

Centre for Applied Social Studies

Sure Start Peterlee

Evaluation Feedback Report

The Setting up Phase

September 2001

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1 Introduction

- This feedback report is aimed at parents and also professionals.
- Its aim is to give an overview of the early stages of Sure Start Peterlee, that is up to and including the first days of the Sure Start team.
- We have presented the views of staff and parents on various issues, without judging them. An important part of our job is to sum up what people are saying and doing and feed this back so that staff and parents involved can reflect on this.
- The areas we have looked at are:
 - Ideas about the aims of the Peterlee programme;
 - Early strengths of the programme;
 - Early challenges;
 - Challenges for the future.
- We have also made some comments about how Sure Start Peterlee is beginning to work within Sure Start principles.
- The report is not intended to be a complete account. A summary of each key area is given, so that important issues are clear and readable.
- We have asked some questions which may help people to think more clearly or in different ways about what's happening.

2 Summary

- Sure Start:
 - "Gives you something to look forward to";
 - "Keeps us sane";
 - "Gives us something to get our teeth into" (Parents)
- "People involved in Sure Start feel passionate about it" (Professional).
- "Sure Start is a way of injecting vision into service development" (Professional).

Both staff and parents have devoted much time and energy to getting Sure Start Peterlee off the ground. There has been a great sense of commitment, pressure, hard work, optimism, as well as frustration, at times, for those involved.



The Aims of Sure Start Peterlee (see p.12)

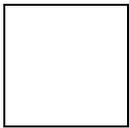
Staff we talked to, think that key aims for Sure Start Peterlee are:

- To provide a wide range of high quality services to families;
- To change mainstream services;

- To improve community health;
- To help families to expect better services in the future;
- To help parents and children develop their potential.

Parents think that key aims for Sure Start Peterlee are:

- To provide crèches and playgroups;
- To set up Sure Start centres;
- To set up training for parents.



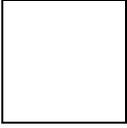
Strengths of the Programme (see page 17)

Staff see strengths of the programme so far, as:

- The development of the "Pathway of Care";
- Meeting its early targets;
- Setting up the Sure Start staff team quickly;
- Getting Sure Start services to families, early on;
- Helping parents to start NVQ courses;
- Finishing Sure Start playgrounds quickly.

Parents are very enthusiastic about Sure Start, in general and especially about:

- The extra confidence their Sure Start work has given them;
- Getting local playgrounds finished quickly.



Challenges in the Setting up Stage (see p.19)

Staff saw the main challenges in the setting up stage as:

- Getting the Sure Start Partnership working;
- Involving parents;
- Involving mainstream services;
- Creating a Sure Start team made up of professionals from different services;
- Heavy workload and difficult deadlines;
- Delays in getting decisions;
- Setting up a Sure Start database.

Parents saw the main challenges in the early days as:

- Delays in getting going;
- Parents getting information;



Challenges for the Future (see p.25)

Staff see the main challenges for the programme in the future, as:

- Changing how existing services work;
- Getting the three Sure Start centres up and running;
- Getting a voice for Sure Start locally and nationally;

- Meeting the local demand for services;
- Using positive ways of talking about Sure Start;
- Working closely with other local schemes.

Parents see the main challenges for the future as:

- Good communication between professionals and parents;
- Getting the Sure Start centres set up.

3 What's the Feedback About?

The report is based around what parents and staff in Sure Start Peterlee thought and felt about a number of important questions relating to the early days of the programme. As time goes on, we will look at what children think about relevant issues.

It's very important to have a record of what happened in the early days of the programme, so that people involved can look back and see how the programme has developed in the way that it has.

Key questions for this first evaluation report were:



- What is Sure Start about for people in Peterlee and what do they hope the programme will achieve?
- What were the early challenges for the programme?
- What has gone well so far?
- What challenges does the programme face now?
- How are those involved in the programme learning from what has happened so far?

The feedback report will also look at how the programme is starting to work within the Sure Start principles.

We hope that the report will help those involved in Sure Start Peterlee to think more clearly about what has been happening in the early stages, where the programme is now and where it needs to go in the future.

