

## **Summary of Sure Start Weston Three Years Evaluations**

This report outlines the evaluations that have taken place at Sure Start Weston over the last three years. It also highlights the way in which Sure Start Weston plans to evaluate services in the future.

### **Pre Sure Start Weston 1999**

The Early Years Development and Childcare partnership, as the lead body for the development of the Sure Start trailblazer programme in Weston commissioned research in the autumn of 1999, involving local families. The report by Southampton Voluntary Services, detailing the research findings was entitled "Involving the Local Community" and informed the development of the Sure Start Weston programme and the subsequent launch of its purpose built centre, which opened in December 2000.

There were four main aims of the research:

- To raise awareness of Sure Start Weston within the local community,
- To identify take up of existing services, what is good and what could be better,
- To identify barriers to accessing current and potential services
- To identify what other services and support parents feel would help them give their children a Sure Start in life.

The methods used by local workers to gain the views of families included focus groups, time lines, storming techniques and open questions, a problem wall as well as face to face interviews.

The problem wall identified four key themes for parents with young children in Weston:

- Isolation and a lack of support networks,
- Economic pressure,
- A lack of support with parenting and
- Environmental issues including housing

Solutions included the development of family support networks, improved access to district shopping areas, a community café, housing improvements, new local leisure facilities, new groups for parents, a local baby safety equipment loan scheme, more information locally in settings about training, education and managing finances.

The key recommendations of the report included

- Developing effective ways of linking parents with services at earlier stages of parenthood through the use of more outreach services and befrienders.
- Establishing an Informal antenatal drop in service.
- Enhanced play facilities for under 5's, both indoor and outdoor.
- An enhanced toy library service, possibly including safety equipment, and
- Delivery of services in a way that is non-stigmatising to parents.

This report helped to form the basis of the Sure Start Weston delivery plan.

### **Evaluation 1: August 2000- May 2002**

The first major piece of evaluation for Sure Start Weston was carried out by Training for Work in Communities (TWICS) a local training provider. The first phase of the evaluation covered the period August 2000 - July 2001 and the second phase took place from September 2001 to May 2002. The two evaluations were then compared in order to highlight any changes and differences in experiences.

The TWICS evaluation focussed on training local parents to conduct inquiries in order to evaluate the effectiveness of services provided through Sure Start Weston. Ten local parents were involved in the first stage and attended a six-week training course. The results of feedback from 68 families who completed the questionnaires included views on the local environment, local services and the needs of families. The questionnaire was then followed up six months later to gauge the differences in experiences and feelings of respondents.

The results concluded that the majority of families in the survey had heard of Sure Start Weston and also showed a significant increase in families making use of services provided by Sure Start Weston. The centre provides a key focus for family support and the range of activities offered and had seen a marked increase in the building usage since late 2001.

### **Evaluation 2: October 02 – March 03**

The second piece of evaluation to take place at Sure Start Weston involved examining the level and extent of involvement of dads and male carers entitled "How can Sure Start Weston encourage more Dads and Male carers to use their services?" This two-phase consultation exercise included a questionnaire survey in the first phase, in which 49 dads and male carers with children aged 0-3 years were consulted.

The second phase consisted of longer one-hour interviews with four dads/male carers to gain more in-depth information. Recommendations from this report included

- To open the Sure Start Weston Centre on Saturdays to offer activities for dads/male carers and their children and families
- To explore opening evenings when dads could access services
- To offer groups and services that dads can dip in and out of rather than activities that require a regular commitment
- To offer more recreational activities that are of interest to dads and to provide screenings of National Sporting events.
- To establish an antenatal class available in the evening or weekend.
- To improve marketing and publicity through
  - An increase in the publicity targeted at dads developing a welcome pack for dads, and
  - Employing a worker who could lead on dads work
- To explore ways to encourage part time dads and male carers with limited access to access services
- To change the image of the programme so that dads are an inclusive part of provision.

### **Evaluation 3: July 2003**

The Chief Executives of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight commissioned a piece of research in July 2003 and covered Sure Start Weston along with four other areas in Hampshire. This was to evaluate the impact such a service has on a local community and was entitled "Sustainable Communities." The research surveyed professionals and parents about the impact of a Sure Start programme on the locality.

