottle to Cup Exchange through a display in one of the drop-in centres and also leaflets and free gifts used to publicise it. They felt this was a good idea and many of the parents had received information packs from their outreach workers.

The drop-in sessions are integral to the success of Sure Start Thurnscoe thus far and have provided the community with something that Thurnscoe was lacking beforehand. When participants talk of Sure Start, they talk about the drop-in sessions. Drop-in sessions are ways in which parents initially become involved with other aspects of the programme, such as the meetings. All of the participants make use of the drop-in sessions in the way Sure Start intended (i.e. not just being viewed as a parent and toddler group). Participants mentioned how they use the drop-in facilities to get advice, to meet up with other parents and enrol on courses. Participants had been on a variety of courses such as childcare and health and safety and truly valued these opportunities:

*"You can go there to enrol on loads of courses. Normally 3-day courses at the college like health and safety, first aid and fire safety. There are also the longer courses that can go on for about 10 weeks and you can receive a certificate at the end. There's also a free crèche."*

## 5.7 Childcare

Although none of the participants were currently using any formal childcare, and didn't necessarily have any wishes to use childcare until their children were older, the general consensus was that Thurnscoe is much in need of some childcare provision that is both affordable and of good quality. It was discussed that those parents who wanted to use childcare would have to travel to Goldthorpe at the moment and this effects the take-up of employment. Parents therefore welcomed the work Sure Start were doing with Neighbourhood Nurseries and the work to introduce wrap-around care. There was however debate surrounding whether this childcare would be affordable to most parents in Thurnscoe.

A couple of parents expressed interest in returning to employment but this was on hold until their children were older. A few parents suggested that things would be much better once the Sure Start building is operational and that this would provide some

parents with the opportunity for employment and childcare provision. Most parents it seems generally prefer to look after their children themselves whilst they're at such a young age as the following quotes demonstrate. It also appears that those without family nearby sometimes feel like they could do with the occasional evening for themselves:

- *"I'm definitely going to use the breakfast clubs when my children are older. I think that the problem I have with childcare round here is that there aren't any people that are qualified and registered to look after the kids so I just don't trust anyone. I would use them though if I could afford them and they were qualified."*
- *"I'd like to have access to someone registered with qualifications but just to baby-sit on the odd occasion, for odd evening I don't trust anyone but my mum, but if they've got a qualification and I got to know them through Sure Start then it would release a lot of stress"*
- *"to me nobody loves them as much as you do so no-one will love them as much as you do"*

## **5.8 Employment and training**

Although none of the participants were currently in employment there was a real willingness to learn and develop new skills. All of the eight parents had taken part in at least one of the courses provided by Sure Start. This enthusiasm to learn is undoubtedly strengthened by the fact that the parents are fully involved in deciding which courses to run. Sure Start Thurnscoe has been providing parents with the skills that are going to help them either re-enter or gain employment or go on to further training. Indeed some of the participants had been to the local college to see what types of courses are on offer, a lack of childcare has however prevented take-up of some of the courses.

Sure Start Thurnscoe is viewed by the parents as being very committed to delivering training to parents and to providing them with new skills, and parents are encouraged to get involved:

*"There's always people coming in to encourage us to sign up for different courses."*

It was also expressed that Sure Start can provide anyone with any relevant employment information should they require it. It was also mentioned that they often have people coming in to the drop-in sessions from the employment service or from local action for jobs.

A positive story was given of a member of the Sure Start team encouraging one of the parents to develop their skills in a particular field and this person embracing it. One of the male participants discussed that he was currently doing some voluntary work, support in the community, which he had got involved with through Ian at Sure Start. This participant was going to be doing some work in the youth service and doing a buddy system with young offenders which he shall be receiving training for. He explained that although he'd got involved with this through the youth service, it had been Ian at Sure Start who had pointed him in that direction.

## 5.9 Impact of Sure Start Thurnscoe

It was clear throughout the group discussion that Sure Start Thurnscoe has had a positive impact upon those that are involved with the programme. The programme is not only helping to develop the skills of parents, the social and emotional development of children and a sense of community, it is providing the community with a real sense of hope and enthusiasm for the future of the area. Parents are beginning to see Thurnscoe as a better place to live because of Sure Start and other regeneration work that is going on in the area. The following quotes show some of the responses given by parents when they were asked what difference Sure Start has made to their own lives:

- *"It gives me something to do and helps your children to learn to share with other kids. Their attitudes improve a lot."*
- *"It's nice to know your opinions count and people care"*
- *"It's learnt him how to share with other kids; it's helping with his attitude and that. He loves it"*
- *"Before we started going he didn't really have anyone to play with, now they've always got kids of their own age to play with. I've got people to talk to and friends and that kind of thing"*
- *"It's nice to know that your opinion on things counts 'cos you get your say, and they take note of it"*

One person emphasised that the benefits of involvement with the programme is so much more than purely seeing it as attending a parent and toddler group. This is something which the rest of the group agreed with but perhaps their initial responses once again linked Sure Start with the drop-in sessions:

*"They're all things that you can get from parent and toddler groups but I find it's made me more aware around how important the first few years of your kids lives are, because with all the different aspects we've been looking at, from health development, psychological, it makes you realise how important these issues are and makes you take more of an interest"*

## 5.10 Focus group write-up - Sure Start Thurnscoe

### Year 1 Evaluation

**Venue: Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2003, 11.30am**

**Location: St Hilda's Community Centre**

### Background

Eight parents attended the discussion group including 2 men and 6 women. All the respondents were members of the Parent's Forum and therefore knew each other prior to the group discussion taking place. None of the group members were employed or in training.

