

# CORBY SURE START PROGRAMME - THREE YEAR SUMMATIVE REPORT

October 2004

## PART 1 - SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS TO DATE

### Corby Sure Start Evaluation 1999

Tait.C, Fletcher.C, and Whalley. M, (1999) *'Evaluating Services and Defining Local Needs'*; Pen Green Research and Training Base, Corby

In anticipation of the setting up of Corby Sure Start in 1999, a series of meetings were held so that the development group for the project could discuss their plan, local targets and proposed interventions with parents in the community. The planning group was made up of both parents and professionals. To ensure that the needs and wants of the local community received close attention during this initial phase the planning group decided that

- the development group would always be chaired by a parent
- at least one third of the group would comprise parents from the Sure Start catchment area

It was clear that parent representatives and parents who attended the meetings to develop the plan wanted their voices to be heard. In the words of the report,

*"..parents were very vocal in expressing their views and concerns."* (Tait et al; 1999; p 1)

As a result of these discussions the development group felt that a key use of the funds provided by the starter grant for the project was to conduct a Parent Led Needs Assessment (PLNA). A survey of the needs of families conducted by other parents would ensure that there was a congruence between the priorities identified by the development group and those of people in the local community. Consequently, a team of 13 'parent interviewers' was recruited and trained as,

*"It was felt that parents as interviewers would be more likely to engage in an honest, open and critical dialogue with other parents." (Tait et al; 1999; p 1)*

It was decided that families with children under the age of one would be the 'target group' for interviewing as their experiences would have been the most recent and most relevant to the aims and objectives of the Sure Start Project in Corby. Thus, the 1999 PLNA had four key aims in line with local and national objectives:

1. To produce evidence as to how effective ante- and post-natal services had been.
2. To identify those needs of families which had not been met.
3. To develop insights into the contributions made by Health, Social Services, Education and the voluntary sector to the reduction of stress and vulnerability of families with infants.
4. To ensure that the interventions planned by Corby Sure Start, as developed by parents and professionals, were appropriate and matched local needs.

Some of the key needs identified for expectant mothers and new mothers and their families, were a mixture of forms of personal support and those of a practical nature. Parents identified emotional support as a key factor, access to transport and health services along with information on child development, and the provision of childcare facilities such as crèches. Crucially, these would allow parents some 'free time' from their children - time when they could do something for themselves, or 'just have a break' (Tait et al; 1999; p 21).

### **Corby Sure Start Evaluation 2001**

Tait.C, Fletcher.C, and Whalley.M (2001) *'Parental Employment, Early Years Care and Service Evaluations'*; Pen Green Research and Training Base, Corby

The second survey, conducted in 2001, focussed on how parents evaluated services in the light of patterns of parental employment and the accessibility of early years childcare (Tait et al; 2001) This study followed the established model in 1999 and 'parent interviewers' were once again recruited, including several parents who had carried out interviewing in the initial study. It was decided to contact as many of the original cohort

of interviewees as possible, as their children would by then have been about two years of age. The reasons for this decision were,

- The second survey would allow comparisons to be made
- The levels of support from local services experienced by these families could be ascertained
- An accurate assessment of how many had come into contact with the Sure Start programme could be made
- Focussing on parents with children aged 18 months to 2 years would allow some assessment of the needs of parents who were trying to return to work, and whether specific new initiatives set up by Sure Start to support this were being successful or not
- The success of specific government policies intended to encourage mothers back into the workplace, such as family credit and working parents tax credit, could be examined
- The amount of support and childcare provided by the parents' extended family could be investigated and assessed in terms of parents making a return to the workforce.

It was not possible to fulfil the original intention and replicate the 1999 study and so re-interview all the participants. This was due to reasons such as,

- People no longer at the same address
- People who could not be contacted
- Those who declined to take part in the second survey

However, 31 of the original 57 families who took part in the first evaluation were successfully re-interviewed. This allowed analysis of how things had developed for them now that their children were 2 to 3 years of age. This group were seen to be a distinctive sub-set of the original participants in terms of stability and consistency of residence, relationships and employment (Research, Development and Training Base 2001; p5). This group was designated as Cohort 1 and their data was analysed separately from that of

Cohort 2, a group of parents who were being interviewed about their usage and experiences of services for the first time.

