

The University of Sheffield
School of Education



**EVALUATION OF WOODTHORPE &
WYBOURN SURE START PROGRAMME
March 2003 - August 2004**

FINAL REPORT

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Report dated: September 2004

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Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers

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Workshop Participants

Sure Start programme staff, Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 impact of recent events on the Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 evolving and has clearly been experienced positively by many stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on the importance of reassuring parents and agencies who support them of the merits of a more transparent and inclusive approach to Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. 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 make a greater success of Sure Start.

CHAPTER ONE

The Research

Background to the Evaluation

- 1.1 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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, Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn is a Round 5c Sure Start programme. In common with all Sure Start programmes Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start is obliged to evaluate the service it provides. Therefore, in 2003 the Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 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. The Programme Manager for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start at the time became a key driver setting up, and centrally involving Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start in a Combined Evaluation of Six Sheffield Sure Start programmes.
- 1.5 It was envisaged that evaluating Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 former Programme Manager for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start was willing to enter in to this process of open evaluation alongside other programmes, reflects the commitment to transparency that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start brought to working partnerships based in the community at that time.
- 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's work**
- **promote collaborative and mutually beneficial evaluation practices.**

CHAPTER TWO

Our Approach

Recognising context

2.1 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme is commonly agreed by the full range of stakeholders to have been through a difficult period. A great deal of hard work has gone in to enabling the programme to move beyond recent difficulties and to deliver services in line with Sure Start principles and its delivery plan. Many problems encountered are firmly in the past and in this report we will evidence that the programme is, as the full range of stakeholders feel, 'going from strength to strength'.

2.2 It is, however, true to say that when the evaluation began serious difficulties were quickly unearthed. The full range of stakeholder groups felt that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start was operating in very difficult circumstances and put forward a range of carefully considered, yet sometimes disturbing criticisms which, though challenging, were clearly meant to be constructive. Criticisms were made in the hope of prompting beneficial change to the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme. It is equally true to say that only nine months later the extent of the achievement that the programme had made to respond to these difficulties was such that even its most vocal critics had completely turned their views around; in one person's words:

'when I look back at what I had to say in October [2003] I feel like everything needs tearing up and rewriting because the situation has so utterly transformed for the better [Summer 2004]'

Local community partner

2.3 We agree with the above spokesperson that a positive picture can be presented of the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme at the time of writing in September 2004. Nevertheless, irrespective of the

optimistic note on which this evaluation will close, we have ascertained with the full range of stakeholders that in order that accomplishments, strengths and any weaknesses of the programme evidenced through this evaluation can be fully appreciated and understood, it is necessary to outline some of the factors which have had a bearing on the programme's performance over the whole of the last 18 months. In order for us to be able to reference the observations we later make about how stakeholders currently perceive the programme and its processes and operation, we need to have painted the full picture about how the programme has come to be in its present shape - at least in as far as we have been able to understand the picture. This is important because stakeholders from all groups have commented throughout the process of the evaluation that they have been confused about difficulties surrounding Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn.

- 2.4 We stress that it is not uncommon for Sure Start programme's to encounter periods of difficulty. When a programme is open to evaluation, to raising the voices and issues of its key stakeholders and to engaging with the perspectives of outside evaluators as part of an improvement plan this is the sign of a programme committed to providing the very best for its children and families.
- 2.5 To understand tensions that have had an impact upon the recent success of the programme we have taken advice from both the former and the current Programme Managers, consulted with the full range of stakeholders and referred to relevant documentation provided by the programme. On the basis of this information, the difficult context in which Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has been operating during the evaluation period is briefly described in this report.
- 2.6 Respondents did not talk in a personalised way about the programme's difficulties. This report respects that reticence, while dealing with problems highlighted, both common across Sure Start and special to the area, that are inevitably tied up with the managerial issues. Anyone who is looking for a single person or explanation to blame for the programme's past difficulties will find this report a disappointing read. We have simply tried to put the struggles of the past 18 months into context and hope that this will point to lessons that can be learned for the future of the Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme and for other Sure Start programmes.

- 2.7 During the evaluation period, Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has been through an early stage of its development. Its rapid growth is demonstrated by the fact that, during the evaluation period, the area team has grown from 5 members of staff to 18 members after the recruitment of Home Visitors, Men's Out Reach Workers and Behaviour Support Workers. Inevitably there have been teething problems and growing pains which are common to other Sure Start programmes both in Sheffield and nationally.
- 2.8 Superimposed on this picture has been the early departure of a Programme Manager, preceded and followed by, a period of some considerable uncertainty. This also is not unique, as there is a high turnover of managerial staff in Sure Start Programmes nationally. Nevertheless it should be noted that during the primary data collection stages of the evaluation the crisis caused by the lead up to the Programme Manager's departure was uppermost in everyone's minds. The Partnership Board and Accountable Body took steps to support and provide cover for the programme during this time.
- 2.9 Because a breakdown in a managerial system always has serious consequences we revisited emergent issues right up until the closing stages of the evaluation period to clarify progress made as the crisis settled down. In this final report we wish to acknowledge this background and explore the way in which the programme has responded to managerial issues that are inevitably tied up with the programme's achievements.
- 2.10 Most stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation are of the opinion that it never will be possible to definitively establish all the causes of past difficulties, or indeed to definitively pinpoint the origins of problems the programme has encountered. However they also accept that the problems themselves and their resolution do have to be openly discussed in this report. It is certainly worth noting that wholehearted agreement was expressed for the view expressed by a representative of one of the Lead Agencies that
'Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn wouldn't exist today if it hadn't been for the work and commitment of its first Programme Manager.'
- 2.6 It is important to note that even in the difficult operational context referred to, the programme has had some considerable success. Amongst other strong features to be discussed further in this report, the

programme has established strong parental involvement, provided 'lots of support to parents' and created many opportunities for young children and their families living in the area. Nevertheless, some lack of clarity prevails locally, about the strategic direction of the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme and we discuss this later in the report.

- 2.7 What is unanimously agreed by all stakeholder groups is that there are many strands to the success of a Sure Start programme. There is also a 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.

Research Process

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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's first 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.
- 2.10 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

- 2.11 Throughout the Project our main link has been with the two consecutively appointed Programme Managers for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start who have been in post over the course of the evaluation. The former Programme Manager briefed us on the scope and aspirations for the work and initially facilitated the participation of Sure Start stakeholders in this study. Both Programme Managers and their administrative staff acted as liaison thereafter and provided us with all relevant background information to the project. We have very much appreciated the conscientious and thorough work of the Administration Team.
- 2.12 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

- 2.13 We undertook a documentary analysis of written materials provided by the programme including the *Delivery Plan* (June 2002). 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 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

- 2.14 An initial interview was held with the former Programme Manager, who as the key person initially 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*

- 2.15 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)
- 2.16 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.
- 2.17 The aim of workshops was to encourage stakeholders to self assess, in broad terms, ways in which from their perspective the Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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.
- 2.18 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme from this information.

- 2.19 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 subsequently taken of numerous, often detailed written and oral submissions from respondents giving feedback or providing further information.
- 2.20 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.
- 2.21 This event, called the 'Mixed Stakeholder Workshop', allowed for responses to the data emerging from different viewpoints to be shared and explored. By holding this event right at the end of the research period we were able to orient the focus specifically to capture progress made since the new Programme Manager came into post. The central concern of the workshop was to establish the emergent and collective priorities of those who contributed to the evaluation. At the event, participants were clear that they found this cycle of activity constructive.
- 2.22 The workshop structure was intended also 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

- 2.23 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.

- 2.24 To gather this information in ways that would be easy and comfortable for parents, the programme was asked to identify activities a roving researcher could attend to observe and talk with parents. The focal activities chosen for Woodthorpe & Wybourn were the Men's Music Project, the Play Van and Woodthorpe 'Take A Break'. 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 projects. Involving parents as researchers is an expressed priority for the Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme and the building up of interest in this has been an important offshoot of work undertaken as part of this evaluation.
- 2.25 As a direct result of the commitment of Programme Manager's participating in the combined evaluation to an open evaluation process, 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has been incorporated into our analysis.
- 2.26 It is necessary to note that the Evaluation Team originally agreed a different strategy, with a group of parents and the former Programme

Manager, for involving parents as researchers in this project. The agreed plan - built on extended discussions with parents - was for the Evaluation Team to provide introductory training which would enable parents to carry out qualitative and quantitative research tasks to explore aspects of the programmes functioning in which they were interested. The decision was taken to go ahead with this work and recorded at a meeting between the Evaluation Team and programme representatives. Many months later it was established that the work was not after all, to go ahead as planned, although no formal communication of the decision to cancel the plan agreed with parents was made to the team. Towards the end of the study period an alternative plan for picking up parents perspectives - as outlined above - was proposed as a matter of some urgency by the Evaluation Team, because the programme would otherwise have no commissioned evaluation on the views of parents. We believe the change of Programme Manager, and interim period in which the Programme was officially without a Manager, had an impact on how what had originally been agreed was interpreted. This paragraph explains what went on from the Evaluation Team's point of view.

TELEPHONE SURVEY WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS

- 2.27 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn area. Working in partnership with the programme, a list was drawn up of local groups in the Woodthorpe & Wybourn area. In total eight 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 seven groups were consulted by telephone. Respondents provided a valuable insight into the interaction between Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and local community organisations even though two felt they knew relatively little about the programme.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA ON THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

- 2.28 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. Parent respondents elected to be interviewed in their homes.

OTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- 2.29 In addition supplementary interviews were conducted in response to specific requests and when Research Directors felt it appropriate to explore particular view or opinion.
- 2.30 To further supplement the data, Research Team members attended a Woodthorpe & Wybourn Parents Forum meeting, evaluation sub-group meetings and other 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

- 2.31 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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.
- 2.32 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

- 2.33 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 we develop and make *emerge from*, and are *grounded in*, what Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start stakeholders say, perceive and experience.
- 2.34 It was made clear to us that the programme's 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. In our view it would not have been possible for evaluators to conduct meaningful or reliable impact analysis when the research was originally commissioned.

PARTICIPANTS

- 2.35 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.

- 2.36 We have been impressed by a strong sense of shared commitment to getting 'best value' from the evaluation of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start.
- 2.37 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

- 2.38 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.
- 2.39 This document comprises our **Final Report** on the evaluation. In June we presented our analysis of Headline Findings to a mixed group of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start stakeholder and took feedback. In September 2004 we discussed a draft of this Report with the Programme Manager and took final amendments 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 WOODTHORPE & WYBOURN SURE START PROGRAMME

The Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start Team

The programme is delivered by a group of professionals to cover a number of specialisms; family support, early years, health, parental involvement and management and administration. At the time of completing field work for this evaluation (July 2004) the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start team consisted of the posts outlined below. All posts are full time unless otherwise stated.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Programme Manager	37 hours
Health & Outreach Co-ordinator	(seconded - reduced hours in holidays = 34 hours per week)
Learning Co-ordinator	37 hours
Sure Start Midwife	(seconded from September 2004)
Administration Team Leader	27.5 hours per week

CORE TEAM

Finance & Monitoring Officer	37 hours
6 Outreach Workers	24 hours each (3 with an 8 hours addition - Early Years hours)
2 Men's Outreach Workers	30 hours (male)
2 Parent Involvement Workers	25 hours each
Breastfeeding/smoking cessation worker	Appointed September 2004
Administrative Support Worker	25 hours
Administrative Support	37 hours (male)
Behaviour Support Worker	30 hours

CURRENT VACANCIES

Information/Evaluation Officer	
Early Years Worker	
1 Men's Outreach Worker	

Activities offered through Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 serve a variety of functions.

HEALTH ACTIVITIES

PLAY AND SAY - A six-week workshop devised to promote the speech and language development of children under four. It aims to show carers how they can help their child's speech and language development by having fun together and playing. Funded and delivered through the SLA with Sheffield Sure Start Speech and Language Therapy team.

HEARING TESTS - Sponsored by Sure Start and delivered by the Audiology Unit. Drop-in sessions held at the Standhouse Centre.