The group attendees were as follows (pseudonyms have been used):

- Simon- Granddad. 1 daughter and 2 grandchildren (the grandchildren are aged 4 months and 4 years)
- Jane- Grandmother. 1 child and 2 grandchildren (the grandchildren are aged 4 months and 4 years)
- Tara- 2 children (aged 4 months and 4 years)
- Dave- 2 children (aged 4 months and 4 years)
- Jackie- 1 child (3 years) and pregnant
- Karin- 1 child (4 years)
- Amy- 1 child
- Sarah- 1 child

### Involvement with Sure Start

A number of the parents had got involved with Sure Start through parent and toddler groups they had attended with their children in the area, this was mostly heard of through Andrea. Some participants had heard about the initiative through friends and family. One respondent explained that the social services encouraged her to get involved as her child had been in care. Many of the participants had attended many of the early consultation sessions that took place before the programme had been approved and had just continued their involvement once the programme was up and running.

Reasons given for becoming involved with the programme included a general interest in their child's development and the fact that they were able to get involved because they had the time available. One participant explained their reasons for involvement as the following:

*"For me it was just another thing to take my kids to, it allows them to play and interact with children."*

One participant emphasised that they felt it was important for their child to learn to interact with other children. Another respondent discussed that they had got involved with Sure Start as their daughter had started to take their granddaughter to the drop-in sessions and they wanted to spend more time with them. This person described it as

being "a big pleasure" to see their granddaughter enjoying herself in the company of other children. One group member added:

*"For me I wanted to get more involved with the community and put something back into it. Also it's really good on a social level because you get to meet other parents and you make new friends."*

The majority of the group are heavily involved with Sure Start and the services they provide. It was explained that they all attend Parent's Forum meetings and many of them are also involved with various other Sure Start meetings including the sub-groups. Many of the parents discussed how they help out at the activity sessions. A few of the participants mentioned that they help out in the kitchens, and help to tidy up after the drop-in sessions, one person adding *"we get involved in everything"*. One of the fathers commented:

*"We try and help out as much as we can. We try and get more dads involved as well so we put on special groups for just the dads."*

With regards to the Parents Forum they have meetings once a month. On average parents were dedicating 4 to 5 hours a week to Sure Start, including meetings and attending the drop-in sessions.

When asked what activities they had undertaken through Sure Start it was explained that Sure Start continuously ask the parents who are using the services what they would like in regards to other services and support. They then try to provide those services. Participants discussed how they had also taken their children on day trips through Sure Start during the school holidays; many had also attended organised events such as sports days and fun days. The groups also take their children swimming every Thursday through Sure Start. Many of the participants had taken part in courses which Sure Start has provided for them, examples of courses they had undertaken thus far included health and hygiene and childcare. One participant added, *"they put a lot of courses on to re-education parents"*. It was explained that there is generally no need to advertise the courses, as there are usually enough people through the drop-in sessions who express an interest in taking part.

Some of the participants were involved in fundraising activities too. The male participants discussed how they were currently trying to get a dads group set-up under the guidance of a Sure Start worker, although they were experiencing difficulties in engaging fathers.

Participants described their roles within the Parent's Forum as being about listening to what other parents in the community want, those that aren't currently involved with Sure Start. They bring these ideas to the Parent's Forum and discuss what they can do about problems and discuss what they'd like to happen. They explained that sometimes they have meals, and they produce minutes after each meeting.

## Community Awareness

Participants generally felt that there are a good number of parents involved with the Forum, and they generally think the programme is doing well in terms of its attempts to get parents involved. Further discussion took place surrounding the fact that the programme is always trying to encourage parental involvement when they have event days, one person explained that they had a stall at the summer fayre and handed leaflets and colouring books out at the sports day. They also discussed a recent sponsored walk that they'd completed in which they all wore t-shirts with the Sure Start logo on, and handed out leaflets. When asked how they could help to make people more aware of the programme the general consensus was that this was something that would happen as the programme progresses, *"just as it's going along"*.

They're aware that the programme publicises itself and the services it provides (in shops etc), although they felt that more often than not people will not notice these leaflets, and word of mouth is something which works best at getting people involved, especially the hard to reach. Some of the participants had been involved in helping to publicise the programme through distributing posters etc.

*"With the adverts and leaflets in the local shops some people don't notice them so a lot of people just hear about it through word-of-mouth through friends and family. We all try and develop ways of publicising the services more."*

The group also discussed a newsletter that they were about to produce to inform community members of what services were on offer. People were also made aware of the service through the events that they held and also information available within the drop-in centres.

The male members of the group discussed how it had been difficult to get other fathers involved with the dads group:

*"Fathers know about the service but I think it just might be in the culture, some do want to get involved but they think it's just a woman's thing and it would make them look bad. It's a cultural thing about dads groups and kid's things; we need to break that mould. We're struggling, banging our heads against a wall trying to get people involved"*

Following this the respondent explained that they had about four fathers involved in the dads group at the moment. They mentioned that they were soon to be going to visit another programme's dads group to see if they could gather any tips from them and to gather best practice.