The main findings of this 2001 report were that

- There was a variety of family types evident in the survey
- Generally, family life and employment had to be carefully 'juggled'
- Family support and agency support in terms of childcare had to be carefully coordinated to enable mothers to return to work
- The mixed patterns of shiftwork in Corby helped to promote mothers returning to work as long as there was great flexibility in childcare arrangements
- There was some expressed preference for childcare to be undertaken by relatives within the home for children under 3 years of age

### **Corby Sure Start Evaluation 2003**

**McKinnon, E., Fletcher, C and Whalley, M. (2003)**

- (a) *'Parent to Parent User Satisfaction Survey 2003 Corby Sure Start'* ; Pen Green Research and Training Base, Corby.
- (b) *'Evaluations from Staff Focus Groups and a Survey of Management Board Members'*; Pen Green Research and Training Base, Corby.

This evaluation was divided into three discrete strands.

- A Parent's Satisfaction Survey, similar to those conducted for the previous two evaluations, which provided a largely summative perspective on the Programme
- Focus Group sessions were carried out Sure Start workers, which provided a largely illuminative perspective
- A survey of Sure Start Management Board members provided a largely formative perspective.

The Parent-to-Parent User Satisfaction Survey By allowed direct evaluations of services by service-users via a number rating regarding the quality of the service they have

experienced, plus comments about the services and how they felt improvement could be made. This allowed the differentiation of three different ranges of ratings - 8-10, 5-7 and 4 or less. These ranges were then associated with,

- a high quality of service and how this could be maintained
- an acceptable quality of service and how it could be improved
- an unacceptable level quality of service and how this could be reduced or eliminated?'

These categories formed the basis of how each group or service was evaluated. The evaluation also found that some services were particularly significant because of their functions of, 'signposting' parents towards other groups and services and/or 'gatekeeping', in the sense that they were instrumental in allowing or promoting access to other groups or services. Family Visiting and Transport were two highly rated services which were chosen to exemplify these processes.

The Focus Group work with Corby Sure Start workers showed that there was a strong esprit-de-corps in the programme and workers displayed a deep commitment to the programme and its aims in terms of supporting parents and families in the community. Often workers, at all levels and across the programme, worked well beyond their remits in terms of job descriptions. However, there was no sense of resentment about this as staff deeply felt that this was 'their' programme, they had created it and would do all they could to meet the needs of the families they supported.

Both the staff and members of the Management Board felt that the programme was very well managed, that workers were well supported and given ample opportunity for training and self-development. Board members felt that all concerned had clear understanding of the structures and systems in the programme, people's roles in the organisation and its aims and objectives.

Both board members and workers acknowledged the progress that had been made in terms of inter-agency cooperation and collaborative work but that there were some problems and difficulties in this area that needed to be addressed.

## Corby Sure Start Evaluation 2004

McKinnon, E., Fletcher, C and Whalley, M. (2004)  
'*Outreach Provision Users' Satisfaction Survey-OPUSS'*  
Pen Green Research and Training Base, Corby.

In 2003 Corby Sure Start staff worked on and produced their own document 'Annual Report 2003 - Corby Sure Start' (Corby Sure Start, 2003). This provided a detailed summary of the work undertaken by the Sure Start team in the previous year. It deliberately used an informal style because it wanted to present a "balance of facts, figures and 'real stories'" to complement the monitoring and financial reports which were included (Corby Sure Start, 2003 page 5). The Introduction to this document referred readers to the annual evaluation work being completed by Pen Green Research, Development and Training in the same year. This work was in the form of a Users' Satisfaction Survey and was published in two documents, 'Parent to Parent' and 'Evaluations from Staff Focus Groups and a Survey of Management Board' (McKinnon et al, 2003; (a) and (b)).

As a result of their own report, and the evaluation work done by the Pen Green Research Base the staff in Corby Sure Start had learned a great deal about the programme in general and about its operation in and around the Pen Green Centre in particular. However, it was also recognised that a significant area of Corby Sure Start's provision was its 'outreach work'. This encompassed all of the work which took place in a variety of locations away from the Pen Green site, but mainly in the two Community Houses at Wick Close and the Kingswood Community Centre. The senior management of Corby Sure Start felt that the outreach provision was an important aspect of the Programme's work and that it needed to be evaluated in its own right. It was anticipated that the data produced would provide Corby Sure Start with a deeper understanding of parental views about the groups and services operating across the Outreach locations. The information would also allow better-informed decisions to be taken about how this area of work could be developed in the future. These two points formed the rationale for the 2004 evaluation, 'Outreach Provision Users' Satisfaction Survey-OPUSS'.

## PART 2 -

### A. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

#### 1. Workforce Development, Capacity Building and Regeneration

The annual evaluation of 2003 included work done with the staff of Corby Sure Start and members of the Management Board. Feedback from staff focus groups highlighted the value placed by staff on the amount and quality of support they received from managers. Opportunities for training and professional development were also favourably commented upon.