COOK AND EAT - Sessions within the Time Out group held weekly at Manor Community Childcare Centre and the Standhouse Centre. Delivered and funded by Sure Start and the Family Support/5-a-day project.

HEALTH WALKS - Organised by the Parent Involvement Team as part of the 'Take a Break' Group. Monthly walks around the local area including Centre in the Park, Norfolk Park. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

PROMOTIONAL EVENTS - The programme maximises opportunities to include health promotion input within all events and activities. It also holds one-off health promotion events, such as the Men's Health MOT checks held in October 2003 at Wybourn Wellbeing Centre.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT - Cot-age and Sure Start working together to give parents and carers free fitting for smoke alarms, safety gates and fireguards. Parents and carers are asked to pay £6 towards the cost of fireguards and gates. Funded and delivered through an SLA with Cot-age.

EARLY YEARS ACTIVITIES

ST AIDAN'S DROP-IN CRÈCHE - Four sessions held each week at St Aidan's Centre. Funded by Sure Start, delivered by Jolly Tots.

WOODTHORPE CRÈCHE - Held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at Woodthorpe School. Funded respite crèche places available. Funded by Sure Start, delivered by Woodthorpe Playgroup in conjunction with Woodthorpe Forum.

STAY AND PLAY SESSIONS - Run by Behaviour Support and Parent Involvement Workers at Manor Childcare Centre, the Standhouse Centre and Wybourn Youth Trust. Stay and Play sessions aim to encourage parents to get involved in play. Funded by Sure Start, delivered by Sure Start.

CRÈCHES - Run in conjunction with training courses. Funded by Sure Start, delivered by PACTS staff and Jolly Tots.

RESPITE CARE - Offered through an SLA with Manor Community Centre for Children, for children with additional needs.

LIBRARY PROJECT - The programme supports Bookstart, and offers Book and Toy Library membership. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Two Parent Involvement Workers support and enable parents to attend the Parents Forum, Partnership Board and other groups.

PARTNERSHIP BOARD - Six parents are currently members of the Partnership Board. Four parents for Woodthorpe and two for Wybourn (there are currently 2 parent vacancies for Wybourn).

PARENTS FORUM - A group held once a month at Woodthorpe School which provides an opportunity for parents to tell the programme what they want and need. Delivered and funded by Sure Start.

CHILDCARE TRAINING - A range of childcare courses from basic childcare qualifications through to NVQ 3. Courses available to staff and parents. Funded by Sure Start, delivered by Woodthorpe Forum and Sheffield College.

BLOKES BREAKFAST/DROP IN - Held every Tuesday morning at St John's School for fathers who care for children under 4. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

MUSIC PROJECT - A group held every Friday at St Aidan's community-based recording facility. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

TALKING BOOKS - Funded and delivered by Sure Start. Parents in the 'Men's Art Project' record 'talking books' for their children on a Tascam Portastudio.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

TRIPS AND DAYS OUT - Delivered and funded by Sure Start. For example, the team is offering a day trip to Skegness on 18th August 2004 to local families. The team are organising activities for the afternoon on the beach.

BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT - 1:1 support offered in the form of home visits, the 'Time Out' group, and input into local pre-school services such as playgroups. For example, the programme has offered 12 weekly sessions covering issues from creative activities to tantrums. Parents can self-refer, or can be referred by Health Visitors or Home Visitors. Funded and delivered by Sure Start

PLAY VAN - Four sessions offered per week during school holidays, two in Woodthorpe and two in Wybourn. There is a bouncy castle, ball pool, air flow tunnel, slide, sand and water play. The whole family is invited to attend. The van and staff also go along to Fun Days and Festivals in the local area. Funded and delivered by Sure Start

TIME OUT - Group support for parents and carers. Funded and delivered by Sure Start in conjunction with City Council Family Support Worker. Sessions are offered weekly at Manor Community Childcare Centre and the Standhouse Centre. Mothers, fathers and carers access this through Behaviour Support. The groups take part in activities as well as having visits from Fire Safety and the community dietician, while their children are cared for in the crèche.

PARENT AND TODDLER GROUP - Held at Woodthorpe School during term time on Wednesdays and Fridays. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

TAKE A BREAK - These are twice-weekly sessions, with two held at St John's School and two at Woodthorpe School. Mothers, fathers and carers are invited to drop in for a cup of tea and a chat while their children are cared for in the drop-in childcare area. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

LINKS TO HEALTHY LIVING NETWORK - Co-working on promotional events.

TARGETTED ACTIVITIES

YOUNG MUMS GROUP - A six month programme supporting young mums with a crèche to access learning opportunities and qualifications. Held once a week at the 'Steel Inn'. This group is delivered by 'YASY' (Youth Association South Yorkshire) and funded by a number of organisations working in partnership including, YASY, Sure Start and Sure Start Plus.

YOUNG MUMS LEAVING CARE GROUP - Held at the Park Youth Club.

TALL SHIPS FOR YOUNG MEN - Four members of Wybourn Youth Trust Fathers' Group took part in a character, skills and confidence-building expedition from Falmouth. Externally funded, supported and organized by Sure Start.

TARGETED SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES FOR FATHERS AND MALE CARERS - A range of activities are being offered by the Men's Project Workers, including; trips out (to the Dogs), training (Forest Training) Blokes Breakfasts, Men's MOT checks, snooker mornings, Music Project.

SLA PARTNERS

Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start have Service Level Agreements with the following partners:

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY SERVICE

Group and individual contact with parents and carers of young children including 'Play and Say' sessions described above.

ST AIDANS

The provision of childcare places to enable work, training or respite.

JOLLY TOTS

The provision of childcare places to enable work, training or respite.

WYBOURN YOUTH TRUST

The provision of childcare places to enable work, training, social and emotional development or respite.

COT-AGE

Provision and fitting of safety equipment. Subsidised by Sure Start, service delivered by Cot-age. Parent contribution of £6.

FAMILY SUPPORT (CITY WIDE)

Behaviour support specialists provide a number of services including: home visiting; the 'Time Out Group', 12 weekly session covering issues from creative activities to tantrums; and also work alongside parents, playgroup leaders and Speech and Therapy Services to develop 'play and say' session at local groups.

WOODTHORPE FORUM

Have an SLA to operate a 'time bank' scheme.

WOODTHORPE PLAYGROUP

The provision of childcare places to enable work, training, social and emotional development or respite.

MANOR COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR CHILDREN

Respite places for children with particular needs.

COMMUNITY TEACHERS

Community Teachers provide a course to aid literacy and numeracy development. Currently offered to parents at the 'Time Out Group'.

COSTS AND RESOURCING

	April 2003- March 2004
Outreach and Home Visiting	66,803.40
Support for Families and Parents	131,142.21
Play Learning and Childcare	26,253.82
Primary and Community Health	68,279.69
Special Needs Support	26,892.95
Teenage Pregnancy	6,913.73
Improving Parents Employability	-
Capital and Revenue Building	50,000.00
Management Salaries	36,040.66
Administrative Salaries	30,119.92
Premises	69,649.74
Administrative Other	-
Evaluation	11,557.48
Other	642.41
Total	524,296.00

PLANNED FUTURE ACTIVITIES

BABY MASSAGE - Members of the Sure Start team (Behaviour Support Workers) have completed training for baby massage and plan to deliver this service in the near future.

BREAST FEEDING - Peer support group and volunteer support workers will be recruited. The breast feeding and smoking cessation worker will support the community midwife to increase the number of breast feeders in the area and provide opportunities to link into other support networks to stop smoking.

BOOK AND TOY LIBRARY to be delivered at both bases.

SENSORY BOXES - to improve interaction between parents and babies.

INVOLVING PARENTS IN CHILDREN'S LEARNING - research project to identify patterns of children's play and assist greater parental involvement with learning processes.

SUN AND SAFETY EVENT - in conjunction with Woodthorpe school

HEALTHY EATING EVENT in September with School

The programme notes : 'when the new building opens at Easter 2005 an assortment of additional sessions will be added to the regular timetable'.

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. We have been candid with our presentation of the data because we feel there are a number of matters which the programme needs to confront 'head on' and on which consensus needs to be arrived at promptly and in an open forum so that it can make the most of the excellent work set in place.
- 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 the Children's Centre Plan
- 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn in making life better for children, parents and communities in the area.
- 4.6 Some of the Sure Start work we have witnessed in Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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:

Communication and Team Working

Involving Parents

Working With the Local Community

Working in Partnership

Monitoring and evaluation

Mainstreaming

4.9 Findings which emerged from our analysis of the data we collected. These 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 There is widespread agreement that the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme has experienced considerable difficulties during the period of this evaluation and some of the Headline Findings have been strongly influenced by this. Part-way through the evaluation the Programme Manager resigned. There then followed a period during which there was no Programme Manager in post. A new Programme Manager came in to post approximately two-thirds of the way in to the study period. All of this has had an impact at the sharp end of what the programme has been able to deliver.

At the end of the evaluation period we are able to present evidence to suggest the programme is beginning to leave a protracted period of crisis management behind.

Strengths of the programme and areas for development are as follows:

o The staff team have presented a united and coherent face throughout a difficult year and look forward to the opportunity to break away from past difficulties and move the work of the programme on.

o The programme team has considerable positive experience of working with the local community. It is an advantage that the Programme has workers who live in the community and have local knowledge and links.

o Most stakeholders agree that 'strong parental involvement' is a key strength of the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme. Participation of fathers in the programme is seen as a distinctive strength worthy of wider dissemination.

o Further attention to developing services which will support groups not yet engaged with the programme is required.

o The programme has a strong track record of relatively extensive parental involvement in the programme. A core group parents have been involved in the Partnership Board and related groups but their period of office is due to expire. The programme needs to widen participation of new parents who are currently peripheral in terms of programme governance.

o Local providers are predominantly positive about working with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and have a number of suggestions for strengthening their relations with the programme. The hope is repeatedly expressed that a sharper focus on services for children and their parents will emerge as the programme works to overcome barriers to joint working which have dominated until recently. Partners and other interested local groups want their voices to be heard so that their specialist and expert knowledge can be used productively to benefit Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and its clients

o Links between the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team increasingly seeks to maximise opportunities to engage with the local community.

o Systems of monitoring were immature when the evaluation began. Improvements have been substantial during the course of the evaluation and these need to be maintained. Specifically, there needs to be well-defined emphasis on health targets and the collection of health data.

o The Programme is sharply focused on defence of Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn and with recognizing and dealing with its day-to-day problems. The imperative for change linked to city-wide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services is, however, an essential focus for continued improvement.

The data which has informed these findings is now explored.

COMMUNICATION AND TEAM WORKING

The staff team have presented a united and coherent face throughout a difficult year and look forward to the opportunity to break away from past difficulties and move the work of the programme on.

- 4.10 The Children's Workforce Reform places emphasis on getting early years services and intervention right by encouraging:
- integrated and coherent working
 - teams that are stable, yet flexible and responsive,
 - skilled, trusted and valued team members and
 - well led, well managed, properly supervised working (Pugh, 2004).
- 4.11 Stakeholders working both within the Sure Start team, and those seeking to work with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start from other agencies in the interests of children and their families, have placed considerable emphasis on the above-mentioned requirements for effective working. The front line and administrative Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start staff have done a tremendous job of maintaining a good standard of integrated and coherent working in difficult and trying circumstances over the past eighteen months.
- 4.12 In order to build on that foundation, problems of communication and inter-agency working, combined with the impact of a renovated programme management have to be dealt with as priorities. Staff recognise that the new Programme Manager can be assisted in the tasks ahead by effective appreciation of the teams already considerable and positive experience of work in the local area. It is agreed that there is work to be done on getting communication and team working right both within the programme and beyond the programme in order to best equip the programme to meet its key objectives.
- 4.13 Working through a period of uncertainty threw up new opportunities for staff as well as reproducing old and creating new problems. For example, the Administration Team coped admirably with additional responsibilities thrown upon its shoulders as a consequence of the transitional managerial situation that led to newly cohesive and expanded working practices and skills:

'the Administration Team has really gelled .. it took a while but we've worked really quite well together ... We've looked at workload and tried to split it fairly, and we've had monthly team meetings... I've fed back an awful lot more to key people about what's happening higher up in the Team so they don't feel excluded.... And we've started working to plans. So we all know what's expected of us at certain times.'

