

The University of Sheffield
School of Education



**EVALUATION OF FIRTH PARK AND
SHIREGREEN SURE START PROGRAMME
March 2003 - August 2004**

FINAL REPORT

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Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers

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Workshop Participants

Sure Start programme staff, parents, Partnership Board representatives, Community Group representatives, SLA partners.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This report is the product of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start staff, SLA partners, Partnership Board members, community group representatives and local parents who have shared their expertise in order to make the evaluation as practically-based and useful as possible.

The report is organised as follows. **CHAPTER 1, THE RESEARCH** provides background to the evaluation and the research team's objectives. **CHAPTER 2, OUR APPROACH** briefly explores the background to the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme so that the focus of the evaluation can be fully understood, before moving on to establish the research team's approach to the project. In **CHAPTER 3, DESCRIPTION OF THE TEAM, PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES & SERVICES** is presented. **CHAPTER 4, KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**, explores the detail of the data we have collected linking 'Headline Findings' to national objectives and local issues. **CHAPTER 5** discusses **WAYS FORWARD FOR THE PROGRAMME** which is still relatively new and has clearly been experienced positively by many stakeholders. Action and Implementation Plans are provided to ensure there is something of importance to all stakeholders in the report that can be worked with to support the programme's continued development and help make a greater success of Sure Start.

CHAPTER ONE

The Research

Background to the Evaluation

- 1.1 Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start is one of eight Sure Start programmes in Sheffield which are part of the Government's strategy to improve health and social well-being, raise educational achievement and strengthen families and communities in the context of disadvantage. The programme is committed to promoting the best start in life for children under four through the integration of early education, childcare, health and family support.
- 1.2 Sure Start is described as a 'cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion' (<http://www.Sure Start.gov.uk>). Further context is provided by the Government's Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* which set out proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children and young people. Against this backdrop, Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start seeks to ensure that children and families in its local area have access to services, opportunities and practical support which can help to break cycles of disadvantage and improve the lives of all children. The programme is expected to contribute to initiatives in health, education, social and emotional development and community support which will have a major impact on the well-being and aspirations of young children, their families and the communities within its reach.

Requirements for Evaluation

- 1.3 Firth Park and Shiregreen is a Round 5 Sure Start programme. In common with all Sure Start programmes Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start is obliged to evaluate the service it provides. Therefore, in 2003 the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme committed itself to an evaluation to assist in planning further development of services and provide independent and objective feedback from the full range of stakeholders.
- 1.4 The Programme Manager for Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start became a key driver in setting up, and centrally involving Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start in a Combined Evaluation of Six Sheffield Sure Start programmes. At the end of 2002, Six Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers came together to constitute themselves as a community of Sure Start practitioners whose programmes would undergo parallel evaluation and shared development.
- 1.5 It was envisaged that evaluating Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start as part of a combined evaluation of six Sheffield Sure Start programmes would offer many advantages to the individual programme and to the city of Sheffield and its environs more widely. A combined evaluation would open up opportunities for forging new insights into the respective concerns of service providers, build awareness relevant to negotiation over the roles and responsibilities of various agencies in fulfilling the Sure Start delivery targets and move all stakeholders along the road to the reconfiguration of children's services. That the Programme Manager for Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start was willing to enter in to this process of open evaluation alongside other programmes, reflects the commitment to transparency that Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start has brought to working partnerships based in the community.
- 1.6 In March 2003 six Sheffield Sure Start programmes jointly commissioned Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn to undertake their evaluations through the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. The evaluation of Firth Park and Shiregreen was thus set alongside evaluations of five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes to bring added value to the process of individual programme evaluation by maximizing scope for mainstreaming good practice.

- 1.7 The emphasis on rolling out the principles driving the Sure Start approach to all services for young children and families tasks individual Sure Start programmes with a significant duty. Participation in the combined evaluation of Sheffield Sure Start programmes helps to ensure that Firth Park and Shiregreen is mindful of the extent to which it must meet the challenge of this work and locates a specific resource through which to support it.
- 1.8 It was agreed that the evaluation would take as a key objective an in depth focus on process and be designed to improve understanding and practice by building on the knowledge and experience of participants. The evaluation would be approached as a process of learning, not of inspection and the role of the evaluators was interpreted as to help those involved with Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start think through what they are doing.
- 1.9 This emphasis is complimented by the view of Naomi Eisenstadt, Director of the National Sure Start Unit, that Sure Start providers already know a great deal about what benefits children's development ~ what remains to be determined is how to pull together services and how to work together as a team in pursuit of this (Eisenstadt, 2004).
- 1.10 It was established that the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start evaluation would comprise a drawing together of work undertaken by the programme and a positioning in relation to challenges ahead.

Research Teams Objectives

- 1.11 Our objectives for specific evaluation of the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme were to:
- **evaluate the functioning of the programme in relation to Sure Start aims**
 - **engender open discussion** of concerns, tensions and anxieties which affect the work of the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme and make recommendations about how these may be usefully addressed

- **highlight good practice and develop thinking** in relation to possible directions in which the programme may move to accommodate new changes and operationalise the priorities it has established
- **consider strategies to promote inclusion** of groups the programme is finding 'hard to reach'
- **identify relevant training and new challenges** - and identify the role of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start in both acquiring training and providing it for different groups within the communities it serves
- **clarify who are the most appropriate people/agencies to develop particular aspects of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start's work**
- **promote collaborative and mutually beneficial evaluation practices.**

CHAPTER TWO

Our Approach

Recognising context

- 2.1 The Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Programme has grown considerably since its Delivery Plan was approved in August 2002. An original staff team of 10 has now expanded to one of 29 working to support over 1,000 children under the age of 4 and their families in the Firth Park and Shiregreen area. Census material estimates that 19% of these children are from black and ethnic minority communities.
- 2.2 A community survey undertaken in June 2002 demonstrated that improving childcare was a top priority for local families and this has been seen as an important determinant of the programmes work. Accordingly, as part of the Capital Development Plan, Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start contributes to the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative in Firth Park that will create 70 childcare places.
- 2.3 It is important to note that, as a Round 5 programme, Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start is in an early stage of its development. Its Partnership Board is 'young' and has already made impressive headway under the excellent guidance of the Joint Chairs. Similarly, a rapidly expanding staff team have had to adapt quickly to changing working relationships and re defined roles and responsibilities. Under the organised and strategic steer of the Programme Manager this has been achieved with considerable success.
- 2.4 There is an understanding in this programme that its evolution depends on its connections with a range of both statutory and voluntary services and it has not been easy for Sure Start as a new agency in the area to

forge these links. As the Annual Report (2004) reflects, the programme has made considerable progress in cementing its presence in the local community by working to the key Sure Start objectives in a manner which is sensitive and complimentary to existing provision.

- 2.5** What is unanimously agreed by all stakeholder groups, is that Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start has made an impressive start particularly in respect of establishing structures that will help meet, monitor and assess its own progress. There is very strong commitment to moving the programme forward in the service of local people. In this report, we feel it should be clear what steps must be taken to enable this to happen most effectively.

Research Process

- 2.6 We wished to conduct an evaluation based on transparent processes so that people could see the different perspectives of a range of stakeholders and understand how impressions are made and conclusions are drawn, in order to promote positive engagement with recommended processes of change. Like our research approach, this report is structured to further processes of engagement. Stakeholder perspectives are positioned alongside each other to show how taken for granted assumptions about particular practices are open to a range of interpretations. Action and Implementation Plans have been constructed to suggest practical steps that might usefully be taken on the basis of views put forward.
- 2.7 We use, in all of our work, a *partnership based action research approach* to both develop and implement a model of participation which aims to be of use to all those involved in the research process. The principle methodological tool chosen in consultation with the Programme Manager was the *Process Evaluation Method [PEM]* (Dunn and Moore, 2003), which places emphasis on enabling open dialogue of issues prioritized by participants, including informal, covert and contested issues which often militate against developing inclusive practice. In this way we set out to engender cross stakeholder debate in order to help promote change and accelerate the Sure Start agenda of supporting children, parents and communities through the integration of early education, child care, health and family support services.
- 2.8 This way of working often throws up more than the data one is aiming to get at. For example, criticism of the programme on one hand is complemented by numerous expressions of gratitude and admiration for the efforts and practices of particular agencies, individual staff and workers on the front line of service delivery. The data reported is therefore most usefully engaged with in a discursive way - with a view to thinking about how further opportunities can be created for the views of different stakeholders to be brought into open debate.

Phase One - Setting Up

- 2.9 Throughout the Project our main link has been with the Programme Manager for Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start who briefed us on the scope and aspirations for the work and facilitated the participation of Sure Start stakeholders in this study. The Programme Manager and administrative staff acted as liaison and provided us with all relevant background information to the project. We have very much appreciated their conscientious and thorough work.
- 2.10 In addition we have attended regular meetings with Programme Managers from seven Sheffield Sure Start programmes to keep abreast of citywide issues as reported and experienced by Programme Managers that have a bearing on evaluation issues.

Phase Two - Information Gathering

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

- 2.11 We undertook a documentary analysis of written materials relating to the programme including the *Delivery Plan the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Annual Report(2004-2005)*, *The Parent Involvement and Evaluation Strategy*, Risk Assessment information and working documents which the Programme Manager felt it appropriate for us to look at. In addition, the *Sheffield Sure Start Mainstreaming Services* document (Davies 2003) has helped us to locate the programmes work within the context of the national early years agenda. Analysis of all of this information was used to build up a background picture of the programme's work and to help us formulate questions to be asked at data gathering workshops.

SETTING AN AGENDA

- 2.12 An initial interview was held with the Programme Manager, who as the key person involved in the development of the programme provided an overview from her perspective. On the basis of this preliminary meeting we then constructed and agreed a workable, realistic agenda for information gathering that would add value to practice as it unravels and make transparent all aspects of the process, including our emergent thinking.

EVALUATION WORKSHOPS - PROCESS EVALUATION METHOD

- 2.13** For four key stakeholder groups the central data gathering exercises conducted took the form of exploratory workshops designed to take stock of their perspectives. Groups involved in exploratory workshops were
- Programme Staff
 - SLA partners
 - Partnership Board Members
 - Community Group organizations (city-wide)
- 2.14** The Programme Manager was tasked with identifying named individuals to participate in workshops for each of the stakeholder groups. All programme staff were invited to attend the Staff Group workshop. Although the Programme Manager recognized the importance of encouraging attendance at workshops, and stressed the importance of evaluation for the programme, optimum participation was not always possible. Those who could not attend workshops had their comments given consideration and factored into our analysis when these were either put in writing or communicated directly to the Research or programme team.
- 2.15** The aim of workshops was to encourage stakeholders to self assess, in broad terms, ways in which from their perspective the Firth Park and Shiregreen programme meets user and potential user needs. Participants were asked to explore what works well in their view in relation to delivery of services and what might be needed to develop and enhance the programme's functioning in the future. We also talked to people individually during workshops if they wished, to provide an opportunity for individual perspectives from 'within stakeholder groups' to come forward.
- 2.16** We found across the city that community group representatives had difficulties meeting together and were not available in sufficient numbers to participate in programme specific workshops. We therefore invited representatives of 41 community groups identified either by Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start staff as working locally, or by Voluntary Action Sheffield as working with families with young children across the city, to an evaluation workshop designed to gather the views

of community groups on their relations with, and aspirations for, Sure Start in Sheffield. We extracted points of relevance to the Firth Park and Shiregreen programme from this information.

- 2.17** An initial working document was compiled to outline and review the perspectives gathered from each stakeholder group. This was circulated to all contributors who were invited to feedback on any matters of accuracy or interest. Account was then taken of numerous, often detailed written and oral submissions from respondents giving feedback or providing further information.
- 2.18** A compilation document was then produced which was, as far as possible agreed by all contributors, to give a fair and accurate account of discussions held with each stakeholder group. Agreed summaries for each group were collated into a single publication, along with additional data on parent perspectives, (see below) and circulated across the groups to enable each of the different stakeholder groups to gain insight into the perspectives of others. The compilation of different perspectives on the programme was then used as the focus of a workshop for representatives from all of the contributing stakeholder groups who came together to discuss key issues arising.
- 2.19** This event, called the 'Mixed Stakeholder Workshop', allowed for responses to the data emerging from different viewpoints to be shared with a view to maximizing collective thinking on the development of the programme. Our objective was to develop a future agenda for the programme based on the emergent and collective priorities of those who contributed to the evaluation.
- 2.20** The workshop structure was also intended to ensure that those who have taken part in the evaluation process are supported in their capacity to respond to what is learnt from each other.

PICKING UP PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS

- 2.21** Following the lead from the national Sure Start evaluation team our work with parents was designed to focus on how parents feel about involvement with the programme, how convenient Sure Start services are for parents in the area, any barriers preventing parents accessing services and how satisfied parents are with the services they use.

- 2.22** To gather this information in ways that would be easy and comfortable for parents, the Parental Involvement Workers were consulted to identify activities a roving researcher could attend to observe and talk with parents. The focal activities chosen for Firth Park and Shiregreen were :
- Play & Stay session at the Centre for Life,
 - Firth Park; Hartley Tots (*not actually a Sure Start session although Sure Start initially put some money in to buy toys and equipment - nevertheless firmly identified by parents as Sure Start related*)
 - Firth Park Home Visits
- 2.23** Getting alongside parents in their everyday encounters with Sure Start turned out to be hugely informative, offering many more benefits from research enquiry than we had imagined. A spin-off of the contact between parents and the roving researcher has been that many parents we met indicated that 'next time' they might feel confident enough to be actively engaged in producing 'Sure Start snapshots' themselves and in developing their role as community researchers for subsequent evaluations.
- 2.24** As a direct result of the Programme Manager's commitment to an open process of evaluation and to mainstreaming good practice, we have been able to produce a Training Resource, based on the data collected alongside parents, over and above the requirements of our original tender document (see Annex). This resource entitled 'Maximising Inclusion in Sure Start' provides 'snapshots' of everyday practice in the delivery of Sure Start activities drawn from across the six programmes looking at delivery issues together as part of the process of shared evaluation. We have presented this data separately, in descriptive format, in order to try to give readers - in as brief a space as possible - a feel for what delivery of a Sheffield Sure Start programme is actually like and to illustrate a variety of approaches to working towards Sure Start objectives and promoting participation and involvement. The material is drawn partly, but not exclusively, from Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start and identifies many issues of central concern to the programme. The Training Resource can be used to engender further self assessment of programme's delivery. Data which relates specifically to activities delivered by Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start has been incorporated into our analysis.

TELEPHONE SURVEY WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS

- 2.30 To compliment data obtained through the city-wide consultation with community organisations, a local telephone survey was conducted to gather perspectives of community group representatives operating in the Firth Park and Shiregreen area. Working in partnership with the programme, a list was drawn up of local groups in the Firth Park and Shiregreen area. In total 18 groups were identified, including local toddler groups and pre-school providers. Each of these was contacted by a member of the research team in order to set up a telephone interview. In some instances there was no response to the initial telephone call, in these cases, a further two attempts were made to access views. In total 12 groups were consulted by telephone. . The remaining groups provided a valuable insight into the interaction between Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start and local community organisations.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA ON THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

- 2.31 A postal questionnaire was distributed to Partnership Board members to elicit individual perspectives on partnership working in the programme. In addition, a Partnership Board meeting was observed. In order to explore in further detail the elements of parent participation, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents from the Board.

OTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- 2.32 In addition supplementary interviews were conducted in response to specific requests and when Research Directors felt it appropriate to explore particular view or opinion.
- 2.33 To further supplement the data, Research Team members attended programme activities by invitation and appraised documentation provided by the programme. We attended Regional Evaluation Workshops and Sure Start Conferences in Sheffield, York and London for further background.

MAINSTREAMING ACTIVITIES

- 2.34 The Programme Manager was invited to take part in four additional research workshops aimed at making connections between issues raised by the data within the Firth Park and Shiregreen programme and issues raised across the five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes

participating in the Combined Evaluation. These 'Air and Share' workshops for Programme Managers focused on:

- issues raised by programme staff
- issues raised by SLA partners
- issues raised by Partnership Board members and
- issues concerning parents.

- 2.35 The aims of the city wide Air and Share sessions were to
- identify common areas for development
 - develop awareness of obstacles to making a greater success of Sure Start which might persist for structural reasons rather than programme specific ones
 - explore possibilities for Programme Managers of evolving a shared response to emergent issues where appropriate and
 - initiate first stage development work around mainstreaming activities and good practice.

These activities have also been analyzed in terms of new avenues they offer the programme.

QUALITATIVE DATA

- 2.36 It is important to note that the methodology on which the majority of data gathering has been based is a qualitative one. This means we have been interested to understand people's experiences of how the programme works from their necessarily subjective positions in order to bring these into relation with each other. Qualitative method does not however mean that data collected around individual views is not interrogated and 'triangulated' against those of others. We have used Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1998; Moore 2004) as a well-established method of ensuring that ideas and recommendations which we develop and make *emerge from*, and are *grounded in*, what Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start stakeholders sa, perceive and experience.
- 2.37 We knew that due to the newness of the programme, its systems for gathering quantitative data were in their infancy as this evaluation began to get underway and that quantitative data available to the evaluators would be embryonic at best. We therefore decided to prioritize a focus on the way that the programme is perceived and valued by those involved and to address issues surrounding the production of quantitative data as part of this process.

PARTICIPANTS

- 2.38 More than 50 stakeholders made sustained and in-depth contributions to this evaluation over an eighteen-month period. Many others were involved in a less intensive way and we wish to acknowledge and thank everyone who participated in the evaluation process for their constructive and committed approach to this enquiry. All stakeholders made us welcome and gave of their time in a thoughtful and open way. They were considerate of each other's views and perspectives and raised matters of concern in a positive and respectful manner which has enabled us to gather a wealth of information. Some difficult issues surfaced but were always appropriately attached to deeply held values and very real concerns about the quality and impact of the programme.
- 2.39 We have been impressed by a strong sense of shared commitment to getting 'best value' from the evaluation of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start. We have been particularly impressed by the willingness of the Programme Manager to be responsive to issues raised throughout the course of the evaluation.
- 2.40 Given the limited time and resources available, it was not possible for us to talk with everyone we would have liked to nor indeed to meet with everyone who wished to meet us.

Report Production

- 2.41 It was established that work undertaken would lead to a report with recommendations for the future development of the programme and suggestions for improvement in its current functioning and remit.
- 2.42 This document comprises our **Final Report** on the evaluation. In June we presented our analysis of Headline Findings to a mixed group of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start stakeholder and took feedback. In August 2004 we delivered a Draft Report to the Programme Manager ... for feedback on matters of clarity and technical accuracy of the draft report. This final report takes full account of feedback received on the Draft Report.

CHAPTER THREE

Describing the Programmes Work

- 3.1 This chapter outlines the nature of the Sure Start team operating in Firth Park and Shiregreen and the range of activities they and partner agencies are involved in providing. Information is given to describe to the best of our knowledge each of the services delivered by the programme as the evaluation draws to a close in August 2004. This helps to illustrate how the programme seeks to work towards Sure Start objectives.

- 3.2 It should be noted that the nature and scope of activities in any Sure Start programme is likely to be continually evolving, so this chapter also details planned future activities as far as these are known. Again, as the programme must be flexible to meet local needs, the activities detailed in this chapter will change and be adapted as new interests evolve and new groups of people develop their links with the programme.

THE FIRTH PARK AND SHIREGREEN SURE START PROGRAMME

The Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Team

The programme is delivered by a group of professionals to cover a number of specialisms; early years, family support, health, parental involvement and management and administration. These members of staff are grouped within teams (Core Team, Early Years Team and Health and Outreach Team). At the time of writing this evaluation (July 2004) the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start team consisted of the posts outlined below. All posts are full time and occupied by women unless otherwise stated.

PROGRAMME MANAGER

CORE TEAM

- Part-time Monitoring Officer
- Information Officer
- Admin Manager
- Finance Officer
- Admin Assistant
- 2 Part-time Admin Assistants

EARLY YEARS TEAM

- Early Years Development Manager
- Early Years Team Leader
- 3 Part-time Crèche Workers
- 3 Play Development Workers
- Part-time Crèche/Toy Library Worker
- Training Co-ordinator
- 2 Parent Involvement Workers

HEALTH AND OUTREACH TEAM

- Health & Outreach Manager
- 2 Part-time Midwives
- Family Resource Team Leader
- 1 Family Resource Worker
- 1 Part-time Family Resource Worker
- 2 Part-time Family Resource Assistants

PROPOSED FUTURE POSTS

- Early Literacy Worker
- Mobile Toy Library Worker
- Volunteer Co-ordinator (working with volunteers, community researchers and 'Apprentices')
- Male Family Resource Worker

Activities and services offered through Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start

These are described under the following headings; health, early years, parental involvement, supporting families and communities, and accessing 'hard to reach' parents and carers. In practice, many of the services cut across more than one of the categories and so they may appear more than once in the list below.

