

SURE START BRIDGWATER

EVALUATION SUMMARY 2001-2005

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report outlines the evaluation that has taken place since 2001 on behalf of the Sure Start Bridgwater programme. This report provides an overview of the evaluation that has been carried out, and action that has been taken as a result. It is designed to be a reflection on the evaluation activity that has taken place throughout the course of the programme and how this has contributed to the ongoing development of the programme. For further detailed information regarding any of the studies mentioned in this report, please refer to the web address noted on the acknowledgements page of this document.
- 1.2. Sure Start local programmes aim to break the cycle of deprivation that may exist in particular areas, and to increase the uptake of a range of children and family services so that long term gains can be made for children living in low income families. Sure Start Bridgwater is a trailblazer programme which was launched in 2000, and currently the programme is reaching 95.8% (604/630) of children living within the area (2004 data).
- 1.3. Children's Centres are an important asset in developing the work of Sure Start local programmes and provide a number of core services. There will be four Children's Centres across the Bridgwater area. Children's Centres are required to deliver a number of services as noted below:
 - 'Educare'/Early Education integrated with day care
 - Family support and parental outreach
 - Child and family health services
 - Links with schools and Children's Information Services
- 1.4. More recently a number of new outcomes have been published which will form the centrepiece of all Children's Services. These are part of the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework and are as follows:
 - Be Healthy
 - Staying Safe
 - Enjoy and Achieve
 - Make a Positive Contribution
 - Achieve Economic Wellbeing

2. EVALUATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 The evaluation for Sure Start Bridgwater is carried out by the Community Evaluation Unit which is based within Taunton Deane Primary Care Trust. There are benefits to this approach. Sure Start Bridgwater is able to benefit from a locally focused but independent evaluation approach. Evaluation for the programme began in January 2001, shortly after its launch in 2000. The evaluation team has expanded since the launch of the programme, but in its early days the programme collaborated with a local Education Achievement Zone to share an evaluator who was hosted and line managed within a wider evaluation team serving the health community. A small evaluation team is now shared across a number of Sure Start programmes ensuring that the programmes gain good value from the team.
- 2.2 Evaluation staff are full members of the Sure Start Bridgwater team, taking part in team events and attending team meetings. However, as they are based in a separate organisation to Sure Start Bridgwater and separately line managed, the programme is able to benefit from evaluators which are familiar with the local programme and area, yet able to offer an independent and unbiased opinion as evaluators.
- 2.3 The evaluation that has been carried out by the Community Evaluation Unit on behalf of Sure Start Bridgwater has responded to need and used a mixture of different types of research methods. A summary of the evaluation work that has been carried out and how the evaluation has been used to shape the development of the programme is detailed in the next section.

3 EVALUATION FOR SURE START BRIDGWATER BETWEEN 2001 AND 2005

3.1 Evaluation strategies are often overcomplicated by using unnecessary or academic jargon. In all the Sure Start programmes that the team has worked with including Sure Start Bridgwater, the evaluation strategy has steered away from labelling different types of evaluation in this way and instead chosen to be more explicit about the type of evaluation that was taking place and the reasons why it is being done. This has helped to make evaluation much more open and accessible to those working within the programme and to those who wish to use the findings of evaluation.

3.2 The evaluation team have been involved with Sure Start Bridgwater from the early days of the programme and the programme has benefited from the continuity of staying with the same evaluation provider throughout the course of the programme.

Community Questionnaire (Spring 2001)

3.3 One of the first pieces of evaluation work which took place for the programme was a community questionnaire. This questionnaire aimed to establish baseline information at an early stage of the programme. The questionnaire was sent out to all households in the Sure Start area including both Sure Start and non Sure Start households. The purpose of including non Sure Start households was to allow them to act as a control group against which any change could be measured. The questionnaire also collected information for other local initiatives (Education Achievement Zone and Single Regeneration Budget) in the area to avoid 'questionnaire fatigue'. The first questionnaire received a response rate of 53% (3598)

3.4 The results of the questionnaire have been widely used and shared with a range of different organisations and providers. The questionnaire was repeated during autumn 2003 and the data analysed to demonstrate the impact that the programme has been able to make over the short time period over which it has been running. The response rate to the questionnaire during the second round was 45.8% (4593).