Member of staff

- 4.14 Improvements to working practices have proved beneficial and are ongoing. There is evidence that some good working 'routines' and 'divisions of labour' are increasingly being laid down:

'we've stopped fire fighting ... for a time we had no forward planning and things always done in a rush ... I think now we're just able to take a bit of time and plan things better...'

Member of staff

- 4.15 As the evaluation moved into its final stages programme staff have indicated they are satisfied with communication processes inside and outside of the three working teams which make up Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start, based as they are, on successful informal co-operation. Positive as this is, with changing accommodation and a growing number of employees and volunteers, a more systematic approach will be required utilising traditional formal communication methods alongside IT and personalised staff email addresses.
- 4.16 The programme's email facility is not currently reliable - for example the email system at one of the programme's bases was described as '*down for five weeks month*' at the time of writing. Similarly there are problems with telephone contact particularly when phones need to be placed on divert from one of the programme's venues to another leaving staff out of immediate contact leading to communication difficulties the programme can ill-afford. Its telephone number is not listed in the main BT directory under the main Sure Start entry.
- 4.17 In part these difficulties stem from the current lack of suitable premises for the programme which has undoubtedly cost the programme in terms of staff effort. The programme is waiting for completion of a new Sure Start building but in the meantime the staff team are conscious that the circumstances in which they work are detrimental to

optimum delivery of services in accordance with targets and key objectives outlined in the Delivery Plan.

- 4.18 Staff know that communication difficulties impact at the sharp end of the programme's work. They report some improvement in their capacity to communicate with external agencies:

'Previously I didn't know what I could or couldn't do for other organisations .. we weren't told everything that was happening in our programme but now I know I can ask and things are really open now - the systems are better'

Member of staff

- 4.19 The Administration Team has recently made a step change in the efficient production of the Newsletter by developing a well-conceived division of labour. Staff have agreed that the three teams could usefully submit regular pieces for the Newsletter. It is important to keep in mind its potential threefold readership:

- Parents and the wider community
- Programme Staff and
- Other agencies working in the community.

There is a vital role for the newsletter to play in securing the commitment of other agencies working in the community.

- 4.20 Team working has improved during the evaluation period and this is deserving of praise:

'The Management Team is now very strong, and you need that to have a strong team'

Local Partner

'The new Programme Manager has been supported to stabilize the programme team'

Partnership Board Member

'We have systems in place that mean the team feels sustainable now'

Member of staff

It will be helpful for the programme to ensure regular opportunities for shared reflection on what people are doing to sustain the culture of

continual improvement that is currently being established. In one person's words:

'There will be no moving forward if we stick to what we're good at.'

Member of staff

- 4.21 To continue the successful work of the staff team at WW Sure Start the programme now needs a working environment that facilitates and expands their talents.

INVOLVING PARENTS

Stakeholders who have contributed to this evaluation agree that 'strong parental involvement' is a priority for, and key strength of, Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start.

Participation of fathers in the programme is seen as a distinctive strength worthy of wider dissemination.

Further attention to developing services that will support groups not yet engaged with the programme is required.

- 4.21 Involvement of parents is widely seen as one of the programme's strengths:

'I think their involvement with parents is good'

Service Provider

'They have strong parental involvement.'

Service Provider

'Home visits are giving lots of support to parents'

Service Provider

- 4.22 As is the case for Sure Start programmes all over the country however, the Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme knows there are groups of individuals who do not access services, or who are reluctant to get involved. Thinking about groups the programme is finding 'hard to reach' can usefully be broadened out to encourage consideration of 'Targeted Services'. This is because people with additional needs who are not engaged with the programme are not always 'hard to reach'. Nevertheless some families with additional needs require services that are beyond what's currently on offer through Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start 'core universal services'. Thus it can be helpful to think about families the programme is finding 'hard to reach' in terms of the development of specifically targeted services.

- 4.23 Targeted services to involve men in Sure Start are unusually well developed in Woodthorpe and Wybourn. The work that the Programme is

engaged in with fathers and other male care-givers - who potentially comprise the largest group Sure Start programmes nationally are finding hard to reach - is going well. The activities of the two Men's Project workers are certainly a model of preliminary work with such a group:

'... Everyone knows that we're finding our jobs very hard because getting men involved in Sure Start is a nightmare. A lot of mother's would have written the dad's names on the Registration Form, but it didn't necessarily mean that the dads were willing to have anything to do with us. So we have got to do a lot of outreach work that is starting to really show fruit now. Last week we went along to a betting shop to fill up a trip ... we are the sort of people who, if we're walking on the street and we see a bloke with a baby we're talking to them and that's that!'

Member of staff

- 4.24 The determination, innovativeness and persistence of the Men's Project workers in the community is impressive:

'They get referrals from Social Services largely for fathers who have been referred to Social Services or children who are getting no activities and it's basically about getting men to feel proud of their role as fathers and discussing parental techniques that work.'

Local partner

- 4.25 The programme has been very creative in its efforts to have contact with men. For example, its Outreach Worker heard about the Tall Ship Youth Organisation in Portsmouth and encouraged four local men who were part of the Wybourn Youth Trust Fathers Group to take part in an expedition. The expedition was from Falmouth and was around UK shores, France and Ireland. The expedition ended in Dublin and the participants were flown back home. The trip was organized by a Sure Start Outreach Worker and a Youth Worker from the Wybourn Youth Trust and was funded by the Tall Ships Youth Organisation. In our view this exemplifies excellent practice in joint working to meet Sure Start objectives.
- 4.26 Our information is that participants felt their experience was tremendously valuable. They learnt many new skills '*from crewing to confidence building*'. Two of the participants in the expedition used it for the ASDAM gold award. Once men have been on the expedition they

are able to work as volunteers on future expeditions thus having further opportunity to build on their skills. It was noted that there were many Woodthorpe & Wybourn fathers interested in the project who were unable to participate due to their domestic circumstances. In the future it may be that the Sure Start programme can develop strategies for getting around this obstacle to participation thus considerably enriching opportunities for young parents in the area. In addition, we would particularly recommend support and encouragement of young mothers to participate in potentially life-changing expeditions such as the Tall Ships project.

- 4.27 Nearer to home, we have observed interest in the Men's Music project to be rapidly increasing and the project is effective in achieving some focus on parenting and children's issues whilst at the same time contributing to the men's personal development.
- 4.28 Many elements of this work find favour with families and this shows the importance of the men's out-reach work being fed back into inform other types of intervention with families including parenting skills training and children's development initiatives.
- 4.29 The Woodthorpe & Wybourn Delivery Plan positions Parental Involvement Workers as the key to the initiation of local Sure Start intervention. It is their work that has provided the foundation of the successful development of the Home Visiting and Administration teams. The Home Visiting Team has just begun to move from an initial introductory, exploratory and information-giving phase towards more bedded in and rounded practice:

'the role of the home visitors changed slightly over the last month. Initially it was going out and offering information to families about Sure Start. That's now changed. They now go out and actually offer some family support and kind of go back at regular intervals to the same families... The success of that is due to the enthusiasm and commitment of the Home Visiting Team and the fact that they're probably enjoying it more now that they can do more in-depth work with families, and families are responding to that.'

Member of staff

- 4.30 There is recognition that this new stage requires clear evaluation and assessment:

'We've changed the remit for the home visiting. So some families may need support, some may not. So we still go and do the initial visit, and then a decision has to be made about what support is required.'

Member of staff

'We identify families that need a high level of support so that we can identify the problems facing the family. We can [look at] the time scale and then obviously offer them more or less support if needed. The best way we can do that is through an assessment so we can target individual problems... '

Member of staff

- 4.31 Clarity is needed to avoid role overlap, unnecessary duplication and even sometimes confusion and conflict which can result from ambiguity, for example :

'If Parental Involvement Workers are organising a trip, you know, should they be collecting money or should the Home Visitors try to do that?'

Member of staff

As the role of Home Visitors is currently being reviewed these kinds of issues can be openly discussed. All options should be considered; it might turn out that the original division between Parental Involvement Worker and Home Visitor is not helpful and that a larger number of demarcated roles are required. Efficient and open lines of communication, as well as good will on all sides should enable these questions to be looked at.

- 4.32 There is a perception that a small minority of parents have become over dependent upon individual team members:

'Some families I deal with just seem to think they're the only ones you actually work with and sometimes if you're not careful you can wear yourself down because they can phone you fifty times a day like, 'Have you done this and have you done that? Can you come and see me?' And it's something as simple as they're wanting to do a course at college and they've not received the application form. They want you to go to the house for them to tell you that when they could tell you over the phone and you could sort it out and go back to them with any feedback you get. So that's the only other thing. I suppose its just... obviously still supporting them, but making known the limits ... I've started saying in fact, 'if you want to do this course, here's all the

information. Here's the contact name. Here's the contact number and I'll get back to you in a couple of days to see what they've said'

Member of staff

- 4.33 We agree it is necessary to draw this kind of boundary between staff and clients, making it clear exactly what the roles of both should be. A member of the team is now tasked with specifically addressing this issue. In the above-mentioned example, we would wish to re-emphasise the importance of involving parents in education wherever appropriate and as far as possible.

INVOLVING PARENTS IN PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE

The programme has a strong track record of relatively extensive parental involvement in the programme. A core group parents have been involved in the Partnership Board and related groups but their period of office is due to expire. The programme needs to widen participation of new parents who are currently peripheral in terms of programme governance.

- 4.33 A number of respondents raised inter-related problems centred on parental involvement in Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. Contributors tended to run issues together in their discussions and for this reason we present the points in the order they arose, before drawing some inferences. Each quote comprises an interesting 'thinking point' for the reflective reader:

'One of the things I think they do very well is involving parents, but one of the things I don't think they do very well is they don't have enough of a focus about wider involvement with parents or what they're actually doing with those parents when they've got them involved.'

Local provider

'It seems to me like they've got their parents, they've got their groups... and actually that looks good and that seems very effective,

but the whole sort of drive and thrust isn't necessarily to get more parents involved in that way. It's going through the parental involvement workers, but this leaves things with the sort of parents who have the power.'

Local provider

'I was seeing that there was a sort of like well, 'we have parents involved, that's enough' attitude.'

Local provider

'Well, I think it's really complex actually because they've got parents involved who are very committed and very involved and know what they're doing and, you know, that's great, the Parents' Forum was very open. One of the problems was that they were very open, but they had no focus...'

Local provider

'Because Sure Start haven't developed the close links with the people who are working with parents every day, such as our staff, they sort of work with the groups that are willing to come along. They haven't made an effort to reach the other parents that perhaps need that support more, but don't actively go and volunteer themselves to join these groups. So, if they did have more close links with organisations such as ours, then we could help get to the parents for them.'

Local provider

'Some parents are willing to come in and volunteer, but not all the parents are like that.'

Member of staff

'There are a lot of parents in our Centre that would benefit greatly from some Sure Start input, but they're not reaching them.'

Local provider

'I felt at the very beginning when choices and ideas were put to parents at the first meeting about Sure Start in this area, giving parents a choice for what they wanted is fine, but you have to give them information about what's available, and I didn't feel that there was quite enough information given to parents for them to make good choices in what they wanted.'