HEALTH ACTIVITIES

Breastfeeding Volunteer Training - Funded by Sure Start, delivered in partnership with North Sheffield PCT. Free of charge.

Individual Breastfeeding Support - Funded and delivered by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Infant Massage - Baby massage course held at Hartley Brook School. Nine parents with babies attended. 4 crèche places for older siblings were provided. Also baby massage demonstrations and promotion with local health visitors and parents/carers who attend a local child clinic. Funded and delivered by Sure Start in partnership with other agencies. Free of charge.

Teenage Parents and Mums-to-be - Ante- and Post-natal support and information. Funded and delivered by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Aquanatal Classes - Ante- and Post-natal support and information. Funded and delivered by Sure Start, in partnership with Concord Sports Centre. Concord charge £1 for those in the programme area, £3 for those living out of the area.

Post-natal Support Group - Funded and delivered by Sure Start in partnership with North Sheffield PCT. Free of charge.

Smoking Cessation - Work with individuals undertaken by Sure Start midwives. Funded by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Individual Support to Families - Funded by Sure Start, delivered in partnership with other agencies.

Home Safety - Safety equipment supplied and fitted. Subsidised by Sure Start, service delivered by Cot-age. Parent contribution of £6.

Health & Outreach Forum - Networking and service development group. Led by Sure Start, working in partnership with other agencies.

Community Clinic - Led by Health Visitors in partnership with Sure Start and other agencies. Free of charge.

EARLY YEARS ACTIVITIES

Parenting Skills - Delivered by C'mon Everybody. Funded by Sure Start. Creche service offered by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Stubbin Toddlers - Open Play and Family Support session. Funded and delivered by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Stay and Play - Offered weekly, sessions available to parents/carers to come along and play together. Delivered and funded by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Play and Say - Weekly speech and language activity sessions that take place within a toddler group environment. There is a twenty minute therapist session within each two-hour toddler group session. This six week programme has recently been extended to 12 weeks due to high level of demand for the service. Funded by Sure Start, delivered in partnership with Speech and Language Therapy service.

Make and Take - Two-hour session run by the Play Development Team, focusing on parents/carers' interaction with their children. An activity and discussion group. Funded and delivered by Sure Start. Free of charge.

Toy Library - Runs within Firth Park Library. 2-hour session available. Activity, story and loan service every week. Service in its very early days at time of going to print. Aim is to deliver sessions and offer parents/carers the chance to loan good quality learning resources for a nominal fee.

Crèche Sessions - 'Drop-off' 2-hour sessions booked by parents/carers. Subsidised by Sure Start Charge £2 per session.

Children's Clinic - Childcare service offered for parents/carers for older or younger children while parents see health visitor or advice worker

Community Based Crèches - Offered by Play Development Workers to facilitate specific groups, for example, teenage parents group, La Leche training, community training groups, school nurse training sessions, family support training sessions.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Home Visits - To register/inform families re Sure Start

Trips and Events - Organised by the Parental Involvement Workers (e.g. The Deep, Eureka, Tropical Butterfly and Wildlife Centre)

Parental Involvement Workers (PIWs) - PIWs follow up families who are registered but have not participated in Sure Start activities, support parents who are accessing services for the first time, and also support parents on the volunteer programme and Partnership Board

Parents Group - Feedback meetings for parents and carers, e.g. there was a recent meeting focused on volunteering that was well-attended.

Partnership Board/Childminders Meeting/Training Opportunities - These sessions are offered on an 'as and when needed and available' basis. The childminders meet every second Thursday each month and a crèche is provided by Sure Start.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Outreach Service - Family support services delivered by the Family Resource Team to deliver one to one support and group work. One worker is fluent in Urdu. The programme also provides some respite care for families that are being supported by the Family Resource Team, in the form of childcare provision within Sure Start or local child minders.

Home Start - Befriending service offered to individual families by trained volunteers. Funded by Sure Start, training delivered by Home Start. Free of charge.

Advice and Benefits Support - Funded by Sure Start, delivered by Firth Park Advice Centre. Free of charge.

Domestic Abuse Support - Funded by Sure Start, delivered in partnership with Parson Cross Domestic Abuse Project. Free of charge.

C'mon Everybody Support with parenting. Fifteen week courses delivered across the programme area. Free of charge.

Credit Union Awareness Training - This is currently being developed in conjunction with Firth Park Credit Union.

Holiday Play Schemes - In the six week holiday period the programme provides 3 sessions per week out of Sure Start buildings - community based activities for children aged 0-6 years, but older children are accommodated too. Centre for Life base open throughout the holiday period every day from 10-2 pm. Offers Play and Stay sessions for children 0-4 (again, older siblings will be accommodated). Trips organised (e.g. Sundown/Millennium Galleries) and partnership working with outside agencies (e.g. Park Rangers, Fire Service).

HARD TO REACH GROUPS

The following activities are offered to target 'hard to reach' parents and carers:

SAVTE - Sheffield Association of Voluntary Teachers of English group. ESOL classes. Delivered by SAVTE, crèche provided by Sure Start in the Centre for Life base.

Support to teenage parents - through individual support and group work (Young Mums Group) in the local Connexions building. Led by Sure Start midwives with Family Resource Team. A programme of activities is planned, including work around self-esteem, crafts, parenting and trips.

One-to-one support - Around parenting, welfare and benefits advice, and targeted services e.g. specialist support for those affected by domestic abuse. One worker is fluent in Urdu

Saheli (Asian Mums Group) - Targeted support group and interactive play session set up to meet expressed local needs. Crèche service offered in partnership with Family Resource Team. Meets weekly. Funded and delivered by Sure Start. Free of charge.

PACES - Earlier in the year Sure Start and PACES (a citywide organisation for children with special needs) jointly organised 2 very successful events for parents where parents were given the opportunity to talk and share experiences. Further workshops are planned to build networks of support.

SLA partners

Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start have Service Level Agreements with the following partners:

- **Home Start**
Befriending service offered to individual families by trained volunteers. Funded by Sure Start, training delivered by Home Start. Free of charge.
- **Social Services**
Part time Family support development worker. Linking work with Sure Start family resource team and Shiregreen Young children's centre.
- **Cot-age**
Safety equipment supplied and fitted. Subsidised by Sure Start, service delivered by Cot-age. Parent contribution of £6.
- **Firth Park Advice Centre**
Advice and benefits support. Includes home visits and attendance at Sure Start activities/events.
- **Speech and Language Therapy**
Speech and Language Service working in partnership with Sure Start . Individual therapy sessions including triage and referral to audiology service. Cascading training to Sure Start workers, local nursery schools and playgroups accompanied by 'Tool Kit'. Training provided for parents through Play and Say sessions and includes resource pack. All provided free of charge.
- **Parson Cross Domestic Abuse Project**
Specialist support on a one to one basis. Funded in partnership with two other Sure Start programmes.

Costs and Resourcing March 2004 - March 2005

Budget- by Teams and Activities

Management and Admin	£162,523.57
Development/Evaluation	£106,612.58
Building/Occupation	£71,408.10
Outreach and Home Visiting	£147,518.89
Community Health Care	£94,671.48
Parents and families	£90,056.98
Play, Learning and Childcare	£220,208.41
	£893,000.01

Planned future activities

- Toy Library sessions and activities
- Children's physical activity groups
- Relationship Play Sessions
- Develop Family Learning strategy. PEEP training is planned for September for the Early Years and Family Resource team. (PEEP is Parents as Early Educators Programme). Then PEEP sessions will be provided locally at existing toddler groups.
- Childminder support - meetings and activity sessions
- Developing and strengthening links with local nurseries, schools and community organisations, for example, outreach work with Concorde Leisure Centre (working to engage women into physical activities. Sure Start to provide a crèche service twice weekly for 2 hours).
- Extension of Play and Family Support drop-in sessions
- New Monday morning Toddler Group to be set up at Shiregreen Neighbourhood Centre, by the Play Development Team in September. The plan is to engage with the local community to take over the running of the group, and to duplicate this process at Hinde House School where the toddler group would act as a feeder group for the Nursery in the school.
- Additional SAVTE group to meet in First Start (there is already a waiting list for this group). The programme offers crèche facilities free of charge.
- Dads' Group - involvement of dads in their child's development
- Drugs and Alcohol support group in partnership with Drugs and Alcohol Team
- Domestic Abuse support group

- In conjunction with PACES provide a support group with families with children with disabilities.
- Allotment project in partnership with other organizations
- Healthy Eating and weaning led by '5 a day' Project worker
- Cook and Eat sessions led by '5 a day' Project worker
- Breastfeeding Café in First Start building to be opened in September 2004
- Evening Ante-natal classes, delivered by Sure Start in partnership with health professionals
- Maternal Mental Health support, in partnership with the Maternal Mental Health Project
- Childcare training for parents and carers
- Development of volunteer programme and training for volunteers that will lead on to further education or employment
- Partnership working with other local Sure Start programmes to develop CD Rom training too
- Deliver Community Research Training for local parents/carers (Participatory Appraisal)
- Offering help and support with training and career advice with input from Jobcentre Plus and New Futures

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary analysis of stakeholder perspectives

- 4.1 This section presents a thematically organized drawing together of the data that shaped the development and key messages of the report. What can be seen from our analysis of the data collected from various stakeholder groups is that key themes emerge, albeit often with different emphasis, which have a bearing on the programme's progress to date in meeting long-term Sure Start objectives. Sometimes these present as consensus or as debate that is constructively underway between groups. At other times they reveal conflicts and possible tensions between different groups and in relation to constraints groups experience.
- 4.2 Within the thematic discussion reference is made to the four Core Sure Start Objectives, plus an important fifth dimension:
1. Improving social and emotional development
 2. Improving health
 3. Improving young children's ability to learn
 4. Strengthening families and communities
 5. Mainstreaming
- 4.3 In the context of Sheffield Sure Start programmes 'mainstreaming' is interpreted as transferring policy lessons, securing funding to continue particular activities, ensuring that mainstream agencies adapt and reproduce examples of good practice
- 4.4 Thematically focused feedback is intended to provide the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme with the following:

- a comprehensive mapping of issues uppermost in the minds of all stakeholder groups currently involved with the programme
- evidence of good practice in the programme's work
- suggestions and guidance on where attention needs to be paid in thinking about future programme developments and delivery
- material which can be used to engender further self assessment of services
- a document which can be used by the programme to evidence to all stakeholder groups how it currently works towards each of the Sure Start long-term objectives and its plan for development in relation to them, and
- a snap-shot which the programme can be 'measured against' in terms of its own development as a key player in Children's Centre Planning

4.5 In addition, in accordance with our original tender document, in Chapter 5 of this final report we have put together **Action and Implementation Plans** for each of the Stakeholder domains we have worked with. These include our suggestions for training, support and development within each area. They set out in simple terms the actions we feel at this stage in the evaluation each stakeholder group could usefully prioritize and progress in order to play its part in facilitating the growth and success of Firth Park and Shiregreen in making life better for children, parents and communities in the area.

4.6 Some of the Sure Start work we have witnessed in Firth Park and Shiregreen is immensely powerful in challenging understanding of what is involved in delivering local programmes. The programme faces many challenges to 'get it right' and our analysis of contrasting stakeholder perspectives identifies areas of provision where good practice is seen and also areas where improvements could be made, to encourage reflection on and re- conceptualisation of, current thinking and practice.

4.7 It is important to make clear at this point that, in line with the rationale for the qualitative approach to our work which we outline earlier, we are not making our recommendations on the basis of the imposition of arbitrary external judgments but on the basis of what we were told or shown by service users, providers and partners in workshops, interviews and observed settings. The issues we are representing are firmly 'grounded' in the data we collected throughout the report.

4.8 Discussion of the data is based around the following emergent themes:

Monitoring and evaluation

Involving Parents

Developing a Community Presence

Accountability

Mainstreaming

- 4.9** Findings which emerged from our analysis of the data we collected are presented firstly as '**Headline Findings**' in respect of what we learned from key stakeholders. There then follows a more detailed discussion of findings under which we integrate the perspectives of different sets of stakeholders in relation to the key Sure Start principles. What is evident is that there are some areas of clear convergence - where all sets of stakeholders agree on particular difficulties or strategies for improvement. Other experiences and impressions of the functioning of the programme are clearly at odds and need careful consideration if maximum benefit is to be gained from this report.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

- o The programme has developed an excellent working group structure which has made a key impact on good practice in stakeholder involvement and participation in decision making and strategic planning
- o The programme has good, practically based working systems in place that facilitate its work well and engender clarity and transparency in relation to programme processes and outputs.
- o There is considerable evidence to demonstrate a good understanding throughout the programme of key Sure Start objectives and targets and how these are being met
- o Local parents are involved in the programmes work at all levels and monitoring and nurture of this involvement is a programme strength.
- o Interface with community groups and those providing Service Level Agreements works generally well although some issues of communication need further attention.
- o Community groups and other agencies seek closer contact with Sure Start and stress the importance of relevant accessible information about the work of the programme. They offer ideas on good practice in working together which could usefully help the programme to extend its reach into the community.
- o Communication with local groups in respect of factors 'not in the programmes control' but which it will nevertheless be held to account for needs attention.
- o Clarity is needed about the precise role and remit of the accountable body in order for best value for the programme to be derived from relationship with it.
- o This programme works extremely well in the context of change. The Programme Manager leads strategically and has demonstrated willingness to engage in citywide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services. This programme needs further opportunities to contribute to city wide strategic planning.

The data which has informed these findings is now explored.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- o The programme has developed an excellent working group structure which has made a key impact on good practice in stakeholder involvement and participation in decision making and strategic planning.
 - o The programme has good, practically based working systems in place that facilitate its work well and engender clarity and transparency in relation to programme processes and outputs.
 - o There is considerable evidence to demonstrate a good understanding throughout the programme of key Sure Start objectives and targets and how these are being met.
- 4.10 How Sure Start staff monitor their success at meeting the targets they are required to meet - and what works well and not so well in relation to this is the core business of any evaluation. We have taken a very process led approach to this in our work with all stakeholders as we are mindful of the many Sure Start evaluation reports already in the public domain that simply state that 'monitoring is problematic' or show by presentation of statistical material that monitoring is in place in relation to targets - but provide little information of how this is happening and little exploration of experience for others to learn from.
- 4.11 We worked from the baseline, that any casually interested observer of Sure Start as it has run out over the past five years can confirm, namely that monitoring is experienced by the vast majority of Sure Start staff and agencies at all levels as difficult in terms of:
- Collecting data
 - Analyzing what that data means
 - Interpreting it and acting on the results in manner which adds value to practice on the ground.
- 4.12 As a way of looking at practice in relation to all of the above in respect to targets which the programme is working towards and at the same time helping to positively input to capacity to 'do' all of these things we have, in our discussions with all stakeholders looked to elicit;

- their perspectives on what they need to monitor and evaluate - and why
- what helps in this process?
- what hinders?

What follows is a summary of our findings in relation to where the programme is at in getting to grips with monitoring and evaluation and what could usefully be done to improve processes

- 4.13 The programme convenes five Working Groups that meet monthly to work on the following specific issues :
- childcare
 - health and well being
 - strengthening families and community
 - capital projects
 - quality assurance and evaluation
- 4.14 It is clear that working groups greatly assist communication and information sharing. They feed into the Partnership Board to facilitate wider participation among local agencies and individuals in shaping the programme. The minutes of each group are put together in one document and sent out to all working group members. This system enables members of each working group to know what the others are doing. In addition, the minutes inform the working of the Partnership Board and these systems helpfully promote open and transparent working practices. These groups are dynamic and change and adapt as programme priorities change. for example, the 'Strengthening Families and Community' group membership has changed and they now have a new training co-ordinator. This working group had been 'revisited' and they are just in the process of finalising a new strategy/delivery plan.
- 4.15 There is good evidence that this Sure Start Programme takes seriously the importance of monitoring and evaluating progress in all areas. Good, practical and workable systems of 'keeping aware and on top of' the direction which various aspects of work are going in have been developed. Innovative methods of collecting and recording information are in everyday use. What is particularly impressive here is the efforts which have been made by staff to make sure they understand the processes of monitoring and evaluation, and to make these their own by trying out methods which suit their own working practices and are straightforward to communicate.

- 4.16 An example of this may be seen in the extent to which the delivery plan is made good use of across the programme as a working document. As already mentioned, Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start make excellent use of a system of working groups to monitor and evaluate the progress they make in a variety of areas. As outlined below, a key task of each working group is to consider the objectives they are working to in light of the delivery plan:

Given that delivery plans are written by people who probably will never ever have to implement them, they're often a bit optimistic or nebulous. So, what we're currently doing is asking all the working groups to go through the delivery plan with the objectives that they work to, look at them and say, "Have we done it? Why haven't we done it? Do we still need to be doing it? How do we put it into this year? Are we going to do what we say we're going to do this year?" And kind of just re-write it, so that this year we will have a fairly accurate delivery plan saying, "This is what's been done. This is what needs to be done." It's more like an action plan.

- 4.17 This approach has many advantages in our view and could usefully be adapted and learned from by other Sure Start Programmes. It familiarises a wide group of stakeholders with the delivery plan, allows them agency in reflecting on the work they are doing in the light of key objectives and feeds into an informed process of action planning.

Monitoring parental involvement

- 4.18 The process of registering family's contact with Sure Start Programmes is notoriously complex. The pressures of wanting to secure involvement and sustain contact with parents and children needs to be balanced against 'putting off' those who are interested in participating but who may react negatively to feeling they are being 'recruited'. The team at Firth Park and Shiregreen have developed a multi layered system of monitoring and follow up of parental interest in the programme which has the characteristic trade mark of simplifying tasks which need to be carried out to meet the needs of those who use them:

We made up a system which was to make sure that everybody - not just us, but the SLA's and all other agencies- knew exactly what form to fill in when they took a phone call or if they had

any contact with somebody and where to put it, so that we'd capture the information in the way we need to.

- 4.19 Where it was felt it would be appropriate, proactive requests for registration have been made, people have been transported to particular events and welcome packs developed to mark the process of formally registering with the Programme:

Then we wrote a letter to invite people to Parents Voice and to invite them to register fully if they hadn't done so already and get their welcome packs and we also took them to events. If they attend then they'd be registered if they're not already and then they go onto the data base which means that they will be kept informed on a regular basis and therefore we're less likely to lose them.

- 4.20 Allowing 'expression of interest' as a different but interlinked process to registration has provided the team with a useful way of monitoring and evaluating the different reasons people in the community have for attending or not attending Sure Start events and making use of Sure Start services. This demonstrates sensitivity to issues of participation alongside determination to involve as many people as possible in Sure Start activities in a variety of ways

If they filled an expression of interest form or they've spoken on the phone or they've had contact with people then we'd try and invite them to Parents Voice. If they don't attend, the parent involvement workers follow them up and give them a phone call. We just have a chat and say, "Is there a reason why you didn't attend? Would it be handier if it was a different day?" or, "Is it not the kind of thing you want to come to?" The point of this is that if they don't attend Parents Voice, they're not going to be lost - we can let them be part of things in a different way.

- 4.21 In order to keep contact with fathers, and to maximise their opportunities for involvement in the programme, the parental involvement worker phones all those on the parents list before each event to see if they are coming and also afterwards, to make sure they enjoyed it or to find out why they did not come. The one to one phone call makes all the difference and is part of the relationship-building with fathers in the local community.

- 4.22 Thus there is evidence of a continuous process of evaluation and reflection- not only formalised within the working groups - but on an ongoing, everyday basis. This takes the form of identifying the barriers to participation by making contact with different individuals and groups after an event and saying, "We noticed you didn't come. Is it in the wrong place or the wrong time?"

Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of Service Level Agreements

- 4.23 The Programme team monitors the effectiveness of the various service level agreements through the quarterly review process and through ensuring that the newly introduced 'team brief' reaches all SLA providers to help keep them on track. Every partner is invited to the relevant team meetings and since June 2004 bi-monthly team meetings have been instigated which each team will take it in turns to host. This is designed to include partners and keep people informed of work in progress. When a particular provider was struggling to deliver programme staff produced a SLA summary which noted what was working well in respect of this particular SLA and what was proving challenging in order to focus discussion and keep a record of the monitoring process.
- 4.24 Stakeholders - from diverse groups - report that broadly speaking they are kept well informed of the programmes work and developments. Minutes of working groups are effectively circulated, and this means that a variety of organisations are kept in the picture. In general referral processes work well both informally and formally. What these processes demonstrate, is that mechanisms are in place for feedback on work in progress to be acted upon and developed, and for connections to be made between one aspect of work and another. Such 'tracking' of information will in our view contribute to the sustainability of the work undertaken by this team and provides a useful model that others can learn from.
- 4.25 An area the programme recognises needs further work is that which relates to explaining in more detail the expectations that Sure Start has of its partners in terms of monitoring. Community group and SLA stake holders pointed that local groups sometimes do not understand *why* they have to monitor their work in so much detail and this can impact on their ability to work successfully with Sure Start.

I think Sure Start should talk more with local groups about what is expected in terms of monitoring. I think some groups who have

worked successfully in the community and have been established for some time find it hard to work with Sure Start as they are not used to working in the same way as Sure Start.

Also as a small provider with an SLA with the programme pointed out

Rae - for a small organisation it is difficult getting information and we don't necessarily have the processes to support it.

- 4.26 Issues such as these pose working tensions for the programme which is required to collect information for the auditing department of the accountable body. Some stakeholders asserted that Sure Start have to resist this and explain to the accountable body that this is not always possible. The Programme Manager has taken note of these concerns and is working to get auditing information broken down into activity areas. This is probably more relevant for programmes that have NCH as Accountable Body.

Accessing and using baseline data

- 4.27 Overall, difficulties obtaining baseline data restrict the scope of the work of the programme. In recognition of the fact that this is not an issue peculiar to Firth Park and Shiregreen, the programme manager is working to get a protocol agreed with Primary Care Trusts across the city relating to the access and use of necessary baseline data. Within the locality it is hoped that the health and outreach forum will contribute to an ease of flow of information by creating an environment conducive to partnership working. However, the programme also recognises that even the most positive partnership working cannot manoeuvre around the data protection restrictions imposed by current legislation such as the Human Rights Act.
- 4.28 Although the Sure Start Unit has assisted the programme in obtaining some basic missing data there are still difficulties in accessing important data relating to health - for example, around smoking cessation and breastfeeding. The team here have been proactive in pursuing the data they need - meeting with the Caldicott City Wide co-ordinator in order to come up with a protocol that will ensure that the programme can actually get the information it needs.
- 4.29 Whilst there are few problems within this programme in respect of getting referrals, getting referral *information* remains a significant problem. Despite the efforts outlined above - at the time of writing -

July 2004 - there is still a problem for this programme in getting baseline data in terms of health. Proactive approaches are still being made - by for example, the programme midwives who have been going out to midwives and health visitors 's in the community and sitting in clinics in order get as much relevant data from other health professionals caseloads as possible. The problem is that there isn't a system for getting such information from health professionals on a *systemic* basis. This may be addressed through the Maternal Health Strategy for the city.

IT Systems

- 4.30 At the outset of this evaluation ,the problems arising from the programme being in temporary accommodation spread to the effective working of their computer systems and impacted negatively on communication both within and outside the team. For example, the costs of installing suitable systems - internet and intranet - were prohibitive, given that the programme was shortly to be moving to new premises. At that time the team were using a software system not without its problems which led to inefficient working at times. For example, the system could not cope in the situation where a father has registered a child that didn't live with him or where there is more than one family living at an address. This meant that alerts had to be inserted and there were delays while the Sure Point IT support team adjusted the system accordingly.
- 4.31 Impressively staff made the best of this situation and have learned from it to plan IT support for the new building meticulously and carefully. They have clear ideas of what is needed and there will be a server to back things up. In terms of software , they have changed provider and purchased new software which will allow the programme to link the planning of events, activities and evaluation and monitoring and to make this information available to partners.

Involving parents

- o Local parents are involved in the programme's work at all levels and monitoring and nurture of this involvement is a programme strength.

Parent: When I first joined the Partnership Board I was like a mouse in a lion cage. I can't describe it any other way because.. everybody else knew what they were doing and we didn't and we were all sat in a little clump at the top of the table.....and we all felt like little mice - well I know I did. It was rather daunting ..

Interviewer: What's it like now ?

Parent : It's very nice ... we seem to know more people now and we've got into it a bit better

Interviewer: So you wouldn't describe yourself as like a mouse in a lion's cage now?

Parent: No. Now I'm one of the lions [laughing].

- 4.32 Parent involvement is a key Sure Start commitment and considerable effort has been put into making the community aware of the presence of Sure Start within the Firth Park and Shiregreen area. The programme has an excellent *Parental Involvement and Evaluation Strategy* which details a sound and coherent structure for the work which the programme undertakes with parents . We found that the programme has good communication with parents, good monitoring of parental involvement, and parents and other stakeholders report that there is good follow through on events promised. Arrangements are kept and , importantly, there is a good record of events and sessions running when planned . Where necessary good notice of cancellation of planned sessions or events is given in good time and rescheduling is followed thorough on. This '*practical and day-to- day reliability*' of the programme has given local parents confidence in it and, in our view, helped to develop sustain committed parental involvement.

- 4.33 Programme staff attach considerable importance to developing the agency and personal development of parents in the programme's work whilst at the same time acknowledging that widening involvement of parents in the programme presents major challenges. Initially the lack of a dedicated venue for Sure Start activity in Firth Park and Shiregreen reduced the likelihood that parents felt able to get involved in the programme. There remains a shortage of venues in the locality - and in the City more generally - which are appropriate for the purposes of Sure Start activities and offices which currently house the programme are not easily accessible for families with young children. Considerable effort has been put in to securing parental involvement in the programme over the past year as can be evidenced for the 2004-05 Delivery Plan, the Annual Report [2004] and the many positive comments parents have made about their involvement in the Programme.
- 4.34 For some of those parents who have participated in various aspects of the programme, sustainable links have not always been easy to create. Programme staff are reflective about why this might be the case and factor these things into planning:

you always get some people drop out because people just get fed up of it and it's demanding of their time. You get a couple of people who are very committed but it is usually over a very short space of time and then they just burn out

some parents leave because their children are four and they say 'I'm not sure there's a role for us now'. ... I do think that's an issue really, how do you still keep people? Especially once they've actually developed their skills.

The staff team are constantly striving to find ways to create sustained involvement of local families in the programme:

parents are now working as volunteers which is a way I would like to see it go, that we engage people over a longer period of time. This is a programme of work and we've got to work out a way of keeping people engaged because it's always moving on and it's always meeting some kind of need.

However there are pressures involved in the challenge of supervising and supporting volunteers which staff acknowledge:

I've also got a volunteer that comes once a week and helps me out. I've tried to make her do it like she's working, like done supervision with her and I've asked her if she wants any training, but to be honest, I've not been on-going with the supervision because I've just not had time!

- 4.35 The irony of a situation in which the better the programme supports the personal development of parents then the less likely the programme is to secure sustained involvement of those same parents is familiar to the staff group;

In some ways parents move on - they go on to courses and they do things that they find fulfilling and satisfying. But, you know, they've actually had training on chairing meetings, in taking part in meetings which has given them new confidence and I think they probably are using their skills in other arenas and other venues.

- 4.36 Parents have been keen to take up opportunities for training through Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme. Positive outcomes for parents have been observed and staff have subsequently paid attention to helping to extend modes of participation and define new openings for personal development:

We have eight parents on our Partnership Board. We had more parents than places! We're now asking some parents to go onto working groups instead and work through those and then look at being on the Partnership Board the following year.

Training has been delivered 'in house' and is complemented by external agencies such as Voluntary Action Sheffield. Yet staff realise there is further work to be done on identifying the factors that can lead to wider participation of parents and other family members in Sure Start at Firth Park and Shiregreen.

- 4.37 Firth Park and Shiregreen has evidenced a strong commitment to widening participation of fathers within the programme and to not separating issues for fathers off in to a separate 'detached' project as can happen in Sure Start programmes .In the early days of trying to get fathers involved, the lack of childcare opportunities the programme

could make available is felt to have created particular difficulties around widening participation of fathers.

- 4.38 Nowadays this has been overcome by attending to the interlinked issues of first, identifying activities which appeal to local men and which they would feel comfortable to take part in and second, providing integral child care solutions which make participation viable. Day trips to attractions local men might find of interest, which have facilities for under 4's as well as facilities for mothers to enjoy separately - such as Magna, which combines emphasis on science and engineering, with exciting accessible play space and shops and cafes - have proved a popular way of bringing families together, fuelling further interest in what Sure Start can offer.
- 4.39 The team at Firth Park and Shiregreen feel events such as the Magna trip and similar leisure activities that have been arranged enable 'big issues' in support of family life to be tackled in small ways. For instance, creating a space in which mothers disappear for coffee together can help people to reflect on new possibilities for sharing child care responsibilities if they so wish to do. Similarly on coach outings :

Fathers have started opening up and talking about their views on children and what they want to get out of the group.

- 4.40 The efforts Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start staff are making to include men in the programme are taking them in to relatively new territory. Mothers have historically been the more natural focus of such programmes and again staff have observed scope for working with local women to advance the inclusion of local men

I was talking to a mum and she was saying, "Well, I need to talk to my husband about it." So, I said, "Well, I'll come and talk to your husband." And I've done that a couple of times. That's worked really well to go and talk and explain about Sure Start to her husband. He's then talked to his wife about it and become engaged that way. That's something I want to carry on more.

- 4.41 Staff at Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start are undoubtedly carrying out leading edge work to draw men into the programme. Some events are being organised exclusively for fathers and their children that break further ground in changing the focus of support for under 4s away from mothers. Staff are working with fathers-to-be and looking at ways of

maximising their involvement in parenting. As well as practical issues around finance and employment, projects also encourage fathers to think about the emotional aspects of being a father - bonding with the baby, to read to very young babies and to enjoy physical contact with their babies and young children. In this work the programme is raising awareness about postnatal depression and its symptoms and encouraging prospective fathers to think about coping strategies they might put in place to support their partner.

- 4.42 So, the programme has undertaken excellent work with fathers and although the male parental involvement worker who was pivotal to this work has recently had moved on to Father Figures his post will be advertised shortly. The programme is keen to develop a programme of work to build on the success they have had in involving fathers.
- 4.43 An ongoing and related concern for the programme - well articulated in its *Extending Reach Strategy* [see Appendix 2] is how to widen participation of those groups traditionally thought of as 'hard to reach'. The issue of so-called 'Hard to Reach Groups' (HRGs) is going to be central to the delivery and evaluation of all Sure Start programmes. It illustrates the tensions, and very practical difficulties, around the staff's aspiration for Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start to become both universal and non-stigmatising, while at the same time accessing the groups of parents and children perceived to be most in need.
- 4.44 The Extending Reach strategy exemplifies how this programme is willing to reconceptualise the issue of accessing HRGs as one of how to reach groups '*we are finding it hard to reach*'. Collaboration on a research project concentrating on three under-represented groups - fathers, black and minority ethnic groups and children and parents with learning difficulties has provided the programme with an information resource they intend to build up as they go along. This work on 'hard to reach groups' has allowed the programme to develop their thinking and plan their work accordingly:

the challenge ahead, and one that we're already looking at is involving 'hard to reach' families, particularly black and ethnic minority families. I think that we need to develop systems to find those families and we need to become accepted by those families as being a supportive organisation that helps them address some of their needs. We want to know about those people and I don't

think that really we've actually got in touch with as many as we would like to and I think we need to do that.

- 4.45 Some of the SLA partners we consulted with as part of the evaluation were clear that the introduction of the Sure Start programme in Firth Park and Shiregreen had enabled them to include parents they would not otherwise have contact with:

'my job was to support families that weren't accessing the centre.'

One strategy for promoting parental participation in the Sure Start programme has involved actively identifying parents with young children who are not registered at a nursery or other form of provision. For instance, if the Shiregreen Centre is the nearest venue, parents are then encouraged to visit and to fill in an application form for their child:

'it really does start from there. They move onto parents' groups, they come to the toddler group. They get the confidence to go to training. The children become familiar with the staff. It's [a total] transition for the child.'

- 4.46 Parents find the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start session workers relaxed, friendly and welcoming. Most parents attending sessions say they do not know much, or even particularly care about the wider aims of Sure Start, they are just happy to have something to get them out of the house which allowed themselves and their children to see new faces. Interestingly, lots of the same parents clearly are familiar with the wider Sure Start objectives which is evident from remarks they make in passing such as that Sure Start aims to 'give kids a better start in life, to provide training and support, it's about supporting families.' Frequently Firth Park and Shiregreen parents say they are 'lucky to live in a Sure Start area'.
- 4.47 Venues are not always ideal One venue, acknowledged to be adapted as well as possible for the needs of modern under-fives was nonetheless described as *'purpose-built in the 1930's to put the fear of God into little children'* another in use was waiting for carpets to be laid and so on. But then the quality of the venue isn't necessarily a key determinant of a successful session - as one person remarked *'it was fun here today, we like it a bit 'rough & ready'*

- 4.48 Parents report that they often come across Firth Park and Shiregreen through its proximity to schools where they are taking other children. They report having seen posters and say '*Sure Start are always delivering a new lot of leaflets*'. The programme gets a good response to these which is followed up by a home visit to build a rapport with local families, explain what is on offer and fill out Sure Start registration forms. These meetings are designed to last only around 15 minutes so that they are easy for parents to fit in. Parents acknowledge that '*word of mouth is a big thing in an area like this*' and so a happy session or a positive home visit is a 'quick-win' route to bringing new parents in to relationship with the programme.
- 4.49 The Firth park and Shiregreen Partnership Board has a good track record of involving parents. Members feel that the Programme Manager is 'connected' with the parents and that support for families through the Parent Involvement Workers is of high quality. The Partnership Board works well in many respects. The following positive comments were emphasised throughout our evaluation
- The Partnership Board is friendly, meetings are accessible nowadays, with less jargon than when the board first started - having parent chairs has helped this increased accessibility
 - Parent members feel as valued as the workers - for example, they appreciate that meetings are scheduled as much according to parents' needs as those of other members. Members value :

"A wide variety of people across the community coming together."
"Parents and workers are treated as equals"
 - Parents are supported to 'catch up' if they miss meetings and not made to feel uncomfortable about non-attendance

Comments made by one respondent echo those made by others:

We are operating in 'challenging' times. However the Partnership Board works effectively and progress is steady and the ethos is very much proactive and inclusive for all participants.

- 4.50 Having joint parent chairs is felt to have a positive impact on the nature of the board meetings - meetings are consistently reported as having a

friendly feel. Considerable efforts appear to have been made by Parent Involvement Workers to bring parents onto the board and to take on the role of chair. The Programme Manager sets the agenda with the Chair. It was reported that members receive documents that must be read prior to meetings, well in advance, and they feel they can find out what things mean if they don't understand the documents. Parents clearly feel comfortable about ringing up for advice or clarification.

- 4.51 A 1-year term for Parent representatives on the board was agreed by the previous Steering group and the present board. Nevertheless, parent board members question the length of term to be served as a member of the Partnership Board - they wonder if one year is a long enough period of office and seek clarity on what 'hand over' arrangements are in place. It has been suggested to the board that it would be helpful if the board operated an arrangement similar to that often operated for school governors, with half of the members being replaced in one year and one in the next and so on. This would assist with handover arrangements and enable the programme to benefit from the skills and experience parents have developed. The Programme Manager is writing a paper on this issue for the Partnership Board and tying the issue in to looking at how the board can be strengthened in readiness for the emergence of Children's Centres. Specific guidance from the local authority on this matter would be very helpful.
- 4.52 Initially, an Open Day was used as an opportunity to try and get parents involved in the board. It is noted that some parents who initially express interest in being involved on the Partnership Board subsequently drop out - the crucial point was made that people think that being involved in Sure Start is about being involved with children and not about attending meetings. There is ongoing commitment to bringing more parents into relationships with the Partnership Board and ideas about what will help to facilitate this have been put forward and built into a support strategy for example:

Parents need more confidence building/training to ensure that they are able to express their views positively.

Professionals should become more involved with parents at local level, and should be more flexible, ensuring ownership of the programme is with the parents

- 4.53 The training undertaken re chairing meetings was felt to be very effective and boosted confidence. Training for new parent members of the board would be useful as would 'away-days' for parents who are sub-group members. It was also made evident during the evaluation that parent members of the board wish to develop ideas on how they or other parents could/would bring problematic issues to the board and feel that this could be usefully explored through training.

Best practice on involving parents at Partnership Boards

- 4.54 All programmes who have taken part in the Combined Evaluation have made considerable efforts to involve parents in Partnership Boards. This is a very positive finding because parent involvement is at the heart of the development of genuine partnership in the local Sure Start programme and community. In our view involving parents in the Firth park and Shiregreen Partnership Boards has been particularly successful and much of the good practice noted below is drawn from practices operating within this programme. Others are noted here to help inform ongoing work to develop the Partnership Board.

Parents say their participation in Partnership Boards is maximised when there efforts are made to:

- Make sure all information about the board and going to the board to presented in accessible ways -short papers are preferred, sent well in advance, clearly written in plain English, marked as for (a) discussion, (b) information or (c) needing a decision. Parent board members feel most comfortable where they know they can ring a named member of the board or programme staff for advice or clarification to find out what things mean if they don't understand the documents.
 - Make sure that parents feel included as equals on the Partnership Board - Parents enjoy the experience of being on Partnership Boards where they feel welcomed and valued. They like to feel able to ask questions and on most programmes recognise that they might need to ask more. They describe their involvement in boards as an 'open learning process' through which they become 'more clued up about everything' over time.
- 4.55 Creating an inclusive Board is not merely a matter of welcoming words, and being friendly to parents - action taken to enable their participation is key. Parents are appreciative when careful consideration is taken to find times and venues for meetings that are convenient for them.

- 4.56 The provision of a crèches is vital as a tool for enabling participation. Paying travel costs for parents is also helpful.
- 4.57 Parents appreciate being supported to 'catch up' if they miss meetings and not made to feel uncomfortable about non-attendance
- 4.58 Many parents are conscious that participation in Partnership Boards falls to the 'same few' and that many other parents are missing out on the opportunity to be involved in Sure Start governance through Partnership Board membership. They say ways need to be found of facilitating participation of second language speakers for example.
- 4.59 The need for parents who are newcomers to Partnership Boards to have induction training is stressed. Existing members would also like to have 'refresher' sessions from time to time.
- 4.60 Parents say when they first come to be involved in a Partnership Board they feel anxious about 'grasping what a board does'. Most feel they learn Partnership Board procedures and issues quickly, but there are questions to ask about speed with which parent members are asked to take on central responsibilities and the scale of related responsibilities. When Partnership Board membership spills over into a requirement for the same parents to participate in sub-groups, the pressures of membership are soon felt. Many parents find that Partnership Board membership can become overly burdensome when their involvement in satellite groups is necessary.
- 4.61 Positive suggestions came from parents about how participation of a wider group of parents in Partnership Boards could be encouraged
- *'have parents in to photocopy or sort papers so that they start to get involved and get a feel for what we do'*
 - *'the school PTA has 'once-only' membership and I think this would help people to get involved in the board without feeling they're suddenly going to be roped in for ever'*

Developing a community presence

- o Interface with community groups and those providing Service Level Agreements works generally well although some issues of communication need further attention.
 - o Community groups and other agencies seek closer contact with Sure Start and stress the importance of relevant accessible information about the work of the programme. They offer ideas on good practice in working together which could usefully help the programme to extend its reach into the community
 - o Communication with local groups in respect of factors 'not in the programmes control' but which it will nevertheless be held to account for needs attention.
- 4.62 Relationships between the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team actively and successfully seeks to maximise opportunities to engage with the local community. The Programme recognises that this is an area where they can continue to improve and discussion at the Mixed Workshop provided examples of recent work targeted at improving engagement with the community.
- 4.63 The programme's 'Allotment Project' for example is a very positive project that is outreaching to all sort of areas. This project links to the 5- a- day initiative and healthy eating targets. At the moment the programme is trying to get other partners involved. They want to eventually sell organic produce grown on the allotment to the community café. The Programme is currently trying to access Objective 1 funding. to move this project forward.
- 4.64 There is however praise for the work Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start has already undertaken to develop its community presence from across the range of community groups we consulted. All of the groups interviewed were aware of the principal Sure Start aims and objectives. And could describe how the programme aimed to support families with children under 4. However, a small number of groups perceive the programme as a 'funding stream'.

