

# Parents tell Sure Start Euston how it is

## Summary of a survey of families of children aged 0-3 years living in the Regent's Park neighbourhood of Camden

### What is Sure Start?

Sure Start is a partnership of local services for families with children aged 0-3 years. Each local partnership has Government funding to work in a selected neighbourhood. The aim is to help parents give their children the best possible start in life.

Sure Start Euston covers the neighbourhoods of Regent's Park, St Pancras and Somers Town. It is the first of four Sure Start programmes in the London Borough of Camden. Its services include drop-ins, home-visiting, parenting groups, extra health care, training, volunteering, social events, crèches and support to find childcare and employment.

### Why do a survey?

Sure Start aims to prevent families from coming into need, rather than picking up the pieces once things have gone wrong. This means that Sure Start has to attract parents into services that they want to use. National policy, data about needs and research about good practice are all taken into account, but the most important factor for every Sure Start partnership is the views of local parents.

In Camden, families were consulted when plans for Sure Start Euston were first developed in 1999. Some parents have been active in our Partnership meetings, and many are now getting involved in our Neighbourhood Parents' Forums. But, to make sure that we really were responding to local needs, we wanted a more detailed picture of families' circumstances and opinions. A door-to-door survey would also help parents get to hear about us. Our catchment area is large, so we decided to start with Regent's Park as a manageable size of neighbourhood.

### How did we do it?

We engaged experienced researchers to oversee the survey and local parents as the face-to-face interviewers. The researchers were Susan McQuail and Dr Valerie Wigfall of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education. Islington Sure Start had pioneered the survey, and some Islington parents came and talked about their experience of it. Euston parents then adapted the 40-page questionnaire to local concerns. They came to two training sessions to learn how to carry out the interviews.

The research was carried out between April and August 2001. We had a team of 17 interviewers in total, who between them spoke 10 different languages. They were allocated to different housing blocks, so that we called at every flat on the Regent's Park and the Crown Estates. When they located families with children aged 0-3, they conducted an interview with the parent/s or carer/s lasting about 45 minutes. Where necessary, they passed on details of people who needed an interpreter. The researchers checked all the questionnaires. In all, questionnaires were completed with 171 families.

**“ If the survey proves that certain needs are apparent, we hope Sure Start can meet those needs. Some of the people we interviewed said that surveys are never more than just surveys. I defended the point that Sure Start is hoping to make some real changes. ”** - A parent-interviewer



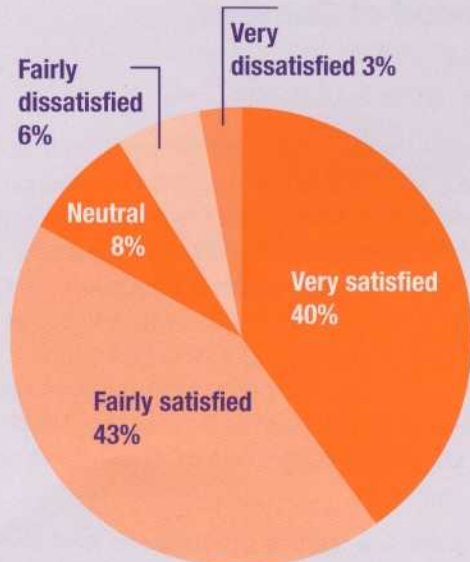
THOMAS CORAM RESEARCH UNIT  
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EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Sure Start

# What we found out

## Satisfaction with services

### General satisfaction with services for children



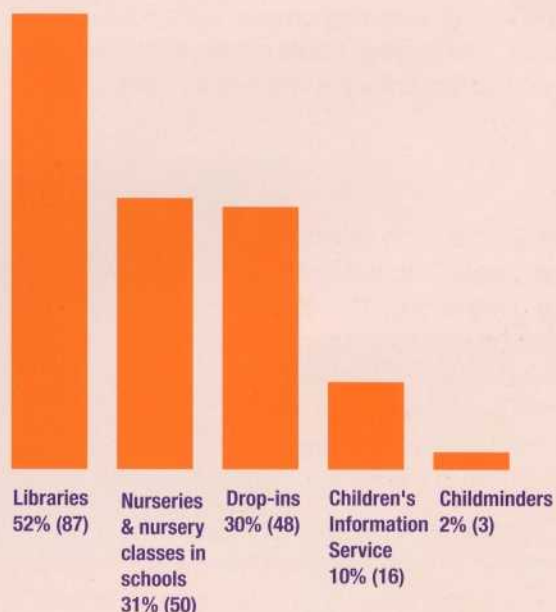
### Key findings:

- The greatest dissatisfaction was about **waiting times at health services**. 33% of parents were dissatisfied with the waiting times at their GP, 26% with waiting times at hospitals, and 10% with waiting times at health centres.
- Among non-health services, the greatest dissatisfaction was about **outside play spaces**: 24% of parents thought they were unsuitable.