Local provider

- 4.34 So, upon reflection, it is generally felt that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start is very effective in obtaining initial parental involvement but this positive view is expressed alongside a number of reservations. Two main points seemed to emerge here.
- 4.35 First, local service providers are aware of the danger that recruitment of parents typically attracts an active, community-minded and committed minority of parents. Invaluable as such people are to any Sure Start programme, it is clear that they must be supported in their capacity to underpin efforts for reaching out to those parents who may be in greater need and 'harder' for the programme to reach.
- 4.36 Second, some partners feel that they could assist Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start in respect of developing targeted services but that such opportunities have, to date, been missed in their view. We are perplexed to have observed at first hand the suggestion that local agencies might be able to assist in widening participation in Woodthorpe & Wybourn completely dismissed at a mainstreaming event for Programme Managers. We consider it to be essential that the programme team looks afresh at their expectations of what other community groups can offer in terms of widening involvement of parents.
- 4.37 All stakeholder groups commend the involvement of a committed group of parents in Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. However it must be stated that no mention was made by any contributor to the evaluation of the importance of developing the capacity of local parents as key players in planning for and delivery of the forthcoming Children's Centres. We feel this omission must be clearly recognized. A clear link between the Children's Centre initiatives and the programme's development plan needs to be evolved with all stakeholders.
- 4.38 Some attention should be paid to the current situation whereby a core group of parents are currently most involved in programme governance. This might be off-putting for prospective parent members who may feel less self-confident. While this requires sensitive handling, it also gives a sense of the real evolution of parental involvement that participation in Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start facilitates.

- 4.39 Parent members of the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start Partnership Board have an invaluable wealth of experience in relation to both the Board and the programme more generally. They describe the Partnership Board as *'a genuine and supportive environment'* and *'an open and true partnership'*, and assert that:

'the agencies involved live and breath community regeneration' and
Parent Partnership Board Member

'parents are confident that everything is transparent and nothing is going on behind closed doors'.

Parent Partnership Board Member

This latter remark clearly shows the Board has reflected on, and assimilated, the lessons of a somewhat troubled early history of the programme to which many stakeholders have alluded:

'I think the Partnership Board has evolved. We had a really difficult phase, really difficult, and as a team we worked through it and evolved, so we've got to a position where we do work as a team and we can have discussions ... and the professionals on the Partnership Board really do take on board what parents want and work towards achieving it. If it's not possible there's always the support and explanations as to why..'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.40 The *'difficulties'* referred to concern the context in which the Partnership Board took measures to guarantee a fifteen-minute period at the beginning of Board meetings to discuss matters without staff present:

'[in the past] we had a few difficulties where we didn't have a place to go if there was complaints or anything like that, so things got a bit heated. This wasn't fair so we were given the slot so that we could bring things to discuss them openly and it worked really well. We don't generally need it.'

Partnership Board Member

It was also explained:

'staff issues can be brought up as well ... if there's something confidential going on with a member of staff that needs to be discussed by the Board it's not very fair to discuss it in front of Parental Involvement Workers and things like that.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.41 This short item at the beginning of the agenda for non-staff participants to discuss confidential matters was reported by parent and also by non-parent members as being a positive innovation. However it has been difficult to get people to arrive promptly because of transport problems for parents or overlapping commitments of Partnership Board members; as a result this important item has often been curtailed. If the Board is to continue with this slot then timing must be reconsidered to ensure full participation. We have, however, picked up a sense that Board members feel it is increasingly unlikely that this segregated interval will continue to be required.
- 4.42 It has been stressed that the Partnership Board aims to take a balanced approach, one that maintains a sense of proportion and perspective and which enables trust between parent members and non-parent members. We expand on this next.
- 4.43 Parent board members had plenty of positive things to say about their involvement in the Partnership Board. They feel it is supportive and inclusive as typical comments show:

'On the Board we get communication, trust and equality.'

Partnership Board Member

'Everybody gets to voice their own opinions and we work out what would be the best solutions. Everybody is an equal and made to feel just as important as others. We all want what is best for our programme.'

Partnership Board Member

'It's a good environment, people are willing to help each other.'

Partnership Board Member

'It's very friendly. If you're not sure of anything you can ask and they will do their best to help you understand better.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.44 These positive comments notwithstanding, it is necessary to note that the Parent Involvement Team has had to work hard to maintain a viable parent presence on the Partnership Board. During the course of the evaluation, events largely beyond the Team's control led to the resignation of a minority of the original eight parent members recruited. This situation triggered a steep learning curve for Involvement Workers and parents alike, during which the former have made strenuous and conscientious efforts to support the latter's development and effective participation. Mistakes are inevitable. But they have been identified and evaluated by the Parent Involvement Team itself, and appropriate solutions proposed as the following interchange shows:

'What happened was initially Parental Involvement Workers weren't officially elected to the Partnership Board so they could only go as observers. I went along to a few but then I was told - not by parents, but by some senior members of staff - 'you can't go anymore now. Parents have got to go on their own'. The parents still wanted me to go, but I had to say to them, 'I can't come with you. I'm not allowed.'

Parent Involvement Worker

'Not only that! They weren't given the grounding to confidently become Partnership Board members. They were really thrown in at the deep end of it, and to be perfectly honest, I would have resigned as well if that had been me!

Member of Staff

....After the Away Day and after I spoke to parents, it was felt that these parents did still need support and Parental Involvement Workers still needed to go with them. So its just mistakes have been made along the way that we've rectified.'

Parent Involvement Worker

- 4.45 Some parents feel that whilst there has been progress on involving parents on the Board, it took an unacceptably long time for the nature of their participation to be established:

'the transition from Steering Group to Partnership Board was quite difficult. At that time I was one parent with about 20 professionals and there kept being this discussion about the professionals needing

to define what the Partnership Board was before parents became involved. So I was fighting a losing battle and thinking 'well, actually if you're defining what the Partnership Board is you should have parents on board now because you can't be making a decision about how it will work with parents because you're not one of them living on Woodthorpe Wybourn'. And I left for a while because I just couldn't deal with that battle. '

Partnership Board Member

'The management at the time wasn't giving enough information to the Parental Involvement Workers about what being on the Partnership Board actually involved. At the time I was doing a Steering Group and about five different Sub-Groups and the information that was coming to you was, 'you need to do this' and that was basically it. There'd be no reading material, and at one point when we were finding our feet there were two meetings in one day sometimes. At that point a couple of parents actually dropped out because it were just too much for them. It has calmed down now ...'

Partnership Board Members

- 4.46 Parent members who contributed to this evaluation feel that the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start Partnership Board has increasingly developed a 'bottom up' ethos and practice which helps to prioritise the agendas of parents. They feel there is a democratic approach to decision-making and parents say they currently feel free to participate and ask questions. Indeed, it has become evident through the evaluation that problems experienced have been largely resolved thanks to the perseverance of the parent members and the willingness of the professionals to relinquish power. This has led to an increase of trust, described by one respondent as '*the glue of partnership*':

'initially when everybody first started, you got parents sitting on one side going, 'oh they're professionals,' and professionals sitting on the other side going 'parents' and sort of just going through the process of having meetings together. But it's actually building the trust and parents knowing 'well there's somebody from Social Services over there, but they're not going to take the kids away,' or 'there's somebody from Manor and Castle Development Trust over there, but they don't think I'm an idiot'. And you know, professionals probably thinking the same sorts of things ... it's about working together. It's about learning to do it and I think we've done it really well as a team and built trust...'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.47 Clear ideas have been put forward about how trust is built:

'for parents a lot of trust comes if we're not talked down to.'

Local parent

'yes, that's where trust comes from. If somebody speaks to you as an equal or as if you're valued then you sit there and think 'they're not judging me.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.48 A positive relationship between professionals and parent members of the Partnership Board has had to be built up over time. Initially:

'The trust weren't there, were it? That trust wasn't there because you didn't know who you could go and say something to without it getting back.'

Partnership Board Member

Similarly:

'the problem was communication, professionals and the parents weren't talking to each other'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.49 Parents say a specific event proved to be the ideal mechanism for building good Partnership Board relations:

'The Away Day changed everything'

Partnership Board Member

This was a sentiment repeated time and again in relation to the evolution of effective partnership:

'The Away Day solved all the problems really'

Partnership Board Member

'We worked it through. We recognised the problems. We got the Away Day, which was fantastic, really positive and we built on that...'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.50 The vital ingredient that enabled communication barriers to be broken down was felt to be in the Away Day's relative informality:

'I went and sat with the professionals, but by the end of the day everybody was mixed up, and you can see that now at the Partnership Board meeting. It used to be half and half on a table and now everybody just sits down together'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.51 Interestingly, the Away Day process was likened to the evaluation workshop:

'yeah, the Away Day was a bit like this workshop. We did what we thought was positive, what we thought was negative and everybody sat in groups, getting to know each other and talked about things that people thought were working well and others didn't, or just things that people didn't know and it was a safe space to say it. And we came out at the end of the day with an Action Plan about how partnership could be. We worked out how we were going to work with the Partnership Board, how we were going to work, communication, and agenda setting.'

Partnership Board Member

We have since heard several illustrations of action taken to promote positive working relations between parent and professional Board members. Strategies for encouraging joint working have certainly paid off for the programme in terms of bringing parents and professionals closer together.

- 4.52 At the time of carrying out the evaluation parents said that no parent had chaired a Partnership Board meeting and gave reasons for this situation as follows:

'I think the intention is to move towards parent chairing, but I think it's going to be quite difficult if people are having one year terms to move to chairing because .. well I've been there from day one, so it's second nature to me, but others haven't and it's quite a big thing to chair a meeting.'

Partnership Board Member

'I personally wouldn't have the confidence to do that. I mean I've got confidence like I'll stick my hand up and say 'I'm sorry, I don't agree

with your opinion,' or, 'you haven't done whatever,' but I don't think I'd have the confidence to chair a whole meeting by myself.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.53 It was pointed out that given the way the Partnership Board functions since the Away Day the fact that parents do not currently chair meetings is not really a problem:

'I don't actually think it's that essential if you've got the amount of input that we've got from parents. I think quite often when it's more exclusive, if a parent's chairing it then the particular parent is empowered, but because of the way the Partnership meetings are held and because of how the parents feel, I don't think it's an issue that [the chairing] is done by the lead agencies.'

Partnership Board Member

'We've been asked before 'is it okay how it's being done?' and everybody were fine about it'

Partnership Board Member

'There's no presumption that that's the way it will be, is there? It is a collective, just about everything's a collective decision.'

Partnership Board Member

These assumptions will need to be kept under review.

- 4.54 Further, parents have clarified how the previously mentioned Away Day led directly to the resolution of two important issues: all necessary Partnership Board information has since been distributed well in advance of meetings - and as a result it has become well established that any member can add to the agenda. Communication around Partnership Board matters nowadays is generally reported to be satisfactory.

- 4.55 Parent members who contributed to the evaluation feel that the outcomes of the Away Day bode well for the future of the Partnership Board, and particularly for new parent members:

'I think that parents who want to be on it next time, they'll be able to be given a lot clearer picture of what's expected, what's involved and things like that...'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.56 It has been suggested that Away Days could be opened up to all Parents' Forum members:

'when we do the staff Away Day, what we were thinking was to open it up to everybody so the people that were on the Parents' Forum would be invited to that as well. So then again you're removing the barriers so it's total open management. And then what I intend to do if it's going to work ... is to put tables for people where you've not got all health professionals on one table, but actually put people in an objective group so you're looking at a particular target and seeing what we're doing well, where we want to go and how we're going to get there. That's the kind of thing that I'd like to do ...'

Member of staff

- 4.57 More frequent use of Away Days could be a good idea. However, a couple of possible downsides should be considered: first, if Away Days become a routine part of Sure Start management they may lose their unique capacity to effect positive change; second, staff, and other groups, may on occasion need a separate Away Day to air their own issues.

- 4.58 Inevitably there are some barriers to parental involvement in the Partnership Board that need to be routinely dealt with. Parent members know there is no 'quick-fix' approach to enabling their participation:

'learning and understanding what is new and what decisions are being made takes time'

Partnership Board Member

everything's a challenge'

Partnership Board Member

They need to be certain that they will be supported to develop their expertise and confidence.