In terms of involving the rest of the community, one person suggested that it wasn't necessarily the fact that people aren't aware of the programme; the issue is that they're not interested in becoming involved. Another participant stressed that it's not always possible for people attend and join in because they work.

The participants didn't all know each other before their involvement with Sure Start. Participants described it as being *"a pleasure"* to be involved in the programme and emphasised the positive impact upon the children and community of Thurnscoe:

- *"it's nice for them to get to know each other, grow up together in moderation and be friends"*

- *"it's nice for us to get our kids together on a Wednesday afternoon and talk about stuff and just to be involved in it"*

All of the parents were consulted on what they wanted from Sure Start and whether they wanted to get involved in the beginning. Again, some participants stressed that they had friends/family who would have liked to have been involved but they couldn't because of work commitments. Participants described how Sure Start had put on lunch for parents/carers in order to attract as many people as possible about their opinions and what they would like the programme to offer.

### **Feelings about the area**

The group was asked how long they had lived in the area. A large proportion of the respondents had lived there all their lives whereas others had recently moved back to the area after a few years away. When asked to describe the area, responses included the following:

- *"it's getting a lot better"*
- *"When the Sure Start building's built and the Lift building is built it'll be a lot better. At the moment there's not much really"*
- *"not a lot for the kids to do"*
- *"we've got no parks round here"*
- *"nothing for younger children"*
- *"they are developing a lot of areas, it's slow, but it'll get there"*

A number of parents mentioned the lack of activities for young children to do in the local area as being an issue. The lack of outdoor play areas and parks was highlighted as a major problem and existing parks were deemed as too dangerous for children to use. Some stated that there were places they could take their children for walks, but there was nowhere in particular for them to play, no swings, slides etc. It was stated:

*"The council are always saying that they are doing something about the play areas but nothing ever gets done. They seem to be just building houses and not putting enough money into children's facilities. It is slightly improving though."*

Another respondent added:

*"When there's nice weather you want to take your kids to the park but there's nowhere you can take them. The only park available is full of the older kids and there are no public toilets. There also needs to be more litter control because the parks are covered in syringes."*

When asked whether they felt that the area had improved in recent years many felt that it was slowly improving but they acknowledged that it was going to be a slow process. People felt the area was showing signs of improvement particularly since the introduction of Sure Start and its services, others felt that it couldn't get any worse than it was anyway. Some participants mentioned that a lot of derelict houses have been knocked down lately which has made Thurnscoe safer; people feel it's getting safer. There was also mention of the fact that ramps have been put in for push chairs. One person raised the issue of poor fencing for houses. There was however recognition by

many participants that Sure Start has certain targets to meet that are set in order to keep getting the funding, and they can't possibly tackle everything that's wrong with the area.

It was generally felt that the Sure Start building and the development of the programme in general will be a real impetus to change in the area, as one of the parents described:

- *"Once the new Sure Start building has been built it will be much better. There will be much more things available for the children to do."*
- *"it'll be a lot better when the building is built, 'cos then there's somewhere for people to go if they need to go everyday, they'll be someone to talk to"*
- *"not enough for toddlers at the moment, but there's a lot of money to be spent in Thurnscoe"*

It was clear that whilst people feel there are a lot of improvements to be made to the area, they are optimistic about the future with the knowledge that an architect is now in place for the new building and generally being aware of what Sure Start is aiming to bring to the area. People are also finding services such as the drop-in centres very useful, especially for getting advice and talking to other parents.

Other issues that parents mentioned were the need for improved transport links, it was explained that there is currently only one bus an hour to the next village. One participant also mentioned that there were no public toilets in Thurnscoe. Again, parks were mentioned, people would like to see better litter control in the existing parks.

## **Support and Advice**

The parents were asked about the advice and support they received whilst pregnant. For one of the group members Sure Start did not exist when they were pregnant therefore they did not receive any support.

Another respondent discussed that she had moved into the area in 2002 however she could not get transferred to the local doctor from Goldthorpe because the local surgery was full. Because of this it was very difficult to get support from her doctor, particularly as the transport was bad in the area. It was discussed how the buses in the area are not accommodating to pushchairs.

A couple of the group members had been visited by outreach workers or midwives prior to giving birth and had received an adequate amount of support. Some mentioned there being a very good doctor in Thurnscoe. Others also discussed that there would be the availability of a resident doctor when the Sure Start building was opened. Another participant mentioned how her midwife was due to be seconded to Sure Start later in the year and thus she felt that the support and advice available to parents would become much better.

When asked about their awareness of child and family services in the area it was explained that they only knew of Sure Start and the drop-in centres. One respondent explained:

*"If you have any problems or need help or advice you can ring up Sure Start and even if they can't help you with a particular problem then they can give you a number of someone who could."*

Participants felt that the drop-in sessions are concerned with offering family support, which they embrace due to the informal nature of the sessions:

- *"It's a really nice place with nice people. It's a great support network and it's very relaxed. There isn't loads of emphasis on support so there's no stigma attached to asking for help."*
- *"the drop-in's like a family support group really"*
- *"everybody helps one another"*
- *"we've got a child psychologist, and a midwife on a Wednesday, there's a nice support network"*
- *"without being too centred on support so there's no stigmatism"*