Eastover Childcare and Community Questionnaire (Summer 2001)

3.5 The Eastover Childcare and Community Questionnaire was carried out to assess the need and demand for childcare in the Eastover area. The questionnaire aimed to gather specific information regarding what type of childcare was needed in the area and in addition to consult with local residents regarding facilities in the Eastover Youth Centre. The final response rate to the questionnaire was 31% (685/2232 questionnaires were returned).

- 3.6 The information collected by the questionnaire was used to plan what activities to put on at the centre and also to plan for childcare in the Eastover area. The information was subsequently used for a successful grant application.

Library Service Evaluation (Summer 2001)

- 3.7 As part of the Sure Start Bridgwater programme and to support the work towards meeting targets around library use, a mobile library van was provided for the Hamp and Eastover areas of the programme. In order to gain the views of mobile library users about the service and to ask for ideas about how to best promote the service, on site user surveys were held over 3 weeks (with the evaluator attending one stop in each week), during August and September 2001.
- 3.8 Despite attending the mobile library service for such a time period, surveys were only carried out with eight people, as the numbers visiting the mobile library service were relatively low. However, the thoughts of the users of the mobile library service were very valuable and helped to highlight ways in which the mobile library service could reach more people.
- 3.9 The findings of the survey were able to influence the way in which the mobile library service operated. The results of the survey were discussed at a service level agreement review where discussions centred on how to increase the use of the library van. Partly as a result of the suggestions made by parents, a library worker was employed to go on the van to support parents with choosing books and keeping an eye on children. The logo on the outside of the van was also re-designed to ensure it was more eye-catching and the route was altered to take in additional stops.
- 3.10 The changes that were made to the service at this stage ensured that the library van changed from a mobile library with a small number of users to a busy and vibrant place for parents to bring their children. The mobile library continues to attract high numbers of parents and children. A further impact of the time spent developing the service at Sure Start Bridgwater has been that the use of the mobile library has been extended and Sure Start Taunton now makes use of the library van on days when it is not being used within Sure Start Bridgwater. The evaluation findings and subsequent changes that have made have therefore benefited two different Sure Start programmes.

Evaluation of Home-Start Drop-in Groups (Summer 2001)

- 3.11 Home-Start was provided with funding from Sure Start Bridgwater in order to increase their capacity to support families within the Sure Start area. Home-Start provided trained volunteers as well as providing drop-in groups as a way of offering support to families in need. Two drop-ins were established, one was held within Sure Start House and another at the Early Excellence Centre. Whilst one drop-in was well attended, the other was not and an evaluation was put in place to establish what factors contributed to a successful drop in, how the drop-ins could be improved and for those who

had been invited to attend the drop-ins but not attended, the reasons for their non-attendance. In order to evaluate the Home-Start drop-in sessions, semi-structured interviews were carried out with users and non-users of the drop-in sessions.

- 3.12 The evaluation was able to collate a range of views and ideas about how to improve the groups and how to encourage non-attendees to attend. In addition, the evaluation provided information about the outcomes of the group for those attending. Shortly after the evaluation took place one of the venues in which the drop-in took place was altered and refurbished. The comments collected as part of the evaluation were able to provide ideas about how to organise and decorate the new drop-in room.

Childminding Report (Spring 2002)

- 3.13 An evaluation of the Bridgwater Childminding Network was carried out during 2002. The Network was set up as part of the Sure Start programme in Bridgwater and was one of the first Sure Start approved networks in the country. It was felt important that an evaluation was carried out to assess the impact of its work. Postal questionnaires and five in-depth interviews with childminders were carried out to establish any potential impact of the Childminding Network. Questionnaires were sent out to all 11 childminders, and a postcard reminder was used in order to increase response rates.

- 3.14 The response rate to the postal questionnaire was 63.6%. The findings of the evaluation confirmed that the network was heading in the right direction although there were some issues surrounding reviews of health and safety procedures that needed tightening up. As a result of the evaluation the Network revisited and resolved the issues highlighted as areas for improvement.

Evaluation of the Horticultural Project (Autumn 2002)

- 3.15 An observational study of the Horticultural Project was carried out during autumn 2002. Data was collected in a variety of different ways and included use of observation notes, a tape recorder to capture children's feedback, and digital photography to document the work that is taking place. One of the aims of the evaluation was to document the work that takes place as part of the project, as well as to consider the extent to which the project contributes towards the Sure Start objectives.