Sharing Views on the Feedback

This first evaluation feedback is a very important stage in the collaboration between the Peterlee programme and the evaluation team. Since collaboration is a two way process, we are keen to get as many responses to this report as possible from those involved. This will help us to target our evaluation more effectively in the future. Some ways of giving us your views about the report are given listed at the end (see page 35).



4 What is the Feedback Based On?

Information for this report has been gathered from a number of places within the Sure Start Peterlee programme.

- Partnership meeting (x1)
- Inner Forum meetings (x2)
- Parents' meetings (x4)
- Informal discussions with the programme manager (x3)
- Interviews (x3)
- Team meeting (x1)
- Meeting with Health Visitors and Midwives (x1)
- County Sure Start meetings (x2)

- Programme Managers' meetings (x5)
- A range of documents from Sure Start Peterlee, including training schedules for staff; on-going information about targets and general programme progress.

In the report, when we talk about "staff", we are referring to staff we interviewed or staff who were involved in the meetings listed above.

When we mention "parents", we are talking about parents who were at the various meetings we attended.



5 The Aims of Sure Start Peterlee

5.1 Background

A large programme like Sure Start is bound to be about different things for different people. The Government has set out its aims for the programme nationally. These relate to improvements in the health and well being of families and children to age four, so children are ready to flourish when they go to school.

Although there are guidelines for what each Sure Start programme should aim to do, the government does not expect all programmes to reach the goals in the same way because each has to respond to what's happening in its own local area. Therefore, each Sure Start programme will have slightly different aims and will work in different ways to achieve them.

Within each Sure Start, staff, parents and children will have their own way of looking at things because they are looking at Sure Start from different points of view. The government hopes that this range of views will be a major strength of the scheme.

It's very important that all of these views are known at the start, so that they can be taken account of. People's views may change as time goes on and the programme moves forward. We will be able to look at these changes in later feedback reports.

5.2 What Staff Think

Staff talked about their approaches to Sure Start in interviews and meetings. Sometimes, individuals emphasised slightly different ideas. This is not surprising, since professionals come from a variety of backgrounds and have different work experiences. Here are some of the main points they told us about.

Sure Start: A Service Deliverer

Staff we talked to believe that Sure Start, itself, should deliver a wide range of services and therefore the programme needs a large staff team.

There are a number of reasons for this approach:

- During the Sure Start consultation exercise, parents said that they would value extra help from professionals;
- There is a strong belief that a large Sure Start team from different professional backgrounds is the best way of achieving programme targets and providing better services for families;

- Key Sure Start staff thought that there would be better communication between professionals within a single Sure Start team;
- It was felt that a large team would be the best value for money.
- Having health visitors in the programme would make it much easier to collect the large amounts of information which the Sure Start Unit wants from programmes.

Improving Health

- There is a strong view that Sure Start Peterlee is about improving family health by giving people help early on, to avoid difficulties later.

Setting up More Preschool Play Opportunities

- Staff said that setting up more playgroups was a vital aim for Sure Start Peterlee because there have been so few playgroups in the area, due to lack of venues.

Developing Potential

- There is a strong feeling that Sure Start Peterlee is about helping local parents and children to develop their full potential.

Raising Expectations of Services

- Staff believe that Sure Start should help local people to expect more from services.

'Mainstreaming' Sure Start

- Staff feel that Sure Start should help existing services to change so that they can meet the needs of families more effectively, in the future.

- Sure Start should help to “inject vision” into how services for families in are developed.

Giving Children a Level Playing Field

- Sure Start should aim to give all children the chance to do well at school.

5.3 What Parents Think

Views from parents about what Sure Start means for them were gathered at a number of parents' meetings.

Venues for Playgroups

- Parents talked about the lack of places for playgroups in the area.
- They think that an important aim for Sure Start is to set up new venues where playgroups and crèches can be held.

Daycare

- Parents felt that Sure Start should set up more daycare in the area, so that mothers can go to work, if they want to.
- One parent highlighted this point, saying: “It’s difficult to get back into the workplace - how can you, when you’ve got children?”