4.65 Approximately half of the community groups surveyed reported that they have *regular* contact with the programme and representatives from all of these groups had visited the Sure Start offices/community bases. Comments made included:

- *'we have regular contact...but this has only just started'*
- *'we have contact once every 2 or 3 weeks and we go to Sure Start meetings'*
- *'we have contact quite regularly as we work together....we get a lot of referrals from Sure Start'*

4.66 Only three of the groups interviewed could name a Sure Start member of staff which is possibly to do with rapid recent expansion of the Sure Start team, but nonetheless needs addressing.

4.67 Some of the groups surveyed reported that they had been proactive in building up a relationship with Sure Start, describing how they themselves had made the *initial* contact with the programme to develop links:

'we made contact about a year ago because we were getting so many referrals from Sure Start to our service that we approached the programme about sharing resources ...and in order to work more collaboratively'

In other circumstance the programme had made the initial contact.

4.68 The experience of local groups of *'linking in'* with the Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start is, however, somewhat mixed. A minority of the groups interviewed expressed dissatisfaction. For example, several groups highlighted that they did not have regular contact/information from the programme and one group reported that:

'it is difficult to get speaking to people at Sure Start -they didn't seem interested'

4.69 A more positive experience of building up a relationship with the programme was described by another group. The programme has provided valuable support to the individual concerned, who runs a local

toddler group; they have offered to help deliver craft activities during sessions, and are going to try and encourage parents to be more proactive in helping to run the group. The programme has also input into a session by 'lending' a speech therapist to the group and this proved very successful.

- 4.70 When asked if they would like more contact with the programme, or if they were happy with their current level of involvement, there was a rather mixed reaction. A number of the groups were happy with the present level of contact; several of the groups reported they felt it would be beneficial for all concerned to have **more** contact:

'we would like support and advice'

'we feel we could help spread the word about Sure Start through the community as the people who attend can tell their daughters and granddaughters'

'we would like to have a partnership.....however.....some perceive partnership differently.....Sure Start said they wanted one but are not trying very hard'

- 4.71 The majority of the groups surveyed were aware of and receive publicity material produced by Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start. When asked what publicity material was produced, respondents cited a number of different forms including word of mouth, brochures, leaflets; advertisements for 'mother and toddler groups', and posters.

One group described the Sure Start publicity as:

'all over the area.... in particular in the Methodist Church in Firth Park'

and another reported that publicity material is:

'all over the place....just about everywhere you go...'

A third organisation described how they work together with Sure Start to produce joint publicity for Sure Start funded services.

4.72 Community groups reported that the Firth Park and Shire Green programme, 'provide good crèche facilities' and 'child involvement' was suggested by at least one group as being a particularly effective aspect of the programmes work. Other areas of work mentioned by the groups as having a positive impact included: meeting parents' needs and the friendly approachable staff within the programme. One respondent talked about the number of trips organised by Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start, and praised the summer clubs delivered by the programme at a local school, where families with a child under four could participate. The 'Bumps and Babies' group, attended by Sure Start midwives, was also mentioned as an activity that works well.

4.73 Several organisations highlighted that there were some areas in which Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start programme could improve. Comments made included:

'more referrals could be made to relevant community organisations'

'they could try and get more agencies involved'

Cross referral of services

4.74 Of the organisations surveyed, 3 stated that Sure Start did inform relevant families about their particular organisation/services and one group stated that;

' we get a large number of referrals from Sure Start'

4.75 One group said that their organisation is included in the Sure Start publicity material. A number of groups were unsure whether Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start told relevant families about their services. Most of the groups we interviewed highlighted that they did tell families about Sure Start and the services they believe the programme could offer.

4.76 When we talked to community groups and organisations city wide they identified all of the issues discussed above in relation to other Sure Start programmes too. In addition three key sets of issues concerning their relationships with Sure Start programmes generally emerged . These are reported below - as they are reported in all programme

reports produced as part of the *Combined Sheffield Sure Start Evaluation* in order to inform practice in general.

- Communication
- Supporting hard to reach groups
- Maximizing the impact of Sure Start in Sheffield

COMMUNICATION: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, UNDERSTANDING, AND INFORMATION-SHARING

- 4.77 Community group representatives place emphasis on the importance of two-way knowledge and understanding in their relations with Sure Start. Programmes need to be aware of local and city-wide groups working with families with young children, and these groups need also to understand what Sure Start delivers. Effective communication systems are seen as vital in order to improve links between community groups and Sure Start.
- 4.78 Community group representatives feel clarity about roles and responsibilities for information-sharing is essential if their organisations are to work well with Sure Start programmes. A lack of knowledge about what respective agencies offer can create difficulties and impact negatively on relationships; for example, inappropriate referrals can arise. One community group representative described how parents have been referred to their organisation by Sure Start with high expectations about immediate availability of childcare places which could not actually be met. Mutual understanding of what Sure Start and community groups provide, helps agencies to achieve the aim of working together effectively - we return to this theme throughout the paper.
- 4.79 Community group representatives identify the building of trust between individuals and organisations as crucial to the development of good inter-agency links. It was pointed out that if trust breaks down between agencies, it is invariably difficult to rebuild.

Community group representatives identify a variety of ways in which understanding and relationships can be, and are, being enhanced between their respective agencies and Sure Start programmes:

- 4.80 **Physical proximity leads to closer working relationships** where Sure Start workers are based on the same site as a community organisation it has been found that increased contact leads to considerable

improvement in communication and thus to more effective services for families.

- 4.81 **Informal interaction between the groups and Sure Start workers assists effective working.** Where a Sure Start programme is proactive in arranging social get-togethers for the team and members of other groups they are linked with barriers between agencies are quickly reduced. For example, it has been seen in one instance that improving the quality of the relationship between a Sure Start programme and a community group through such relatively informal strategies meant workers became able to make referrals more appropriate to the respective services. Informal contact between community groups and Sure Start programmes can offer opportunities for developing mutually important understanding of roles and responsibilities. One programme holds an 'open lunch' on a regular basis for community group representatives connected with Sure Start and this is found to promote strong informal links.
- 4.82 **Building up opportunities for formal interaction promotes effective working.** Attendance by community group representatives at Sure Start meetings and participation in Sure Start team training and development activities is found to assist a growing relationship between the two agencies. Some community groups welcome opportunities to attend Sure Start team meetings as this enables them to inform their own colleagues of what is going on in the programme. It is recognised that the provision of reports to Sure Start Partnership Boards enables community organisations to have an important input.
- 4.83 **Recognising diversity of interests and demands** Sustaining close links between Sure Start and community organisations can be a demanding business. For example, community group representatives often report finding it difficult to regularly attend Sure Start meetings - and this can be the case even where links are cemented through the existence of an SLA. It can particularly be a problem for sessional workers to attend Sure Start meetings or to fit in with a programme's meeting timetable. All this can make it hard to 'get communication going'. Attendance at meetings can also be compromised if community group representatives feel only a small part of a programme meeting is of relevance to their organisation. Representatives of some community groups feel obliged to prioritise the provision of parent support over and above attendance at meetings in order to protect their own resources. This is particularly true of smaller voluntary sector groups where capacity is a real issue.

There is a tension here around the need for strategic planning and hands on work. Whilst individual Sure Start programmes cannot make special arrangements for all of the varying interests and commitments of community groups, there may be a way of instating changes to the way meetings are organised that take into account some of these issues.

- 4.84 **Sure Start workers taking part in the work of community groups** Communication is reported to be reinforced when Sure Start workers are able to attend courses or otherwise take part in activities run by community groups. The need for clarity over roles and expectations is crucial when such links are made, however.
- 4.85 **Involving community groups in Sure Start evaluations** Participation in evaluation activities is seen as beneficial in terms of facilitating links with local programmes and with other groups operating in Sure Start areas - it signals a willingness to take the views of community stakeholders seriously.
- 4.86 **One-off events can help cement relationships** e.g., a recent job training fair held by a Sure Start programme in partnership with Sheffield College was attended by a wide range of agencies and individuals, targeting those providing training for childcare and education qualifications.
- 4.87 **Familiarity with the team** Respondents stress that successful inter-agency work depends upon tried and tested personal relationships. They feel there is a need for discussion between programmes and appropriate community groups to facilitate the building of trust and the development of personal relationships. It was acknowledged that difficulties can occur in the event of staff turnover and the need for groups who have built up a good rapport with one member of Sure Start staff to be 'very proactive' about establishing relationships with other members of the team was emphasised.
- 4.88 **Clear and swift referral pathways** are vital for effective inter-agency working. These are dependent on sound understanding of the differences between organisations. Representatives point out that there can be complex and sensitive nuances in the different ways that groups operate and what they offer e.g., 'practical' vs. 'emotional' support. Referrals should be made both ways - i.e., to and from - Sure Start and local (and city-wide) groups. Community groups feel referrals to Sure Start must be acted on immediately - reports were cited of

instances where a person had been referred to a Sure Start programme but then not picked up by a member of the team to Sure Start team for several months - sometimes reasons for delays such as this are known - but community group representatives are anxious to ensure opportunities to offer a mainstream service to vulnerable people are not missed. They wish to be notified if referrals they make cannot be dealt with promptly. Some attention is warranted to how programmes provide feedback to groups concerning their involvement with individuals referred on.

- 4.89 **Getting publicity right** All community groups who interact with specific local programmes report that they receive leaflets, posters etc from their respective Sure Start programme(s). Apparently, sometimes very little notice of forthcoming events is given which community groups find frustrating as they know families who would be interested in events on offer with more notice. Some community groups operating on a city-wide basis but without specific connections to a named local programme do not receive publicity materials and consequently do not always have a clear, up to date picture of the services that Sure Start programmes in Sheffield are offering across the city. Community group representatives also say it is helpful if publicity can be a mutually beneficial promotional process for Sure Start programmes and other groups working in the community with families and young children. Reciprocal dissemination of information provides a valuable opportunity to enhance the work of the full range of agencies.
- 4.90 **Consistent Sure Start approaches assist community groups** sometimes city- wide organisations are finding one set of rules applies to one Sure Start programme whereas different systems are in place for another. Some programmes require more detailed information around financing, for example than others, but the reasons why this might be so are not fully understood.
- 4.91 **Sustainability matters** In order that the work being developed by Sure Start programmes is sustained beyond the life of Sure Start funding, there is a need for the development of the programmes to be firmly based in strategic planning informed by contact with local and city-wide community groups. A tension exists for Sure Start programmes in that they have to meet set targets in a relatively short space of time, whilst also working towards sustainable practice. Community group representatives realise that the structures and systems of the framework within which the programmes have to operate can create

barriers to effective partnership working and these have somehow to be ironed out.

- 4.92 **Duplication presents difficulties** it is clear from listening to community group representatives that on occasion community groups offering pre-school provision have been required to compete for recognition with their local programmes. Conflicting interests have been observed, for instance where a community group is hoping to expand its provision but finds a local Sure Start programme progressing similar plans without providing an opportunity for other agencies to work in collaboration. The outcome of this sort of situation is that duplicate childcare services can appear in close proximity to other provision. Community group representatives express frustration where they feel duplication of provision arises as a result of a lack of effective consultation.
- 4.93 A regular **city wide Sure Start newsletter** would be welcomed.

SUPPORTING HARD TO REACH GROUPS

- 4.94 Some city-wide community agencies have encountered difficulties building links with the Sure Start programmes. At least one group supporting vulnerable and marginalized children reports a history of unsuccessful attempts to make links with Sure Start. Representatives note that disabled children and their families seem particularly under-represented in Sure Start work - yet report numerous failed attempts to contact programme managers about this
- 4.95 On the other hand, a parent empowerment programme for parents of disabled children, funded by the Home Office and delivered by a Sheffield agency, has been working well with two Sure Start programmes. The project decided to target its recruitment drive for parents of disabled children in Sure Start areas and has recently run two pilot workshops. Sure Start workers were invited to put forward names of families in their areas who might like to participate in the training programme. There is felt to be potential for further development of this work as the project moves from a pilot to a full programme of training.
- 4.96 Community group representatives are confident that in some localities, referrals to Sure Start and to relevant community organisations are being made by Health Visitors. Good practice in respect of this is not, however, said to be city wide. Some agencies are concerned that families

who are members of minority ethnic and/or linguistic communities face particular obstacles around access to services and assert that there is a need for disability equality training for Sure Start staff and for action planning around how to reach 'missing' children, including those with impairments, and how to tackle the exclusions they face.

- 4.97 It was reported that families needing support are not easily identified *between services* and it is therefore often impossible to target families effectively. This results in a 'huge gap' of unmet need in the city - which was particularly noted with reference to disabled children and their families, resulting in families losing out on their service entitlements and often embroiled in protracted battles for services they could be receiving. There is a recognized need for a data base that would enable Sure Start programmes and community groups to identify and target families efficiently. (This may be available through Sheffield Index?)
- 4.98 Respondents stress that marginalized parents and children - perhaps more than most - need to be able to network and relate to other parents. Sure Start in conjunction with local community groups should be well placed to facilitate these processes. It was noted that parents whose children who are identified as having additional support needs often find services available to other children, such as access to childcare or pre-school education facilities are denied to them and again that Sure Start programmes, working collaboratively with key community agencies, could help make a difference to the extent to which *all* families can access their entitlements.

MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT OF SURE START IN SHEFFIELD

- 4.99 The consensus from respondents who contributed to this evaluation is that Sure Start is making a tangible difference to the quality of life of families living within Sure Start areas. Impact is realised to be influenced by the length of time the programme has been up and running. It was held that it is much harder to make a positive impact in some areas than in others - where there is greater cultural diversity, for example.
- 4.100 How to maximize impact thorough developing a coherent city-wide approach to Sure Start is of great interest to all community groups who contributed to this evaluation. Yet none knew how to, or who to, contact about a strategic issue affecting all programmes and most sensed a lack

of a clarity about any city wide strategic direction for Sure Start. Barriers produced by different funding systems and administrative hoops to jump through - which are especially burdensome for organisations working with more than one Sure Start programme and encountering different systems were all cited as barriers to effective joined up working which seem to stem from a lack of city-wide coherence.

- 4.101 Links between Primary Care Trusts and Sure Start are said to bode well for coherent strategic development - the current development of strategy for Maternity Services across the city was singled out as indicative of positive change.
- 4.102 Finding families who live just outside the boundaries of a Sure Start programme angry and frustrated about not being able to access services is a familiar tension picked up by community group representatives. They take this as evidence that programmes are making a difference to the lives of families with young children which parent value.

According to representatives of community groups the impact of Sure Start is maximised by :

- listening and responding to local and city-wide community groups
 - working with community groups to bring in those families and children who are currently not accessing services - reducing isolation and supporting inclusion in an ordinary life - the role of an 'inclusion worker' is welcomed by community groups
- 4.103** Relationships with Service Level Agreement providers are also key in establishing a high quality community presence. Sure Start programmes are judged by the quality of service they provide indirectly - through their contracted providers - as well as by the services they provide directly through their own staff. Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start take the responsibility of managing their SLA partners very seriously and there is a commitment at all levels in the programme to provide the best for the local community. On occasion differences of opinion about the form and quality of provision has caused problems which the programme has had to carefully negotiate.

- 4.104 SLA providers appreciate that Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start is still a relatively new programme which is expanding rapidly and beginning to make a mark. Initially, a small and overstretched Sure Start staff group were struggling to meet the demand for services which SLA providers were keen to set up. This led to frustration as one SLA provider describes below;

we've had venues that haven't been used because Sure Start team members haven't been in place to recruit the team for a long time. [SLA partners] have sat there, you know, not being used by children and families because the Sure Start team leader wasn't in place so they couldn't recruit the team - you can't just have somebody sat there doing nothing for a year because they haven't got a team, but that's kind of what's happened.'

- 4.105 Trying to develop services that respond to community need in the absence of some of the key statutory service providers is also seen by representative SLA partners as problematic:

'if other big agencies aren't on board with Sure Start it's just like hitting a brick wall'.

In the Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start area, particular concern is expressed by SLA partners about the difficulties the Sure Start programme has encountered in developing effective links with Social Services.

- 4.106 The majority of SLA providers now feel that - facilitated by the programme-they are having a positive response in this area:

'People seem to be very keen to take part in training and move on. Obviously we see that as a big value in the work we do with Sure Start especially because the training that Home Start offers is well recognised in the city so then that actually gives people opportunities to move on to family support work which is really useful.'

A range of childcare courses has been offered by SLA partners and other, non-vocational courses are also provided. These have included disability awareness training and a basic sign language course

- 4.107 However, it is clear that some SLA partners who were already well established in the community before the introduction of the Sure Start programme, have experienced some specific elements of Sure Start as constraining their autonomy:

'we'd been doing this for more than five years before Sure Start came along and we had been offering training locally, so we were quite experienced at how to listen to people's needs. And so when we were asked to consider being the people to do the training by the then Steering Group it seemed obvious we could do it, so we went down that route. What I think we weren't expecting was to have to jump through so many hoops'

- 4.108 Having noted this, SLA providers recognise that Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start programme team are seen as occupying an uncomfortable middle-ground between the national Sure Start organisation and the grass roots communities:

the problem is that you've got a Programme coming from central government, people's aspirations coming from the grass roots and in the middle the Sure Start programme where this is supposed to kind of be worked out. This bunch of people in the middle have to listen very carefully to the bottom level, but they're being bombarded all the time with information from a Sure Start Unit about 'targets we've got to meet' and 'the ways we've got to work this' and 'forms we've got to fill in about this' and so on and these are some of the conflicts inherent in running a Sure Start programme in a community of this nature.

- 4.109 It is clearly crucial for those organisations and individuals who are working with Service Level Agreements to know what they are accountable for, who they are accountable to, what they need to check back on, and the scope of their decision making autonomy. On the basis of the consultation and discussion arising through the process of this evaluation, it is our view that broadly speaking the Programme is striking the right balance here - particularly in recent months as processes have embedded.

4.110 However, the Programme Manager is clear that the situation in respect of negotiating and managing SLA's during the Programmes early days was not ideal. When she came to post SLA targets and outputs had not been clearly identified and contracts were often delayed; this laid the foundations for some difficulties in Programme/SLA provider relations. Work is still necessary to develop the progress made over the past year in ironing out difficulties in SLA management.

4.111 Positive comments were made about communication and coordination between the Sure Start team and the SLA providers:

'They seem very keen to kind of involve us in meetings and events. They remember us ... we do feel that we're involved, so I would say that's a big plus.'

Although the increasing size of the Sure Start team raises concerns for some providers about how this can be maintained

we seemed to be really involved in everything and then as the team got bigger and bigger you get pushed out a bit to one side and you just have contact with that [team] and it's not as effective.'

It will be important for the programme to keep a close eye to this. The Bi monthly team meetings - which will look at cross cutting programme themes - and the team brief will be important in reducing feelings of 'marginalisation', but other measures to support and involve this key group may also be necessary.

Accountability

- o Clarity is needed about the precise role and remit of the accountable body in order for best value for the programme to be derived from relationship with it.
- 4.112 Realising what you are accountable for and to who, what you need to check back on and what you have autonomy in deciding is crucial for any organisation or individual to establish. Being confident about the balance between working to wider agendas and pursuing your own - or those determined by the communities you serve- requires support structures to be in place which make clear the links between and across initiatives. The Sure Start staff team at Firth Park and Shire Green have worked hard to establish these within their own programme and in relation to their accountable body - a Primary Care Trust. Nevertheless, difficulties emerge which need wider airing to enable Sure Start programmes generally to work to their maximum effect.
- 4.113 A major challenge for Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start lies in having an accountable body that is in itself part of a relatively new structure and for whom a local Sure Start programme is a relatively 'small' part of their overall picture. The programme manager in this team has successfully established a reciprocal relationship with the programme's accountable body and this has helped to some extent to clarify roles and enable staff to appreciate what its function is and where responsibilities lie.
- 4.114 Successful attempts have been made to increase engagement between the accountable body and the programme, for example, senior management are routinely invited to events put on by the programme, different people from the accountable body sit on the Partnership Board and attend working groups. Help and advice has been sought by Sure Start staff from a variety of individuals within the PCT during the recent risk assessment, and staff from the programme regularly go to events hosted by them to gain a wider understanding of their work. In it's turn the PCT has invited the programme to get involved in the Commission for Health Improvement [CHI] action plan.

