

## **Annual Evaluation Report 2004**

### **Introduction**

Sure Start Abbey is a round five programme and is the third of 4 in the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham. The Abbey ward covers the town centre area of Barking and has a population of approximately 10,206, 24.6% of whom are under the age of 16. The community is ethnically diverse and highly mobile, having the highest proportion of minority ethnic groups within ward population (53%)<sup>1</sup>

Barking and Dagenham is in East London on the North bank of the River Thames and within the M25 London Orbital Motorway. The neighbouring London Borough Councils are Newham to the West, Redbridge to the North and Havering, to the East.

The Borough's regeneration and renewal strategy is determined that regeneration will improve the quality of life for local people with wider benefits in housing, better education, skills jobs and facilities. There are huge opportunities for change in the borough, both physically and socially. Barking Reach, Dagenham Dock and the area around Ford's in South Dagenham are some of the largest regeneration sites in London.

### **Lead Agency**

In April 2004, the Department of Education, Arts & Libraries took over as lead agency for the four Sure Start programmes in Barking & Dagenham, this coincided with the appointment of new managers in each programme. This change has had a major impact upon the progress of the programme while a review takes place on service delivery, and a new staffing structure is put in place which will take the programme forward to into a Children's Centre.

### **Children's Centre Agenda**

Stage one of Barking & Dagenham's Children's Centre agenda will see the creation of eight centres. Sure Start Abbey will be the first of these, therefore the programme is moving towards the children's centre agenda, with mainstreaming and sustainability in mind. A new building is currently being constructed to house the current Sure Start team and the new Abbey Neighbourhood Nursery.

### **Community Survey**

In 2003 Sure Start Abbey commissioned Cordis Bright Consultants to carry out a community survey which was published in October 2003. They trained and supported eight local parents from the Abbey area to undertake interviewing work of parents of young children in the area. They used a standardised survey instrument designed in partnership with local parents, the programme management and Cordis Bright.

The survey sought to establish the perspective of local parents in relation to a range of issues:

- What local residents think about being a parent in the Sure Start Abbey catchment area

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<sup>1</sup> Figures taken from 2001 Census

- The extent of local parents and carers awareness about Sure Start Abbey
- What parents in the area are currently accessing both for themselves and for their very young children.
- What other types of services and support, local parents and carers and their young children would like within the Abbey area.

The surveyors, drawn from the local community used their knowledge of existing social and community networks in order to locate and interview families in the Sure Start Abbey area. Among the strategies they chose to adopt were: accessing families through community groups, accessing parents in parent and Toddler groups and interviewing parents in local parks and outdoor play areas. In all 179 parents were interviewed by parental surveyors, representing some 30% of the 600 or so relevant households in the area. Each surveyor also participated in debriefing sessions to garner some of the qualitative outcomes

The surveys, together with the qualitative findings were then analysed and reported and the consultant identified a number of key areas that the programme should look at addressing in its service provision.

### Key Areas Identified and Action to Date

➤ **Services for asylum seekers and refugees**

The ethnicity breakdown of those interviewed was as follows<sup>2</sup>:

Asian (Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi)	47%
White	26%
Black (African, Caribbean)	18%
Other	9%

Although this issue was identified, given that around ¼ of the respondents to the survey were seeking asylum or were refugees and that the white population was under represented, the level of need for these services is unclear. To date no specific services for this group have been identified, all services are inclusive and aim to meet the needs of the community.

➤ **Action around literacy levels with regard to reading and writing in English**

The need for a Training & Employment Worker has been identified, and while the recruitment process takes place an interim appointment of an agency worker has been made.

Duties assigned to this post includes the assessment of basic skills and ESOL, and courses to meet the identified needs of the parents are being set up both in house and in partnership with local providers. Once the team moves into the new building this can be run on site with registered crèche facilities available.

<sup>2</sup> Cordis Bright Ltd, Sure Start Abbey Community Survey Report October 2003

➤ **The Development of Family Support worker posts**

In April 2003 Sure Start Abbey entered into partnership with the Family Services Unit (fsu) who are a local voluntary agency, to provide Family Support Services to the programme. Unfortunately this recently came to an end due to irregularities in the initial procurement process and the programme is now tendering for a similar service. We hope to have this element of the programme back in place by January 2005.

➤ **Promotion of breast feeding especially amongst identified groups within the wider community**

The survey identified that breast feeding rates varied considerably between parents of different ethnic origin with 100% of parents of Black origin indicating that they breast fed, compared to 41% of their counterparts of White origin.