Training

- Parents wanted Sure Start to help them do different types of training. For example, one parent wanting to do some training in the area of librarianship.



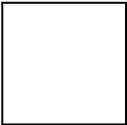
5.4 Talking Points

Connecting ideas

Understandably, parents and staff sometimes emphasised different aspects of Sure Start. Parents frequently talked about the direct benefits of Sure Start to themselves and their children. Staff, on the other hand, were also aware of other issues, such as:

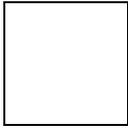
- The need for Sure Start to work well with other agencies and change the way they work, over time.

Below, we ask questions which may help staff and parents to think further about these different ways of looking at Sure Start.



"Mainstreaming" Sure Start

- How much do parents know and understand about the aim of "mainstreaming" Sure Start?
- Could parents be involved in helping mainstreaming to happen?
- How could they be enabled to take part?
- What might be the advantages of their involvement?



6 Early Strengths of Sure Start Peterlee

There is much satisfaction with the rapid development of the Peterlee programme. Staff consulted, feel that the hard work to reach this point is now paying off, while accepting that there are still many challenges to be addressed.

6.1 What Staff Think

The Pathway of Care

- Staff feel strongly that the "Pathway of Care" developed by Sure Start Peterlee, will be a very effective way of working with local families. It is the "back bone" of the programme.

Meeting Targets

- Staff are pleased that Sure Start Peterlee is meeting its targets in some areas and going beyond them in others.

Early Appointment of Staff

- There is satisfaction that staff have been quickly recruited in an area where there are skill shortages.

Early Delivery of Services

- The programme began to deliver a range of services to large numbers of families, early on.

Parent NVQ Training

- Staff view the enrolment of 10 parents on NVQ courses as a major early achievement for the programme.

Early Completion of Playgrounds

- Staff were delighted by the early completion of two Sure Start playgrounds in the Eden Hall area.

6.2 What Parents Think

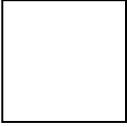
Parents consulted were very enthusiastic about what they had gained from being involved with Sure Start.

Increased Confidence

- Parents feel that Sure Start has given them confidence. They can now communicate with professionals in a way they couldn't before.
- Sure Start has given them a role which they enjoy.
- Sure Start has reduced their feeling of being alone, at home.

Getting Sure Start Playgrounds Finished

- Parents were very pleased that the Sure Start playgrounds have been completed.
- They were especially happy with their involvement in the design of the playgrounds. One parent said: "I was so proud to say that I had in-put to those plans".



7 Challenges in the Setting up Stage

Setting up any new scheme is often a difficult and time consuming task and this has certainly been the case with Sure Start Peterlee. It's not surprising, given the scale and newness of what had to be done in Sure Start, that there have been a number of problems and frustrations involved in setting up the programme. Some of these have been worked through, while others will take longer to overcome.

7.1 What Staff Think

Staff we talked to, described a number of challenges for the programme in the early days.

Getting the Sure Start Partnership Working

- Staff reported that there were many difficulties in achieving good working relations between staff on the Sure Start Partnership, in the early days, for a number of reasons:
 - Staff from different agencies were not used to working together, in many cases;
 - Professionals could often only see things from their own organisation's point of view;
 - Staff had not worked on an equal footing with each other before.

- One member of staff said that you could either sit back and appear to work together, or you could actually work together and sort out problems and that was something very different.
- Because of the problems, it took time for staff on the Partnership to work out what Sure Start was really about. Staff from Education thought it was about education, while staff from the Health Services thought it was about health.
- These early problems took a time and effort to work through, before there was agreement over the final Delivery Plan.

Involving Parents

- Staff felt that sometimes parents were not fully included in early meetings because professionals found it hard to avoid using "jargon" which parents could not understand.
- It was thought that some professionals were not used to working with members of the public directly and this caused difficulties, to begin with.

Involving Mainstream Agencies

- There have been problems in getting some mainstream services involved in Sure Start. For example, there was little involvement from Social Services, in the early days.

Getting the Sure Start Team Together

- There were a number of challenges involved in getting Health Visitors and Midwives accepted as part of the Sure Start team.