Although it was explained that there was not a specific support service for fathers only, it was explained that they were encouraged to call Sure Start for any help or advice they needed; it's the same for everybody. Many of the participants mentioned how people at Sure Start are very approachable, and people would contact them for a range of support and advice:

- *"if anything happens I go directly to Sure Start"*
- *"if we want to find anything out we just ring through to the Sure Start office and probably speak to Andrea or Janice"*
- *"If you have a hospital appointment they're always obliging to take you. We've had a few personal problems that they've been more than helpful with"*

The parents were then asked about their attendance at information sessions on breast-feeding, hygiene and safety. A pregnant participant discussed that she intends to breast feed and her midwife has asked her if she'd like to do some more intensive training on breast feeding and help her to set up a breast feeding session and to provide counselling for mums that want to breast feed:

*"I was asked to offer advice to other young mothers on breast-feeding so the people at Sure Start offered me more training so that I could."*

One of the parents was not aware of any of the information sessions however they spoke of new services that were being introduced. They commented:

*"They're setting up a pregnant mums session and mums with young kids. They offer loads of courses and things like baby massage and talks on postnatal depression from midwives. I think its called bumps to babies and I think anyone can use them."*

Not all of the participants were aware of the introduction of Bumps to Babies; one of the people who wasn't aware was currently pregnant.

None of the participants had any children with special / additional needs. One participant explained that her friend has a child with special needs, although she receives support from Sure Start like everyone else does, she doesn't get the support she needs from statutory bodies:

*"She has to fight for everything, for support at school; she can't get full mobility or anything like that. She has to ask for things herself because there's nobody for her to go to"*

The group didn't feel there was any need for a particular support group for parents of children with special/additional needs. It was felt that the supportive nature of the drop-in sessions was enough:

- *"Some parents benefit from being around parents in similar predicaments but others don't, people feel differently about support groups. She gets support from her friends".*
- *"I think that she gets the most support from her friends and I don't think there's enough demand for special needs groups in this area."*

## **Early Services**

The group were asked about their awareness of Book Start. A number of the group members had received books for their children and also leaflets about the benefits of reading to their children. These were often provided by their health visitor's during their assessments. However a couple of the respondents had not heard of Book Start. A comment made was:

*"I think it was quite good, they were good quality books and you got a little dragon toy as well."*

All participants explained that they read to their children in a regular basis.

Others then spoke of other gift packs they received through Sure Start which were welcomed including fun in the sun packs and packs for new mums:

*"When my baby was born I was given a little starter pack and I got a bottle and a bib and bubble bath and stuff. It was good, a nice little gift pack."*

However another mother discussed that she received a pregnant mothers' gift pack but after she had given birth therefore it was too late to use it. Another participant mentioned that they thought this issue has now been addressed.

All of the respondents were made aware of the Bottle to Cup Exchange through a display in one of the drop-in centres and also leaflets and free gifts used to publicise it. Many had also received information packs from their outreach workers.

As was discussed above, all of the parents make use of the programmes drop-in sessions. They discussed that they use them to get advice, to meet up with other parents and to enrol on the courses. One of the group members cited:

*"You can go there to enrol on loads of courses. Normally 3-day courses at the college like health and safety, first aid and fire safety. There are also the longer courses that can go on for about 10 weeks and you can receive a certificate at the end. There's also a free crèche."*

It was explained that they had all had a chance to suggest courses they would like to go on and if there was enough interest in them they would try to offer them. They explained that courses stop running during the school holidays and instead they have

day trips out. A couple of participants explained that they were soon to be attending a three day course at Northern College on relaxation and anxiety.

Participants explained that before Sure Start some of them would go to parent and toddler groups at the community centres because it was better than doing nothing, but it wasn't the same as it is now where there are so many more activities going on.

## **Childcare**

All of the group members were full-time parents and none of them were using any formal childcare. Some respondents discussed that they would like to go back into employment however the lack of childcare facilities in the area and the expense stopped them from doing this. One of the parents stated that although whilst her children are young she wants to care for them herself, in the future she would like to use wrap-around care:

*"I'm definitely going to use the breakfast clubs when my children are older. I think that the problem I have with childcare round here is that there aren't any people that are qualified and registered to look after the kids so I just don't trust anyone. I would use them though if I could afford them and they were qualified."*

All of the respondents agreed, discussing that there wasn't adequate childcare in the area and that it definitely prevented parents from going into employment. It was stated that in order to use childcare they would have to go to Goldthorpe. It was also felt that the breakfast and after school clubs were going to be too expensive (one person mentioning it was going to be £25 a day). There was mention of Childcare Tax Credit to cover most of the costs however by other participants. Participants also gave the following comments:

- *"I'd like to have access to someone registered with qualifications but just to baby-sit on the odd occasion, for odd evening I don't trust anyone but my mum, but if they've got a qualification and I got to know them through Sure Start then it would release a lot of stress"*
- *"to me nobody loves them as much as you do so no-one will love them as much as you do"*

Therefore some parents felt that although there was a need for childcare provision, they weren't necessarily interested in using the childcare until they felt their children were old enough, many preferred family to look after their children.

Parents were aware that Sure Start is working with the local schools to develop nursery provision there. Participants felt there was a need for childcare provision in Thurnscoe due to the lack of any at the moment.

## Employment and Training

None of the respondents were employed, however as stated earlier some of the group members wanted to go back into employment. They felt that this was made difficult because of the lack of reliable and affordable childcare in the area. Some were not considering this until their children were older.