- 4.115 In addition to raising awareness about and building a relationship with the accountable body, the programme manager has taken concrete steps to secure the relationship between it and Sure Start in order to ensure that she receives the necessary support in order to run the programme successfully:

I made sure that in terms of my line management, that comes from the accountable body, that we actually set up a year's worth of supervision or one to one's - so they would know exactly what we are doing.

- 4.116 It is clear that, alongside the proactive work they are engaged in within the community, developing the best possible relationship with the accountable body is something the programme needs in order to maximise its impact. Having a Primary Care Trust as an accountable body should have positive benefits in terms of contacts made with Sure Start - although it is not evident yet that these have been developed to capacity.

- 4.117 Accountability to the Primary Care Trust is only one of the Programmes responsibilities;

We've got lots and lots of layers and levels of responsibility and the accountable body sits within that. It's not a hierarchical thing -with the accountable body here and Sure Start there. Responsibility is not just to the accountable body. It's to the parents in the community.

Staff are mindful that Sure Start programmes are accountable to a number of different bodies - to the Sure Start Units operating nationally and regionally; their accountable body; and their local community. As well as introducing an inevitable tension into the strategic direction of Sure Start programmes, this also impacts on everyday working practice. For example, the simple exercise of ordering equipment becomes problematic when the accountable body expects the programme to use a particular supplier, even when a more economic supplier has been found by the programme staff. In this instance the programme had to decide between answering to their local community (saving every penny possible) and their accountable body that has systems set up to work with particular suppliers.

- 4.118 Similarly, the differing instructions, systems and expectations between the accountable body and Sure Start nationally lead to conflicting demands that on occasions can contribute to a feeling of workloads being doubled. Financial management and differences in accounting procedures required by accountable bodies on the one hand and Sure Start regionally and nationally on the other are of particular concern here, and this is something emerging in Sure Start programmes more widely as a matter in need of attention.

Mainstreaming – the new challenge?

- o This programme works extremely well in the context of change. The Programme Manager leads strategically and has demonstrated willingness to engage in citywide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services. This programme needs further opportunities to contribute to city wide strategic planning.

4.119 The *Green Paper, Every Child Matters*, places the challenge of mainstreaming best practice of initiatives such as Sure Start at the forefront of strategic planning for all children's services. The mainstreaming agenda for Sure Start in Sheffield is now focused city wide on The Children's Centre Initiative. The Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Programme Manager plays a key role in this debate and is a respected commentator on matters relating to it within and outside the Sure Start community. All stakeholders agree that the particular skills of the Programme Manager and her clear understanding of strategy and policy position the programme well in the context of current changes.

4.120 **Thinking** about mainstreaming services and the impact this will have on Sure Start is fairly well developed in Sheffield and well articulated in the document *Sheffield Sure Start: Mainstreaming Services* (Davies 2003).

The Sheffield Sure Start programmes see mainstreaming as:

- Policy lessons from the work and experience of Sure Start local programmes having a direct influence on policy process, this to include governance issues and expertise in involving local community (mainstreaming policy)
- Securing of funding to continue particular activities (mainstreaming projects)
- Ensuring that mainstream agencies adapt and reproduce examples of good practice from programme activity so ensuring that successful Sure Start approaches are an integral part of future service provision (mainstreaming good practice)

- 4.181 **Practice** around mainstreaming is less well developed however. So, whilst our evaluation can evidence many good ideas on what will help and support the programme in constructing a framework for feeding into local and district wide forums to sustain its work and at the same time help to re-shape service delivery, it cannot evidence many examples of existing practice which supports any of the definitions of mainstreaming given above.
- 4.182 Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start is not alone here and, as Davies notes, given that Sure Start funding will only just begin to taper for the Trailblazers in 2004, there is has to date been no time imperative to persuade statutory services to accommodate successful Sure Start initiatives. Nevertheless, in meeting the Sure Start objectives effective working practice with other agencies is essential, and the programme will need to direct significant attention to this in the coming year. Below, based on the data we have collected from a range of stakeholders, we set out how this may be achieved - whilst at the same time noting what is working well already to take the programme in this direction.
- 4.183 We note that all agencies are signed up to the Delivery Plan. However the programme encounters difficulties with getting agreement to mainstream services. Nevertheless, all stakeholders consulted as part of this evaluation say they are keen to extend and develop two-way relationships between Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start and other local agencies.
- 4.184 It can be very hard for people who have worked in organisations which have had to constantly fight for resources, to actually drop an entrenched 'combative' way of thinking and look at 'working in partnership'. Yet partnership working can be the key to survival as a viable agency. Whether and how Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start engages with this process - and what are the most appropriate channels for doing so - requires further reflection and discussion. Sure Start 'can't do everything' and the Partnership Board will need to support the staff team in building into its strategic planning mechanisms for working out how other people or groups can fulfil the roles which are currently outside the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Partnership's remit, but which their own services and efforts are often very connected to.
- 4.177 Mainstreaming of services is fundamental to the Sure Start vision. Pressures of work over the past year and the rapid expansion of the team and services provided to the community have meant that there have been

few opportunities to stand back and take a medium to long-term view on where services are going in Firth Park and Shiregreen. Mainstreaming has only been mentioned in passing by most stakeholders, although it is clearly at the front of the Programme Manager's mind. The problem of how relationships with other agencies can be fostered to ensure mainstreaming of key services and initiatives is key and the programme is already addressing the difficult questions of who - specifically can help forge mainstreaming links and how to advance this agenda.

4.150 How to maximize impact thorough developing a coherent city-wide approach to Sure Start is of great interest to all groups who contributed to this evaluation. Yet most sensed a lack of a clarity about any city wide strategic direction for Sure Start. Barriers produced by different funding systems and administrative hoops to jump through - which are especially burdensome for organisations working with more than one Sure Start programme and encountering different systems are all cited as barriers to effective joined up working which seem to stem from a lack of city-wide coherence.

4.150 Links between Primary Care Trusts and Sure Start are said to bode well for coherent strategic development - the current development of strategy for Maternity Services across the city has been singled out as indicative of positive change.

What is working well in relation to joining up with other local initiatives and working towards mainstreaming?

4.151 Programme stakeholders across the board are already asking themselves difficult questions about their role in determining strategic direction - and this is very positive. The Partnership Board is taking a lead here by considering the scope it has to facilitate links with existing groups. Mechanisms for ensuring that Partnership Board representatives are people who are sufficiently 'hooked into' services in the area so that expertise can be brought in *through* the community are being enhanced and will be strengthened through forthcoming elections. The excellent Annual Report, recently produces evidences the ability of the partnership board to connect local provision to mainstreaming agendas in simple, straightforward and accessible language.

- 4.152 There is a genuine concern on the part of Partnership Board representatives to enable people to feel involved in development and planning.
- 4.153 The Programme Manager has committed to a process of sharing the emergent lessons from this evaluation of the programme with five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes. Engaging with a comparative model, which necessitates a very open look at what works well but also at what works less well in an individual programmes requires a genuine commitment to the mainstreaming agenda. It also requires some nerve on behalf of the participating Programme Managers who willingly forgoe the privacy of a lone evaluation in order to make the strongest possible contribution to rolling our best practice across the city and hopefully across Sure Start nationally.
- 4.154 As a direct result of the Programme Managers willingness to locate the evaluation of Firth Park and Shiregreen as part of a city-wide evaluation she has, by working together with other participating Programme Managers, secured tangible progression for the programme on significant mainstreaming initiatives. These include:
- Action to collectively consider ways of bringing parents into networks with other Sure Start programmes
 - Action to develop joint commissioning, monitoring and evaluation of SLA contracts
 - Action to identify specific possibilities for joint working with regard to four agencies: Speech and Language Therapy, Pre-School Alliance, Cot-Age and Home Start.
 - Action to develop a Training Resource to look at 'Maximizing Inclusion in Sure Start' (see Annex)
 - Action to ensure collective representation of Programme Manager's views to the Lead Strategic Officer(s) for Sure Start in the Local Authority

These actions confirm that long before the evaluation report has been issued the Programme Manager has taken a proactive approach to mainstreaming good practice identified through the evaluation process and implementing change accordingly. This is an extremely impressive response.

Areas needing to be developed to contribute to shaping mainstream service delivery

- 4.155 There is always scope to consult further with other services to maximise knowledge about what it is that Sure Start is doing, albeit with all of the implications on time and energy this has. As we have noted above, other local agencies need to be clear about how Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start fits in terms of their own remit if targets around mainstreaming are to be met. Sure Start needs to contribute its expertise in particular areas and lobby for the development of those groups which will help them contribute to mainstreaming agendas for young children's services
- 4.156 Clarity over the role of the Accountable Body is essential to future planning of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start. It is also important that the Partnership Board continues to communicate effectively about its own role within the programme and about its role in advancing a mainstreaming agenda in order to ensure that staff, families, community groups and service providers are secure in their understanding of what this key group within the organisation does and aspires towards.
- 4.157 The Programme Manager and her team are well aware that the imperative of mainstreaming is already firmly with us and are at the forefront of city-wide developments on this. Whilst community groups and other agencies are realistic about the problem of instability in changing contexts, and are in particular familiar with short term funding of services, the extent to which the Programme can be clear with its partners about how its role will develop will determine the level of confidence of those engaging with it.
- 4.158** By way of conclusion here it is important to note that tensions around continuity and stability create difficulties for working practice. When agencies are, for example uncertain about their future, effectiveness can be rapidly impeded. As Children's Centre developments progress in Sheffield, the extent to which Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start is consulted with and informed about how the changes will impact on its service organization and delivery will determine the quality of its relationships with local organizations. This is crucial for local politicians and strategists to take note of. **Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start and has put a range of strategies in place to position itself as a programme growing in strength and capable of leading the mainstreaming agenda if given the opportunity to do so.**

CHAPTER FIVE

Ways forward for the programme

ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

- 5.1 In developing Action and Implementation Plans for respective stakeholder groups we have tried to provide realistic and practical guidance grounded in the experiences and perceptions reported to us. Action and Implementation Plans are working tools and need to be negotiated and agreed on within and across stakeholder groups - so what we have detailed is not intended to be directive or exhaustive but rather meant to guide the commitment which is already clearly in evidence to get the most out of the programmes work and support its continued development.
- 5.2 We envisage that it will be the role of the Programme Manager with the Partnership Board to facilitate discussion and agreement about actions to be implemented as part of the development planning process which the evaluation will hopefully feed into. We hope you will consider the recommendations below and think about who might be charged with taking them forward. We have included actions for each stakeholder group that we feel we could usefully be undertaken.

Action and Implementation Plans for Programme Staff

During the process of this evaluation, programme staff demonstrated understanding of each other's views and perspectives and raised matters of concern in a positive and professional manner. They are clearly committed to providing a high quality service and keen to develop working practices that will affect positive change for children and families in Firth Park and Shiregreen.

It is our view that the staff group of any effective Sure Start programme must also be robust enough to engage actively, creatively and constructively with all stakeholder groups. They should continually reflect on and review all aspects of their own practice, with a fixed focus on enhancing the position of parents and children and young people as key drivers of every aspect of the programme's work. We strongly encourage the Firth Park and Shiregreen programme Staff Group to continue the collective process of critical self-reflection in which they have become engaged through participation in this evaluation process.

Based on the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews the following activities are recommended for the programme Staff Group to help ensure that the programme continues to go from strength to strength. The suggestions outlined below entail a continual review of many working practices. We emphasise here that these suggestions do not infer criticism of existing practices but rather signal the potential for staff to develop their own expertise and the service offered.

The Staff Group could

- Think about ways in which currently involved parents could be supported to become ambassadors for the training programme in the community.
- Consider how else aspects of the delivery plan could be made use of to focus the work of the Programme - given the success of using it in Working Groups.
- Consider how parent feedback on programme services can be most effectively recorded and communicated so that the Programme in general learns from them.

- Develop ways of sharing parent and child feedback with agencies providing services to the Programme to develop an on going dialogue about what works and what needs developing.
- Consider whether there are aspects of good practice in programme delivery that could be sharpened, formalised or further developed to support a mainstreaming agenda?
- Think about what else needs to be done to improve systems of monitoring and evaluation within the Programme?
- Identify 3 processes that could be improved and articulate what the improvements would be?
- What can the programme staff be expected to do in respect of accountability?
- What can't the Programme do, and how can realistic answers from external sources enhance its autonomy?
- Develop a strategy to maximise liaison between members of staff and the Accountable Body.
- Review strategies for systematically taking account of staff training needs. Training should enable individual and team development and respond to the wish expressed by staff for clear progression pathways.
- Work towards clarity on how partners can most efficiently be included in meetings.
- Work towards clarity on how events and activities can become the building blocks for sustainable target-oriented service delivery in order to identify ways in which staff can take part in assessing the sustainability and the potential for mainstreaming of services.
- Review strategic plans for engaging with families with under 4's who have marginal or no contact with Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start with the aim of addressing the specific blocks to participation.

- Encourage strategic alliances with voluntary agencies to promote working together on changing priorities for the programme.
- We encourage all programme staff to work together to protect the impressive team spirit openness and trust which has, in our view, characterised your programme during the course of the evaluation. To this end we suggest the staff team participate in an ongoing process of training to support team building in the context of ongoing rapid change.

Action and Implementation Plans for the Partnership Board

On the basis of the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews the following activities could be undertaken by the Partnership Board to help ensure that the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength. In respect of each suggestion we recommend the identification of a named person to be responsible for driving the action forward.

- Undertake to clarify the Partnership Board's shared vision for the programme. We suggest this process is initiated through a dedicated series of away days and specifically involves representatives from the Accountable Body with the aim of establishing clarity about its role and responsibilities.
- Clarify all roles, responsibilities, purposes and functions with all members of the Partnership Board.
- Review decision making processes to maximize efficiency.
- Develop, disseminate and implement a clear Strategic Plan detailing activities that the Partnership Board wishes the programme to prioritise through the next planning cycle. Specifically we would expect these to include
 - a review of the key needs for service planning and delivery for reaching and consulting with currently underrepresented children and their families,
 - identification of appropriate mechanisms for consulting with parents and children.
- Revive plans for a system of mentoring parents which appear to have fallen by the wayside despite parent interest.
- The Board should find ways of ensuring attendance of a member from Social Services.
- Monitor and make public activities which are undertaken to optimise participation by faith and community groups currently under-represented on the Partnership Board.

- Consider strategies for wider dissemination of Partnership Board activity.. This should be part of a wider discussion on how to improve the Board's communication strategy.
- What use is going to be made of the excellent Annual Report?
- Set up new opportunities for parent involvement in the Partnership Board - for example following the suggestion that some parents are willing to help out with administration on a flexible or one-off basis. Work with parents to evolve practical ideas for ways forward on this.
- Find ways of maximising the focus of Board meetings on topics which parents prioritise.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of SLA Partners

The Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Programme has a key role to play in eliciting and responding to initiatives and ideas for service development put forward by SLA partners and prospective partners. Based on the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews, the following activities could be undertaken by programme Staff in collaboration with the Partnership Board in respect of SLA partners to help ensure that the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength. In respect of each suggestion we recommend the identification of a named person to be responsible for driving the action forward.

- How can the Sure Start Programme team work with SLA providers to improve understanding both of perceptions of, and attitudes to, venues selected as sites of Sure Start activity within different sections of the Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start community?
- Do individuals and organisations providing direct client services under Service Level Agreements have access to systematic assessment procedures? To what extent are these shared between organisations? How is the effectiveness of any procedures monitored?
- How can the 'link-role', that providers of direct client services undertake, be made most effective - in liaison with the Sure Start core team, in liaison with other SLA providers and in liaison with outside agencies? How can observations of emerging need be fed back into the programme planning and inform future development of SLAs?
- To what extent is there a clear and shared understanding of who the hard to reach groups in the Firth Park and Shire Green community are? What systematic attempts have been made to identify these? How do the SLA partners work together to target hard to reach groups and how do they coordinate with the core Sure Start team in this regard?

- How far should SLA providers have the autonomy to decide how they meet their Service Level Agreements? Where should responsibility for defining appropriate use of workers' time and expertise in relation to the SLAs lie? How far can Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start expect SLA providers to develop new services and new ways of doing things in order to help meet Sure Start targets?
- How can SLA providers ensure that the experience that they bring with them of delivering services to the Firth Park and Shire Green community is able to inform the continuing development of Sure Start while also ensuring they are open and sensitive to any need to adapt these services to meet the specific needs of Firth Park and Shire Green clients, in a way that is accessible to this community?
- How can SLA partners collaborate with the Programme Manager, to ensure these issues are fed back and addressed at the level of the Lead Organisation and Regional or National Sure Start units?
- There is clearly a need to further improve the contracting process if services are to develop in line with client needs within the Sure Start area and if providers are to work with the Programme team to enable mainstreaming and sustainability of services in the long term. What steps need to be taken to prompt positive change?
- What can SLA partners do to feed their interpretation of local community need into the local, regional and national Sure Start agenda? What support would be needed for them to do this?
- How far do/should individuals who work with SLAs understand the relationship between their SLA, Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start's delivery plan and Sure Start targets? What information is shared in respect of this?
- How is understanding of the commitments of SLA partners shared with all members of the Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start core staff team?
- How could more effective liaison between the SLAs and Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start be organised? How can SLA partners be enabled to access and share all appropriate information with the Sure Start

programme? What infrastructure and/or training would be needed to make this happen?

- How can SLA providers best feed into the development of effective and efficient mechanisms for monitoring and review?
- Both the SLA providers and Sure Start workers need to feel monitoring activities provide a reasonable record of what providers are delivering to Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start. They also need to feel the review process is valuable to all involved and has a positive role to play in shaping the on-going work of SLA providers. Could SLA providers, in collaboration with the Programme Manager, refine monitoring and review processes so they are better able to meet the needs of all parties?
- Can SLA providers join together to begin to make explicit the support they feel they need to enable more effective participation at this level? How can SLA partners feed these requirements back to the Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start Programme and to Regional and National Sure Start?
- How can SLA providers be supported to ensure that they are able to develop positive elements of their existing services while also ensure they can identify and respond to client needs that do not 'fit' with existing patterns of service provision?
- How can Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start and the SLA providers ensure that everyone shares the same 'vision' and are able to effectively monitor activities and progress towards meeting targets?
- Review strategic plans for encouraging SLA partners to develop their relationship with the programme. This will involve reviewing the structures and processes SLA providers need in place to communicate effectively with the team and each other. The review should be set up to enable SLA partners to help the programme team to shape and fine tune services that they provide to meet Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start targets. An important aim of this work will be to close the knowledge gap between SLA partners and staff about what each party can bring to the programme.
- The programme should find ways of capitalizing on some excellent work SLA partners are carrying out and of giving feedback on the input of

SLA partners. A review of how SLA partners would like their work to be monitored and evaluated in line with Sure Start requirements and also to show 'added value' would be timely.

- Establish joint initiatives to ensure the experiences of individual SLA providers working with the team and with the client population feed back into the process of reviewing activities and also inform the process of reviewing the SLAs themselves. In relation to this it is important to set up systems that enable SLA partners to ensure they can identify and respond to client needs which do not 'fit' into existing patterns of service provision. All of this is crucial for sustainability.
- Monitor the difficulties SLA partners articulate concerning competing demands on their time and expertise with the aim of better enabling them to meet the requirement of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start. Convene a forum for discussion of these issues.
- Update information on Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start's provision to avoid duplication of services.
- Model good mainstreaming practice - take stock of lessons to be learned from the process of negotiating SLAs with other Sure Starts. Work with SLA partners to develop a set of concrete practical guidelines to inform the development of SLAs and to identify principles of good commissioning / contracting practice that would help to make a greater success of their work with Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Community Groups

The Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Programme has a key role to play in eliciting and responding to initiatives and ideas for service development put forward by Community Groups working in the area. Based on the data we have collected through key stakeholder workshops and interviews, the following activities should be undertaken by programme Staff in collaboration with the Partnership Board in respect of Community Groups to help ensure that the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength. In respect of each suggestion we recommend the identification of a named person to be responsible for driving the action forward.

