

Evaluation Update

Sure Start Aylesbury Plus is required to conduct a local evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the programme in relation to children's health and readiness for school and also in relation to the effectiveness of partnership working and ensuring that the programme meets both national and local targets. A broad-based evaluation strategy has been adopted.

Meeting National Sure Start Targets and Objectives

Measuring whether the programme is meeting national targets is relatively simple. The programme is required to submit a range of monitoring information:

- Monthly monitoring returns
- Quarterly reports
- Annual reports

All of these monitor the type and level of activity carried out by Sure Start partners and ensure that planned objectives have been met.

Delivering the Services that the Community wants

1. *Involvement and Feedback from Parents* - Sure Start facilitates involvement and feedback from parents in a wide variety of ways:

- Representation on the Partnership Board
- Representation on the Executive Group
- Representation on/chairing the Working Groups
- Managing the Parents' Panel, a small grants scheme designed to support projects/proposals for Sure Start families put forward by Sure Start parents
- Participating in a range of formal and informal training sessions, both for parents only and sharing with Sure Start staff and volunteers
- Training as trainers
- Recording the progress of the programme through learning to use professional video equipment in the Video project
- Organising and managing an arts/activity group for parents and children
- Organising and managing a dance group for children and parents
- Forming a Parents' Support Group

Sure Start also organises regular events for both specific and general groups which provide opportunities for fun, information sharing, feedback and evaluation.

For evaluation purposes, these measures provide an ongoing testing of the programme's ability to respond directly to the needs, wishes and abilities of parents.

2. *Planning and Development Exercise* – this exercise was designed to explore with families their experience of being parents with young children in the Aylesbury Plus area. The exercise, in the form of a detailed information-sharing survey, was conducted on behalf of Sure Start by the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLAM). Almost 300 families participated in the exercise, which covered health, education, social and psychological issues. The exercise was designed to:

- Introduce Sure Start to a range of families
- Discuss awareness of services available for families with young children
- Discuss families' experience of using those services
- Identify gaps in services as experienced by families

The results of this exercise have been used to:

- Contribute to the planning of the Sure Start programme for 2002-2004 – the Delivery Plan has been submitted to, and accepted by, the Sure Start Unit.
- Re-focus the work for the three Working Groups, which meet monthly to plan and monitor ongoing progress and developments of the programme.

For evaluation purposes, we would like to use this exercise as a basis for measuring the impact of Sure Start after six months' activity and again two years later. It is proposed that a group of parents be trained to conduct the follow-up exercise.

3. New Parent and Children Centre – some of the strongest feedback from parents about gaps in services is related to the availability, affordability and accessibility of childcare. Parents have indicated that they want a range of flexible services – to cover out of hours, weekend and holiday periods.

In response to this identified need, Sure Start succeeded in including a proposal for a new Parent and Children Centre in the New Deal for Communities' plans for re-development of the area. The plans proposed a centre that could house a variety of Sure Start services, a new 50-place nursery and a range of support and training opportunities for parents. The centre was prioritised in the proposed plans and scheduled as one of the first new buildings.

However, just before Christmas 2001, the residents of the Aylesbury estate voted against a change to become tenants of a new Housing Association which was the basis for the re-development plans. The result is that Sure Start Aylesbury Plus needs to re-examine how to achieve the objective of providing a Sure Start centre which includes childcare provision. The programme is aiming to do this primarily through the momentum and direction provided by the New Childcare Initiatives Working Group. This group is chaired by a parent and currently has five parent members.

At the first meeting of the Working Group in 2002, the implications of the tenants' vote were considered. The parents decided that they would identify and approach other Sure Start parents, mainly through the group provision that already exists, to canvass views, opinions and needs in relation to the centre, in the light of the changed plans. It was also decided that the Council would need to be lobbied in order to raise awareness of the need for such provision.

For evaluation purposes we would like to monitor the progress and success of this project, which will be largely parent-driven. We would like to train parents to conduct surveys, interviews etc with both parents and children as part of the process of gathering views, planning for the design, operation and management of the centre.

Participatory Appraisal Framework

The inherent method of working within the Sure Start programme has been confirmed by South Bank University as conforming to the Participatory Approach to Appraisal. An evaluation framework was produced by SBU between May and June 2001 based on work carried out within the programme to date, and aiming to highlight any gaps in the process. The evaluation framework confirmed that the strategy followed to date supplemented by plans in place to train parents to take on the next stage of evaluation will cover the outstanding gaps in the participatory approach.

Evaluation

The evaluation process should be able to evaluate the effectiveness of:

- **Parental Involvement and Feedback** – does the programme have the ability to respond to the needs, wishes and abilities of parents? A wide range of evidence is continually being accumulated from the presence of parents at every level of management and activity, eg photos, videos, qualifications, training etc.
- **Planning and Development Exercise** – forms an excellent source of baseline information – can we demonstrate a difference in the experience of parents two years into the operation of the Sure Start programme? Training is planned to support parents in conducting the follow-on exercise – which will be an amended exercise, concentrating on key elements of the Sure Start programme and addressing gaps identified in the first exercise. The first key area of service to be evaluated in this way will be the Health Visiting Service.
- **New Parent and Children Centre** – can the objective of providing this centre, identified as essential to the support of families with young children in the area, be achieved? Training is needed to support parents to ensure that the wishes and desires of

both parents and children can be accommodated within the plans for the design, operation and management of the centre.

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