## Childcare and early learning

### Families using childcare or early learning services

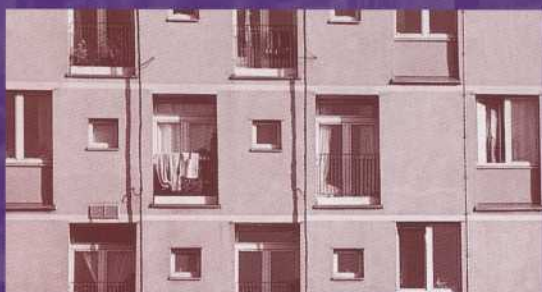


### Key findings:

- 26% of families were using none of the above services, ranging from 18% among white British/Irish families to 32% among Bengali families.
- Although Camden and Sure Start aim to offer at least a part-time nursery place to every 3-year-old, 45% of 3 year-olds were using no nursery provision (rising to 57% among Bengali 3-year-olds).
- 36% of under 3s (i.e. pre-nursery education age children) were using **drop-ins** (rising to 61% for white British/Irish families, and falling to 22% for Bengali families and 12% for Black African families)
- No **family support services** were being used by the families at the time of the survey, although three had used Parents & Co in the past.

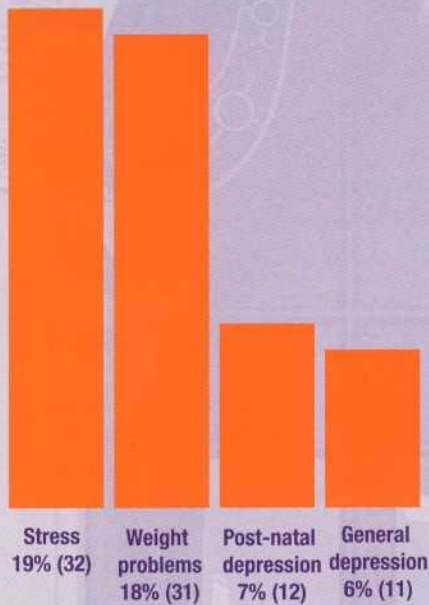
“There is a need for nurseries for 2 year-olds and under, so that parents can go for training or work. The sooner the better!”

“I need more facilities for my 3-year-old who has special needs. In school holidays, I can't give enough attention to my other children.”



## Family health

Parents' health problems since having children



### Key findings:

- In all, 33% of parents had suffered from one of the above health problems since having children. Over half had suffered from more than one health problem.
- 49% of white British/Irish parents had suffered from at least one health problems, compared with 17% of Bengali parents.
- Just over half of parents who had suffered from these health problems sought **professional help**, generally from a GP.
- 47% of families did not take their child under 4 for **dental checks**. Nearly half of these families felt that their child did not need dental care.
- 13% of the parents interviewed were **smokers**. This rose to 41% among white British/Irish parents. Only one Bengali parent smoked, and none of the Black African parents.

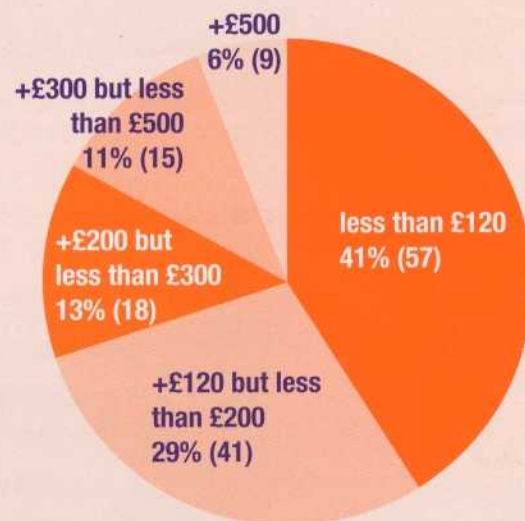
**“I would be happy to see more facilities for Muslim children and families, especially geared towards education.”**