- Does Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start have up-to-date information about all groups in/near the area?
- How is information between Firth Park and Shire Green Sure Start and local community groups shared?
- Do all known groups receive publicity material? What is the strategy for dissemination of publicity materials?
- Is the Sure Start programme informing families of 'other' groups' services and activities?
- The overarching question of interest to Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start and Community Groups concerns how to 'join things up' to make the most of hard-pressed resources and expertise already available in the area, to enhance the experience of disadvantaged families and young children. In respect of this, a review of participation and involvement of community groups in the work of the programme and of existing co-operative arrangements the programme has with the voluntary sector, should be set up. Launch a strategic plan for widening participation of community groups in the work of the programme.
- Take stock of the programme's existing communication strategies to ensure that its aims and objectives are communicated clearly and concisely to all relevant local groups. Check that all known local groups receive publicity material and are engaged in a strategy for making those

in their organisations aware of what Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start is doing.

- Identify systems for effective development of links with local groups wishing to strengthen existing relationships with the programme. This could include the development of strategic alliances through which, *at the invitation of the Partnership Board*, community groups can have a direct input to programme issues.
- Community Groups stakeholders say they would find a regularly updated list of all the services and activities the programme provides identifying all the partners involved very useful.
- Contribute to setting up a citywide strategy to facilitate interaction between Sure Start programmes across Sheffield and community organisations that work across the city with families with young children. Identify a named person to participate in this process for Firth Park and Shiregreen.
- Convene discussion with local community groups of ways in which joint work can be undertaken to reach and include children and families who persistently fall outside of the reach of the programme. In Firth Park and Shiregreen, families seeking asylum or refuge, and disabled children and parents, can be identified as groups currently missing out on Sure Start provision.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Parents

The Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start Programme is required to elicit and respond to aspirations and ideas for service development put forward by local parents. Based on the data we have collected through meeting with parents involved in the programme, the following activities should be undertaken by programme Staff in collaboration with the Partnership Board to help ensure that the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength.

- Clarify strategic plans for maximising the participation and involvement of parents in the work of the programme at all levels. Specifically we would expect this to include review of plans to raise the profile of parents within the organisation and to position family members as the principal architects of Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for maximising the participation and involvement of children in the work of the programme.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for building on its good practice in maximising the participation and involvement of men in the work of the programme.
- Set up fact finding to identify new information counters for promoting the programme in Firth Park and Shiregreen. Parents could conduct this enquiry.
- Continually learn through maximizing the input of parents, caregivers and young children into training throughout the organization.

CHAPTER SIX

Concluding observations and Recommendations

- 6.1 Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme is a successful Sheffield Sure Start programme. It is evolving well and has clearly been experienced positively by stakeholders. There is - of course- scope to further develop innovative approaches to widening participation in the programme and we have made recommendations in respect of this for all stakeholders in the section on Action and Implementation plans of this report.
- 6.2 Stakeholders who have contributed to this evaluation are unanimously agreed that the work of the programme is valued by the local community. Aspects of its delivery, including well organised internal systems , well supported parental involvement and imaginative services which support the four sets of Sure Start objectives provide useful 'best practice' exemplars for other programmes to utilise.
- 6.3 At the point of drawing this phase of evaluation to a close the programme is providing imaginative services around early education, childcare, health and family support which look set to have favorable and enduring consequences for the under 4's of Firth Park and Shiregreen and their families.
- 6.4 It will be important to reassure the team, parents, partners and community agencies of the commitment of the Accountable Body to an open, transparent and inclusive approach to the Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start programme to support its high quality work.

- 6.5 We hope the programme and its allies will consider the recommendations and Action and Implementation Plans provided and think about who might be charged with taking them forward.
- 6.6 We have 4 recommendations for the next evaluation of the programme, these are that:
- Progress on following through Action and Implementation plans is a key focus of evaluation - because these plans have emerged directly from the expressed aspirations of the programme's key stakeholders.
 - Parents are supported in developing a central role as community researchers - because Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start has a nucleus of committed group of parents ready to take on this role and staff well-equipped to support them.
 - A strong focus is placed on thinking about child development outcomes - because building an evidence base will build confidence in the provision and position some of the imaginative services being provided through Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start at the leading edge in terms of being able to provide practice pointers for other providers
 - The programme continues to align its evaluation with that of other Sure Start programmes - because the headway made through the Programme's willingness to work collaboratively towards advancing the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services in this way has been impressive.
- 6.7 The Programme Manager is clearly asserting proper methods of consultation within this programme. This, combined with her enthusiasm, and respected strategic steer on key issues has impressed us as evaluators. A useful step to engage with next will be for the Programme Manager to write an open response to this evaluation which will set in motion the process by which the programme will move beyond the work to date outlined in this report. This will position Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start as a programme capable of making a pivotal contribution to the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services which is now focused city wide on the Childrens Centre initiative.

Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn, August 2004.

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ANNEX A - TRAINING RESOURCE

**MAXIMISING INCLUSION IN
SURE START**

Looking at everyday practice in the delivery of Sure Start

At the request of the Programme Manager we have included this Annex as a training resource which can be used to engender further self assessment of programme's delivery. The production of this resource has been made possible by the willingness of six Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers to commit to a model of transparency for the purposes of this evaluation.

What's in the Training Section

The Training Section contains stories of everyday Sure Start events followed by a series of themed 'Thinking Points' around the general topic of 'Maximizing Inclusion in Sure Start'.

Stories of Sure Start delivery were collected by a roving researcher whose brief was to focus specifically on how parents feel about involvement with the programme, how convenient Sure Start services are for parents in the area, any barriers preventing parents accessing services and how satisfied parents are with the services they use. To gather this information in ways which would be easy and comfortable for parents, programmes suggested activities the researcher could attend to observe and talk with parents. Getting alongside parents in their everyday encounters with Sure Start turned out to be hugely informative, offering many more benefits from research enquiry than we had imagined.

As a way of finding out about parents experiences, the roving reporter strategy turned out to be a process which parents felt comfortable with and very willing to contribute to. A spin-off of this contact between parents and the roving researcher has been that many parents we met indicated that 'next time' they might feel confident enough to be actively engaged in producing 'Sure Start snapshots' themselves and in developing their role as community researchers for any subsequent evaluation.

Stories provide a scope for describing what works well in terms of raising participation and involvement in Sure Start settings which bears immediate relation to the actuality of everyday experiences. They validate the day-to-day struggles which make the process of widening participation both a difficult and necessary business. They are clearly subjective and impressionistic, presenting

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

only one person's viewpoint, but nevertheless have great potential for transferring both user and provider experiences of participation in Sure Start into this report. Narrative description brings alive a sense of the essential ingredients which facilitate participation and involvement in a range of settings.

The stories offered as snapshots put forward examples of practical ways in which Sheffield Sure Start programmes are working to bring young children and their parents into what the programme can offer. The snap-shots do not always make for easy and comfortable reading; they sometimes reveal thorny issues which need to be explored. 'Thinking points' to assist in this process follow the set of stories. The 'Thinking Points' are by no means exhaustive and many others will occur - however they signal that there is no room for complacency in the delivery of Sure Start programmes and will generate a range of practice indicators for Firth Park & Shiregreen and other Sure Start programmes alike.

As readers attempt to draw out 'the key points for successful Sure Start delivery' it will be clear that Sheffield programmes are carrying out deeply impressive work to take forward the project of improving outcomes for young children in the city. Yet even within the snap shots, similarities and differences between practices and interpretations of what Sure Start can achieve can be seen. All, however, evidence an understanding that the following are vital components:

- Commitment and enthusiasm of staff
- Provision of a varied range of creative activities and opportunities for children and their parents to encourage them to become involved in services which are for them
- Planning and preparation for raising participation and involvement
- Enabling children and their parents to feel safe and supported
- Commitment to inclusion in principle and practice - viewing 'problems' in supporting the participation and involvement of children and parents as 'problems for service providers' and not 'problems which individual children and families have'

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- Learning from experience

We hope that in the snapshots provided readers will see how - in very different ways - Sheffield Sure Start programmes achieve the above and much more, during the course of 'ordinary everyday' delivery. The stories put forward examples of practical ways in which children and their parents are being brought into partnership with local programmes. They suggest many ideas about how all programmes can make further headway with the task of making certain services support the Sure Start objectives.

Snapshots evidencing the facilitation of children and parents in Sure Start

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STAY & PLAY April 2004

The day is now very hot and very sunny. Two minutes before the start of the session there was torrential, monsoon, cartoon-style rain but it's over now like somebody just turned off a tap.

The waiting room where everyone is meeting up is bright and well laid out, there's a large green tray populated with plastic dinosaurs, a blanket strewn with 'Babies Big Bright Board Books'. Toys litter the floor and at a craft table by the doorway a solitary child in a Pop Idol T-Shirt, Lucy is in the process of embalming herself in what Rebecca, Sure Start Parent Involvement Worker, cheerfully refers to as 'the wiggly glue'.

'You mustn't mind' Rebecca reassures Lucy's mother, 'they need to get messy sometimes'. The conversation turns to just exactly how big an area you can cover with a chocolate cake if you spread it out thinly enough.

Two more mums arrive with pushchairs; they're soaked through with rain and steaming from the sunshine,

'Christ' they say, 'It's like some bugger just turned tap off' and their children join Lucy at the craft table. Rebecca steers the conversation around to parenting, she does it in an uncontrived and relaxed manner and mentions a parenting group that is starting up at a nearby school,

'It's very informal' she says 'nothing heavy' and you might find it helpful, after all you don't get any training to be a parent do you?'

The mothers agree and say they might give the group a try. One mum mentions her mate who has five children 'Ah can cope wi' one' she says 'but not wi' five!'

The room is filling up now; parents are chatting away and children are playing together. The atmosphere is very friendly and relaxed and the relationship between Sure Start workers and the mums seems very good. Two grandparents who are out shopping poke their heads through an open window to say hello to their grandson.

'It's alright this' says Clare, mother of a three-year old boy, 'I've been coming to this for 11 months now, I saw the poster while I were out shopping and thought I'd try it. I've met people through coming and its nice when people from here say 'hello' to you down the shops, best thing is getting away from the telly'.

Rebecca says the turnout can vary wildly - some weeks there are 26 families on others only 7.

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Rebecca puts some music on. It's the theme from Robin Hood and as bold Robin and his Merry Men go riding through the Glen, two three-year-old children decide this is the ideal time to eat the 'wiggly glue'. This turns out to be a feature of nearly every Sure Start session where glue is made available. Apparently it tastes 'a bit salty.'

Rebecca circulates and records parents details on an attendance sheet and introduces a new mother to everybody in the group, meanwhile there's a certain amount of Avon catalogue business going on in one corner of the room.

'They're not monsters' one mum says to no one in particular, 'they're dinosaurs' and it takes a moment to realise she's not talking about her children. She says she's been coming to this group for 18 months - pretty much since the start - and she's obviously picked up some of the Sure Start buzzwords.

'It provides good interaction for us parents and if it were crap - sorry if it weren't a good, a successful session, people just wouldn't come back next week.'

There's another mum here who describes herself as 'a regular' and she's brought her sister-in-law with her today who is visiting from Liverpool and has decided to bring her child along. One mum is happy but feels that Sure Start could do more. Not this Sure Start, but Sure Start in general:

'I'm from one of the poorest areas in Sheffield she says but 'coz I live 2 streets away I can't actually register with Sure Start for this area. I come to Stay and Play but I'm not allowed on the trips or the activities and I feel really fed up about that when I hear the other mums talking about what they've been up to.'

There's a break for toast and juice, then everybody sings a song. It's raining hard outside now and everybody disperses.

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PLAY & STAY

April 2004

‘Sometimes I feel like I’m the Pied Piper’ Margaret says ‘and everybody’ else is the rats!’

Margaret, Parent Involvement Worker for the Sure Start Programme, has seemingly limitless enthusiasm for the project.

The Centre we are in has a lovely newly refurbished Sure Start room. It’s bright and warm with spring pictures on the walls and a variety of toys and games ranged across low-level tables. Within the next few weeks it will also have a purpose-built outside play area ‘just in time for the summer.’

There are 5 Sure Start workers here this morning, one of whom is a trained volunteer, and eventually 8 adults and 6 children. A couple arrive who are new to the area; they’ve seen the Sure Start posters outside and are keen to sign up. Unfortunately they live just the wrong side of the Sure Start boundary for this area and so are not able to register for the full range of Sure Start activities, nor eligible for a welcome pack, but Margaret says they’re welcome to come to Play & Stay.

Margaret explains the Welcome Packs.

‘I stole the idea from another Sure Start group she says ‘and now other Sure Start’s have copied the idea from me.’

Margaret has put together 4 separate packs, each one tailored to a specific age range, some of the packs originally contained a lullaby tape, but these are no longer included, as Margaret has concerns that the songs may not be appropriate for certain minority ethnic groups.

Pack One - Age 0-1yr.

Bath thermometer

Bedroom thermometer

Book suitable for age – a soft book

Sure Start bib

Bottle & Cup

Sure Start information pack

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Pack Two - Age 1-2 yr

Plug protectors x2
Book suitable for age
Textured 'sensory' ball
Bottle & Cup
Sure Start info pack

Pack Three - Age 2-3yr

Play Dough
Pastry cuttersx2
Book suitable for age
4-piece jigsaw
Bottle & Cup
Sure Start info pack

Pack Four - Age 3-4yr

Play Dough
Pastry cuttersx2
Textured 'sensory' ball
Book suitable for age
Bottle & cup
Sure Start info pack.

The session itself is pretty much a carbon copy of other Play & Stays I have been to across the City.

The children play together, parents chat, the children eat the glue, and its all very relaxed and low key. Margaret and her team are friendly and enthusiastic and two of the 'parents' turn out to be registered child-minders who regularly bring their charges to this session.

None of the parents I spoke to seemed to know much, or even to particularly care about the wider aims of Sure Start, they were just happy to have something to get them out of the house which allowed themselves and their children to see new faces.

Margaret says that although Sure Start information is provided with the Welcome Packs, it rarely comes up in conversation with the parents. 'In fact' she says 'It seems like they'd rather talk about anything else than parenting, but sometimes you can judge a lot from what they don't say.'

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PLAY TOTS May 2004

There are 4 mums here and 8 children this morning. The session takes place in the kind of cavernous high-ceiling 1930's-style classroom that was purpose-built to put the fear of God into little children. The room has been decorated and adapted for the needs of modern under-fives; there are Barney posters on the walls, toys and activities litter the floor and a section of the room has been fenced off to provide an area where later the children are given their juice and toast.

Pinned to the notice board by the door there's a photo montage of the Mum's Christmas 'do' at the local skating rink. They're all sporting foam antlers and hysterical grins.

Sharon introduces herself. She is a Pre-School Learning Alliance Support worker. 'I'm a kind of trouble-shooter really' she explains. 'I have about 40 of these groups on my books and I go round, give support and advice where its needed. Recently I've spent a lot of time with this group.'

Sharon explains that until recently the group was being operated without any proper constitution or structure. The group now has a leader, Anthea, a treasurer, Jacky, and a chairperson, Hayley, all of whom are here this morning. Sharon explains 'that usually the room's a lot nicer than this. Soon as we get the new carpet down it will be lovely.'

The session is noisy, not to say a little rowdy, but the workers and the mums get on very well and there's a tangible sense of 'fun' here, rough and tumble, enjoyable boisterous play is going off here, something that has not always been a feature of other Sure Start sessions. The children play together, run around and fall spectacularly from time to time. The mums chat, keeping half an eye on their charges and the workers prepare cups of tea, coffee, juice and endless plates of toast. There's an in-depth analysis of the merits of different brands and styles of disposable nappy. It's generally agreed that Huggies used to be the best. Formerly Huggies were Undisputed Lords of the Kingdom of Disposable Pants, but according to these mums their latest offering, the new, the improved, the innovative Huggies Superflex - is 'rubbish'.

I speak to a mum. She says she's been coming to this session for about 6 months. She found out about it through bringing her older son to nursery elsewhere in the building, says it gets her out of the house, is something to do and a good place to meet other mums.

'Is there anything else you'd like to see them do, or any changes?'

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'No it's great!'

This session runs three times a week. Sharon says that Wednesday is usually the busiest day and that they've up to 16 families in.

'We've just been round delivering a new lot of leaflets' she says ' So that should bring a few more in – plus we do a Bumps & Babies session as well as trips out and Fun Days.'

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TIME FOR YOU

June 2004

'Tony Blair says that only 50% of childcare workers need to be qualified ' Debbie says, 'but he also states that everybody who works with food must have a certificate, so how much sense does that make?'

Debbie has very strong views about what Sure Start needs to provide a proper service.

'Good early years workers are what Sure Start really needs' she says 'people think anybody can look after kids, and that training's not needed, but it's not true, you wouldn't ask just anybody to cut your hair would you? Everything we do, all the courses, the training, the events, need to be underpinned with good childcare and food'.

Christine, Parent Involvement Worker, introduces herself. She's a very down-to-earth, pragmatic person and later during the session itself her attitude and approach pays dividends. She shows me around. This morning's session is split across 2 rooms.

'We're trying to build confidence and give people a good place to come' she says as she shows off the new crèche, then leads me into the parents room where she introduces the mums. This room is light and airy and laid out with easy chairs. On a big table under the barred window there's an array of magazines; Red, Practical Parenting, OK, Inspirations For Your Home, and all the usual Sure Start literature. Notably there's a feed back leaflet 'Praise or Grumble' which encourages parents to make comments about how they feel Sure Start is performing in their area.

This morning's session is mainly concerned with getting the Clothes Bank into some sort of order. Parents bring in surplus summer clothes in the winter and vice versa and today the mums are sorting through the summer clothes, which will be sold for a few pence each.

The atmosphere in the room is very friendly and sorting through baby clothes provides the perfect setting to talk about everything and nothing. The conversation ranges from Big Brother to wasps and almost every item of clothing that's pulled out of the bags provokes a barrage of 'oohs' and 'aahs' followed by a discussion about an aspect of parenting or child growth and behaviour

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Christine is very friendly with the mums; she looks like them, she talks like them and there is no sense whatsoever that she is lecturing or talking down to them.

One mum says 'This is supposed to be 'Time For Me' and you've got us slaving away'.

'It's a break from home, that's all, so get on wi' it lady!' Christine replies and everybody laughs.

Christine mentions the First Aid course that will be starting in a couple of week's time. One mum asks if it involves lots of writing, and it's obvious from the tone of her voice that she's very apprehensive about this. Christine and the other mums pick up on this immediately and all reassure her that she'll be Ok – a really nice, ordinary example of friendship and support.

The conversation veers toward potty training and once again the manufacturers of disposable nappies come in for a fair amount of stick. Christine's theory is that they're too 'good'.

'The old-fashioned way' she says 'was to wait after your child had weed itself and let it go cold, but modern nappies are so good at keeping the liquid away from the skin that you can't really do that anymore –so it's made our job harder'.

Christine goes on to suggest other techniques and then, only a few minutes before the end of the session, one mum puts into words what's probably been playing on her mind for the last two hours.

'Since she's 'ad the grommets in she's just stopped talkin'. She seems to understand but she just points. She will not talk.'

'Do you respond?' Christine asks 'When she's pointing are you responding?'

'Yeah we do. Always. She's going backwards, we're really, really worried.'

It turns out that the mum has made an appointment for her daughter at Northern General Hospital for tests but that it's not until August. Christine suggests that she attend a hearing drop-in session run in conjunction with Sure Start partly as way of reassuring herself and also as a fast track to advice and possible treatment for her child.

The parents go into the crèche where they are reunited with their children. They read a story and everybody sings a song.

Christine managed to steer a two-hour conversation around almost every aspect of parenting, diet, behaviour and housing and provided the mums with the opportunity to discuss their own experience in a supportive and friendly environment. Which all sounds a bit formal. It didn't seem like that at all and that's what was so good about it.

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YOUNG PARENTS GROUP APRIL 2004

It's 11.00 on a very wet Tuesday morning. Maureen, Sure Start Home Care Worker, and her driver Chris are sheltering in the council mini bus parked outside a tower block on the estate.

'It's good is this group' Chris says 'coz they get their veg.'

