



# **SURE START WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND -EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME-**

## **Annual Report - Oct 2002-Sept 2003**

### **Introduction**

Work on planning the evaluation began at the beginning of 2002 and a Service Level Agreement with Sure Start Weymouth & Portland was signed in October 2002 when the evaluation commenced.

The University evaluation team will be available to Sure Start services to help them identify what information they need to collect and help each of them get an idea of how much work the evaluation will involve.

Bournemouth University has developed an evaluation plan which has been accepted by the Sure Start Management Board and the Evaluation Working Group.

### **Aim of the evaluation**

The aim of the Sure Start Weymouth & Portland Evaluation is to describe:

- ◆ short term achievements of local Sure Start services
- ◆ progress towards National Sure Start objectives and targets
- ◆ progress to inform future development of services

### **Objectives**

Within a three year period the goals of the local evaluation are:

- ◆ To describe and assess how services are working
- ◆ To provide information and feedback on how Sure Start services are meeting needs
- ◆ To describe achievements
- ◆ To encourage as full a community involvement as possible

- ◆ To find out to what extent the Sure Start programme is beginning to achieve the national Sure Start objectives (goals), which are:
  - to improve social and emotional well being
  - to improve health
  - to improve children's ability to learn
  - to strengthen families and communities

It is hoped that the national objectives will be achieved by the Weymouth & Portland programme through local activities and services provided for the Sure Start community.

### **The Evaluation Working Group**

The Evaluation Working Group consists of members of the University research team, local parents, Sure Start workers and other community representatives. This group manages the evaluation, allows discussion and reports back to the Sure Start Management Board. The plan is to meet every three months (or as often as needed).

### **Progress to date:**

#### **Baseline Community Survey**

One of the requirements for all Sure Start programmes is that they undertake a local survey with residents who live within Sure Start areas who are parents of children under five.

Programmes are required to carry out a local survey, therefore, (either a Sure Start specific survey or community survey) within three months of the programme's approval, i.e. baseline, and again at the end of year 3.

The community questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Sure Start manager, the Sure Start business manager, Sure Start project workers, members of the Partnership Board, community workers and Sure Start parents and drew on examples from other Sure Start programmes. The final draft was approved by the Evaluation Working Group.

The questionnaire contained 53 questions and was designed, in sections, to find out what parents with children under five think about the Sure Start Weymouth & Portland services already available, the professional support received after the birth of their youngest child, play and learning opportunities available for their children under five, special needs services for children under five, local play and learning opportunities and other local community services in the area.

A questionnaire was sent to all Sure Start residents with children under the age of five. A total of 714 questionnaires were sent and a prize draw was included with the survey to encourage parents to complete the questionnaire. The cut off date for returned questionnaires was the end of May 2003. A total of 217 questionnaires were returned giving an overall response rate of 31%.

A draft report is currently being circulated to the Evaluation Working Group and will be completed and printed once final amendments are made.

Thanks to the willingness of parents to take part in this Community Survey, a great deal of valuable information has been provided. It provides evidence that, overall, parents hold positive views of Sure Start services, professional support received after the birth of their youngest child and local play and learning opportunities for children under five. Further insight into specific problem areas and wide-ranging suggestions for the development of further services was provided. In addition, the data provided serves as important start point data required for the National Sure Start Unit.

The responses from families living in the Sure Start areas identify a number of important issues which link both to the Sure Start National Objectives and Sure Start Weymouth & Portland achievements.

### **Contacting services and service providers**

We have met with a number of service providers and parents facilitating projects via the parents forums throughout the year both to get to know them and to discuss plans for evaluation of their services. These meetings have resulted in the following evaluation projects.