- 4.59 Participants in the evaluation described a healthy relationship between the Parents Forum and the Partnership Board. Indeed efforts have been made to involve all registered parents in the election of parent members to the Board:

'At Parent Forums [we were] asked if anybody had interest in being on the Board. We had a voting sheet with everyone's picture and name who was interested on being on the Board, sent to all the registered

families and then everyone got the opportunity to vote for who they thought...'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.60 This approach has paid dividends as well as revealing an important problem, particularly for the selection and election of new Partnership Board members:

'We did get eight people. Often people say, you know, 'We've got one or two,' and we got eight people and still people showing interest, three or four stand ins as well, didn't we? So, I think it's only the level of commitment that's required that makes it difficult sometimes for people to stay involved. I think once you get involved you can't just do the one meeting and be involved. And you sometimes look at your home and child and think, 'who are you?' I think for some people that juggling is quite difficult. I'm quite fortunate because I've got a lot of support, but I think some people find it really hard. I've only got one child, but, you know, people who have got more children, they're stuck. They can't give what they want to give. They can't give the programme enough, it's a battle.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.61 There are questions to ask about expectations of parents involved in programme governance and about the scale of these responsibilities. We heard several times that some parents felt saddled with more than they had bargained for when getting involved:

*'Parents were asked to go onto the Partnership Board and when they said, 'Well, what will be expected of us?' it was 'Well, a meeting once a month.' What they weren't told was, as well as go to a meeting once a month, they read a very long agenda and papers over the next three weeks. Then they've got to go on sub-groups and then they might get called at the last minute to come to other meetings. And it was just as volunteers that they wanted to be involved. They don't want to be **that** involved. It's too much for some of them and they just weren't ready. So my job has been really to support them and say, 'Well, if you don't want to be on a subcommittee, come off, but stay, keep going and sit back.' And we're getting them some training. We've arranged that they get training on how to read the Delivery Plan and how to pick up key points of the Delivery Plan and how to pick up key*

points on agendas, and how to have a voice and to know that you can speak and have an input on the agenda.'

Parent Involvement Worker

- 4.62 This reveals issues for Parental Involvement Workers to focus on, with which we know they are already concerned. One parent Partnership Board member argued strongly that expectations of the level of commitment that can reasonably be expected from Parents' Forum members need revision:

'I think it's about having the level of involvement right because the people that have gone onto the Board, they are involved, they want to be involved. They want to know about the intricate details of finance and things like that. I think a lot of people that are coming to Parents' Forum that's not what they're there for, and they don't have time to be there for that. They're there to have quality time with other adults, hear views, have their views heard. You know, get a couple of hours away from the kids, have a nice breakfast, discuss things that they want in their community. They don't want to know that 5% of Sure Start's budget has to go to such and such or, 'We have to meet this objective.'

Local parent

- 4.63 An interesting distinction is drawn between the parent Partnership Board members and the general run of Parents' Forum members. It points to the way in which becoming a member of the Board leads almost inevitably towards parents becoming quasi '*professionals*' themselves. This raises some key dilemmas, not only for Sure Start professionals, but also for parent Partnership Board members, concerning how to realise Sure Start targets, as is illustrated by an exchange initiated by parents and contributed to by professionals:

'We had a really healthy breakfast at the Parents' Forum which is meeting targets. Parents want bacon butties. Low salt, low fat, brown bap.'

Parent

At this point a professional, intervened:

'Yeah, but the good thing is, and this is just from an outside perspective, when I came to that meeting they had a choice .. whereas some programmes would have said, 'well parents want bacon

butties, so bacon butties is what they're getting,' you didn't do that. You said, 'Well we'll provide an assortment and people can choose,' and there were quite a few left at the end because people when they went back they had a bacon butty, but then they went for the fruit. So that to me was a success because next time then possibly they might make that choice first'

Service provider

A parent Board member added an interesting suggestion:

'It is a success, but that's what increases the budget and then parents suddenly say, 'well, we want to do this,' and you say, 'well, we can't do that because you wanted the bacon butties.' ... I think the Parents' Forum should have a budget. I think they should have their own pot of money even if it's not a lot.'

Partnership Board Member

4.64 These kinds of problems have also been linked to Sure Start targets and objectives:

'There needs to be some discussions done at the Parents' Forum about objectives and where money needs to be spent to meet targets. There are community issues about where the money goes...'

Staff member

'Yeah, a lot of parents who don't actually come to any meetings at all seem to have got this idea in their heads that all the Sure Start money is just to spend people on trips, for buying things for them. A lot of them don't actually understand that they've got this many targets to meet ...'

Staff member

4.65 In this context, recruitment to the Parents Forum and the provision of training and education opportunities for all Forum parents is the key to the problems of participation on the Partnership Board. One idea put forward is for the Parents Forum to become a 'reserve' so that parent membership of the Board becomes rotational:

'The parents that resigned from the Partnership Board are still involved with Sure Start. They're still on the Forum and they might come back to the Partnership Board, but they're just not ready yet.'

So they're really taking a break and maybe when they're electing again, they might feel ready then as long as training is provided.'

Member of staff

- 4.66 The point was made that *'being a parent member of the Partnership Board is not a career'*. Staff feel parents deserve wider incentives to participate in the running of the local programme. Indeed, as the Parent Involvement workers have realised:

'a lot of the parents, if they're enthusiastic and keen, they get roped into doing everything. It's the same parents usually that you rely on because other parents don't want to know. I think that's quite difficult, if they've got children or other jobs, to be available to attend all these meetings as well as Partnership Board.'

Parent Involvement Worker

- 4.67 The data also raises important questions for Sure Start generally in relation to a perceived failure to deliver adequate parent training:

'... Parents kept saying [at the Away Day], 'When are we going to be having this training?' They are really very keen. The problem I find is when parents are so keen and Sure Start have said, 'We will arrange for training, da-da-da.' and then they don't get it. You need to strike while the iron is hot and Sure Start is no good at that. They say, 'We're going to do it' and then they don't follow through, but parents want it now. So its just got to be that I've got to deliver something on it really and go along with my parents to build their confidence.'

Parent Involvement Worker

- 4.68 Staff feel that ideally, parent training should not be exclusively provided by programme staff, but complemented by other local agencies offering accreditation and consequently enhancing future employment opportunities.

- 4.69 The question has been raised about what to do to retain those most 'involved' parents who were successfully drawn into the Parents' Forum and onto the Partnership Board, from which some subsequently resigned suffering from overload and burn out. The point was made that providing these, and other, parents with wider options through training, education and enhanced employment opportunities is a Sure Start priority. Yet some respondents have commented that the programme has not been proactive about opportunities for adult education. This brings 'key

messages' from the evaluation to concerns around mapping and isolation which are discussed elsewhere.

- 4.70 On a wholly positive note, parent members of the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start Partnership Board describe striking changes in their confidence for participation that have taken place over the duration of their time on the Board:

Interviewer: Can you describe your first few experiences of going to a Partnership Board meeting?

Parent : 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 there was us .. 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 ... you get welcomed, you get a 'hello' as soon as you get there - well you'd got that to start with, but 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].

The quote above signals tremendously positive outcomes of participation on the Board.

- 4.71 The quote below sheds light on the evolution of parental involvement from the Sure Start Steering Group to the Partnership Board. A parent member gave an account of the problems they initially faced and eventually overcame:

'It was quite difficult for some parents. I've been on for three years now, and when the other parents came on it was quite challenging for them and they felt intimidated. But I think as things changed they got more confident - they've said themselves that they all feel equal and now they've got the information and they understand that we're

all just a group and it really is a strong group I think it's a positive experience for most people now.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.72 Partnership Board members who contributed to the evaluation say conflict resolution processes work well and outcomes tend to be positive:

'we haven't had any major conflicts recently'

Partnership Board Member

'there've not been any disagreements on anything really for months because we're all on the same wavelength now.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.73 Even so, participants did go on to place potentially difficult differences of opinion in a now familiar framework:

'if we're discussing a particular thing, sometimes the professionals have a different idea to the parents, don't they, you know? Because they've not really got small children now, have they? So, they might think something but we'll say 'well, actually no, we'd rather have it this way,' and then we'll sort of talk it through, won't we?'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.74 Sometimes issues are relatively minor - such as how to fund a trip to Centre Parcs. Other issues can be more complex such as when different views arose on the key Sure Start target to encourage breastfeeding, though the parent members did not, initially at least, give this debate the status of a conflict:

'One of the last things, conflict that I can remember, was over breastfeeding .. but it weren't a conflict as such, it was just more a difference of opinion.'

Partnership Board Member

The underlying issue was, again, the relation between professionals and parents, in this case the balance of personnel who should conduct breastfeeding training for new mothers:

'it were about breastfeeding peer training where they said it had to be ten professionals involved. That were their policy and we didn't

agree with that. We said it should be five professionals, five parents and we sort of fought for that, didn't we?'

'Yeah, we had quite a conflict... 'policy', wasn't it? They were saying that's what they normally deliver .. any change would compromise that'

Partnership Board Members talking

So the '*tension*' centered on the habitual way in which professional breastfeeding trainers delivered their service, and whether this was subject to negotiation and compromise. In fact change was agreed after the parents '*challenged*' that usual way of working as the following discussion shows:

'We did get it sorted. We got it sorted so the parents could do it. We did agree that there would be a five and five split, so if we got parents that wanted to do it, they could do it and we would work a system out within Sure Start where we could perhaps pay them for sessional work, because it was about being employed. But parents didn't want to. There wasn't any parents that wanted to do that level of training ...'

'It was quite a commitment for that initial training.'

'It was wasn't it? But it was a really positive thing that as a Board we challenged things ... We challenge outside rather than challenging ourselves don't we? We challenge other organisations more than ourselves ... we challenge them to fit more in what we need.'

Partnership Board Members talking.

- 4.75 This seems to provide a model of how parent Partnership Board members should operate, as well as of how professionals should adapt their own methods of working to the demands of the users of their service. We note, however, that the eventual barrier to realising peer breastfeeding training was the lack of enthusiasm and involvement of other parents. We return to this issue of 'commitment' at various points in this report.
- 4.76 So, heartening and praiseworthy as this account of the history of the Partnership Board is it does seem to lead to some pressing problems for it's future: the continuity and expansion of parent involvement: *'and that's what we need to maintain really'*. One person stated:

'again, it's a learning process isn't it. ... When we first came to the Board everything just sort of went straight over the top of our heads and now we're just getting a general understanding of most things now and we've nearly finished our term - just as we're getting into it and really sound like we know what we're talking about ...'

Partnership Board Member

In short, if the current parent members have to leave the Board soon there is the danger that the continuity of this positive history will be broken. Strategic planning is needed to avoid this.

- 4.77 When carrying out the evaluation we found considerable uncertainty concerning how long the current parent members could or should serve on the Board:

'Somebody's told me a year. Somebody's told me two years. I really don't know. It's not been very clear from the start ... but it takes a while to get that confidence level'

Partnership Board Member

'it were undecided at first. A year or two years, majority of people said for a year at first ...'

Partnership Board Member

'I got the sense that because [my child's is coming up to five] my term of office may be coming up to an end, but it's a sort of [presented as] 'an opportunity for you to move on because your interests are as a parent are slightly different and your child in full-time education'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.78 The question of parents being re-elected, or simply staying on, was also raised:

'Well, my youngest will be four in April, so if there are any other parents with children under four who want to go on the Board, then they'll be elected and I'll step down.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.79 Parent members of the Board reported attempts to clarify their terms of engagement which are now beginning to be resolved at the time of writing this evaluation report. It took some time for the original Terms

of Reference to be unearthed and reviewed by the Partnership Board so that the period of parental terms of office could be decided, and any necessary changes or additions agreed. Minutes of Partnership Board meetings show the Board has gone on to revisit them.