The group runs from 12.00 'till 2.00, which gives Maureen an hour to 'round up' her girls. The group started six months ago and has 14 girls on its books, the most they've had at any one session is 9 and the least, 3. There are 10 'possibles' this morning and as the bus weaves its way through the estate, Maureen tries to contact her girls in advance by mobile 'phone. In the event she only makes three successful pick-ups, two mums and one mum-to-be. Maureen greets the mums cheerfully, then fusses over their babies as she straps them into the minibus's child seats.

'Starting next month you'll have to do this bit for yourselves' Maureen says, 'it's to do with the insurance.'

None of the girls seem too bothered about talking to me, so I try to reassure them by saying that their real names will not be used and ask them to pick an alias from Corrie instead. Instantly there's a friendly argument about who's going to be Candice and who is definitely not going to be Deirdre. 'Candice' tells me that she's been coming to this group for 9 months now and that her baby 'Alex' is 15 weeks old.

We arrive back at the block and find another mother and baby waiting outside. Maureen opens up and the girls troop into a common room at the base of the tower. There are posters up everywhere, Craig David on the ghetto blaster, toys and books on the floor and two big comfortable sofas. The room has a separate kitchen with a serving hatch and there's a selection of 'healthy' sandwiches (plenty of salad) on offer, plus grapes and some less healthy crisps and chocolate mousses.

The girls go for the crisps first, then two of them, Fizz and Katy slope off for a fag. I follow them out.

Fizz is very pregnant and very fed up.

'Ah just wanna get it over wi' she says, puffing on her fag.

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'Ah know ' says Katy 'and it's right boring, they keep yer in for three days if it's yer first, ah'll come and see you though.'

'Would yer?'

'Yeah let me know when yer go in'.

'So that's a result for Sure Start' I thought, 'the mums might be outside smoking instead of eating the healthy things, but they are offering each other support'.

Back in the room Sammy is talking to Helen the midwife. Her baby is having what Sammy describes as its' 'needles' tomorrow and she isn't sure what to expect. The girls all seem to like Helen, she chats away to them, mentions a baby massage session which will be taking place at a local church, chats a bit more, drops the idea of a weaning party into the conversation and reintroduces the Sure Start theme of healthy eating.

'If you attend four sessions' she says, you get a free hand blender and it's a great little thing. And we'll show you how to use it to do stuff that's not jarred – coz you never know what's in them - preservatives and allsorts.'

The mothers have asked that their partners/ the babies fathers do not attend this group but Helen says that it's important to try to stay in touch with them all the same. The conversation turns to the finer points of bottle feeding, Maureen turns the music down while Helen demonstrates with Katy's child and explains about 'spit-up' (posit), Fizz looks blank and turns the music up again.

Maureen also has an excellent rapport with the girls. She is enthusiastic, pragmatic, brusque and her non-Sheffield accent is a source of constant amusement. The girls instantly pick up on difference in age, class and outlook amongst Sure Start workers.

Later in the session when Helen talked about what a 'Post-natal' involved, the conversation shifted around to contraception, which in turn led to comments from the girls that they never felt like going out anyway, even if they could find a baby-sitter.

'But you don't just have to go out at night' Helen said, wouldn't it be nice to have a day out shopping?'

'Yeah' Candice added sharply. 'And wouldn't it be nice to 'ave plenty of money in yer pocket to do it!'

Later on a Community Teacher, Karen, joined the group. She was just brilliant with the children and as she played a peek-a-boo game with Candice's baby everybody was soon smiling. But as she produced story-sacks and started talking brightly about finger-puppets,

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songs and rhymes the atmosphere in the group began to freeze over. The killer moment was the singing.

‘Do you like singing?’ she asked.

‘Naaah’

‘Well neither do I really, but it’s great for your kids and you should try to get a bank of songs together for when you just don’t know what to do with them!’

‘Ah just sing’im that shurrup song’ Sammy said

Karen ignored that, and put on a nursery rhyme tape.

The transition from Craig David to Bobby Shaftoe was never going to be smooth, but as the singer on the tape managed to sound posh, pained, folksy and patronising all at the same time you could see the steel defence shutters dropping down behind the girls eyes and you could almost hear them thinking ‘what has this got to do with us?’

The tape seemed to come from another universe and one which bore as much resemblance to these girls lives as an episode of Little House on the Prairie or a day- trip to Walton’s mountain.

The girls found out about this Sure Start service through the usual channels, G.P midwife or health visitor and their comments about its success were the often heard ones:

1. it gets us out of the house
2. if it was rubbish we wouldn’t come back.

Towards the end of the session a Sure Start Advice worker appeared and took Fizz into the kitchen to explain about what benefits she would be entitled to and how best to obtain them.

All in all it was a very successful session and (Bobby Shaftoe aside) it was quite a surprise that Maureen and her team had been able to impart so much information in such a short time and even more striking that they’d made hardly any of it either daunting or pedagogic.

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BABY MASSAGE

May 2004

'You'll have to take your shoes off before you come in here' Ryka says.

Ryka is a Home Visitor and Outreach worker who has recently trained in baby massage and this session will be last of the second block of four-week courses that she has run so far. She hands me a folder, which all the mums who attend are given at the beginning of the course. It contains clearly written fact sheets about baby massage, sleep and colic, songs and rhymes to sing whilst doing particular massages and a step-by-step guide -with diagrams- of the entire 'Gentle Touch' baby massage programme.

The room at the rear of the Sure Start office has a brand-new laminate floor, is very warm, light and beautifully decorated. There are six purple massage mats laid out with pillows towels and a few toys, a lavender scented candle is burning in one corner of the room and soft music is playing on the stereo. It's all very relaxing, so relaxing in fact that the first baby to arrive promptly falls asleep.

In the event only 3 mums turn up, but in terms of cultural and social mix the clientele couldn't be more diverse. One is a very 'posh' well-spoken lady who talks excitedly about the new house she is having built, the second is reet Yorkshire and the third is quietly spoken and Afro-Caribbean. They all coo over each other's babies and begin to discuss which colour clothing the infants look best in; one looks good in green, one in blue

'and you, you lucky thing' the posh lady says to the black baby 'well you just look gorgeous in anything!'

Ryka greets them and makes them all a drink. She asks a few general questions about health/ welfare and how the previous week has gone in terms of parenting, and then turns off the music tape. The parents have all filled in health check forms at the beginning of the course.

'This week we'll be doing a full body massage – if the babies will let us!' she says 'so if you just want to undress your baby.'

Only one baby gets undressed as one is still asleep and the other is being breastfed.

Ryka runs through the massage programme. She demonstrates the various techniques and movements on a very lifelike doll and in between each stage there is a great deal of relaxed conversation about children, parenting and life in general.

'We'll do the tummy next' Ryka says 'you might want to loosen the nappy a bit as this one often gets things moving'

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She explains that this massage is good for colic, then tells a cautionary tale about a mother who foolishly failed to slacken the nappy and performed this manoeuvre upon a baby which had been constipated for three days. It was a poo-based disaster in the making.

'It just exploded everywhere!' she says with relish, and everybody laughs.

This session was very relaxed, friendly and loving. There was a great deal of information being passed on, but in a completely natural manner.

There was one wonderful moment where all the mums sang 'I love you' to their babies. This was perfectly natural and unforced and also very moving in its own way.

As the session drew to a close, Ryka thanked the mums, asked them all to stay in touch, made them aware of a wide variety of other Sure Start activities and handed out evaluation forms for them all to complete

'And don't forget' she said finally 'please call in whenever you're passing'.

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Parent Forum Meeting May 2004

'I've just had to grab a box and run this morning' Gaynor says, struggling with cups, milk, coffee, tea and biscuits. Attending this meeting is not really part of her usual job, but as the Parent Involvement Worker is off sick, Gaynor's had this meeting passed on to her at very short notice.

Parents Forum is an individually constituted group of parents set up in June 2002. This group was originally formed as a way for parents to air their views about Sure Start and to comment upon the service it was providing for them. Since then it has evolved into a much more autonomous group of parents, with links back to the Partnership Board, and was formally constituted by Sure Start in April 2004.

One by one the mums arrive and take their children downstairs to the crèche. There's a lot of general conversation about their own, and their babies health and concern over an absent member of the group who has just had a very difficult birth. Top topic of conversation is a recent drunken Hen Night.

'I were like sponge' says one mum 'It were just all soakin' in!'

Eventually there are 8 mothers sitting in a circle, one has kept her child with her, some have a lot more to say than others, but they all seem relaxed and friendly and as the meeting begins they become cheerfully businesslike.

Gaynor isn't quite sure how this meeting goes, so she asks a mum, Maria, to chair the meeting and offers to scribe instead.

'Ok ' Maria says, and they begin.

An agenda is quickly drawn up. Gaynor writes it up in purple felt-tip on a flipchart, she's reusing the backs of church stuff and turns over a page that reads

'Thou shalt not covert thy neighbours possessions'

'oh yeah' says a mum to anybody prepared to listen, 'ee's got a great big four be four!'

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Agenda

1. MOT day
2. Table Top Sale
3. Treasury
4. Summer Trip
5. AOB 'if things crop up'.

The meeting lasts two hours. The mums run through the agenda, sometimes going off at tangents before being put firmly back on course by Maria who turns out to be a natural born chairperson. When they are critical of the way some Sure Start events have been organised Gaynor sometimes defends Sure Start and sometimes agrees with the mums, saying that she welcomes their feedback, but the tone of meeting remains friendly and enthusiastic.

The mums seem to have a very clear picture of what they feel is appropriate for their area. When the MOT day is discussed they are critical of some of the 'treats' on offer.

The MOT day also known as 'The Pamper Day' offered free hairdressing, manicure, beauty and makeover treatments. The mums saw this day as a 'reward' for the work they'd done and were disappointed that lots of people had turned up 'for the freebies' who they'd never seen before. There was widespread criticism of the Gel Nail treatment. It turned out that the nails could not be removed with acetone and that it would cost £5 to have them professionally removed, or £15 to have them redone, and that they would need to be redone at least every three weeks.

' Now that's not right for Sure Start parents round 'ere is it ?' one mother asked and was greeted with universal agreement. The 'Virgin V' make-up stand came in for similar criticism.

'It's too pricey that stuff, not right for this Sure Start area, its more like Rimmel round 'ere or that bloke down the market wi' stall outside Bodycare!'

A recurring complaint was the lack of childcare available to mothers who wished to attend Sure Start activities and courses, quite often several crèche workers being required and booked, but in the event, only one arriving. Gaynor responded by saying that Sure Start have just signed a new contract with a local childcare organisation and that the situation was set to improve.

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At several points during the meeting Gaynor would introduce a point by using a phrase like 'I'm just going to play devils advocate here' or ' Sorry if this sounds contentious...'

When she used these phrases there was always a universal 'No, no go for it Gaynor!' response from the mums - they certainly were not just complaining for the sake of it, they wanted services and events to improve and were keen to hear any counter-arguments.

When the mums said what a disappointment the table-top sale had been, Gaynor used her 'contentious' phrase and suggested that as an individually constituted group, the Parents Forum mums should have played a greater part in organising the event, especially as it was intended to raise funds for Parents Forum and not Sure Start.

'Julie's role in Parents Forum is now a supporting role, perhaps that has not been made clear?' Gaynor said, and there was a pause, followed by the realisation amongst the mums that this group - nurtured by Sure Start, developed by it, encouraged by it, and finally constituted by it - had just been officially released into the wild.

This realisation led to a very positive discussion instigated by the mums. About:

- how they could carry it forward,
- who would do what (and when)
- how they needed to organise and
- how they should get together 'and sort things out between ourselves more.'

From this description of events it sounds as if the parents were very critical of what Sure Start had to offer, but they were not. The entire meeting was good-humoured, friendly and robust. The mum's criticism was unfailingly incisive, constructive and pragmatic - and they were only critical because they were determined that what they clearly regarded as 'a good thing' could be made even better and benefit even more parents.

At the very end the mums said;

'Thank you Gaynor, thanks for taking all the flak!' and there was a real sense that in 2 hours a tremendous amount of progress had been made.

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HOME VISIT May 2004

It's difficult to go anywhere fast with Josie, she seems to know everybody on her 'patch'. 'This is the worst housing in the area we cover' Josie says as she pulls the car over to check her A-Z, 'even I still get lost around here!'

The Sure Start has recently conducted an extensive mail-out and as a result of the response that this has triggered, Josie has been out and about for the past two weeks, making dozens of home visits. She explains that not all Sure Start Parent Involvement Workers do this, and that the visits are her personal policy. 'It's a way of easing people into involvement' she says, 'it helps build up that initial rapport and sometimes I find the parents will talk to me more easily than they would outside the home.'

Josie's client for this morning, Cheryl, is on her way out of the house as we pull up outside.

'Oh sorry' she says, 'I thought it were in afternoon.'

Cheryl shows us through to her front room.

Cheryl lifts her baby out of its pushchair and hands it to her mother who's sitting in one corner of the room. Josie begins by asking what they know about Sure Start, and when they say 'not much' she explains that Sure Start aims to 'give kids a better start in life, to provide training and support, it's about supporting families.' Josie adds that Cheryl is lucky to live in a Sure Start area.

Josie presents Cheryl with a welcome pack and then helps her fill in the Sure Start registration form. Cheryl has also expressed interest in becoming a Sure Start volunteer and Josie tells her about a forthcoming open day where she can 'come and have a look and see if it's really for you' unfortunately the crèche is fully booked already so Cheryl says that maybe she'll come to the next open day instead.

'Can I have a hold?' Josie asks and picks up Cheryl's baby 'Oh he's strong! Oh look at those little Nikes! Oh what a little porker!'

Suddenly, and for the first time this morning every body is smiling.

'Mine's a bit older now,' Josie explains 'I just have to get that broodiness out of me!'

The visit lasts for 15 minutes and as we leave Josie reassures Cheryl.

'Phone me if you need anything or don't know where to turn, and if you see me in the street don't dodge me!'

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Back in the car I ask Josie if she often picks up the babies.

'Always' she says 'I always do it. Coz then its me as mum talking to the mothers and not just somebody knocking on the door with a load of forms for them to fill in.'

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Breast Feeding Session May 2004

It's 9.30 on a bleak Thursday morning and the shop on the corner is already doing a brisk trade in Super Strength Lager. The first wave of customers crack open their initial 440ml can of the day, drink deeply, then amble down to The Chemist to collect their methadone scripts. It's a Grade A grey day. (This is true, I followed them, they each drink a little plastic beaker of methadone in the chemists).

The breastfeeding session is being held only a few doors up from the beer shop but it might as well be on a different planet. Inside its bright and warm, the air is filled with world music and the scent of fresh coffee, and above all it feels completely safe. This place is instantly appealing, an isolated, insulated cocoon, a good place to take your baby and spend some time with other mums, a secure haven from the traffic and all the other assorted craziness rushing past outside.

'It's not just about breastfeeding this morning' Elaine who's a midwife explains, 'its about breaking into the community - and this is a very, very diverse community.'

There are three staff on this morning, Elaine, Shilpa who introduces herself as 'Community Food Worker', and Pam who is Breastfeeding Support Worker. The session runs on an informal drop-in basis and nearly an hour passes before anybody informally drops in. Eventually there are 5 mums, 5 babies and one-mum-to-be.

Again this is a very relaxed affair, the workers circulate, the mums chat, the kids pull faces at each other and the conversation centres around diet, parenting, behaviour and which supermarkets offer adequate baby-changing facilities. A new mum signs up for Sure Start; she says she found out about this session through her midwife. Elaine chats to her, asks her if any of her friends have babies, then tells her about other Sure Start activities and presents her with a welcome pack.

'We're not particularly here to increase the number of mums breastfeeding' Elaine says 'Just to point out that its an option, and maybe encourage the mums who are doing it to keep doing it longer.' As I left, I noticed a sign in the window

'Mums & Babies Only this morning.

Thank you.'

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And that in itself must give some indication of just how relaxed and friendly the session really was. As a bloke with a pen and a notebook, I really shouldn't have been there, but no-one had mentioned it and there was never the slightest feeling of any suspicion or resentment. In fact nobody looked twice at me or batted an eyelid.

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LIVELY TOTS, STAY & PLAY

MAY 2004

This group is jointly run by Haleema - who describes herself as a trained bilingual helper - and by Rachel, a nursery nurse.

'We've been running here for 2 years now' Haleema says 'We've had up to 12 families in, but for us 7 or 8 is the ideal number.'

Rachel is sorting through a huge pile of abstract expressionist paintings produced by the children in previous weeks. There's only one mum here so far, and her son is already hard at work on yet another dramatic work of art.

'You doing me another one?' Rachel says 'Your other is on the wall over there, its ever so good!'

Lizzie arrives. Haleema and Rachel greet her like visiting royalty, or maybe Santa, and begin devouring the huge bag of books she's brought with her. It turns out she's from the library – just down the road – and she says 'I've got a whole basement full of this stuff, let me know if there's anything else you'd like.'

The arrival of a new consignment of books has caused genuine excitement. 'Its fine for them to take these home' says Lizzie, 'and don't worry if they get torn, we want to promote the use of libraries, not get parents so frightened of their kids damaging books that they never come in.'

There are now four mums here and four toddlers. Amad is leafing through 'Yellow Lorry' and his mum is trying to get him to say 'Yellow'. Haleema is signing up a new mum for Sure Start and Rachel is cutting up coloured paper into shapes while two children wait patiently to stick them onto sugar paper. In the meantime they eat the glue.

Sofia's son has been pointing at me and laughing uncontrollably for the last five minutes, so I decide to take my chances.

Sofia speaks English to me with a pronounced southern accent and Pahari to the other mums.

'I found out about this through word of mouth' Sofia says 'I've been coming here for 8 months. It's good. I don't do the other Sure Start events; I just bring him to this so he can mix with kids his own age. Stops him being stuck in the house all day with me and the elders.'

More mums (all Asian) arrive and then Barbara turns up. 'I'm actually a child psychologist' she whispers to me later 'but I never tell them that – although I will tell

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people if they have concerns about stuff like that - just to reassure them that it's nothing to be afraid of.'

The rest of the session runs as though it has been secretly choreographed. The mums gather round on a section of raised padded seating in front of a TV/ video unit while Haleema and Rachel take charge of their children. The main focus of this session is definitely mum-based and Haleema and Rachel have now become behind-the-scenes child minders. Barbara asks the mums to introduce themselves - for the benefit of the new member - and then says:

'Tell me something that's gone well, been good, been nice with your child this week?'

'She helped me tidy up, and I thanked her, she liked that!'

'He's been good all week'

'We read a book then had a really nice cuddle.'

'We had clothes sent from Pakistan, and he put them all on and he looked happy.'

'So he was showing off?' Barbara says and every body laughs.

'Yeah, but it were really nice!'

Barbara introduces the video she's going to show today. 'It's about behaviour' she says 'about why children sometimes misbehave and what you can do.'

There followed a series of extremely simplistic video clips featuring children who misbehaved as a way of gaining attention and the remedies that could be applied to control their behaviour. The actors/characters/real people/ commentators/ experts in these films were all clad in a shocking variety of semi-acrylic knit-wear and all talked as if they've just donated their brains elsewhere. This was instructional County Cream TV at its very worst and nothing here seemed to have any connection with the diverse and vibrant minority ethnic group who were now goggling in disbelief at this jaded beige footage.

BUT the way Barbara worked with this unpromising raw material and then worked her audience was inspired, imaginative and above all very impressive. Barbara stopped the tape over and over, drew out the real essence of what was going on, repeatedly asked the women about their own experiences - both as mothers and, if they could remember that far back, about their experiences as children.

The stories on the tape existed in a weird and airless knitted acrylic place, but the snapshots of children's behaviour still rang true and Barbara was unfailingly incisive in getting to grips with the universality of troublesome child behaviour. From time to time Barbara also slipped into a very convincing naughty child/fussy mother routine, that made everybody

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laugh, but which was also uncomfortably accurate, and you could see miniature flashbulbs popping everywhere, tiny flashes of recognition and realisation.

'The first time you say 'no' you will feel a bit funny' Barbara said 'you will perhaps think 'this doesn't even seem like me talking', but you have to try it, small changes can make such a big difference!'