- Health Visitors are normally attached to local Doctors' surgeries, so local health visiting would have to be reorganised if they joined the Sure Start team.
- These difficulties were eventually overcome through positive negotiations with the relevant services.

Time and Workload

- Staff talked of the great difficulties in having to do so much, in so little time.
- A huge amount of time and effort was needed to get the Sure Start Partnership set up, get parents involved, get information for the Delivery Plan and then get the Delivery Plan written, all within very tight timescales.

Delays in Getting Decisions

- There was a feeling that organisations such as the County Council and the Sure Start Unit could not respond quickly enough to programme requests.
- This caused some severe problems for the programme in the early days because of the tight deadlines it was working to.
- For example, there were long delays in having the capital spending plan approved by the Sure Start Unit.

Setting up a Sure Start Database

This issue caused two main difficulties, early on.

- First, staff had to collect information about families with children under 4 in the Sure Start area but were not sure how to get it. There were

problems because of the Data Protection Act. There were no guidelines for getting information from the Sure Start Unit.

- Second, staff needed to have a way of keeping information on computer which would help the programme to fill in all of the Sure Start Unit forms.

The Role of the Accountable Body

- There were some initial issues in working out the role of the accountable body (Durham County Council) for Sure Start Peterlee.
- For example, there were differing opinions, initially, about the purchase of office equipment.

Getting the Sure Start Message Across

- There have been some misunderstandings amongst local people around what Sure Start is really about.

7.2 What Parents Think

Delays in Getting Going

- Some parents felt frustrated at the time it took to see things happening in the programme.
- On the other hand, they were generally enthusiastic about their involvement in the programme.

Communication

- Some tensions arose when Sure Start staff were first appointed.
- Parents felt "sidelined" at this point. They said that there was not enough communication between the new staff and themselves.

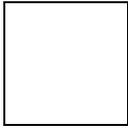
- This was partly due to the fact that lots of different things began to happen at once.
- This issue was taken up by the programme management and in a later meeting, parents said communication had improved significantly.

Keeping Sure Start Supportive

- Parents involved in Sure Start Peterlee felt it very important to present Sure Start approaches to parents, in the most supportive ways possible.
- For example, parents asked the Sure Start team to think about how messages about breastfeeding are communicated, given that some mothers may feel that they cannot breastfeed.

Learning Through Play Sessions

- Parents fed back their views about ways in which communication between parents and staff could be improved in the early "Learning Through Play" sessions.
- Their suggestions were discussed and some changes made, which parents thought successful.



8 Learning Through the Setting Up Stage

It is clear that much learning and development has already taken place in Sure Start Peterlee, as a result of working through some of the issues described above. Some important areas of learning are listed below:

Agencies Working Together

- Sure Start staff believe that professionals from different agencies learnt much about working together, through the early lengthy negotiations, on the Partnership.
- They think that working through the early problems has led to the successes that the programme has had, so far.

Working with Parents

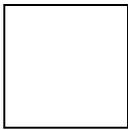
- It's thought that staff and parents are learning how to work better together, at a number of levels. In meetings, professionals are trying harder to explain terms which parents may not understand.
- In day-to-day work with children, Sure Start staff and parents are learning how to talk through issues, together.

Parent Opinions

- Parents have learnt much during the early days of Sure Start Peterlee. They have learnt how to give their views on a number of important issues, especially in parent meetings.

Setting up a Database

- Sure Start Peterlee has led the development of a Sure Start database, working in close collaboration with other Sure Start programmes in County Durham.
- Data protection issues are being successfully worked through with support from Durham County Council. Sure Start registration forms have been developed and are now in use.



9 Challenges for the Future

9.1 What Staff Think

Changing How Existing Services Work

- There is a strong feeling that Sure Start Peterlee has to try to change how existing services work with families, in the future.
- There need to be changes at the top of services (policy level), as well as at the bottom (the people who work with families).
- To get these changes, Sure Start must avoid becoming self-important. Other services need to be included, not excluded.

Meeting the Demand for Services

- Staff feel that meeting the demand for services from local families will be a challenge, as time goes on.

