

Noel Park Sure Start Local Programme: Annual Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Noel Park is a Sure Start Round Five programme that was approved by the National Unit in February 2003. Approximately 10,675¹ people live here, about a third of whom are under the age of 19. As of 30th August 2001², there were 506 children under four years; the age group targeted by Sure Start services.

The Borough of Haringey is a highly ethnically diverse community. Approximately 216,507³ people live here and over half of them have cultural/ethnic origins outside of the United Kingdom. These countries include Greece, Turkey, Albania, China, India, Somalia, and those from the Caribbean islands. It is estimated that 193 languages are spoken across the Borough.

The Borough also reports one of the highest figures for asylum seekers in England, which ranges between 4,800 and 6,000 annually.⁴ These groups include people of Kurdish, Somali, Afghan and Kosovan origins. These individuals do not have entitlement to benefits or work and many live in poverty. The unemployment rate is at 7.3 percent, which is currently twice the national average.⁵ These factors contribute to Haringey's high deprivation ranking (28th), making it one of the poorest areas in the United Kingdom. Some of the most disadvantaged include families with young children who would directly benefit from Sure Start services.

An external team from the University of Surrey currently provides the majority of the evaluation support for Noel Park. This team also offers assistance to five other Sure Start local programmes in the Borough of Haringey, and evaluation activities are occasionally co-ordinated to streamline resources and avoid duplication. The six Haringey local programmes have collectively adopted an 'action-research' approach, whereby Sure Start stakeholders are encouraged to participate in each phase of the evaluation process. Each one of these programmes is at a separate stage in its development.

Establishing a baseline

The first evaluation priority for Noel Park was to establish a baseline understanding of the community's needs, so that appropriate services could be developed and implemented. This began with a consultation exercise with the local community. The first took place in Spring 2002 and reached 89 residents through a

¹ Source: National Statistics, 2001 Census

² Source: Primary Care Trusts Child Health Information Service 2001

³ Source: National Statistics, 2001 Census

⁴ Source: Average Social Service Caseload, Jan 1999 – Feb. 2000, London Boroughs, The London Health Observatory

⁵ Source: Haringey Council Fact File

Participatory Appraisal (PA) exercise. The second took place a year later in Spring 2003, where the opinions of an additional 77 parents were polled through interviews and group discussions facilitated by Wendy Sugarman Associates, a local community development firm.

The main issues identified through these consultations informed the development of the programme's delivery plan and are as follows:

- Difficulties regarding childcare, particularly a lack of toddler groups and creche facilities, and problems with the local day nursery
- Isolated families who do not know about services
- Lack of support for all families but particularly those with disabled children
- Lack of safety in the parks and streets
- Lack of adult education classes

Developing an Evaluation Strategy

The next step for the programme was to develop an evaluation strategy. A scoping exercise between the programme manager, the strategic services manager for Sure Start Haringey and the University of Surrey evaluation team was undertaken to identify key priorities as outlined below. The partnership board was consulted, and nominated members to participate in an evaluation subgroup to help with this process. This group consisted of two parents, the local councillor, the programme manager and a member of the evaluation team. The subgroup is currently under review.

Parent Participation

Sure Start Noel Park decided to focus the first year of its external evaluation resources on exploring the development of parent participation within the 'management' of the programme. It was keen to improve the way it encourages parents' participation in the running of the programme as opposed to being users of services. The study lasted just less than a year (February 2003 until January 2004). The aim was to explore the development of parental participation, highlight positive strategies and the reasons they have been successful and explain perceived challenges in a way that will help the programme to learn from its experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight parents who are involved in the parents' forum and the partnership board, including both chairs. All the parents live in the Sure Start Noel Park area and have a child under 4. They had been involved with Sure Start for between four months and three years. The interviews covered their experiences of being involved so far and their views about participating in the forum. They took place towards the end of the study, in December 2003 and January 2004. Other parents were consulted informally where the opportunity arose, for example at the fun day and parents' meetings.