There was a discernibly positive feeling among staff about the programme and a sense of ownership - that they were involved in building and developing a system of groups and services which was addressing the needs of families in Corby. Staff receive weekly group support including case presentation and monthly one-to-one supervision. There is a clear belief in the importance of ensuring the well-being of the staff individually and collectively. Part of Corby Sure Start's philosophy is to 'grow our own people' and to recruit staff from the local community whenever possible. For example, several members of the Family Visiting team

- are women whose children were in the Pen Green Nursery and who attended groups there
- who then got involved in the data collection for the first Parent-Led Needs Assessment in 1999
- went on to work part-time for Sure Start
- underwent training leading to full -time posts as Family Visitors

In itself, this approach contributes to community regeneration, the development of social capital , helps to meet back-to-work targets and serves as an example of what can be successfully achieved for other programmes following in the footsteps of the 'trailblazers'.

Research and Evaluation this year is covered in its own section below, where another example of the 'grow our own people' approach is described. It is critical to note that staff in Corby Sure Start engage in 'reflexive evaluation' on a day-to-day basis; they don't feel that evaluation is something which is 'done to them' once-a-year. Evaluation is a cooperative exercise which is carried out collaboratively. The focus group work undertaken with staff as part of the 2003 evaluation encouraged workers to 'tell their own stories' about the 'learning journeys' they had been on before they had joined the programme and subsequently. Sure Start staff engage in 'natural' evaluation - debriefing has become second nature to them. It is an intrinsic part of Sure Start work because research and evaluation are seen as being about growth and learning. Staff are not afraid to take risks - their feelings are 'contained' within the programme's systems for support, supervision and training.

The Programme Manager feels that evaluation exercises and reports have enhanced her understanding of how the Programme is operating, as well as that of her colleagues at all levels. New leadership and management skills have had to be learned and developed in order to integrate an expanding team who themselves have different backgrounds and skills. The 2003 'Parent to Parent' evaluation report testified to the integrated provision of services in Corby Sure Start and how families had a variety of connections to many services. This is only possible if staff are working on a day-to-day basis as a team and that this is facilitated and supported by priority being given to regular meetings, support and supervision. On a recent visit of team members to Dublin their Irish counterparts commented 'You're so integrated!'

## **2. Partnership Working**

The annual evaluations have continued to inform the strategic planning of the programme. The 2003 report indicated an apparent 'retreat' of partners represented on the Management Board in terms of attendance at Board meetings. However, this could be interpreted as partners having high levels of confidence in the management and running of the programme rather than the opposite.

However, it is recognised in Sure Start that it is vitally important to keep partners 'on board' in view of the need to encourage and support collaborative working and changing of practices, as well as their involvement in business and development planning. For example, the evaluation for 2004 of Sure Start's provision off-site of the Pen Green Centre (see below under OPUSS) is intended to ascertain how effectively Sure Start reaches people in those parts of the catchment area serviced primarily by the Wick Close Community House and the Kingswood Neighbourhood Centre. This is particularly important as policy is developed in the light of Pen Green becoming a Children's Centre and how Corby Sure Start might develop 'satellite centres' in the future; will they be in Health Centres, primary schools etc? It is crucially important that partners are not only kept informed of developments in provision but are actively involved in the decision-making process which leads to them. The recently completed 2004 evaluation outlined above will inform Corby Sure Start, its partners and stakeholders about parental views regarding the Outreach Provision of the Programme and contribute to the planning of collaborative work and possible mainstreaming of services.

## **B. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION 2004**

### **1. The Outreach Provision Users' Satisfaction Survey - OPUSS (2004)**

This is outlined in the Part 1. above

### **2. Developing the Practice of Parent-Researchers**

To increase the pool of interviewers for this work the training and materials which interviewers received for the evaluation in 2003 were enlarged and deepened and successfully submitted for accreditation by the Open College Network in January. There were over 50 enquiries about the course and 24 people attended one of the six class sessions offered over the first two days of the delivery of the initial unit on Interview Skills and Techniques.

- The Developing the Practice of Parent-Researcher course was accredited by the Open College Network South-East Midlands Region in January 2004
- To date all four units of the course have been delivered, 18 learners have been retained and fortnightly study support sessions are continuing

- A course pack, including all the materials for the first three units has been written and professionally printed; the fourth unit has just been delivered and these materials are being prepared for inclusion into the learning pack file
- A Seminar to launch the pack and share our own work, and that of other Sure Start trainers and evaluators took place on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May 04 and was attended by 65 people. The day included presentations by the Pen Green Parent-Researchers, Sandra Shears (Programme Manager from Sure Start South East Ipswich) and a team of Parent-Researchers from Sure Start West Liverpool. Delegates also divided into smaller groups to discuss the presentations and the related themes for the day.