Keeping Parents Involved

- Staff say it's vital to keep parents involved in the programme, in the future.
- No parents attended the Partnership meeting in July, 2001 which raises a number of important questions (See below).

Getting Sure Start Centres Set up

- Staff are very keen to get the Sure Start centres up and running as quickly as possible because there are so few places to hold playgroups in the area, at the moment.

Decision-making at the Inner Forum

- There is a feeling that senior staff from existing services will have to come to Inner Forum meetings, so that they can make decisions for their services.
- This will save time and enable the programme to work with mainstream services, more effectively.

Working with Local Sure Start Programmes

- There is as a feeling that Sure Start Peterlee will have to work closely with programmes which are close by, such as Sure Start Seaham, to make sure that local services are properly co-coordinated.

Voices for Sure Start

- It is thought that Sure Start needs a voice at national level, to make sure that important issues can be fed back to senior people who can do something about them.

- A county group dealing with children's issues needs to be set up. This would help make sure that Sure Start and all of the other services would be working closely together, to provide the best services for children, in the area.

Sure Start: Keeping the Words Positive

- Staff think that it's very important to talk about Sure Start in the right way. Words like 'disadvantaged', 'deprived', or 'underprivileged' should not be used because they are insulting to local people.
- Words such as 'under-resourced' are more accurate and should be used, instead.

Working with Other Schemes

- There is a view that Sure Start will need to work closely with other schemes which are going on in the area such as "On Track" and "Education Action Zones".
- Staff would like all local schemes to meet together so that local people can get the most from everything that's going on in the area.

9.2 What Parents Think

Good Communication

- Parents consulted, thought that good communication between parents and professionals is very important.

Getting Sure Start Centres Set Up

- Parents see this as vital for delivering the full range of Sure Start services.



Key Questions for the Programme

Involving Parents

Involving parents fully is a major aim for the whole Sure Start programme, as staff are aware. Below are some observations and questions which we hope will be helpful.

- Relatively few parents attend meetings. This is an important issue, since parents should form 50% of the executive partnership of Sure Start.
- What prevents parents going to meetings? How could the programme find this out?
- Are parents actively involved in decision-making at meetings? Are their views clearly asked for, at key points?
- Could parents become more involved in making decisions? For example, could meetings break into small groups so that parents might feel more confident about expressing their views?
- What background knowledge is needed to understand what is going on in meetings? Is this taken account of during the planning or running of meetings?
- Do parents need space to discuss what they feel about involvement in meetings?
- Could there be other approaches to involving parents in decision-making?

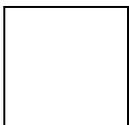
- How will parents be recruited to the management aspect of the programme in the future?

10 Working Within Sure Start Principles

To ensure a consistent approach, the government expects every programme to work from a shared set of key principles. Sure Start services must:

- 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 that 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 too soon to comment in great depth on how the Peterlee programme is working towards the Sure Start principles but some early comments can be made in four areas.



10.1 Co-ordinate, streamline and add value to existing services

Sure Start Peterlee is very much aware of the need to establish effective working relationships with mainstream services such as Health, Social Services and Education.

As is to be expected with new ways of doing things, there have been some early complications in setting up smooth ways of working with some mainstream services.

Programme staff are working through these difficulties, by setting up ways of communicating with both mainstream agencies and other initiatives which are taking place in the area. For example, they are:

- Setting up joint meetings for Sure Start staff and staff from mainstream services.
 - For example, there is a meeting every three months with local health service staff.
 - There will be monthly meetings between Sure Start and staff at the three local primary schools where Sure Start centres are to be based.
- Sure Start Peterlee will be meeting regularly with other local initiatives such as "On Track" and the local "Education Action Zone".
- There has been some joint training for Sure Start and Social Services staff. The two teams had workshop training together to work out what Sure Start will be doing with families and what Social Services will do.



10.2 Involving parents, grandparents and carers in ways that build on their existing strengths

Involving parents to the extent envisaged by Sure Start takes time to develop. Sure Start Peterlee has made a good start. Parents in the area have taken part in a number of ways, so far. Many have attended fun days and some have attended family learning groups.