Informal interviews were also carried out with key programme staff, including community development workers, and the Programme Manager. In the spirit of

Action Research, feedback was provided and emerging issues were discussed during these meetings. Observations were carried out of meetings attended by parents, including two parent forum meetings, one pre-board meeting and three partnership board meetings. These observations allowed the nature and level of parents' contribution to be considered. In addition, secondary data, i.e. reports by the community development workers and minutes from parents' forum meetings were analysed. Opportunistic data were also collected from other Round 5 Sure Start programmes in Haringey (High Cross and Park Lane) to enable comparisons.

A structured thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which allowed seven themes and sub-themes to emerge. These themes are:

- Conceptualisation of parental participation
- Contributing to the programme: effective participation
- Parental recruitment
- Sustaining involvement
- The partnership board
- The role of the Community Development Worker
- Structure of parental participation

The findings showed that Noel Park has established a parents' forum, with parents who are very enthusiastic, highly committed and have a strong sense of cohesion. They effectively participate in the programme and influence decisions as well as provide their own ideas. Pre-board meetings are proving particularly helpful with participating on the board, with the CDWs providing invaluable support.

However, the following areas require particular attention:

- Representation: parents are not representative of the Sure Start Noel Park community in terms of ethnicity or gender. More effort needs to be made to represent others' views.
- Recruitment: more effort needs to be focused on the recruitment of new parents.
- The programme needs to be sensitive to parents' training and support needs.
- Parents need to be given specific roles and responsibilities in line with their strengths and interests.
- The creche should be improved to enable effective meetings.
- Parents need to be able to participate more fully in partnership board meetings, with particular attention being paid to the language used in meetings and the items covered.
- Continuity of Community Development Workers needs to be handled carefully.

There were also a number of specific implications relating to each of the themes. The report (Johnson, 2004) is currently being disseminated, and it is anticipated that it will be used to further develop and sustain effective parent participation.

Additional Evaluation Activities

Noel Park also participated in a process evaluation that took place with the six Haringey Sure Start local programmes during the first half of 2003. This evaluation used qualitative methods (such as interviews and observations) to gather the perceptions of the area programme managers and other employees who contributed to the day-to-day functioning of each programme.

The primary purpose of this evaluation was to provide an understanding of how key activities contribute to short term outcomes within an action research perspective, thus allowing the programme managers to assess their progress towards Sure Start's longer-term delivery targets. The activities discussed in the report (Asmussen et al 2004) were identified using thematic analysis methods and include issues surrounding each programme's

- Management and organisation.
- Mainstreaming activities.
- Level of parent participation.
- Evaluation strategy.

This report is currently under review with Sure Start Haringey's strategic services manager, and it is anticipated that its findings will generate a set of action points for each of the programmes to incorporate into future decision making.

Next Steps

The partnership board has also asked the evaluation team to carry out a study to inform the development of services for teenage mothers within Sure Start Noel Park. The programme is keen to ensure that services are accessible to teenage mothers, and are targeted appropriately. The objectives are to:

- identify and explore the ways in which pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers perceive, access and use services aimed at helping them, and the barriers they experience in doing this.
- to explore their met and unmet needs, and their views about how services can better meet their needs.

Two parents from the Noel Park parents' forum are involved with this project, for example, they are helping to design the interview schedule. It is anticipated that ten interviews will be carried out with teenage mothers who volunteer to participate. Posters inviting teenagers to participate will be displayed in local venues, and existing support services will be asked to inform their users about the study. Semi-structured interviews will consider all services specifically aimed at pregnant teenagers and young mothers including health services, support with returning to education, training or employment, childcare, emotional support, and housing support. Thematic analysis will be applied. The findings will be incorporated into a strategy to support teenage mothers, and will inform decisions regarding the best way to meet their needs and provide appropriate support.

Plans for evaluation after this are under review but delayed due to a change in Programme Manager.

References

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