CELEBRATING THREE YEARS OF WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Foreword
Welcome to this booklet which celebrates three years of working with, and supporting, children and their families in this Sure Start area. Its focus will be on 2003-4 but will also highlight progress since 2001.

A busy year
It has been a very busy few years!
In March 2002, following many months of consultation and building works, a brand new Sure Start centre, including a Neighbourhood Nursery, which is a hub for delivering children and families integrated services, was officially opened in Bedlington. By June 2003 this programme had become one of the first Early Designated children’s centres, one of 32 around the country.
By late 2003, working in partnership with Choppington First School and other community activists, we succeeded in attracting a capital and revenue funding package (European, Neighbourhood Nursery, Sure Start, Neighbourhood Renewal and Northumberland County Council funding). This enabled us to build a centre, in the grounds of the school, which serves local communities on the periphery of the original catchment area. The DfES officially designated Sure Start Choppington as a children’s centre in July 2004, enabling local and accessible services to be delivered in the Choppington and Cleaswell Hill area for additional children and their families.

This programme is underpinned by a strong ethos of continued service improvement and in April 2004, after a year of developing our service standards, and supported by Northumberland County Council Corporate Performance Team, Sure Start Bedlington & District was the first to be formally inspected against South Tyneside’s ‘Safeguarding Children: Achieving Excellence through Best Practice’ framework and was awarded a ‘Top Team’ rating for the way services were planned, implemented and evaluated. The programme was subsequently the first to become the first Sure Start local programme in the country to attain the prestigious Charter Mark – an accredited standard of excellence, demonstrating that the organisation has “gone the extra mile” in delivering customer care. The assessor commended as best practice, the application of an evidence-based tool that benchmarked meaningful involvement of service users from planning, through implementation to evaluation. This approach ensured Sure Start Bedlington & District’s role played a part in the Government’s ambition to halve child poverty by 2010 and was a significant contributor to the Government’s aim of delivering opportunity and security for all.

What is Sure Start
Sure Start’s overall aim is to help provide the best possible start in life for all children and provides a framework for bringing together early education, childcare, health and family support. Sure Start local programmes deliver targeted, locally aligned services within their catchment areas. It plays a part in the Government’s ambition to halve child poverty by 2010 and is a significant contributor to the Government’s aim of delivering opportunity and security for all. Sure Start will support aims to increase individual security and prosperity by enabling parents to work, as well as tackling educational and health inequalities by supporting children’s healthy development and early education.

What is Sure Start Bedlington
Sure Start Bedlington & District is part of the national Sure Start programme.

Section 1
Sure Start Bedlington and District: a successful three years supporting families and children

Paula Head, Sure Start Programme Manager

There is now a wide variety of help and support available, delivered from two children’s centres in Bedlington and Choppington, including:

- High quality daycare in two nurseries with integrated early education and a Childminder Network
- Family Support and parenting programmes
- Speech and Language Services and Support
- Health visitor and health information
- Smoking Cessation Advisor
- Play and Early Learning programmes for young children
- Family Learning Programmes
- Webchat service to provide support to people who work with teenage and isolated parents-to-be
- Breastfeeding peer supporters
- Access to the Wansbeck Job Action Team and Lone Parent Advisor
- RELATE Counselling Service
- Activities specifically for dads and kids
- A range of holiday activities
- Parent Peer Support Groups
- Wansbeck Toy and Book Libraries...and much, much more!
Targets for Objective 1

TARGET 1: Reduce by 20% the proportion of children aged 0-3 who are re-registered within the space of 12 months on the child protection register.

TARGET 2: All Sure Start programmes to have agreed and implemented in a culturally sensitive way, ways of identifying, caring for and supporting mothers with post-natal depression.

TARGET 3: 100% of families with young children contacted by local programme within the first two months of their baby’s life.

Achieving Objective 1

Examples of services that have helped to improve the social and emotional development of families and children in Bedlington & District are:

- Behaviour Management – an informal 6 week course designed to help parents better cope with the challenges than young children can present.
- Baby Massage – a 10 week course for parents/careers of babies aged from 6 weeks to crawling.
- Kidz Aloud Woman’s Group – a community group that provides peer support for women.
- Support groups and activities for dads – male dominated courses.
- Leisure Groups – ten week rolling programmes for people (different programmes for men and women) who may be suffering from isolation or have low confidence.
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How Sure Start Helped Chris

“Sure Start is brilliant,” says Chris. “It has helped me and my family in so many ways, but most of all, by introducing us to behaviour management. It made such a difference to our life! The children are so much happier, and Kirsty and I are able to enjoy a social life again.”