- 4.80 It was also widely felt that the original parent's information booklet should be revisited and reviewed. The Partnership Board is considering a coordinated programme to improve parental involvement in the programme.
- 4.81 Views expressed by parent Partnership Board members on the evolution of partnership and trust, as well as on the assertive role of parents on the Partnership Board, were endorsed by professionals who contributed to the evaluation. For example, a professional observed the co-operative nature of Partnership Board working:

'I've only attended one Partnership Board meeting but because everything is so open and it is a partnership, a true partnership, there's not exclusive cliques that you can get in other Programmes. Whereas you might get, you know, like a Programme Manager and one of the voluntary agencies sitting and talking in a little clique, that doesn't seem to be happening ... everybody's so open about things that there's not these barriers that I think do exist in some other Programmes.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.82 Others confirm a perception of genuine partnership:

'I think there's a strong sense of partnership.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.83 Emphasis has been placed on valuing the 'challenging' role of the parent members on the Partnership Board:

'I think it's really good actually having the parents on the Board. I think they do make a very useful contribution to the project. You can actually get their opinion of what service delivery they're wanting and how they're wanting it.'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.84 Clearly, involving parents is one of this programmes strengths. The

enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated by those parents who contributed to the evaluation provides strong evidence of this. Nevertheless, all participants stressed that it is important to keep an eye on the task of encouraging new parent members into relationship with the programme, either in place of current members or alongside them. Current members who contributed to the evaluation felt a system of mentoring and 'shadowing' might be helpful, pointing out that it corresponded to their own experience:

'I think it helps a lot if, when you're going on to the Board to go with someone and support each other through that.'

Partnership Board Member

'If we'd got an issue to raise we could share it 'well, you say this, I'll say that,' you know, and we'd do it together rather than doing it all on our own. Because we were both experiencing exactly the same things and I think that parents who come on the Board that are new members, I do think it would help a lot if they had somebody who they knew...'

Partnership Board Member

'I do think parents really need to know what they actually are getting themselves into because it' was the exact opposite to what we were told...'

Partnership Board Member

- 4.85 Future shadowing and mentoring possibilities could usefully be discussed in more concrete detail. It would be a great shame if the know-how of experienced parent Board members were not utilised, at the very least, as mentors of new recruits.
- 4.86 Thus the research evidence highlights a need for the programme to ask itself what changes can be made that will have most potential impact on maintaining and widening involvement in the programme further. It will also be important to ask in-depth questions about what specific outcomes or targets the programme is aiming for through its various engagements with parents.

WORKING WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The programme team has considerable and positive, experience of working with the local community. It is an advantage that the programme has workers who live in the community and have local knowledge and links.

- 4.87 It is a tremendous advantage that the Programme has workers who live in the community, have local knowledge and links and bring a spirit of dedication and determination to Sure Start development in their area. However, allied to this is the practical question of who in the community actually gets to have close links with the programme. The Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme has had to tackle tensions arising from this question at grass roots level:

'I can give an example of how barriers that were put up by members in the community are being broken down .. what happened was I got a job that somebody else in the community had who was then seconded somewhere else. Initaly it was hard - my children were threatened at school - and it was really bad, but I stood my ground and I've actually built up some really good relationships with some of the people that were actually quite threatening. So I've overcome that barrier. Sure Start's management and admin teams have really supported me through it.'

Member of staff

- 4.88 The account given above graphically illustrates the potential downside of a situation that Sure Start recruitment policy positively favours. We are reassured to note that the person concerned felt they received adequate support, both from the whole team and the management system. Good practice on maintaining staff security must be maintained.
- 4.89 Staff security and safety must always be a non-negotiable priority. It must be constantly monitored and immediately acted upon. A telephone security system in place to safeguard home visitors has recently been tested and found successful and we recommend that the system is tested on a regular basis.
- 4.90 Staff - sometimes clearly operating in a difficult environment - have begun to win the trust of significant individuals locally, the kind of people that the programme should contact and whose word of mouth reports will

be key in those sections of the community that the Programme must reach if it is to achieve its targets:

'This was a parent I was just terrified of. I just thought 'oh my God! Why have they done this to me?' And I thought 'Well, I'm here as a worker same as she is ...'. Now it's got to the point she's really, really nice to me and her tone's dropped and now she's like 'Hiya! Are you alright?' She was one of the parents I had to win round when I first came, but now she's really nice. I've got a meeting with her next week. And for the first time ever I've been invited to her house and I've been working here since May. So it's taken some time...'

Member of staff

- 4.91 Staff say in a community like Woodthorpe & Wybourn it is vital for the Sure Start Programme to overcome what is sometimes termed the 'social work stigma'. Accounts of good practice were given of innovative projects to organise leisure trips for parents and children that served long term Sure Start objectives. The Parents' Forum, and indeed the wider community were involved in making decisions about the trips and, just as importantly, the events were efficiently organised and run so that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start was seen as delivering on promises at a local level:

'We consulted with the Parents' Forum to find out what they thought they would want as a summer event. It's consultation with parents. We struggled to get parents to have an input but when you have an input and then it turns out as good as what it did ... it's fantastic.'

Parent Involvement Worker

- 4.92 Community involvement is a key Sure Start commitment and considerable effort has been put into making local people aware of the presence of Sure Start within the Woodthorpe & Wybourn area. Importantly, the Parents' Forum is seen by staff as the middle link to the wider community:

'The Parents Forum looked into the trip, priced up what was best, wrote to parents booked it and sorted it out... Parents that came took the registration forms, and we collared people on the coach while they were there. It was open to every child of Sure Start age in the community. It was the whole community and they were registered in one lump!'

Parent Involvement Worker

- 4.93 As well as the successes in registration noted above, the following quote speaks volumes:

'The first year we did our major family event for Sure Start we filled one coach for each community. The following year we filled two. We've now got three coaches on each community - so we've gone up to six coaches.'

Parent Involvement Worker

Trips are valued because:

' they get you to go places that you wouldn't get to go and the experience is great for learning and things like that.'

Local parent

In this and similar ways, for the examples could be multiplied, the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start workers at the front line of delivery have amply demonstrated an ability to negotiate barriers to involving the community with the programme.

- 4.94 It is recognised that sustaining community involvement is a precarious business. In the early days of publicising Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn many people felt enthusiasm of the local community was jeopardised because upbeat marketing raised expectations which could not all be met:

' The reason that it's been so difficult to get the Programme accepted around here is because when Sure Start first came into the community they were full of promises, big promises. They promised this community the earth and then some more, and did not follow through. So the community still don't yet properly trust Sure Start and don't yet trust that what Sure Start say -they are going to do.'

Local community representative

This situation needs to be avoided in the future in order to sustain community confidence and involvement.

- 4.95 Many stakeholders point out that involving the community in a newly emerging project is never an easy process:

'Part of the problem comes with letting the community know what we're doing too far in advance. So we take out ideas, 'oh we might be doing this, we might be doing that,' but they want to know what exactly we're doing, not what we might be doing. And they want to see results. As they've not seen results really that's lost a lot of trust from the community.'

Partnership Board member

- 4.96 To continue the successful involvement of the community in Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start the team now need to ensure knowledge of the local community is constantly updated. Continuing with the policy of seeking to employ local people is important here and will help build trust between the programme local families. The programme should aim to be a visible, inclusive and proactive service that undertakes effective monitoring of the local community's response to its work.

Links between the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team increasingly seeks to maximize opportunities to engage with the local community.

- 4.97 Community group representatives operating locally and across the city identify a variety of ways in which understanding and relationships can be, and are, being enhanced between their respective agencies and Sure Start programmes, including Woodthorpe & Wybourn. These are outlined next.
- 4.98 Representatives of local community groups we spoke specifically about the Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme were aware of the principal Sure Start aims and objectives. They mentioned a folder in the local library which gives an outline of the Sure Start aims and objectives to demonstrate that there is information in the community about Sure Start. However, that said, they also claimed that knowledge of Sure Start, and understanding of what the Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme is trying to achieve, is not universal.
- 4.99 The majority of the groups interviewed are aware of and receive publicity material produced by Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start.

Most groups stated that they regularly receive the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start newsletter which updates them on what is going on:

'there is a regular newsletter sent out'

'they send me a newsletter every month ... I distribute it and register parents who are interested. I see advertisements for Sure Start in the local area, for example in the local Co-Op'

Local community representatives

4.100 Articles in the newsletters of other community organizations such as The Forum Newsletter also help to raise awareness of the programme. Community group representatives find it helpful if publicity can be a mutually beneficial promotional process for them and Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. Reciprocal dissemination of information provides a valuable opportunity to enhance the work of the full range of agencies.

4.101 Generally, the relationships between Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and local groups who contributed to the evaluation have been described positively. A number of groups felt they had benefited from being involved since the inception of Sure Start in the area:

'we have been involved right from the beginning giving advice and information '

'we have been involved since the very earliest days of Sure Start so we know them quite well'

Local community group representatives

4.102 The positive benefits of the presence of the programme in the area were apparent in many comments:

'Sure Start provides for the needs in the community activities education-wise and interaction-wise'

'they organise trips ... they give families opportunities for parents to have a break'

'they do work hard at Sure Start .. they seem to be doing really well .. they are trying hard to get men involved'

Local representatives of community groups

- 4.103 It was appreciated that the programme has to share resources between the two localities in its catchment area:

'they try extremely hard to divide their resources between the two areas of Woodthorpe and Wybourn. They bow to the knowledge of local parents over decisions ... they bring families together'

Community groups representative

- 4.104 Contact with local groups and organisations certainly appears to be on-going and increasingly widespread. Over half of the community organisations contributing to the evaluation reported they now have regular contact with the programme. All of these groups could name a member of staff with whom they could make contact if they needed to.
- 4.105 Community group representatives working across the city say 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 has been found to assist a growing relationship between the two agencies where Sure Start can make arrangements for this. Inviting community organisations to provide reports or bulletins to the Partnership Boards can enable them to have an important input even if attendance is prohibitive and the programme may wish to try some of these strategies.
- 4.106 A number of the groups interviewed about relations with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start identified that there were benefits to be gained from linking up. Where local community groups have worked with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start they feel there are tangible benefits all round:

'we work together to assist local people'

'we find out about events and trips that each of our clients can attend and benefit from'

'working with Sure Start gives an opportunity in terms of improving quality and service'

- 4.107 The potential for cross-referral of services is valued. A number of groups recognise that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start can provide an opportunity for the communities and families they represent to access

mainstream services. Of the organisations surveyed, the majority stated that they believed Sure Start did inform relevant families that they came into contact with about their organisation and said that they in turn, informed their clients about Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. A number of groups, however, were unsure or doubted whether Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start told relevant families about their services. As the evaluation moved on, we picked up growing indications that local agencies are becoming more confident about how the programme operates in respect of referrals to their services.

- 4.108 Most representatives described the contact they currently have with the programme as appropriate but went on to add that sustaining close links between Sure Start and community organisations can be difficult. For example, community group representatives report finding it difficult to attend meetings held by Sure Start. It can particularly be a problem for sessional workers to attend Sure Start meetings or to fit in with a programme's meeting timetable and this is exacerbated if individuals are not working to an SLA. All this can make it hard to 'get communication going'. Attendance at meetings can also be compromised - as we have noted - if community group representatives can 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 clearly a tension here around the need for strategic planning and hands on work which characterizes the engagement of community groups with Sure Start programmes across Sheffield. Whilst Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start 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.
- 4.109 One of the programme's local partners pointed out that it would be difficult their agency to have more contact with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start as they have already to deal with over 22 agencies. Thus the capacity of local groups to network with organisations such as Sure Start is an issue for the programme to consider and collaborative working with other Sure Start programmes could assist progress here.

- 4.110 Involving community groups in Sure Start evaluations is seen by those who were invited to take part 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.
- 4.111 All stakeholders assert that successful inter-agency work depends upon tried and tested personal relationships. They feel there is an on-going need for discussion between the programme and community groups across Woodthorpe & Wybourn to reinforce personal relationships.
- 4.112 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start is offering across the city. A regular city wide Sure Start newsletter would be welcomed.

The question of how to maximize partnership working is continued in the next section of the report.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Local providers are predominantly positive about working with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and have a number of suggestions for strengthening their relations with the programme. The hope is repeatedly expressed that a sharper focus on services for children and their parents will emerge as the programme works to overcome barriers to joint working that have dominated until recently.