Almost all of the group members had been on one of the courses made available by Sure Start centres and some had also been to the local college to find out about the courses on offer. Participants were very positive about the courses they had taken part in. One participant discussed how she had been interested in attending a childcare course at college, but that the lack of childcare at the college had prevented her from pursuing this.

Participants mentioned that Sure Start are always promoting training and provide them with relevant employment information should they require it:

*"They're always promoting it; they've always got people coming in, always"*

They had all been asked whether they would like to enrol on courses however they felt that they often didn't have enough time to do them. One of the respondents cited:

*"There's always people coming in to encourage us to sign up for different courses."*

One of the male respondents discussed that he was currently doing some voluntary work, support in the community, which he had got involved with through Ian at Sure Start. This participant also explained that he's going to be doing some work in the youth service and doing a buddy system with young offenders which he shall be receiving training for. He explained that although he'd got involved with this through the youth service, it had been Ian at Sure Start who had pointed him in that direction.

## Impact of Sure Start Thurnscoe

Participants were asked what difference Sure Start had made to their lives. The following quotes show some of the responses given, highlighting that Sure Start Thurnscoe is helping to improve the lives of parents and their children in the community:

- *"It gives me something to do and helps your children to learn to share with other kids. Their attitudes improve a lot."*
- *"It's nice to know your opinions count and people care"*
- *"It's learnt him how to share with other kids; it's helping with his attitude and that. He loves it"*
- *"Before we started going he didn't really have anyone to play with, now they've always got kids of their own age to play with. I've got people to talk to and friends and that kind of thing"*
- *"it's nice to know that your opinion on things counts 'cos you get your say, and they take note of it"*

One person emphasised that the benefits of involvement with the programme is so much more than purely seeing it as attending a parent and toddler group:

*"They're all things that you can get from parent and toddler groups but I find it's made me more aware around how important the first few years of your kids lives are, because with all the different aspects we've been looking at, from health development, psychological, it makes you realise how important these issues are and makes you take more of an interest"*

### **Final Comments**

Participants were asked whether they had any further comments they would like to add. The comments revolved around the fact that everyone was very much looking forward to having the Sure Start building in place. They praised Sure Start staff for being approachable and extremely supportive. There were no complaints about the programme. All participants expressed an interest in being involved in future evaluation work and felt that training local parents to undertake some of the research with parents was a good idea.

## Section 6 – Conclusions and recommendations

Sure Start Thurnscoe is a programme which staff, partners and many parents are extremely committed to. It is clear that programme staff are very experienced, and they use this experience to ensure both the smooth running of the programme, and to ensure that they're meeting the needs of families in the community, by being flexible, approachable and supportive. Sure Start Thurnscoe is a programme which doesn't dawdle and has a good mix of people involved. Sure Start has given parents a great sense of optimism for the future of the village.

Enabling some staff to carve out their own roles has worked well, because the right people for the community have been involved. These staff members have been proactive in giving the parents what they want from the programme, as well as being able to anticipate what the parents may need support / advice and help with and being there for them. The programme subsequently seems to offer a very supportive environment for all involved, and people's opinions are valued.

Sure Start parents are empowered by the programme and they are clearly being listened to, what parents expressed in the consultation stage has resulted in the services that are being delivered now. This has resulted in parents who are involved in the programme being full of praise for the programme, and their satisfaction with the progress of the programme (they are seeing things starting to happen e.g. the design for the new building, which they have been involved in), appears to re-enforce their commitment to it.

Sure Start Thurnscoe was successful at getting parents on-board early on, and as such the programme has had a lot of input from parents (often helping to promote the programme to others). The number of parents who have been extensively involved in the programme, both in the beginning and at present, compares well with other Sure Start programmes.

Whilst the programme should be praised for its parental involvement to date, the programme now needs to concentrate on reaching a broader number of families, as well as maintaining the commitment of the parents that are already involved. During the research many comments related to there being a core group of parents that are involved in the programme, care needs to be taken that other and new parents are not indirectly felt to be excluded from the programme because of this, the programme should also be careful it doesn't rely on only certain parent's involvement.

Publicising the programme to the community again should re-emphasise that the programme is for everybody, and not solely for 'disadvantaged' or 'poor' families (e.g. in the forthcoming newsletter). It may also be worth establishing services which are more likely to be attended by working parents. Involving more parents should help give a sense of ownership of the programme to as wide a number of families as possible. Now is perhaps a better time to act upon this than when the building is complete, although the opening of the building will undoubtedly stir and renew further interest in the programme. It will be important to think of ways in which the programme can maintain

this interest, as well as generate it at this point, as it has been found that parents often express interest in the programme at events, but don't follow this up.

Also, whilst parents have been more or less able to be involved in whichever meetings they express interest in, now may be the time to reconsider this. In order to avoid a situation where any families are felt to dominate, or drop-in sessions that people are put off by, Sure Start Thurnscoe could re-consider how parents are matched up to the meetings they attend, aside of the Parent's Forum. For example, programme workers could have one on one sessions with parents to discuss their strengths, weaknesses and aspirations for the future. These could then be matched with the most appropriate meetings for them, there may be certain skills which the parents would like to develop that could be done outside of the meetings. All parents would then go through the same process. Although this could be a sensitive issue, it seems it would benefit the programme in the long-term in order to avoid alienation. It would be important for the parents to come away from these meetings having gained something (knowledge, direction, involvement in other areas of the programme etc) in order to maintain their commitment. The experienced team would make this process of getting the right people involved in the right meetings a smooth one.