By now there were no children in the room, they'd been taken into an adjacent hall and were playing with either 3-wheeled scooters or big foam balls. Barbara made a few general points about sleep, parenting, going to English classes – none of which seemed the least bit forced - thanked the women for their input, quickly mentioned some other Sure Start events which might interest them, then let them chat.

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CLIMB AND CRAWL

May 2004

'The aim of this session is to provide interactive play for children between 9-18 months and their carers' Hilary says.

Hilary introduces herself as being a 'Play Support Worker on a service level agreement' then goes back to piecing together the large soft play mat that dominates the room. A Little Tykes archway is set up, a fabric tunnel is unfurled and a big rocking shark/dolphin is dragged into the room. 2 parents arrive with their daughter (and I get to speak to my first and only DAD).

Mark is relatively new to the area, and says he's very happy with the range of activities that Sure Start provides in the area. Mark says that being involved with Sure Start has been a positive experience for himself and his partner in terms of the changes they've seen in their son's development and the friendships they've made. (Again and again parents stress the importance of this social side). It transpires that Mark is a trained youth worker himself and has begun to work for Sure Start on a voluntary basis, helping to run a drop-in centre for young dads. Mark thinks that Sure Start publicity could be better and adds that he'd also like to see more 'mixing up' of parents from different areas. His only other criticism of Sure Start is that its services are still not available to everybody, due to the arbitrary boundaries that are imposed area by area, and that families often miss out who are just 50 yards the wrong side of the divides.

40 minutes into the session there are 7 mums, 7 toddlers, two health visitors, and a student nurse who is here to observe (and Mark). A portable ball pool is set up and the children play together happily while the mums chat. At one point there are three mums crawling about on the mat while all the children remain on their feet.

The room has a very smart new kitchen where tea, coffee, juice and fruit are available. Hilary is keen to stress the developmental aims of this session. She explains that the strict age limit (9-18 months) is to allow crawlers to become toddlers without 'getting bashed into'

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by bigger kids. She says that the best part of the session for her is the increased space that can be made available.

'There are several large-scale toys and activities here, the trampoline for instance, which simply wouldn't fit into most of the houses round here' she says. Hilary adds that she'd prefer to run a morning session as well so that mums who have older children at nursery can stay for the full 2 hours without having to rush off to collect them.

A mum I speak to says she found out about Sure Start through word of mouth and that she now attends the Breastfeeding Support Group, Keep Fit, the Toddler Group and Climb & Crawl. 'My partner works and I'm stuck in the house a lot' she says 'its good this, you get to meet new people'

Hilary and the Health visitors circulate, they talk to the mums about children, parenting, life in general and suggest other activities that might be of interest. This is a very sociable, chatty group; it's the only one I've attended where everybody said 'hello' to me and 'good-bye' as I left.

'Swimming next Monday, no excuses, and don't forget your cozzies!' Hilary announces.

'Can ye imagine me in a teeny pair of Speedos Simon?' Mark asks.

'Yeah Mark, I can, I really can. But I'd much rather not'.

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PARENTS NEXT May 2004

There are only two mums-to-be here this morning, Paula and Caz. There are also two staff; Stella, a Health Visitor and Annie, a Midwife.

This session takes the form of an extended conversation, which is all about impending motherhood.

'It sounds a bit daft' Stella says 'but in a way pregnancy is a sort of holiday period, a break before – you know those big swinging boulders they use to knock down buildings? Before one of them hits you. It happened to me, but it did get better, so don't be put off!'

Stella tells Paula and Caz that this is the time to begin to put things in place for when their babies are born.

'We're here to make sure that you're not isolated' she says 'and we'll be with you until your baby is five if you need us.'

She hands out a green booklet 'Health and your Family' produced by Sheffield Partnership For Health.

The introduction reads;

'This booklet is to help you and your family think about your health. You may wish to spend some time looking at it and thinking about each member of your family in turn. Your health visitor can help you to decide what issues affect your family. You may then be able to think of some changes you might like to make. This booklet is for you to keep.'

The booklet has sections entitled;

- Your Family's Health
- Your community
- Bringing up Children
- Forward Plan
- Family and Community Health

Each section is broken down into a series of points, which the mothers are invited to tick if they require more information.

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For example, on page 2 there's a section headed 'Community' which lists such issues as Housing, Dogs, Public Transport, Noise, Crime, Child care, Neighbours, Isolation/Loneliness etc.

This particular section sparks a good deal of discussion. There's a lot about the local area that leaves room for improvement and Stella encourages the mums to think about lobbying.

'Its about getting together, making yourself heard, getting stuff changed and if enough people do it, there's more chance changes will be made.'

Stella goes on to discuss the changes that are happening in the area, the parks that are being redesigned, the money that has been spent and the money that will be spent.

The conversation returns to parenting. Annie the midwife talks about her role, about diet, about birth and about breastfeeding

'I'm gonna try breastfeeding' Paula says with genuine enthusiasm 'Coz I saw a baby at young mums who were on it, and he was right chubby and healthy!'

Annie says that there's a Breast Feeding awareness day coming up soon and says that the two Breast Feeding awareness workers (mums who have had some extra training) will be there to talk to them.

'Yeah they're brilliant them two' Stella says.

The rest of the session covered aspects of first aid, home birth, a suggested visit to a labour ward, and advice about completing the antenatal record.

'Its good to learn through info.' Annie says afterwards 'info and advice helps ease the anxiety, if you know the process it seems less daunting. That's why we like to take them to a labour ward to have a look, so they know they don't need to be scared.'

Advice was definitely the keyword here. Stella and Annie presented a tremendous amount of information in a relaxed informal, friendly, encouraging and supportive manner, there was no sense whatsoever that this was 'lecturing' and the entire session was characterised by a reassuring sense of 'we're all in this together and we're in it for the duration'.

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MENS ART PROJECT

JULY 2004

'There's usually a few more here than this' Dave says, 'but we've got some off on holiday.'

Dave introduces himself as 'Men's Outreach Worker'. Dave introduces his 'young dads' (they have a laugh about this as one of them is 40 next week), there are only three here this morning, with their partners, and in total there are five children playing with bricks and blocks and hoops strewn across the Centre's parquet floor.

'It's a good room this ' he says ' and hardly anybody ever uses it.'

Earlier in the session the parents have been taking turns to record 'talking books' for their children on a Tascam Portastudio, but there's been a problem with it, Dave says, and now everybody is sitting a round a big table, sifting through sheaves of photographs.

Mick, the Community Artist introduces himself. He's on a ten-week placement here and is working with the parents to produce pictures of their children. In previous weeks everybody has been given cameras and the photographs spread across the table are the result.

Mick explains the process. Each family will choose the best photographs of their children, these will then be enlarged, transferred onto acetate, projected and then blocked out with colour to produce instant 'art'. In fact Mick will do exactly the same thing to their family snaps with his overhead projector that Canaletto did to Venice with his camera obscura.

'Right. Decision time.' Mick says as he works through the photographs with each dad in turn. 'Which do think? That's quite a good one, if you don't mind being in the picture too.'

'No. No, ah want to be in the picture wi' im' says the dad.

While this is going on there's a lot of general conversation about children, parenting, everything and nothing in particular.

'She's a nightmare' a mum says 'takes after her brother...and her dad!'

As the parents run sift through the photographs with Mick they talk about their kids and Mick demonstrates ably the 'Community' part of being 'Community Artist'. He asks questions, sympathises and he makes jokes. Just this simple process of sorting through photographs instigates a great deal of relaxed conversation about family, behaviour and parenting in general.

Some parents are still taking photographs, chasing their kids around the room and laughing. One dad explains what will happen to the art. Each family will have a photograph of

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their children turned into a portrait painting/drawing and there will also be a big 'compendium' picture of everybody, which will be displayed at a nearby school.

Mick's already produced a few small sketches for the parents, just to whet their appetite and they're very impressed.

'Can we take this one Mick?'

'Yeah, sure.'

'We'll 'ave this in a frame at 'ome. It's good is that!'

A mum asks if its ok to bring her other children along next week, they're over Sure Start age but since she has no where else to take them, it's a case of bringing them along or not attending at all. Dave says that she can. As the session draws to a close the dads begin to talk about music, particularly a computer program called Cubase, which one of the dads says can be downloaded from the Net.

Everyone packs away, somebody offers Mick a lift into town and then everybody says goodbye. It was fun this session, it was relaxed, everybody was very friendly, there was a lot of laughter and Mick was great with the parents.

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PLAY BUS July 2004

'Rick's the biggest kid here' Janice says as her fellow Sure Start worker launches himself into the Bouncy Castle emblazoned with the Sure Start logo.

Janice is Sure Start worker for this area and describes herself as being 'from round here.'

The Play Bus is parked outside 'News 'n Booze' and its contents have been disgorged onto a piece of open ground behind two boarded up, derelict and graffitied houses.

On a patch of short grass, between banks of nettles, docks and rosebay willow-herb, an area has been fenced off with orange PVC mesh. In pride of place there's the Sure Start badged bouncy castle, then slides, sandpits, a ball-pool, tables, rocking horses, play mats and white plastic chairs for the parents.

Janice introduces the parents, there are four mums and one granddad, everybody's very friendly and the overall feeling is one of just having crashed a family barbeque. One mum has five children, each one's Christian name begins with the letter 'J' and she's getting a fair amount of stick for that.

'Ow yer gonna go on when they all start gerrin' mail?' one mum asks.

Janice spots a mum and pushchair in the street, just visible through a gap between the two derelict houses.

'HEEEYYYY!' Janice shouts in a very loud voice, 'hey are you coming over here, come and 'ave a cuppa, come on come an' 'ave a cuppa – no excuses!'

'That's 'ow she got me' a mum tells me, as Janice races off in pursuit of her latest victim, 'ah were just walking past, she shouted me an' next thing ah new ah'd bin signed up for Sure Start!'

A few minutes later Janice returns with a fresh scalp.

' I lost her' she admits 'She got away from me - but I found this one in the shop!' Janice introduces the new mum and puts her child into the ball pool while she fills out a recruitment form. The other mums say 'hello' and one by one put their own children into the pool so they can meet the new child.

'One of the Healthy Living storm troopers will be here in a minute' Rick says and does a cod German accent. ' You vill not eat zee crisps, it vill affect zee future of your children!'

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Rick is definitely not from 'round here'. He's far too well spoken, quite posh really - he tells me later that he's a recent graduate. He's a big hit with the Ladies. The mums all seem to like him, he's funny, he's quite able to become the tallest, most enthusiastic 3-year old on the estate and he plays up his difference, uses it to gain acceptance.

Seeing as the Healthy Living worker is imminent everybody hides crisps, coke and anything else that might be considered 'unhealthy'. A plate of sliced pears is handed round. One mum risks a taste.

'They taste like blinkin' rubber' she says.

'Right, fag break' a very young mum announces. I join her and she answers all my questions without even being asked.

'Its great this' she says. 'Janice shouted me int street. Ah go to the other play bus site on playin' field an ah've started coming to this an' all. Ah go to Take A Break too. It's bin great, ah've met lasses ah' were at school wi' and now ah' know loads of mums. Ah' stay all day, its great.'

Rick asks me how much I'm getting paid to do this. So I tell him.

Janice comes over. 'If you're gettin' that much Simon you can stay a bit longer' she says. Janice's quietly spoken, despite the town crier routine earlier, and you can tell that she's totally committed to this project. She mentions the mum with the five kids all starting with the letter 'J', says that some of them are over Sure Start age but that she's accommodated them anyway, else none of the other 'Js' could attend and she talks excitedly about what she's achieved, about the incidents with jelly, custard, spaghetti, corn-flour, and about all the fun they've had. The mums are all listening by now and they chime in with support and agreement.

Janice goes on and on and on about Sure Start in her area, about what's been done and what she's got planned for the future.

'I love it' she says, 'love it'.

CANCELLATIONS

The first session I arranged to visit was cancelled. There were parents outside and the room had definitely been booked. The mums were not happy, they were not brandishing pitchforks and firing hayricks or anything but they were pretty close to revolting.

Phrases like;

- 'it's just not fxxxin' good enough is fxxxin' this' and
- 'if they were goin' to fxxxin' cancel then the fxxxin' least they could fxxxin' do was to fxxxin' let us fxxxin' know!'

were being used.

I phoned the Sure Start office the following day

'Oh sorry, we forgot, we was having our Make Over Day.'

'Right. It would have been nice if you'd let me know, my car broke down and I had to get a cab out there.'

'We did tell yer, all the other mums knew it were cancelled!'

So they apologise for not telling me, then tell me that they did tell me, then tell me that all the mums knew it was cancelled.

On another programme I'd set up 3 visits in one week. The staff were very friendly and extremely helpful. As the week progressed the plan fell apart. One building closed for asbestos removal, another overrun by ants, people off sick, others are on leave, someone's getting married and since its half-term others aren't running.

MAXIMISING INCLUSION IN SURE START

THINKING POINTS

BREAKING DOWN INFORMATION BARRIERS

Accessible information

Relevant and accessible information is one of the most crucial determinants of families contact with Sure Start and lack of information clearly limits access to the programme - particularly for parents under pressure. How can parents who are not currently accessing Sure Start activities find out more about the services and benefits? All programmes benefit from constantly reviewing their criteria for good provision of information to parents.

SPECIFICALLY

- How can programmes promote themselves to parents who are not literate?
- Who could be involved in a discussion about how to improve communication with families who don't find written information accessible?
- How can programme's assess the usefulness of promotions so that an eye can be kept on unintended exclusion of intended recipients?
- How can the profile of particular activities be raised within local communities? What steps can be taken to proactively encourage wider participation?
- How could parents who do attend be encouraged to promote the activity with particular target groups so that everyone knows that they are welcome?

Inclusive resources

Planning and preparation for raising participation and involvement of children and parents - especially where community languages are not shared - is time consuming and requires detailed attention to what is specifically needed to ensure parents and their children to feel comfortable and relaxed. There is

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scope for attention to the quality of teaching and learning resources used in Sure Start activities - materials aimed at parents are often uninspiring and frequently it is the case that more culturally appropriate resources need to be found to maximise engagement.

SPECIFICALLY

- What ways could be found for programmes to work together on involving parents in the production of training resources that reflect local realities?
- What action needs to be taken to ensure the contents of Welcome Packs and other materials for parents are appropriately tailored to the cultural requirements of different groups living in the neighbourhood?
- Can a fact-finding initiative be set up with local people to assess the suitability of such resources?
- What steps can be taken to produce resources in alternative modalities, for example, Braille, large print, tape or video versions of leaflets and so on?

BREAKING DOWN ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS

All Sheffield Sure Start programmes in the combined evaluation have some experience of delivering well-received activities and services in venues that are less than ideal.

Specifically

- What suggestions for good practice in unpromising environments could be collated to assist others working in less than ideal circumstances?
- Encourage specific feedback on the extent to which use of faith venues might be limiting participation by some members of the community.

INCLUSIVE EVALUATION

Good practice is seen where evaluation is built in to a programme's everyday working practice so that there can be continual learning from experience. Best practice is seen where programmes ensure that the perspectives of children are routinely taken into account.

SPECIFICALLY

- How much does it matter if parents attending Sure Start sessions say they do not particularly think about the wider aims of Sure Start? How can programmes evidence the links between parents saying simply 'I like going to it,' .. 'the people are nice' .. 'I'm lucky to live in a Sure Start area' .. and the meeting of targets?
- How can all Sure Start providers be supported to encourage parents to take stock of their individual and collective circumstances, become critical and to think about their own role in bringing about change?
- How can the 'behind the scenes' benefits of participation in Sure Start events be observed - so that the full benefit of involvement with Sure Start activities can be evidenced? For example, how can programmes capture the value of support parents come to give each other?
- What strategies might help to provide a greater sense of what is actually being achieved through activities which appear relatively free flowing and open-ended? For example, could a few minutes occasionally be taken at the end of a session for parents and providers - and in some contexts young children - to say 'what I got out of today' as a simple way of increasing experience of giving (and taking note of) feedback? How could this be tried?
- What steps can programmes take to involve parents in sharing ideas about ways of finding out what the experience of children involved in Sure Start activities is like from children's own points of view?
- Proactive working to include and consult with parents AND children, including on the nature of their participation and involvement is

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important, as is recognition and accreditation of parent participation and making sustained use of their feedback to inform future planning.

MAXIMIZING INCLUSIVE DELIVERY

Effective and targeted use of paid and voluntary workers to support planned activities is crucial. All programmes have different approaches to managing the staff who play such an important part in the service delivery. What can be seen in all Sheffield Sure Start delivery is evidence of the commitment and enthusiasm of workers and their skills in welcoming, encouraging and supporting parents and children in very ordinary and practical ways. In everyday practice this service delivery looks informal, relaxed and really like a group of friends getting on with a task together, but this informality belies careful thinking about different roles, responsibilities and the importance of making all aspects of service delivery as inclusive as possible.

SPECIFICALLY

- Best practice is seen where a provider has the skills required to let a conversation run and drop information that gets Sure Start messages across in comfortable and unobtrusive ways. Is it possible to identify the 'ingredients' of such success? How can all of those involved in delivering Sure Start activities become aware of the ingredients of this approach?
- To what extent are rules and regulations for Sure Start events and activities made by parents and/or providers? How can the role of parents in this be maximised?
- Parents have high hopes for Sure Start and, consequently, levels of disappointment can also be high. Parents are clear that promises have to be delivered if their commitment to Sure Start participation is to be sustained. Every effort should be taken to avoid cancellation of events. A good practice strategy should be developed to ensure effective communication with parents in the event of unavoidable cancellations.
- All programmes should have a clear strategy in place for monitoring, managing and responding to constructive discontent expressed by parents. It can be daunting for parents to voice criticism of Sure Start services even when they are well supported by individual members of staff. What structures are in place to enable people to feel secure in this context?

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- Best practice is found where programmes are seen by parents to respond to feedback - especially if disappointments have occurred.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Widening participation, to bring Sure Start into relation with the greatest possible number of children and families in Sheffield Sure Start areas is a key aspiration for all programmes.

SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO TAKING PART

- Can parents who are involved in activities where attendance is on the low side be encouraged to promote the activity with particular target groups to let more people know their participation would be welcome?
- Parents acknowledge that 'word of mouth is a big thing' and so a positive home visit is a 'quick-win' route to bringing new parents in to relationship with the programme. Beyond the successful home visit however, how are parents supported 'through the next step' to come in to social situations outside the family home, to build their confidence and allow the programme to work towards targets with a wider audience than is seen one-to-one in the home?

SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO GOVERNANCE

- What can realistically be expected of parents in terms of their participation in Sure Start governance?
- What strategies could be tried to involve greater numbers of parents to spread the load?
- What can programmes do to remove any obstacle to participation posed by limited childcare options?
- What role could parents play in encouraging wider involvement in governance? How can the enjoyment, satisfaction and rewards - such as the skills and experiences gained - be highlighted?
- How can programmes plan to ensure that parents will not 'have to wait' to be included to avoid enthusiasm being lost?

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- Scope for bringing parents into contact with parents from other programmes would enable them, and programme staff, to learn from wider experience of Sure Start delivery and to share opportunities where this would offer savings efficiencies or otherwise be beneficial.

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WHO'S MISSING ?

It is vital to take account of which parents and children are under-represented in the day-to-day run of Sure Start provision across Sheffield. The question of 'who is missing?' needs to be returned to constantly.

Specifically

- The problem whereby parents outside of the Sure Start geographical boundaries are felt to be missing out on what Sure Start can offer is common across programmes. What collective action can local programmes take to address the problem whereby parents outside of the Sure Start geographical boundaries are missing out on what Sure Start can offer?
- How can programmes ensure that families with older children are not prevented from having ready and continuing access to Sure Start activities their under 4s would benefit from? It common to find Sure Start staff often have to bend the rules and include older children to ensure that the service can be accessed by their younger brothers and sisters. How can programmes work collectively to secure proper acknowledgement of this issue and to attach a specific budget to dealing with it?
- What action can programmes take to involve men in Sure Start activities and events?
- Can opportunities be provided for men to be involved in activities and discussions that are typically thought of as 'women's territory'. For example, it is well known that women's decisions about breastfeeding are influenced by their partners' views and so it would seem important for programmes to think about how to involve men in supporting and encouraging women to breastfeed.
- The majority of disabled children and their families live in the most deprived areas of the country. All Sure Start programmes should therefore expect to have contact with children and/or adults with impairments. If this is not the case, what must be done to widen their inclusion?

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