A variety of partner agencies involved in Sure Start Weston were interviewed and believed the success of the programme was primarily due to the fact that the local community were involved, not only in assessing the need but also in the planning of services. The report concluded that Sure Start Weston had a significant part to play in building the sustainability of the local community. For example, evidence obtained from the Local Housing office showed that in 1998, Weston had the highest rent arrears and highest number of evictions (six) in that one-year. Since Sure Start Weston was established this has reduced to three evictions a year. In addition, the Weston Housing office no longer has the highest number of rent arrears. This has been achieved by multi agency efforts to target support around the social and emotional development of local communities as well as improving health and strengthening families and the community.

Recommendations from the overall report from all five areas in Hampshire included recognising the allocation of time and resources needed to invest in communities to allow resources to processes, which build community structures and frameworks for engaging members and for developing community ownership and community spirit.

#### **Evaluation 4: August 2003**

The fourth piece of evaluation carried out for Sure Start Weston was done jointly with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership survey and the other two local Sure Start programmes in the city. This examined childcare needs of parents in the city. The research was commissioned by BMG research and the report was published in August 2003. 1500 questionnaires were distributed across the city with a two-week turn around for completion.

At Sure Start Weston, in order to ensure we received enough returns and in order not to stigmatise those adults with poor literacy skills, all questionnaires were completed with the support of a Sure Start worker. The research highlighted how people find out about services locally. In Weston the sample size was 166 respondents. Of these, 125 respondents had a child aged 0-4 years. Preschool provision was used by the largest number of people (39%) and by 51% of parents sampled with children aged 0-4years old. The second most used provision in the area were services provided through Sure Start Weston with 28% of the total sample using a Sure Start group and 36% of those parents who have a child aged 0-4 years. In Weston the main source of information about services was the health visitor or friends, word of mouth (50% using Sure Start Weston). In addition, parents cited Sure Start Weston as the main source of information for parents seeking information about parents and toddlers groups and crèches.

Parents who were very satisfied with their current childcare were those who use childminders along with the private day nursery. Of those parents using services provided through Sure Start Weston, 91% reported being satisfied with the service. Requested courses and training from parents included First Aid, Managing Children's Behaviour and Healthy Eating, all of which are currently provided at Sure Start Weston. A general report is available currently with a more specific area based report due in January 2004.

## **Evaluation 5: January 04-April 04**

The next planned piece of evaluation will start in January 2004. This research will include two key aspects, the user satisfaction survey and the support available for parents around breastfeeding. This will be an independent commissioned piece of work carried out by Hempsall Consultancies and will link across all three local programmes and the proposed fourth area of the city for the proposed children's centre initiative.

The User Satisfaction Survey will provide Sure Start Weston with detailed information about a range of services in the local area as well as Sure Start specific services. It will include information on housing, access to leisure and health services as well as families being able to comment on the local area as a whole. This survey will be posted out to all families with children aged 0-4 years in Weston. Families who access the Sure Start building, satellite venues and community groups will be targeted over a two week period in order to: gain the views of those parents who have literacy difficulties and also to ensure we receive the views of those not in contact with sure Start services directly.

The piece of research on breastfeeding will concentrate on more qualitative information and will include focus groups, one to one interviews and talking with professionals as well as mapping the local area to see how easy and supported women feel to breast feed in their local community. It will encompass cross cutting issues including partnership work, multi agency work and parental involvement however it will not on this occasion include the cost effectiveness evaluation. This will come from the next piece of evaluation work.

The work on this evaluation has now been delayed as it is necessary to obtain approval form the ethics committee. This is needed for both the User Satisfaction Survey which will ask users of the NHS about services such as health clinic and midwifery services as well as the breastfeeding evaluation which will by its nature ask mothers personal and sensitive questions about their choices for feeding their children. It is anticipated that the ethics process will take 6-8 weeks after application, work has already begun however on the composition of the User satisfaction survey.

In addition from October 03 Sure Start Weston has begun to implement into all its services both commissioned and core services quarterly evaluations. These quarterly reports link services to the targets and outcomes they are working to as well as providing statistical information about attendance at groups / home visiting. The reports also place an onus on anyone providing

services for Sure Start Weston to be talking with parents and carers about the service and gaining valuable feedback. The evaluation also records the level of partnership working, inclusion issues, marketing and publicity of the services as well as recording families who move on and the reasons for this. An annual report from all services will bring together the four quarterly reports providing detailed information on all aspects of Sure Start services.

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