There may still be a long-way to go, but Thurnscoe is a good example of how a programme can show continual commitment to getting more fathers involved in the programme. This is helped by the commitment of two fathers in particular. Involving fathers / male carers in Sure Start programmes is never going to be easy (see Fathers in Sure Start by NESS), but it's clear that Sure Start Thurnscoe identified fathers as being a priority for the programme early on. There could perhaps be a clearer strategy for involving fathers, and it would perhaps be worth emphasising the importance and relevance of fathers being involved in Sure Start, especially by using mothers / female partners as facilitators of father's involvement in Sure Start activities (as recommended by NESS). Any strategy would also have to take into account male lone parents, estranged fathers etc. What is clear however is that Sure Start Thurnscoe have the most important factor on their side, commitment, and with continual commitment and forward thinking more fathers should become involved in this programme as it progresses, and learning from what other programmes have been doing for their dads groups shows how the programme is actively learning from others.

Overall, in terms of the five priority areas, thus far it appears that Sure Start Thurnscoe is performing particularly well in terms of the way in which it supports parents, in terms of supporting them in their roles as parents, and in terms of developing their skills by offering them courses etc. The programme is also keen to evaluate their performance and improve the services it provides. The programme now perhaps needs to focus both on reaching more families, and also improving the work towards other objectives such as developing the ability to learn and outdoor play. As the recent consultation which the programme did with parents highlighted that parents are quite dissatisfied with sports facilities in the area, exploring sports which families could get involved in (as well as swimming) may be the way forward. The consultation also highlighted that parents are quite dissatisfied with most of the statutory services, and as such Sure Start needs to work more closely with these services to meet the needs of parents.

Although generally those that are involved in the programme feel well supported in their roles, there is indication that more could be done to make people more aware of what is taking place in the programme, and what is being discussed within the various meetings. It is important that staff members are kept fully up-to-date with developments so they have the knowledge to pass on to others. There was some uncertainty about which meetings people were attending, and some element of uncertainty about roles. It may be worth re-examining the meetings, ensuring that there is a clear structure in place, making sure attendees know why they are there, and what they are expected to bring to the meetings. In terms of keeping people up-to-date with the programme the minutes from the sub-group meetings could be distributed to those involved in the wider partnership, and a spokesperson from each sub-group could also feed back to the management team.

The lack of start-point data and the lack of input from the health authority are both issues which the programme will need to continue to work on. It is important to keep emphasising the importance of collecting monitoring data to the Sure Start workers. In terms of input from the health authority it is expected that relations may improve once the midwife joins the programme.

Overall, the programme is performing well and just needs to bear in mind the above recommendations and conclusions for the future. The fact that the Sure Start Thurnscoe building is due to be completed by the end of 2004 is testament to a well-organised, committed partnership.

## Appendix 1 – Copy of scripts used

### Sure Start Thurnscoe – Key Staff / Partners Script

#### 1. Introduction

My name is ... I'm calling from a research company called Questions Answered; we have been commissioned by Sure Start Thurnscoe to undertake their three-year evaluation. Part of the first year evaluation involves talking to key staff/ partners like yourself to find out your opinion on how the programme has gone so far. Specifically looking at what has gone well, what hasn't gone as well, and what lessons can be learnt for the future. I've got a series of questions to go through that I would like to hear your opinions on – there are no right or wrong answers. Would it be possible to arrange a time in the next couple of weeks when we could undertake a telephone interview with you?

Name of interviewee: .....

Job Title: .....

Telephone number / email address: .....

Date and time of interview: .....

#### 2. Background information

##### 2.1 Firstly, please can you tell me a bit about your role generally (regardless of Sure Start)?

Prompt: - What does your job entail?

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**2.2 Now can you tell me a bit about your / your organisations involvement with Sure Start Thurnscoe?**

- Prompts:
- Stakeholders Forum / Steering Group/ Management Board / Service delivery / Parents Forum?
  - From the start?
  - Involved in the delivery plan?
  - Part of the steering group?
  - How did you become involved?

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**2.3 What were your initial feelings and thoughts about becoming involved with Sure Start Thurnscoe?**

- Prompts:
- Did you know what was going to be expected of you?
  - Any uncertainty about role?
  - Training?
  - Did you foresee any difficulties?

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***Establish if the respondent is involved in service delivery. If not for the next few questions ask for their general opinions on the services that are currently being provided....what is working well, what could be improved etc.....***

**2.4 If you provide specific services as part of Sure Start Thurnscoe can you tell me about this / these?**

- Prompts:
- What are the specific aims of these services?
  - How long have you been providing these services?
  - How many members of staff do you employ to do this?

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**2.5 How successful have these services been?**

- Prompts:
- Have you been able to meet any of the aims yet?
  - Any barrier(s) to successfully implementing your service?
  - Have you undertaken any kind of review / evaluation?
  - What have the benefits of your service been?
  - What services did you provide in the area before the implementation of Sure Start?
  - Publicity?
  - Can you give any examples of best practice, or positive stories, or just an example of something that is working really well?
  - What involvement have parents had so far in the scheme?