**“I stay at home mostly. I really need to learn English after living here for 4 years.”**

**“We feel comfortable to communicate with nursery workers who speak the same foreign language we speak.”**

## Income, employment and housing

Weekly household income after tax  
(82% gave information about income)

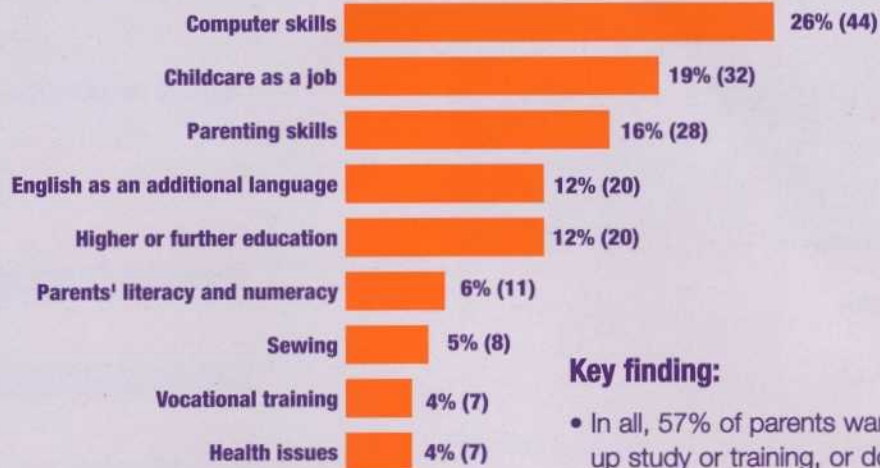


### Key findings

- 44% of households had no-one in **paid employment**.
- 50% said their main income came from **benefits**.
- Low income for some was the result of **low rates of pay**. 30% of those with a weekly income of under £200 said that it came primarily from paid work rather than benefits.
- 21% of families had applied for **Working Families' Tax Credit**. 44% of families had either not heard of WFTC or only partly knew about it. Nearly half of these had a family member working at least 16 hours a week who might have qualified.
- **Housing**: 39% of families with children aged 0-3 were living on the 4th floor or above. A third of these had three or more children.

## Training

### Training courses wanted by parents



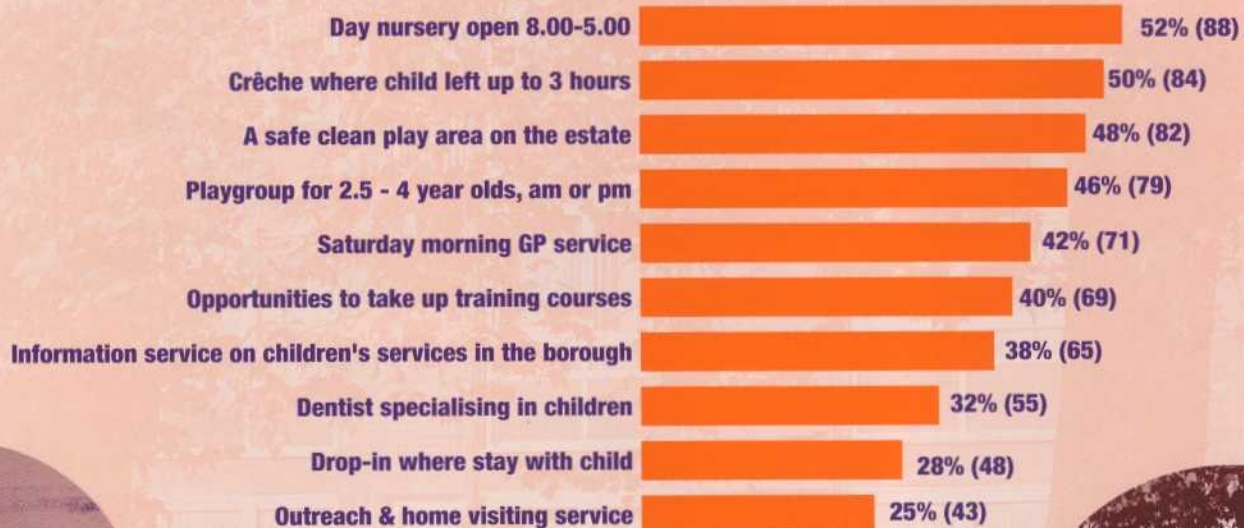
#### Key finding:

- In all, 57% of parents wanted to take up study or training, or do more of it.