Something for everyone

“It’s like one big happy family at Sure Start,” continues Chris. “I’m sure that many people don’t realise it can help them.”

Difficult times

Before visiting Sure Start, Chris’s family were experiencing difficulties.

- Lewis was a bit of a handful, explains Chris. “It was therefore difficult for us to leave the children with other people. So, we didn’t have much of a social life!”
- Lisa had a few other problems too. Her wife was coping with depression both during and after pregnancy, and Carl and Lewis were having trouble with their speech.”

Sure Start

Kirsty heard about Sure Start during her son’s development check at the local doctor’s surgery.

“Why went along to Sure Start just out of curiosity really, but they were very helpful. After talking to both of us, they recommended we try Behavioural management to help us tackle Lewis’s tantrums,” says Chris. “They also offered Kirsty one-to-one support, and assistance with Carl and Lewis’s speech.”

Parent support

Behaviour management helps parents like Chris and Kirsty cope more effectively with their children. It is often a change of approach that’s needed. Parents can be shown better ways of establishing a routine, setting up clear rules, and encouraging the power of positive learning.

Chris found the behaviour management sessions very useful. “It’s brilliant! The children are much happier and easier to manage, and together we are now able to get some quality time.”
Julie, aged 26, lives with her partner Ian and her daughter Natasha aged 6. Natasha has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Section 3 Objective 2: Improving health

How Sure Start Bedlington & District helped Julie...and could help you!

“Sure Start is the best thing that ever happened to me,” says Julie.

“I love my daughter and wanted to support her in every way I could. But, having a daughter with ADHD was exhausting and distressing. Sure Start helped me cope. It’s fantastic!”

Sleepless nights
Before approaching Sure Start, Julie was having difficulties. “Natasha was constantly on the move and wouldn’t sit still,” says Julie. “At night she’d have difficulty sleeping, and would wake up at five o’clock in the morning wanting to play. I was exhausted.” Julie also found it distressing picking up Natasha from nursery. “I dreaded the end of a school day,” she explains. “Almost every day I would be told that Natasha had been disruptive and naughty. Sometimes other parents would be cruel about Natasha, and I would go home in tears.”

Exhausted and depressed
Julie was finding it a strain, and she wasn’t getting any sleep. So she went to her local doctor to see if he could help. “I was talking to the doctor about Natasha’s sleeplessness,” she says, “and he suggested that I change Natasha’s diet by cutting out E-numbers. But still nobody knew what was wrong with her!”

Sure Start
Julie explained to her doctor how tired and depressed it was making her feel. So she suggested that she should contact Sure Start.

“I have never looked back,” says Julie. “Sure Start support worker came to my house, and she noticed straight away that Natasha was delayed in development and referred her to a Paediatrician.”

Giving something back
Julie has become a volunteer helper at Sure Start Bedlington & District. She works in the crèche and the nursery. She also does occasional talks to other parents about ADHD.

“I wanted to give joy and hope back to parents like us,” she says. “I got myself qualified, and now I enjoy giving something back.”
Melanie, aged 30, lives in Bedlington with her partner Arthur and her four children: Jamie aged 5, Megan aged 4, and the twins Ben & Harry aged 2.

Section 4 Objective 3: Improving the ability to learn

Targets for Objective 3

TARGET 1: An increase in the proportion of children having normal levels of communication, language and literacy at the end of the foundation stage.

TARGET 2: All children in area to have access to good quality play and learning opportunities.

TARGET 3: Increase use of libraries by families with young children in area.

How Sure Start helped Melanie

"Sure Start is very good," says Melanie. "The twins were such a handful, but Sure Start helped me...they were fantastic. It made an amazing difference to have that extra practical support. They (Sure Start) are very professional, friendly and I trust them." Melanie first heard about Sure Start after an outreach worker phoned her and offered her help. "She was very nice, and she visited me at home. Then she recommended some playwork," says Melanie. PlayPacks and speech therapy

Sure Start also recommended that Melanie try their PlayPacks course as language plays an important part in how every child learns, makes friends and becomes more confident. "PlayPacks was great," explains Melanie. "I learnt how to help Megan with her speech. I can now already see a difference in her speech and her confidence."

Difficult to cope

Before being approached by Sure Start, Melanie was finding it difficult to cope with her twins and two other children. "First thing in the morning was always very stressful," explains Melanie. Megan was also having difficulties with her speech. She was very shy. "We were told that she wouldn't be able to start school until her speech improved," says Melanie. Sure Start

Melanie first heard about Sure Start after an outreach worker phoned her and offered her...
Section 5  Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities

Achieving Objective 4

Examples of work that have helped to strengthen Bedlington & District’s families and communities are:

Munro Beck Initiative - Sure Start is represented on the Board of the Local Strategic Partnership, to ensure the children and family agenda is fully embedded in the local regeneration strategy.