- 4.113 At this point we must point out that our discussion of communications with other agencies is unavoidably colored by the reverberations of the long period of uncertainty about Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn with which the reader is by now familiar. At the outset of this section it is therefore imperative to remind readers that a new mood of optimism has been expressed by local agencies about the prospects for their relations with the programme. As one person said:

'the scars of our early difficulties with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start will always be there, but the improvements in the last few months have convinced us that the situation is totally transformed and we only have positive things to say about our relationship with the programme at the moment'

Local agency representative

- 4.114 Data presented next needs to be read in this light. The full range of stakeholders who have contributed to the evaluation are agreed that past difficulties cannot be swept under the carpet and that it is vital for the programme that lessons are learnt. This is the reason why we go on to give a full and frank account of some very difficult experiences which partner agencies have been through in their dealing with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start.

The magnitude of the programme's achievements in turning some very damaging situations around can be properly appreciated through engaging with this data and the issues raised make the conditions for sustaining positive relations clear.

- 4.115 The issues raised in this section focus predominantly on problems representative local partners experienced prior to improvements having

been put in place towards the latter stage of the evaluation period. It must be acknowledged that whilst at the time when the evaluation commenced internal problems of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start were impacting negatively on the partners, as the evaluation drew near to completion, steps had already been taken to resolve problems and many of these same partners were anxious to come forward and alert us to recent improvements which they assert have been considerable. With this in mind, we now explore some of the mixed experiences agencies have had with the programme in the past in order that attempts to improve practice are fully informed by an in-depth look at where things previously went wrong.

- 4.116 A major weakness identified for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has been failure in the past to issue Service Level Agreements to agencies working in partnership with the programme. This situation created a sense of '*isolation*' from the programme for partner agencies. Tensions also arose the other way around: partner agencies describe Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start as isolated from other groups and organisations working with children and families in the local community at the time when Service Level Agreements were not being issued.
- 4.117 The problem of Service Level Agreements not being in place has been discussed at length over the duration of the evaluation period and lessons have been learnt about arrangements needed to facilitate sustained good practice around these agreements. Until recently only Speech and Language have had a Service Level Agreement with the programme:

'And then it's, I think it's a bit of an ad hoc mixture. I think some of them are being [paid] for services, but they don't have formal contracts.'

Member of staff

- 4.118 The situation with SLAs, contracts, written records of any kind and partner funding is reported as having been mixed over the course of the evaluation. Two extremes have prevailed where some providers have had an SLA while others are not on the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start map at all. Between these poles some local partners say they '*really don't know*', whether they have an SLA or express the view that '*there's no contractual arrangement whatsoever... you just get payment*' with others agreeing that this is the case. There has been considerable confusion around SLA agreements as suggested by the following interchange:

Interviewer: *'Just a verbal agreement? There was never a letter saying, 'We agree to fund' and for how long?'*

Interviewee: *'No, actually no, there was going to be some written, but that didn't happen.'*

Interviewer: *'So there was an indication there would be something more formal ... something written, but that never happened?'*

Interviewee: *'Yeah, it wasn't indicated to us at that stage that there was going to be a Service Level Agreement. It was just an agreement in writing and what we did was just carry on and invoice Sure Start and got paid.'*

Interviewer: *'You just all invoiced on Sure Start and everything? I'm just getting it crystal clear ...'*

Interviewee: *'Well, we just had a one-off payment....'*

- 4.119 It is not difficult to appreciate that this sort of situation would be far from ideal for local providers. They feel that funding of partner organisations needs to be put on an open, transparent, properly formalised and accountable footing as a matter of urgency. In short they want properly negotiated SLAs that allow an appropriate apportionment of funds, rights, responsibilities and accountability across Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and its partners. Certainly they feel this would be in the interests of the programme's partners:

'We'd love to have a contract or SLA where they were going to give us some money! But we haven't got anything in writing so I can't really comment...'

Local service provider

- 4.120 The programme has recently set out to tackle the issuing of Service Level Agreements. It is certainly our view that clarifying Service Level Agreements will help to make a greater success of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. We are pleased to be able to report that SLA agreements have now been put in place for some partner agencies and whilst this will not guarantee an end to feelings of isolation, it will strengthen links. New SLAs are being negotiated, some of which will involve considerably extending services. Therefore at the time of writing, the research findings indicate the foundations are being put in place for working relations between the programme and partner agencies to go from strength to strength in the future. We welcome initiatives from the programme to establish sound contracting procedures.

Inevitably, as partners point out, these improvements need to be kept under close review. The programme has taken steps to arrange regular meetings to help ensure this will happen.

- 4.121 Local partners contributing to this evaluation feel that the issue of a properly formulated SLA should be closely tied to joint working and good communication between partners and Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start, from the frontline work up to the Partnership Board. There is no avoiding the fact, however, that their overwhelming impression of the recent past is of a dearth of communication between partner staff and frontline Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start personnel, either formal or informal. At one point we were told:

'... all the home visiting team came, but then that's the last we've seen of them really unless it's, you know, by and by. There's not been any sort of team visit. In their induction we are one of however many, so they don't remember what it is that we can do, you know, they're not sort of coming back and building a relationship up.'

Local service provider

- 4.122 Staff are themselves aware that poor communication has been damaging in the past:

'I think we are notorious for being absent from meetings.'

Member of staff

This is a situation that needs to be prioritised and rectified for it cannot but impact on the teams' day-to-day work in every respect. It is also a fundamental barrier to the Sure Start goal of developing mainstreaming. There is every sign that the programme has worked hard to improve partnership working over the last six months.

- 4.123 In the past, poor communications have contributed significantly to impressions of isolation from Sure Start and fragmented local provision:

'We were not kept informed or invited to any of the meetings that they had or anything, we were not kept informed at all.'

Local service provider

- 4.124 Local partners express a desire and willingness to attend more Sure Start meetings to enhance their knowledge of the programme:

'We'd like to come to meetings that are relevant to the area that we can contribute to so that we can find out what's going on and in ways in which we can get involved with them.'

Local service provider

This interest comes with the further condition of genuine involvement:

'if we were still not being used in a significant way, I don't know whether I could justify the time ... I know I can make a contribution and give views and whatever, but there are plenty of people around to do that. We'd need to feel that we were part of it. We'd need to feel that we were being used and we were a significant component within it.'

Local service provider

- 4.125 A lack of contact and two-way communication until recently has contributed to partner anxiety and insecurity regarding service continuity and funding:

'There's an anxiety that we've got - that because we're not in the loop, we're going to be gazumped in some way. For instance, right across the road from us there's this new Healthy Living Centre supposed to be going in that's supposed to have all sorts of stuff for parents and this and that for care and all ... Because we're not in the loop, we don't know whether Sure Start's involved in that and whether, you know, they're putting money into it. We could suddenly find that we're out in the cold. We keep on trying to be part of that whole ...'

Local service provider

- 4.126 These anxieties are part and parcel of a set of anxieties expressed by partners concerning their ability to 'influence decisions' within Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. They are unclear about how to maximise participation, for example, whether to participate within working groups, a stakeholder group or the Partnership Board:

'I think we all see the potential to do more, but it's how to influence the decisions. We know what we're lacking in our projects, and it wouldn't take a great amount of money to provide, but how we try and influence that and, you know, any decisions, I'm not sure.'

Local service provider

4.127 Nonetheless a key opportunity was identified:

'There's a lot of expertise that could be drawn on that isn't.'

Local service provider

We have picked up through the evaluation that there is currently under-rated knowledge and expertise among the local partner organisations. Our enquiries have raised questions about at what level within Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start structures partners - and prospective allies - should be represented and heard. It is evident that there is scope for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and its partners to seriously consider afresh how the latter's expert and organisational input can be enhanced:

'I ask questions. I know what I need to know. I think generally I find out .. but it's an 'information given' relationship rather than an involvement.'

Local service provider

4.128 Local partners want their voices to be heard so that their specialist and expert knowledge can be productively acted upon to the benefit of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and its clients.

4.129 It is indisputably evident that the main aspiration of all local partners who contributed to this evaluation is for better joint working with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start, particularly entailing: improved two-way, all-round communication; better targeted and conceived links; greater funding of partner services; more transparency and formalised contractual relationships.

4.130 Where communication is concerned it is felt that the programme's newsletter could become a more effective vehicle, not only for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start but also for the work of the partners:

'To me the newsletter is more what's happened rather than what's going to happen. I hadn't realised there was a newsletter until quite recently and I would have liked to have advertised or promoted, you know, things that we're doing.'

Local service provider

The planned revamp of the newsletter could take these views into account.

- 4.131 A few other service specific aspirations were briefly raised: one partner would like to fund an important worker they lost through SRB; another would like to provide mornings and afternoon services every day; while another partner emphasised a desire for qualitative over quantitative service expansion:

'I wouldn't necessarily want to expand the number of places and everything, you know. That would be good, but I think I would want to expand the content of the work, you know. It could have more flavour. It doesn't just need to be crèche places. It could be a whole raft of other things as well.'

Local service provider

The programme should clarify the cycle of activity which enables reflection and innovation with local partners.

- 4.132 Funding, evaluation and contracts have been the dominant concerns for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's partners over the past eighteen months. Several felt there to be some irony in the fact that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has seemed to be very thrifty in relation to funding services with which, in their view, Sure Start should be only too happy to have its name associated:

'it's not only that they want to put the Sure Start stamp on stuff they pay for. They don't often want to pay. For instance we're into our eighth week, I think it is - of providing music studio and a tutor for a group under the Men's Project and still no funding has been agreed. And when we said, 'Well look, what about money for this' they said 'you mean we've got to pay for it?'

Local service provider

- 4.133 This impression was reinforced in relation to the issue of Sure Start paying rent when community resources are used:

'I asked at least five times and they say 'No we don't do rent. We don't do rent at all. It's the policy of Sure Start not to do any rent.' So I said, 'You're actually using our premises free.' They said, 'Yes, it's value for money.' I said, 'Well it might be, but how are struggling venues like ours going to survive if you can't pay?' And actually we've

taken the decision that if nothing is up-coming from next financial year, from April, we just simply cannot continue to run Sure Start activities because we have to meet heating costs and all the rest, the cleaning, apportioned management costs. Sure Start money is paid to pay for the staff and whatever and they apportion their management costs, but absolutely no possibility of any rent. Now I have checked with other Sure Starts in other cities and that is absolutely not the case. They're very keen in those other ones I've checked with to actually support communities, to actually, you know, support the venues and... I don't know what's happened with this one, this programme, but I really want to raise and flag up there's been a real problem.'

Local service provider

- 4.134 The programme has now acknowledged these tensions and taken steps to improve relations with partners who have been dissatisfied. It has been agreed by other stakeholders that Sure Start programmes do pay rent for such facilities in other areas. The perceived equation of 'value for money' with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start 'getting something for nothing' has rankled with local partners in the past and is a perception the programme will wish to put an end to. It became clear from the evaluation enquiries that the legacy of these past tensions endures and requires sensitive handling by the programme. As it seems the problems referred to arose in the context of managerial problems that have now been resolved, partners hope that there will be no further impediment to resolving issues to mutual satisfaction, and in the interests of continued joint working.
- 4.135 Other similar examples were cited during the research which have led, arguably, to perceptions of inefficient delivery service and poor value for money:

'We were disappointed that they didn't see that funding could be available for a personal worker. Because we know the difference the project makes with a person to go home visiting, to work with the families ... so that was one disappointment we had.'

Local service provider

Similarly:

'their interpretation of targets has been disappointing. National targets for Sure Start are - for example - to increase use of

libraries with parents and children. I think that was interpreted by the programme as creating little libraries, second hand books changing, but not actually coming to the library to use the library but rather creating a little mini library, which resources collections, which we didn't see in the same way as in no way was it increasing the use of library. So that was a big disappointment really. We're pleased that they have funded collections of books to be in clinics, which is great. It's allowing collections of books to be a resource for parents that are waiting and it makes long waits in clinics a lot more bearable! So that was one good thing. And they have paid for the bookcases to be made that stand in the clinics and they're interactive type bookcases, touchy feely. But we think there could have been other ways and better use of funds, particularly in a person. There is no way there is anyone to upkeep the collection of books that have gone into clinics and, you know, those collections are just left now and there is no one to really supervise. Well, we agreed to it happening, but we did point out that there would probably be no person to manage it, but it still went ahead.'

