



for children and families living in the Hollinwood Ward

Annual Evaluation Report for 2004

*Submitted to North-West
Sure Start Team and the
National Evaluation of Sure Start*

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The Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

A new Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy was produced by Sure Start Hollinwood to run from April 2004 to March 2006. This updated strategy was produced to reflect that fact that the programme has been in operation for more than 3 years. Whilst the monitoring element has continued to track the number and characteristics of children and families within the community and attendance at Sure Start Hollinwood activities, the evaluation strategy has developed through the year with a greater emphasis placed upon the impact and cost of each activity.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy is divided into 3 parts – population and attendance monitoring, activity review and thematic evaluations. A significant amount of the work undertaken during 2004 has been in developing the strategy, establishing the level of evaluation needed for each activity and devising methods and systems to ensure that the necessary information is being collected. As it was being written, the programme manager and research worker met with staff teams, the Partnership Board and the Parents in Partnership group to talk about the background to the new monitoring and evaluation strategy and its focus on cost and impact.

The work that has been completed during 2004 under each heading in the strategy is outlined below.

Population and attendance monitoring

The systems for registering children and families on the Sure Start Hollinwood database have now been in place for a number of years and information from the activity monitoring forms which list the children and parents who have been seen are entered onto the database. During the year, a separate system has been also established to collate the information needed to complete the Neighbourhood Nurseries return.

The monitoring information from the database and other sources is used in the completion of the M1, M3 and M7 returns, the quarterly Neighbourhood Nurseries return and in the production of monthly feedback sheets (which are circulated to the Partnership Board, managers and teams).

The monthly feedback sheets have proved to be a valuable tool which has enabled managers to keep track of the number of children and families seen, particularly from the programme's target groups of young parents, men and families from minority ethnic groups. It also shows the number of children and parents who have attended activities who are not registered with the programme and acts as a prompt to encourage staff to register families. An annual profile for 2004 is to be produced in February 2005 – this will illustrate the patterns of attendance over the whole year and provides an opportunity for managers and staff to request further investigation of specific issues.

The Sure Start database is also used by workers within the programme to target particular children or families. For example, outreach visits are made to families who have not attended services for 6 months and children aged from 2½ to 4 years old who do not attend day care have been invited to Time for a Story. In preparation for the relaunch of a parent and toddler group, workers were able to target all families living within a particular locality.

For the annual Sure Start returns, Sure Start Hollinwood continue to work informally with the other 4 programmes in Oldham to collect the information required from external agencies. This ensures greater consistency of information and reduces the workload for both the agencies providing the statistics and the Sure Start programmes.

Activity Review

Activity monitoring and evaluation forms are completed for each session or activity. During 2004 these have been updated as part of the implementation of the new monitoring and evaluation strategy. The forms are now specific to the individual activities and activity leaders have been able to focus on what information they can collect on a weekly basis that will start to measure impact and feed into a more detailed evaluation.

The process of updating the monitoring forms was important. The research worker met with each activity leader to redesign their particular monitoring form: in doing this, all of the workers within the programme started to think more about what difference their activity was making to children and families and how this could be recorded. The new forms were starting to be used by September 2004.

The research worker has also worked with activity leaders to update their activity planning sheets – these sheets clearly state why Sure Start Hollinwood is involved in a particular activity, what the activity hopes to achieve and how it is going to be done: this has helped staff think about whether an activity has changed since it was first put into place and what impact it has had. The cost, in terms of staff time and other resources is also included. New activity planning sheets are completed for the start of each financial year.

As a result of the changes to the strategy and the development and implementation of new systems, there have been a smaller number of pieces of research completed than in previous years.

One piece, however, looked at **the experience of volunteering** within Sure Start Hollinwood. The research was undertaken so that the programme could find out more about how the volunteers saw their association with Sure Start and to provide information which would help to maximise the volunteering experience for both individual volunteers and the work of Sure Start Hollinwood. The objectives of the research were to find out why people began volunteering, what their expectations were and whether these had been met. Sure Start also wanted to find out more about how volunteers felt about the recruitment process and ongoing support once they were volunteer workers.

The research showed that, generally, activity leaders and volunteers had similar expectations and activity leaders had an understanding of the things that motivated people to become volunteers. Volunteering was clearly seen as a very positive thing for Sure Start and the volunteers themselves.

For most volunteers, gaining work experience was one of their motivations but personal and social factors were also important – the ‘feel-good’ factor, something to do in their free time and the company of other people were also mentioned by most of the volunteers.

When asked about their expectations of the programme, volunteers’ said that they wanted Sure Start to be supportive and respectful. They also expected to receive the necessary training and that the working environment would be safe. The comments that were made by many of the volunteers suggest that their expectations have been met and in some cases exceeded. Volunteers said that they do feel ‘wanted’ and that they are treated ‘professionally’, ‘valued’ and that they receive the necessary support.

As happened with each piece of research, an action plan was produced to take forward issues that were raised. This plan was also used to illustrate a presentation that the research worker and community development team leader gave at a North-West workshop held by the National Evaluation of Sure Start in June 2004 where the theme was using research findings.

Thematic Evaluation

No thematic evaluations have been completed during 2004. Information has, however, been collated which will be used in the thematic evaluations which will be undertaken during 2005-06 (see below).

Informing the Programme

Monitoring and evaluation within Sure Start Hollinwood has continued to inform the management and development of the programme in the following ways:

- A progress report on the evaluation of the programme is presented at each Partnership Board. They meet four times a year.
- A full report and a summary are produced following each piece of work. The full report is always circulated to the Sure Start Management Team and workers who have been involved in the research. A summary is sent to families who have been involved, the Parents in Partnership group, the partnership board and other interested parties. It is made known to these people that they can have a copy of the full report if they wish.

- Following each piece of work and action plan is produced with the relevant service. This is to ensure that any issues raised during the evaluation are taken forward in an appropriate way. When the action plan is produced, a date is set at which it will be reviewed.
- The internal evaluator is now part of the programme's management team.
- Major changes within the programme, such as the proposal to reorganise the programme to form multi-agency teams, have been supported by research (in this case a questionnaire for all staff which was a very useful exercise which has informed the development of this piece of work).

Monitoring and Evaluation during 2005-2006

A monitoring and evaluation timetable has been outlined for the year 2005-06. Much of the work to be undertaken under 'Population and Attendance Monitoring' is ongoing, although there will be some changes which will be required as a result of the programme's move to Children Centre status.

Impact information being collated on a weekly basis via the activity monitoring forms for each service will collated and for some activities, more detailed evaluations will take place – these include the Dads and Kids Club, sessional day care and holiday play workers.

Three in-depth thematic evaluations will also be conducted:

- 'Achieving Economic Wellbeing', will examine the role of Sure Start Hollinwood in enabling local parents to develop skills, to volunteer and to access training and employment.
- 'Making a Positive Contribution', will look at the involvement of parents in decision making within the programme at community capacity building.
- Linked to the vision for the integrated delivery of Children's Services as outlined in Every Child Matters and the Change for Children documents, will examine the impact of the changes to the structure of the programme which took place during March 2005 to create multi-agency teams.

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