#### **Beach Play**

Sure Start Weymouth & Portland ran a Beach Play during the summer holidays for parents and their children from the Sure Start areas. Facilitated by play workers, it was very popular and enjoyed by many Sure Start residents and their children. One of the research assistants (a parent within Sure Start) who attended the beach play suggested that it should be evaluated to discover if it was meeting the needs of parents during a busy time of the year. The research assistant designed a short questionnaire and distributed them during August 2003 for parents to complete. Questions about their attendance and their satisfaction with the beach play were asked. A total of 20 questionnaires were returned. Analysis and writing of the report is currently underway.

#### **Littlemoor Toy Library**

It was agreed by the Evaluation Working Group that the Littlemoor Toy Library will be one of the services evaluated. The toy library meets once a week at the Littlemoor Community centre and is open to anyone who is a Sure Start member from the local area. The group is run by parents from the community who are responsible for all aspects of the toy library and are supported by Sure Start.

Parents have the opportunity to register with Sure Start at the group if they have not already done so. Toys are displayed in a catalogue and can be borrowed for up to two weeks. The group also offers a stay & play where parents have the chance to meet others from the area, have a coffee and take part with their children in activities provided by a Sure Start play worker. Visiting health professionals and Sure Start workers provide support and advice on a regular basis.

An evaluation plan has been devised after meetings with the parents and the Evaluation Working Group. The toy library will be evaluated over a period of 12 months.

### The Evaluation Plan

- Focus group interview with parents running the toy library - June 2003
- Follow-up focus group interview with parents - June 2004
- Individual interview with nursery nurse - August 2003
- Focus group with Sure Start play workers - March 2004
- Parent/carer interviews - semi-structured questionnaire-November2003-May 2004
- Fast feedback forms - completed by parent/carer when returning borrowed toys
- Smiley Bins - children putting the toys they borrowed in a happy or sad bin

### **Art Course**

A series of art courses have been run in the Sure Start areas for the last two years and have been well subscribed and popular with parents and children. Evaluation has been built into the courses by the project leaders and evaluation sheets were completed by the parents doing a course last summer which contained useful feedback about the classes. Participants in the courses have also had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences by writing in a visitors book.

Using this secondary data and interviewing the projects leaders will be part of an on-going evaluation of the art courses during the next two years. A report will be produced by the end of the evaluation period which will describe how the art courses have benefited parents and children in the Sure start areas by encouraging them to enjoy creative activities and learning new skills and techniques and most importantly doing all this in a supportive way together.

### **Sure Start Research Assistants**

From the beginning of the planning stages of the evaluation it was agreed that parents should be encouraged to take an active role in the evaluation of the Sure Start programme. Therefore, two parents from two of the Sure start areas were employed by Bournemouth University as research assistants. It was proposed that these parents will remain in post for one year and then the opportunity will be given to other parents in the following two years.

The research assistants work for a total of one day a week, dividing the hours between them. Crèche facilities are provided by Sure Start. Both researchers have now been in post for nine months and have been involved in all aspects of the evaluation, including, questionnaire design, data collection, analysis and dissemination. Their local knowledge and personal experience of services and the difficulties that can arise provides a valuable component of the evaluation process. It is important that this role helps these parents develop their research skills and awareness of the ethical issues involved in research.

The research assistants are based in the Sure start office, fully supported by the research manager. Visits to Bournemouth University have also taken place and it is planned for them to attend some research workshops run by the university in the near future.

The parental research assistant role will itself be evaluated and included in the final reports to Local and National Sure Start. The research assistants are keeping reflective diaries and will be interviewed about their experiences and feelings of their role.

## **Future plans**

- Individual project support , e.g. Crèche Service
- In-depth evaluation of a variety of projects including community wide, groups and one-to-one projects. These will include the Speech & Language Service at Sure Start and the Underhill Park, which will take place over the next 12 months.
- Looking at how services work together
- Ongoing research experience for parents

Residents within the Sure Start Weymouth & Portland areas will be invited to take part in all stages of the evaluation, and will be welcomed to join the Evaluation Working Group.

*For further details please contact:* The Evaluation Team, Institute of Health & Community Studies, Bournemouth University