- 3.16 The study demonstrated that the project was able to contribute to all Sure Start objectives, although there was further scope for developing the contribution of the project to strengthening families and communities to a greater extent. The evaluation was also able to raise prominent issues regarding how to increase the sustainability of the project by sharing skills with staff within the settings and the Horticultural Project Worker is now ensuring that this is happening within the project. The evaluation team worked closely alongside the project for the evaluation and the Horticultural Project Worker reported that they found that involvement with the evaluation

team provided them with a useful opportunity to reflect on the progress of the project.

Eastover Childcare Survey (Summer 2002)

- 3.17 A postal questionnaire was carried out during summer 2002 to assess current childcare provision and determine further childcare requirements within the Sure Start Bridgwater area. The response rate to the questionnaire was 53.1% (95/179). Two reminders were sent in order to ensure a good response rate.
- 3.18 The results of the questionnaire showed that was demand for a 40 place nursery with wrap around care in the Eastover area. The data collected was used to inform the planning for the Children's Centre which is now up and running in the Eastover area.

Hamp Childcare Survey (Autumn 2003)

- 3.19 Following on from the Eastover Childcare Survey in 2002, an opportunity to put in a proposal for a Children's Centre on Hamp became available. A similar postal questionnaire to that carried out in Eastover was therefore carried out in Hamp during summer 2003. This asked about childcare provision and requirements within the Hamp area. The questionnaire was sent to 326 households and the response rate to the questionnaire was 29%.
- 3.20 The results showed demand for 25 additional childcare places with wrap around care, in the Hamp area. The information provided by the evaluation showed not just the number of childcare places needed in Hamp, but the key factors to influence choice of childcare. The results of the study were used to inform and support the bid for a Children's Centre for Hamp.

Lessons Learnt (Autumn 2003)

- 3.21 This study documented and described the experiences of the Sure Start Bridgwater programme in implementing new and multi-agency ways of working. Thirty-six depth interviews were carried out with managers, front line staff and parents using the services of Sure Start Bridgwater.
- 3.22 The study showed that Sure Start Bridgwater has had a positive impact for a number of different areas including building the confidence of parents to access services, the provision of quality services, providing fast and accessible services and the style and ways of working.
- 3.23 The Sure Start Bridgwater building was found to play a key part in the success of the programme as it acts as a central building where informal networks can develop between staff and sharing of skills and expertise is encouraged as a result. It was also noted that a wide ranging and diverse workforce can raise issues that require careful management. For example, staff may need to compromise and negotiate over the best approach to take when dealing with families and children, and staff need to be clear about the

purpose of each others roles to ensure effective use of the resources and skills available to them.

- 3.24 The information collected by the study outlined the benefits of a multi-agency approach such as piloted by Sure Start Bridgwater. However it also highlights potential issues that need careful consideration in building a multi-disciplinary team. The programme has gained much knowledge and insight into working with multi-disciplinary teams since its launch as a trailblazer back in 2000. The lessons learned within the programme provide an excellent knowledge base to inform the development of the new locality teams that will be set up across Somerset.

Parent Training and Hard to Reach Families (Summer 2004 onwards)

- 3.25 As part of the Lessons Learnt study, it was noted that there were a number of families who suggested that they were aware of other families who chose not to use Sure Start Bridgwater services for a number of different reasons. Although attempts were made to seek out and find families with these types of opinions only small numbers were found. It was felt that this was an important area to follow up and as a result four parents were trained in interview skills so that they could find out more about reasons why parents may choose to use Sure Start Bridgwater services or not. Parents have worked through a number of different stages, interviewing those regularly attending groups, those that have attended once or twice but not returned, and finally interviewing those who have registered but never gone on to use a Sure Start Bridgwater group. It is hoped that the findings of this study when completed, will inform the local picture about how best to reach hard to reach families.

Speech and Language Screen (2004/2005)

A speech and language screen of children inside and outside of the Sure Start Bridgwater area has been taking place since Sept 2004. The study is assessing the speech and language scores of children within pre-schools at two different points in time. This will allow the project to see how far children have 'travelled' in terms of their speech and language development over a number of months. The children within the Sure Start area will receive additional support from staff within the Sure Start Bridgwater, whilst children outside of the Sure Start area will act as a control group. It is hoped that the information from this study will inform decision making about whether it would be appropriate to look at mainstreaming the support available to pre-schools inside the Sure Start Bridgwater area.