The Sure Start Health visitor and Health & Nutrition advisor set up a Breastfeeding support group to help and advise mothers with breastfeeding, links were also made with a local Breast feeding counsellor. Unfortunately the group has not been successful in attracting mothers, this is currently under review and other ways of working being considered.

➤ **A programme for support for parents suffering from post-natal depression**

A very successful programme of activities was run to support mothers who were identified as needing support. An external arts company 'Studio 3' were commissioned and the women worked on projects such as cushion making for the new centre. A review of this is taking place and another programme being put together.

## **Evaluation Provider Selection Process**

At the beginning of 2003 Programme Managers from Sure Start Abbey, Sure Start Thames View and the Children's Fund agreed to go into partnership for their external evaluation and a Briefing Paper was produced to cover the common elements and desired outcomes for the work. Interviews took place and the University of East London were appointed. It was agreed that the specific requirements for each Programme would be negotiated with the Programme Managers and that UEL would meet with each Manager to develop the individual work plans. Work began in October 2003 and will continue until 31 March 2005, with the possibility of extending the Contract on completion.

A steering group was set up with the two Sure Start Programme Managers and the Children's fund. Since that time there has been an interim manager for Sure Start Abbey and two for Sure Start Thames View. Permanent managers were appointed in April 2004. The Children's Fund also changed management in June 2004. The combined effect of this has resulted in some confusion and delays in decision making due to the inconsistency of the group.

## **Evaluation Progress to Date**

Following the award of the contract to the University of East London, an evaluation of the initial stages of the programme was undertaken. This looked at the programme management, staff team structure and roles, local needs and issues and service provision. This was carried out through interviews with the programme manager, one-to-one

interviews with staff, a staff focus group, interviews with members of the management board. Minutes from the management board were analysed, and information was used from background reports and the programme.

Issues identified for consideration

- **Training for all Board members so that they can work more effectively as a group and include parents as active participants.**  
An 'away day' had been planned for the board members prior to my appointment as programme manager but did not take place due to various members not being available. This is due to be re-scheduled.
- **Presenting jargon free information**  
This consideration has been taken on board, and every effort is made to ensure that Plain English is used in all documentation and information distributed to parents.
- **Finding out from parents how they would like meetings to be organised and run**  
An interim agency appointment has been made to the Community Development Worker post. The worker has made excellent links with the parental community and is working with them to empower how the Parents Forum is run. There will also be the opportunity for parents to attend a 'Community Champions' course to raise their self esteem and improve parental participation and representation in meetings.
- **Parents / carers raising young families have a range of needs associated with living on low incomes of less than £20,000.**  
The appointment of an interim Training and Employment worker as described earlier in this report will improve the employability of parents in the area who wish to return to work.
- **Vulnerable Families are living in the area and require sustained and holistic support.**  
Work is in progress on the Children's Centre agenda to identify ways of mainstreaming and sustaining services for the future support of our most vulnerable families

### **Monitoring & Routine Feedback**

There is a culture of obtaining feedback from parents through feedback forms and evaluation of short course / activities. This is currently being done in a number of different ways and there is not a consistent system in place. By using the toolkit as described below a more effective approach will be taken and more useful information will be gained in the development of services.

A comments box has also been introduced to obtain qualitative feedback from parents.

### **Monitoring Toolkit**

Through the evaluation steering group in partnership with the children's fund, a monitoring toolkit is being developed. The toolkit will provide systems that are open and transparent and allow for open communication and feedback between service providers, service users

and Sure Start. The toolkit can also be used as an aid for developing new services. It will record all base information (before beginning delivery) and will help to focus on what will be done and how. By setting targets and outcomes in the early stages, we will have a good platform to measure progress and identify areas which may need close attention.

### **Future evaluation**

The Sure Start Abbey attendance monitoring is showing that the reach figures for Sure Start Abbey are very low, compared with the number of families in the area and on the database. Although the activities appear busy and well attended, it is the same families attending on a regular basis.

To aid with the development of the service and evaluate why there is a vast number of families not choosing to use Sure Start activities, the next stage of the evaluation will be to pose the question:

“Why is Sure Start Abbey not reaching a higher percentage of its registered membership through current activities and services on offer, and what changes would improve the service for local families?”

**Sandra Munns**  
**Programme Manager**  
**Sure Start Abbey**