Several parents have been much more closely involved in the programme, participating in a wide range of activities, for more than a year. We summarise below the main ways in which these parents have been involved, so far:

- **Attending meetings**, such as Parents' meetings; Inner Forum, Capital and Partnership and Regional Network meetings;
- **Giving a presentation** at the Regional Parents' Network;
- **Training** in various areas, including interviewing skills, handling children's behaviour, basic counselling and listening skills, first aid training and craft techniques;
- **Awareness raising activities**, such as contacting people in their own homes and information giving in a local supermarket;
- **Shortlisting and then interviewing** all Sure Start staff;
- The design and development of Sure Start **safe play areas**
- The organisation and running of **trips and fun days**;

- **The purchase of equipment** for Sure Start "Learning Through Play" groups.
- A small number of grandparents attend the Sure Start "Learning through Play" sessions.

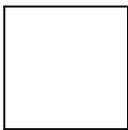
10.3 Avoid stigma by ensuring that all local families are able to use Sure Start services

- Management staff have given the issue of avoiding stigma a high profile in the programme.
- This is especially important since a few families in the Peterlee area were reluctant to get involved with the programme, at first because they had heard that it is for "disadvantaged" people.
- The point was made that it is sometimes difficult to deal with this issue because at national level, the term "disadvantaged" is used in relation to Sure Start. Staff in the Peterlee programme are working hard to overcome this negative impression.
- Staff are very aware of the need to use only positive ways of talking about Sure Start and the Sure Start area. Words like "disadvantaged" and "deprived" are seen as disrespectful to local people and are not to be used.
- Peterlee is seen as an "under-resourced" area, instead, as this is thought to be a much more accurate and supportive term.

10.4 Ensure lasting support by linking Sure Start to services for older children

Sure Start Peterlee is working to link Sure Start to services to older children in a number of ways.

- Sure Start centres are to be built on the sites of three local primary schools in the area, to ensure continuity between the preschool and school years.
- The programme will also be holding regular meetings with schemes such as "On Track" and the local "Education Action Zone".



11 Learning from the Sure Start Experience

We hope that this feedback report will help Sure Start staff and parents to reflect on what has been learnt so far and the evaluation will continue to support learning through future feedback and discussion.

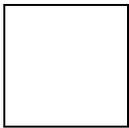
Sure Start Peterlee is already developing its own structure and identity. We must continue to collect views and information about this and feed it back to the programme in the coming months and years.

12 How the Programme is Monitoring its

Progress

- The Peterlee programme has led the development of a Sure Start database in County Durham.

- The database has now been installed and training in the use of the database is being undertaken.
- This database produces all the necessary information for the Sure Start Unit monitoring forms.
- An Organisational Strategy Group has also been set up which will meet every fortnight to review programme progress.



13 Responding to the Feedback Report

Possible Areas for Comment

It is vital that we get as many responses as possible to this first feedback report because this will help us to target our evaluation more effectively in the future. Possible questions to help you to think about your views are:

- Does the feedback accurately sum up what the setting up period was like at Sure Start Peterlee? If not, why not and what is missing?
- Is the feedback easy to understand and clear to read? If not, how could it have been clearer?
- What was the most useful section of the feedback? Why?

Ways of Responding to the Evaluation Feedback

There are a number of ways in which you can tell us what you think about this feedback by:

- Giving your views at the usual programme meetings, that is at the Inner Forum, Parents' meeting or Partnership meeting.
- Contacting the evaluation team directly, by writing to Carol Potter at The Centre for Applied Social Studies, 15 Old Elvet, The University of Durham, Durham DH1 3HL, e-mail: C.A.Potter@durham.ac.uk. If you would rather speak to Carol, you can ring on 0191 374 4752. **We look forward to hearing from you.**

14 Moving On

- The next evaluation feedback report will move on to explore issues to do with what Sure Start Peterlee is doing in the local community and how well it is doing it.
- Future reports will look at areas which parents and professionals decide they want us to look at, in more depth. We will be helping them to choose these areas soon.
- We will continue to report back on how the programme is working within the Sure Start principles.

We look forward to working with Sure Start Peterlee in the future.