**“More drop-in centres, more crèches, and training courses on Saturdays.”**

## Services wanted

Top ten services wanted by parents, from a list of 25 possible services not currently used



#### Key findings:

- 67% of parents wanted more information about or support from Sure Start. (All these families were then contacted by Sure Start Euston.)
- 49% of parents were willing to help plan and develop local services.

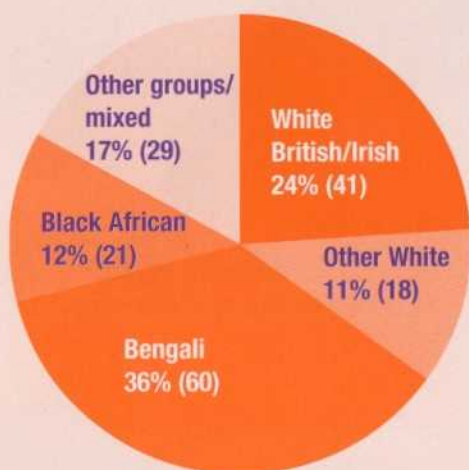
**“A lady from Sure Start took me to a college. I got a place, but there was a waiting list for the crèche, so I couldn't start on the course.”**

**“I feel isolated because I have no friends in the building. There's nowhere to meet other families in the block.”**

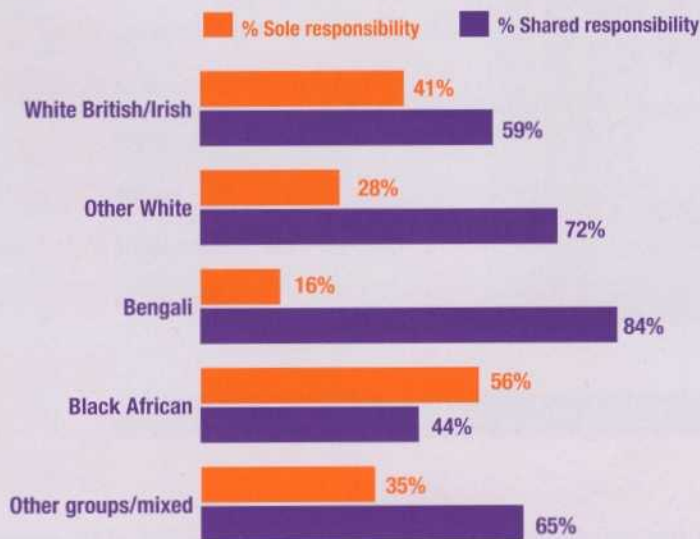
## Who were the families who spoke to us?

- 171 parents and carers were interviewed, 157 of them from Regent's Park Estate and 14 from the Crown Estate.
- 156 were mothers, 4 were fathers, 4 were grandmothers, 2 were grandfathers, 2 were aunts, 2 were childminders, 2 were pregnant with the first child.
- They had a total of 361 children, of whom 202 were under 4.

### Ethnic groups of parents interviewed



### Who is responsible for childcare at home?



**“The nursery won’t give you a place until you have proof that you can pay the fees. But you can’t get work until your child is in a nursery.”**

### Languages spoken by parents (21% spoke more than one language at home)



**“I want to learn how to type Bengali - for leaflets, posters and newsletters.”**

**“Please put the findings of the questionnaire into practice and make positive results.”**

## What will we do next?

- Send this summary to all members of Sure Start Euston and all the people who answered the questionnaire. We have also had it translated into Bengali and Somali.
- Take the results to our Partnership meeting and Regent's Park Parents' Forum to see how Sure Start can respond. The Parents' Forum is using its budget to set up new crèches and drop-ins in the Regent's Park estate.
- Use the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to pilot childcare bursaries for 15 Regent's Park parents who are entering training or employment.
- Work with Camden's Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership to build space for new nursery places in the area.
- Feed the results to key decision-makers in Camden Council and Camden & Islington Health Authority.
- Carry out a simplified version of the questionnaire in St Pancras and Somers Town neighbourhoods in 2002.
- Repeat the survey in 2004 to see what difference we have made.

**“I would like a childminder for my baby, provided it's affordable.”**



## More information

For the full report of the survey, for more copies of this summary – it is also available in Bengali and Somali – or for any other enquiries, please contact:

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