Evaluation and Support for Individual Staff/Teams (ongoing)

- 3.26 The evaluation team have been able to share knowledge and expertise regarding evaluation with members of staff within the programme. As such the evaluation team have supported a number of different staff within the programme to draft questionnaires, analyse data and report on results. The findings of these evaluations have been used as an ongoing reflective

practice tool so that staff can improve and reflect on the groups and services that they provide. In particular, this type of work has taken place with members of staff providing groups and services around breast feeding, post natal depression, behaviour support, and more recently with services provided by the Education team and the Father's Worker.

- 3.27 In addition, the team have been working towards evidencing and establishing outcomes for the work that is carried out by staff. A number of drop-in sessions have been provided so that staff can discuss appropriate ways in which they can evidence the work that they do. Although particular staff within the programme are very proactive about evidencing their work, and can suggest ways in which outcomes can be measured, many find it hard to give time to this area despite its increasing importance. The evaluation team is able to support the development of outcomes measures, but as a result of the volume of staff within the programme and other important areas of evaluation for the Sure Start Bridgwater programme, to date have been unable to progress this area of evaluation as far as they would like. The evaluation however will continue, throughout the next year, to build the 'evidence pot' for the programme in conjunction with staff.

What has enabled evaluation to work well?

- 3.28 A number of factors have enabled the evaluation to work well within Sure Start Bridgwater. The following elements have been beneficial in establishing evaluation in the Sure Start Bridgwater local programme.

- *Staff openness*
Staff have shown a willingness and interest in opening up their work to scrutiny and have supported the evaluation team in providing information and access to their work.
- *Local approach*
The evaluation team are based locally and therefore have a good insight into the work of the programme. This enables evaluation to be relevant, timely and well informed.
- *Evaluation as team members*
As team members of Sure Start Bridgwater, the purpose of evaluation is better understood than if the evaluation team were operating at a distance. Being team members helps in building rapport and trust especially when sensitive issues need to be raised or discussed with regard to evaluation undertaken.
- *Evaluation integral to the programme*
A member of the evaluation team attends the Management Group on a regular basis. This ensures that the focus of the evaluation work carried out within the programme is linked in carefully with relevant strategic issues. In addition, evaluation is able to feed in ideas and ensure that evaluation findings that have previously been collected can be highlighted where relevant with regard to decisions that the

Management Group need to make. Evaluation findings are presented back to the Management Group to inform progress and decision making. This provides an opportunity for staff to consider the findings in an interactive way, thereby increasing the likelihood that findings will be used.

3.29 Inevitably there are also a number of factors which prevent evaluation from reaching its full potential for the programme. These factors include:

- The challenge of establishing and measuring change over short periods of time.
- Lack of clarity and changing goalposts from the Sure Start Unit (e.g. around boundaries/targets etc).
- Difficulties in accessing meaningful secondary data on which to judge the progress of the programme.
- A reluctance at times by some staff to collect key information to inform monitoring and evaluation of the programme.
- A rapid drive for a change in the focus of evaluation from descriptive and process evaluation to an outcome focused approach from Sure Start Unit and NESS.
- Changing priorities for the Sure Start programme, leading to the need for a reactive and changing approach from evaluation often to tight deadlines.
- Lack of resources to carry out more in-depth and longer term studies to demonstrate the impact of the programme.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The evaluation that has been carried out on behalf of the Sure Start Bridgwater programme has been wide and varied and has covered a range of different types of work and activities that have taken place within the programme.
- 4.2 As a trailblazer programme, there has been a steep learning curve for staff and managers within the programme. Evaluation has played an important role in both guiding decisions made within the programme and contributing to the learning experience that has taken place within the programme since its launch.
- 4.3 The integration of evaluation into the programme has been a two way process. The evaluation team have been able to respond to the need for relevant and timely evaluation information, whilst the programme have been open to taking onboard the findings of evaluation in order to ensure that the programme can best meet the needs of parents and children.
- 4.4 The pace of change within Sure Start programmes has been rapid. The programme and the evaluation strategy will need to move and respond to the changes that are taking place. The programme now needs to focus on consolidating the evaluation information that it has built up since 2001 and consider how evaluation can best assist the programme with the new agenda that it faces in 2005 and beyond.