Affordable and accessible - childcare, enabling parents to return to training or work in the knowledge that their child is happy themselves in a safe, learning environment.

Jobs Advisers - help for parents who want to find work.

Activities - Sure Start parents and staff organise a wide variety of fun family activities (including visits to National Trust heritage sites and Green Start nature trail picnic).

Parent Reference Group - parents can join several Sure Start Bedlington & District groups to help shape the Sure Start service and strengthen the local community.

How Sure Start helped Stephen

"Sure Start was my anchor," says Stephen. "It gave me independence, stability, and enabled me to work. My son is received good quality childcare, and I have a career at last."

Professional childcare

"Sure Start’s facilities are great," continues Stephen. "They are very professional, and Jack really enjoyed it."

Sure Start

Stephen first heard about Sure Start in his local paper. "Sure Start, have crèche and nursery facilities. Fantastic! It meant I could do some training, whilst Jack was having fun with the other children," says Stephen.

Unemployed

Before visiting Sure Start, Stephen was unemployed. "I was a single parent, which made it difficult for me to start work or go on a training course," says Stephen. "I explained to the Jobcentre that I was interested in care work, so the advisor recommended that I do a training course. I really wanted to do something worthwhile, but I couldn’t because I had responsibilities for Jack."

Jack benefits too

A few years ago, Stephen and Jack relocated from Scotland. When they first moved to Bedlington, their lives were very unsettled. "Jack seemed quite withdrawn with all the traveling around. He needed some stability," explains Stephen.

A job for Stephen

After successfully completing his training, Stephen is now employed as an Attendant Driver for Social Services. "I really enjoy my job, which involves providing transport for the elderly," says Stephen.
Section 6  
Some outcome measures:  
more parents using our services every year!

Section 7  
Funding:  
Financial statement

2003-04 Expenditure £’s

- Outreach & Home visiting
- Support for parents & families
- Play, learning & childcare
- Community healthcare
- Improvements to parents’ employability
- Improvements to buildings
- Building involvement in community services
- Evaluation
Sarah, aged 24, is a single parent living in East Sleekburn with her three children: Georgia aged 7, Callum aged 5, and Rebecca aged 3.

How Sure Start helped Sarah

"Sure Start changed my life," says Sarah. "It gave me the opportunity to go out and meet new people, and as a result I feel more confident and outgoing. I am also working towards getting some IT qualifications."

New to the area

Before visiting Sure Start, Sarah had just relocated from Leeds. "I was quite shy," she says, "so it was difficult for me to meet new people." Sarah was given some information about Sure Start by her new health visitor. "She suggested I try some Sure Start activities to boost my confidence with others. Sure Start even arranged a registered childminder to look after Rebecca for me."

Rebecca benefits too

"Rebecca was apprehensive about going to the childminder at first," explains Sarah. "But it wasn’t long before she really started to enjoy it. She liked playing with the other children, and it really increased her confidence. It also prepared her for going to nursery school last year."

Quality time for herself!

Once Rebecca was settled with the childminder and Georgia and Callum were safely at school, Sarah began to enjoy some quality time for herself. "The activities were great," says Sarah. "I have been to sessions on massage, waxing and acupuncture and I have met some really nice people."

Qualifications

Sure Start also offered Sarah the opportunity to gain some qualifications. "I didn’t receive good grades at school, because I was pregnant with Georgia at the time," explains Sarah. "But my outreach worker was very helpful and gave me a list of courses that I could do...and I hope to get a job in IT as soon as Rebecca leaves nursery school."

The Future

The Government has announced its Ten Year Strategy for Childcare: "Choice for parents, the best start for children". The strategy sets out its commitment to invest in childcare, early education and work-life balance so that families are able to secure the best start in life for their children. The key challenge for us in the coming period is to continue improving our services for children and families, and keeping our focus on delivery. The task is to continue developing effective partnerships which will translate that commitment and those resources into new high quality local services for children. It is appropriate to finish with a statement from Baroness Ashton, Minister for Sure Start: "Sure Start should now be seen as a development of previous programmes and a move towards mainstreaming the Sure Start approach across children’s services. The significant level of Government investment acknowledges the contribution that has already been made by local authorities, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and Sure Start local programmes. The challenge of the next few years is to build on these early successes and ensure that quality services are delivered that can demonstrably make a positive difference to children and their families."
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