Learners on the course are almost all from the local community and have the opportunity for accreditation on the four units at levels 2 and 3. When completed, this course will equip learners to conduct a piece of research from beginning to end; they will know how to construct interview schedules and questionnaires, carry out fieldwork, analyse data and present their findings. As well as taking part in the paid interviewing for Sure Start evaluations they can offer their knowledge and skills to other employers, community groups, their children's schools etc. This is another example of the 'grow our own people' philosophy which permeates Pen Green and Sure Start and explicitly intends to develop the workforce, build capacity individually and collectively and contribute to the regeneration of the local community.

### **3. Connections**

The Sure Start database contains a large amount of quantitative data which is being evaluated this year by Ruchira Leisten (Senior Researcher at Pen Green), Colin Fletcher (Research and Training Consultant) and Wendy Monajemi (Data-analyst for both Pen Green Research Base and Corby Sure Start). They are applying statistical analysis tools from the Statistics Package for Social Sciences software to examine how parents and families use the variety of groups and services offered and the nature of their multiple-usage patterns. As well as 'mining' the database, Ruchira has been interviewing key staff across the centre about their views on group usage and the ways in which parents initially become involved with groups and move on to and access others.

#### **4. Mass Observation Diary Week**

This is a piece of work based on the methodology used by the Mass Observation movement started in the late 1930s, continued through the Second World War and continues to this day. The Mass Observation archive is kept at the University of Sussex. The Senior Management Team and co-opted staff have had training for this and a pilot exercise has been conducted. Those involved had to keep a diary of all they did on Tuesday February 24<sup>th</sup> and the results were collated for all members of the Senior Management Team to read. The diaries produced were varied in their form and content and gave everyone an insight into the complexities of their colleagues' lives - and quite a few about their own. A further meeting was held to discuss issues such as anonymity and confidentiality.

This work has been further developed by members of the Research Team and the week from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> to Friday 12<sup>th</sup> of November has been selected as our 'A Week in the Life of Pen Green' data-collection period. Thirteen members of staff covering the 10 component parts of the Pen Green Children's Centre have volunteered to be 'Lead Persons' in their respective areas. Training about their roles and responsibilities is taking place on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> of October. Posters, newsletters and flyers have been distributed to all 10 parts of the Centre to publicise the event and encourage the maximum amount of participation from parents, children and staff.

So that all potential diarists are able to participate their 'diaries' can be in various forms - written, drawn, recorded on audio-tape, spoken and noted down by the research staff; they can include poems, songs, photographs. Written or transcribed verbal diaries will be entered onto a database and analysed using Nvivo software. This will identify common themes and patterns in what people have to say and support the analysis of them. Two members of the research team are undertaking training in the use of this software. Diaries in other forms will be examined to see what they can tell us about that person's week at Pen Green. This will allow us to build up a really detailed picture of how the Pen Green Centre works on a day-to-day basis, how complex people's daily lives are and how important Pen Green is to the families who use it and to the community it serves.

## **5. Family Visiting at the Pen Green Children's Centre**

We have embarked on a piece of work designed to produce an evaluation of the Family Visiting Service at Corby Sure Start, reporting to the Programme Manager in January 2005. This involves the Family Visitors completing a tracking sheet which summarises their activities on an hourly basis. This will allow Corby Sure Start to do a cost-benefit analysis of the Family Visitor's specific actions and interventions. Sure Start staff and Research staff will conduct an opportunity-cost exercise in order to produce an analysis of the value of the preventative work which the Family Visiting team has done. We recognise that this will be a challenging piece of work especially in the light of

- government initiatives in the area of supporting families in need (for example, the green paper 'Every Child Matters' , DFES 2003).
- the recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'Young Families Under Stress - Outcomes and Costs of Home-Start Support' (McCauley et al, September 2004; Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Since the publication of the Audit Commission report, 'Seen But Not Heard' in 1994, it has been recognised that family support services should be offered where needs have been assessed and there is a likelihood of positive outcomes for the families concerned. However, it has become increasingly important for service providers and commissioners to produce evidence of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of their interventions. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report mentioned above points out that the government has not yet reported on its own studies of cost-effectiveness of services to children in need, and says,

"Our understanding about support services for children and families and how best to evaluate their effectiveness is clearly at an early stage in the UK...There is also very little empirical work in the UK on the cost-effectiveness of interventions, and the calculation of service costs is still at a rudimentary level." (McCauley et al, 2004; page 61)

We hope that our work will make a contribution to filling in the gap identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Building on an existing piece of unpublished work on Family Visiting we intend to conduct a comparative research project which will look at the similarities and differences in family visiting conducted by Corby Sure Start, Corby Home Start and the Pen Green Nursery.

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