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**2.6 What advice would you give to someone who was about to undertake such a project?**

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*All interviewees...*

**2.7 If you were involved in the planning process for this programme, can you tell me a bit about how this worked?**

- Prompts:
- What worked well and didn't work well?
  - Were parents involved from the outset?
  - Was the planning process equal or dominated by a few?
  - What effect has this had?

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**2.8 Are you involved in any of the sub-groups? Please discuss any other commitments that you have?**

- Prompts: - What is working well and what could be improved with these sub-groups?  
- What does this involvement entail?  
- Any involvement with other initiatives in the area?  
- What effect does this have?

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**2.9 How would you summarise the aims and objectives of the Sure Start Thurnscoe programme?**

- Prompt: - To what extent do you feel that all key staff / partners share the same vision?

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**3 Current situation**

**3.1 How successful would you say the programme has been so far?**

- Prompt:
- Probe fully, ask for examples
  - Anything particularly proud of?
  - Any points of wisdom for other programmes?

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**3.2 Have all the milestones been achieved that were meant to have been?**

- Prompt:
- If not, why, how could difficulties be overcome? What effect has this had?
  - Is the programme performing better in achieving any particular objectives compared to others? (e.g. strengthening families & communities as opposed to improving the ability to learn)

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**3.3 Could you tell me what you think are the good points about the programme and the way it operates/ the way the boards and forums are made-up?**

- Prompt:
- Anything that you would describe as best practice?
  - Early services
  - Community involvement
  - Structure and make-up of stakeholder forum / management board
  - Achieving milestones

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**3.4 And now can you tell me from your perspective what the more negative points are about the programme, could you highlight any areas for improvement?**

- Prompt:
- Early services
  - Community involvement
  - Structure and make-up of stakeholder forum / management board
  - Achieving milestones

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**3.5 So what have the main difficulties been to date? How have these been tackled?**

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**3.6 In terms of the Early Services in particular, have there been any successes or difficulties that you can discuss? (Book Start Plus; Bottle to Cup Exchange; Drop in facilities)**

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**3.7 How successful has the programme been in terms of getting parents and the local community involved in the programme?**

Prompt: -Any groups difficult to access, how is this being tackled?

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**4 Partnership Working**

**4.1 In terms of who is involved with the programme, the Stakeholder Forum etc, do you think the programme has the right balance of people?**

Prompts: - Does this work well between statutory and voluntary agencies and local people?  
- Is parents' input sufficient – and are the parents in the area continually consulted?  
- Are all the key players involved (e.g. health, education, employment service)? Any ideas for improvement in forming linkages?

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**4.2 In what ways could the programme, or your part within this, be made more efficient?**

Prompt: - Could the programme meet the needs of the area better than it currently is?

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**4.3 In terms of the partnership meetings generally that you're involved in, are there any improvements that you can suggest, in order for these meetings to be as effective as possible, and to maximise everybody's time?**

Prompt:       - Is the size and make-up right?  
                  - Frequency?  
                  - What is attendance like?

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**4.4 Is the term 'Partnership' applicable to the members outside of meetings as well?**

Prompts:       - Or is 'partnership' just applicable in the context of the meetings?  
                  - How good is partnership communication and support outside of meetings?

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**4.5 How successful is communication within the partnership and within partner organisations?**

Prompt:       - How could this be improved?

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**4.6 Have there been any key lessons learned within the programme thus far?**

Prompts: - Have any issues come up before, and have these been resolved?  
- With hindsight what would be done differently?

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**4.7 To what extent would you say that the Executive Board / Stakeholder Forum are willing to respond in a pro-active way to the changing needs of the community? Any examples?**

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**4.8 How would you describe your overall experience of being involved in the programme thus far i.e. has it been difficult or straightforward?**

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**4.9 Do you feel that you've been given adequate support and guidance / training and development for your role within the Sure Start programme (in particular parents)?**

Prompt: What would you like more help / support with?

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**5 The Future**

**5.1 Is there anything that you can think of which may threaten the short term or long term success of the programme?**

- Prompt:
- Lack of community involvement?
  - Milestones
  - New initiatives in area
  - Cohesion amongst partners
  - Legal status

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**5.2 If there was one thing you could change about the programme to make it more effective / to help it achieve the milestones, what would it be?**

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**5.3 If you are involved in service delivery, do you have any monitoring information that you could send to me?**

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**5.4 Do you have any final comments, or areas you wanted to talk about that haven't been touched upon?**

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**Thank and close.**

# **FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT**

**Sure Start Thurnscoe**

**Year 1 Evaluation**

Date of Focus Group

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Time of Focus Group

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## **NOTE**

This script provides a guide for the focus group that is about to take place. Wherever possible the moderator will seek to keep questions in order. However, feedback from the audience may require the facilitator to adjust the sequence of questioning.

## Script for Focus Groups

**Moderator** .....

**Notes** .....

**Date** .....

**Location** .....

### **1 Introduction**

**1.1 Participants welcomed to the focus group. Moderator to explain that;**

- **the meeting will last no more than 90 minutes**
- **all information provided is confidential, no answers are incorrect**
- **all participants will receive an incentive of £10 cash – to be given out at the beginning**
- **the meeting will be recorded for confidential analysis only.**

Moderator to explain the purpose of the meeting and to invite any questions before progressing the focus group.

### **1.2 Introduce the group and undertake 5-minute icebreaker**

Working in twos can you find out about the person next to you – for example their name, names and ages of their children and whether they work at all.

People will then feed back to the group about the other person's name.

### **2 Awareness of and involvement with Sure Start**

2.1 We understand that you're all involved in the Parents Forum for Sure Start Thurnscoe, could we go round the group and each of you tell me how you first heard about Sure Start and how you got involved?

2.2 What made you get involved?

2.3 Can you tell me about the Parents Forum and what this involves, how much time you spend on SS activities and what this involves / has involved? What activities have you undertaken through Sure Start if any?

2.4 What do you like best about the Sure Start programme?

- 2.5 What proportion of the community is aware of the SS programme? Which groups of the community are less likely to be aware Sure Start? How could this be overcome?
- 2.6 Do parents remember being consulted about what needed improving in the area?
- 2.7 How are people (if they are) made aware of the programme and the development of child and family services in the area?
- 2.8 Have your friends / families / children been involved in the programme? How? Examples.
- 2.7 What do people think is the best way of making parents aware of the programme? How can people be encouraged to become involved in the programme?

### **3 Feelings about the area**

- 3.1 How long have you all lived in Thurnscoe? Please can you describe the area?
- 3.2 Ask people about their likes and dislikes about the area
- 3.3 Have any improvements been made to the area generally in the past year or so since SS got under way? How? Is it a better place to live? – in what respect?
- 3.4 Ask about what improvements still need to be made to the area

### **4 Support**

- 4.1 Ask about the support and advice people received whilst they were pregnant. Satisfied? Felt they needed more help / advice? What kind?
- 4.2 Ask about the support and advice people have received since their child(ren) have been born. Need more help? What kind?
- 4.3 Ask about people's awareness of child and family services, would they know where to go, who to contact if they needed help?
- 4.4 Ask about awareness and involvement in family support groups
- 4.5 Ask about attendance at information sessions on breast feeding, hygiene and safety – and awareness of these sessions

## **5 Book Start Plus**

- 5.1 Awareness of Book Start?
- 5.2 What they think of it / impact on reading to child?
- 5.3 Attended children's literacy & numeracy sessions at library?
- 5.4 Used mobile library?

## **6 Bottle to Cup Exchange**

- 6.1 Sure Start Thurnscoe are trying to highlight to parents the possible long-term health problems of using a feeding bottle (delayed speech, poor feeding techniques etc) and are instead encouraging use of a feeding cup. Is this something you are aware of? How did you hear? Thoughts on this?

## **7 Drop in clinics / sessions**

- 7.1 Ask about use of drop in centres across Thurnscoe
- 7.2 What do they use these for?
- 7.3 How are they rated? Did they use them before Sure Start began?
- 7.4 How could they be improved?

## **8 Early Education, Childcare and Play Development**

- 8.1 How many children do people have? What ages?
- 8.2 Ask people about what childcare / toddler groups they use and their satisfaction levels. Have they used the Crèches at the drop in centres?
- 8.3 Ask about why parents think childcare is important. Vital to social / emotional development?
- 8.4 Those that don't use childcare - why not?
- 8.5 Ask for feedback in terms of the range and quality of childcare facilities available locally for their children aged 4 and under. E.g. Support available at groups / whether feel it is a good learning environment
- 8.6 How could things be improved in relation to the provision for children aged 4 and under?

## **9 Outdoor play and recreation**

- 9.1 Ask people about what they think about the outdoor facilities for children and recreational spaces. Enough? Quality?
- 9.2 Ask about any improvements that have been made...what they think of the new play area and access to this

## **10 Support for families & children with special / additional needs**

- 9.3 Ask if any of the parents' children have any special / additional needs
- 9.4 Do they think there is enough support and advice available to them?
- 9.5 What support do they access, support groups?
- 9.6 Awareness and attendance at speech and language support sessions?

## **11 Employment and training**

- 11.1 Question peoples' employment status (working, unemployed, training or study)
- 11.2 Would people like to change their situation? – if yes why / how
- 11.3 Are child caring responsibilities limiting their opportunities? (no. of hours able to work, positions employed in, preventing employment training and study etc...)
- 11.4 Use / awareness of breakfast clubs for working parents?
- 11.5 Ask if people have received any careers, education or training advice recently
- 11.6 Ask if they've been consulted about their training needs by SS / Local Action Team? Outcome? Thoughts on this.
- 11.7 Undertaken any first aid training / self-esteem sessions through SS? How useful has this been?

## **12 And Finally.....**

- 12.1 Could you tell me what difference the Sure Start programme has made to you? (individually / children / community) Any examples of how the programme has helped you?
- 12.2 Finally, this is a 3-year evaluation we are doing, so we will be hoping to speak to more parents in the future to try and establish whether the Sure Start

programme is helping to improve things in the area for you and your families. What do you think is the best way that we could get parents involved in this evaluation? Would it be group discussions like this, or would it be filling in surveys etc? For other evaluations we have done we have trained local parents to go out and undertake the research for us, is this something that would interest any of you in the future? Would you also like to be involved in designing the questionnaires we use with parents? Please write yes on the piece of paper provided if you're interested..

12.3 Is there anything else that people would like to discuss?

**Conclude, Thank and Close**

## Appendix 2 – Map of Catchment Area

**SureStart**

AREA MAP OF THURNSCOE  
AREA MAP OF THURNSCOE