Local service provider

4.136 Again, here according to local partners contributing to the evaluation, it seems there has been a threefold problem: overemphasis on getting the Sure Start label in the GP clinics; an overly frugal interpretation of value for money and insufficient attention to the views of experienced workers on the ground.

4.137 In the past it has been the case that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start resources have simply been allocated in an uncoordinated fashion without adequate communication and consultation:

'there were consignments of toys for the crèche and they forgot to tell us or something.'

Local service provider

Clearly the programme wishes to avoid such oversights in the future. The emphasis will need to be not just on improving communications for another initiative, but on evolving a more effective and collaborative way of working.

4.138 It is important to acknowledge that service provider partners who took part in the evaluation also identified areas of good performance by

Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. Positive statements centered on programme staff working at the front line:

'I've always been struck by their enthusiasm and drive, you know, a sort of can do attitude, which I admire.'

Service provider

4.139 This extends to observations of effective work involving parents:

'We hold women's groups once a week where mums get together ... we start them off with craft activities and things to get to know each and other and feel more relaxed and that sort of progresses into parenting skills and things that they can work on. Sure Start people have started attending those groups and have developed good links with the parents. And the working with the Family Support Worker is good as well.'

Service provider

'The home workers have been very supportive'

Service provider

4.140 Local service providers are positive about funding links with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start can generate to help support the provision and expansion of services:

'A positive thing that's happened is that they funded four afternoon crèches and we have the morning crèches funded so they allow access to the whole raft of jobs, employment and training and it's allowed particularly a lot of new parents to do things that wouldn't have happened otherwise ... The crèche closes at 4 in the afternoon because some parents generally find mornings more difficult and our provision was only in the morning, so Sure Start funding has been very good and that's positive.'

'we provide respite emergency sessions for parents in need and Sure Start gave us a very small amount of funding towards that. They gave us £1000, so we are able to provide these sessions for parents who can't afford it and do want to access emergency child care sessions.'

Local providers

4.141 The view was expressed that it is necessary to encourage local schools to embrace partnership and the Sure Start way of working:

'I think it's hard for some of the schools to take on the Sure Start agenda as the schools' agenda is so focused on achievement it's hard for the schools to embrace the Sure Start way of doing things...'

Member of staff

This will become more important as the first cohort of Sure Start children get older, and the issue of Children's Centres becomes more of a reality.

- 4.142 Partners feel Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has done a very effective and necessary job raising its own profile in the local area:

'I think the brand name, Sure Start, has made a brilliant impact in the area in terms of everybody knows what Sure Start is. I mean you talk about 'Work Start' and 'Kick Start' and even 'Book Start' and people aren't too sure, but 'Sure Start' .. you know it's for up to four year olds - it's been brilliantly done.'

Local agency representative

- 4.143 There is agreement that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has 'put itself on the map' in the local area. However some stakeholders have felt aspects of the marketing strategy have been handled insensitively and the programme will wish to avoid this criticism in the future :

'there were some tense moments okay, they made a great job in getting the Sure Start name before people. But there have been cases where it's sort of, 'if we're funding it, bang! Sure Start's name goes on the top and you're obliterated' almost.

Local service provider

- 4.144 Other experiences shared during the course of the evaluation indicate the above-mentioned example was not a one-off:

'We felt Sure Start was taking all the credit when there was actually joint working'

Local service provider

'We felt taken for a ride because we had been there year after year and then along came Sure Start and we didn't count for much. Things wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for the community'

involvement and then Sure Start. It's just about getting the balance, I think.'

Local service provider

- 4.144 Organisations represented in this evaluation point out that they are long-established and well-rooted, both in the Woodthorpe & Wybourn community and within service provision to children and their families. Their representatives have many years of invaluable experience in the field. For example, the Wybourn Youth Trust has been a lead agency for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start while the Manor Community Child Care Centre was the Programme's original steering group. Yet even these agencies reported feelings of isolation from the work of the programme during its most troubled period.
- 4.145 It seems that the problems that led to this situation began at the outset of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's independent life, in the process of it 'mapping' other agencies and services in the local area

'my overall impression of the reading I did first when Sure Start first came out was that it was an umbrella body for provision for up to 4 year olds and I thought, 'this is great because they're going to, first going to map the provision and then we're going to see where we fit in. But it didn't happen at all like that.'

Local service provider

In fact one of the partners, discovered that they were not even on the map drawn up by the programme:

'when Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start produced their own map of child care in the area we were not on it at all, and then we pointed out one or two others who weren't on as well'

Local service provider

- 4.146 At the beginning of the evaluation we kept hearing of key agencies working in the community with young children and their families which had little or no direct contact with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start for a long time. At the time of writing the programme has made links with an increased number of local agencies and there is evidence that it is gradually decreasing its perceived isolation. Local providers feel much happier about their links with the programme at the time of writing this

evaluation report than they did when we began our enquiries. This is a clear sign of the programme's success in getting over earlier problems.

- 4.147 The programme makes referrals to Home Start but unlike other Sure Start programmes in Sheffield does not have an SLA with Home Start. This situation is regarded as anomalous. A number of stakeholders feel Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start should have closer links with Home Start and we endorse this.
- 4.148 Several respondents mentioned the problem of Sure Start working within geographically defined boundaries. In a specific instance given, for example, we were told this means some members of a toddler group are permitted on trips and events run by Sure Start but others are excluded because of their postcode. This was reported as a cause for concern. Joint action with other Sure Start Programme Managers who are faced with the same problem would help the programme to challenge this unwarranted exclusion of families.
- 4.149 The matter of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's relative isolation was frequently explained in terms of problems of 'joint working' as the following exchange demonstrates:

Interviewee: *'joint working skills I would say need to be developed. For example, we've got groups of young parents that we're working with and Sure Start are going to set up groups for young parents .. it just doesn't make sense.'*

Interviewer: *'there's a duplication of services?'*

Interviewee: *'Yeah, without consultation and without recognition of our expertise in this area whereas we thought Sure Start is about building on what is already there.'*

Local service provider

This situation is said to have entailed a breakdown in communication such that the partner organisation involved felt unclear as to what Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start intended to do in this, their own specialist, area of work:

'It wasn't sort of planned, 'let's go and find what there is in the area and let's see what we can build on and let's see where the gaps are'. It was a 'let's have this.' I don't even know if this is true. It's what I heard, that they were planning on setting up a young parents' group. No wonder we're sceptical!'

Local provider

- 4.150 Clearly the experience of local groups in terms of working in partnership with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has been mixed. There is extensive evidence of the programme having difficulties with joined-up working in the past. A small number of local community groups have expressed frustration regarding the programme's early outreach methods. More than one group used words to the effect that '*Sure Start has stolen our customers*'. Another felt parts of their provision had been '*sidelined*'. It is only by finding ways of building up partnership working and nurturing a new trust that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start will be able to put this disenchantment firmly behind it.
- 4.151 Fortunately we can report that recently Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's local partners have started to feel the programme is endeavouring to approach service development 'more from the ground up'. This has not always been the case and the difficulties Sure Start itself faces are recognised:

'It almost seems to me like Sure Start, with all the best will in the world, what's happened is that it's sort of become an organisation ... it's almost like creating a middle layer. It's sort of become an organisation that floats in the community rather than is actually embedded in the community. A bit like a layer of middle management if you like.'

Local provider

- 4.152 Local partners feel that effective 'joint working' is the crucial issue for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and its partners in the immediate and medium term. The matter of joint working has clearly received a great deal of attention during the closing stages of this evaluation and local partners are increasingly saying that the programme is more inclusive and proactive about links. Consequently partners are starting to feel confident that successful relationships can now be built.
- 4.153 Partners feel they have made a concerted effort not to let difficulties in the early life of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start harm their prospective links:

'... I decided not to be too precious about it and said 'well look, I really don't like this.' I said, 'Why don't I re-do it for you?'

Local provider

This exchange illustrates how SLA partners simply feel 'joint working' got off on the wrong foot with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start. As already said, partners are now on the whole optimistic and feel the programme is in better shape for effective jointed up working as the evaluation draws to a close.

- 4.154 Sure Start is in the business of facilitating a culture and practice change in other agencies' work with families, parents and children. Staff feel that to do this effectively it has to be exemplary in its own work. Exemplary work means that a Sure Start Programme cannot aspire to do everything, to substitute itself for the intervention of other agencies, but what it can do it must do well. This is one of the essential conditions for winning hearts and minds in other agencies, which is no easy task because of a range of complex political, professional and community factors that we observe the staff have to address on a regular basis. The objective must be to draw other agencies into Sure Start initiatives and associated meetings. Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's children's bookshelves in GP surgeries project works well in this respect. This kind of initiative can support close working relationships and mutual trust:

'I think its just a period of time before Sure Start is more accepted - those that are interested get more involved, others stay at the edge. I hope that parents will turn things around because parents will say 'I've been to Sure Start, I've been on a trip, I've got a Sure Start worker etc.' And I'm hoping that those professionals that are negative will be swung the other way. There is no point me saying 'Sure Start is brilliant'... its experience that will change things. At the moment everybody is trying to do the best they can.'

Member of staff

- 4.155 It will be interesting to see whether Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start can improve the standard of provision for under 4s and their families locally. For example, a member of staff raised the issue of racist comments observed at a crèche and would clearly like to see a Sure Start inspired policy of inclusiveness implemented there, as well as in the work of other agencies. This aspiration is a worthy one - although such changes can only be facilitated sensitively and on the basis of the programme having already won a good deal of confidence.

- 4.156 Maximum effort to nurture and consolidate links with other agencies in the community is crucial for the further development of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start.
- 4.157 Specifically, there is significant further work to be done on enhancing connections with health agencies in the area. In part this stems from a decision taken early on that health workers would not be employed from the beginning of the Programme's work on the ground; it is widely accepted that in retrospect this decision has proved problematic and anomalous and the programme is set to rethink it:

'I think things have been started but not targeted in the right area really because Sure Start has not had the health input. I can't help wondering why the health professional was not appointed earlier.'

SLA Partner

- 4.158 In relation to partnership working, the Sure Start organisation, both regionally and nationally come in for some criticism. Lack of proper notification of Sure Start conferences was cited as a key example:

'We've missed about three big conferences and one of them the whole team was actually invited to. The whole team was actually invited, but we never heard about it.'

Member of staff

- 4.159 Service providers contributing to the evaluation clearly wish to improve joint working with Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start for the future. In order for this to happen, they feel the programme must avoid actions that have previously felt like colonisation to established groups and workers in the field. Those who have shared their views with us are clear that harking back to previous slip-ups made by Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start is not relevant to how the programme is currently operating. Most reiterated a belief that the programme is now improving and dealing more successfully local agencies and prospective partners.
- 4.160 The resolve of the staff team to improve communication with local agencies must be acknowledged - they have persevered with making links in very difficult circumstances and we hope this will pay dividends.
- 4.161 It should also be noted that local provider agencies have been very positive about getting over past difficulties and continuing to come forward and get involved. Hope has been expressed as the evaluation

came to a close that next time the views of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start partners are canvassed, the discussion will focus much more on child and parent centred services:

'we all work in the best interests of under 4s and their families in this community. We all want to improve their opportunities in life and we've got to work together to get on with that.'

Local service provider.

If the programme can accept such a focus it would show that the problems highlighted by partners in this workshop were on the way to being resolved. Positive outcomes for children under 4 and their families would then be demonstrably more in reach.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Systems of monitoring were immature when the evaluation began. Improvements have been substantial during the course of the evaluation and these need to be maintained. Specifically, there needs to be well-defined emphasis on health targets and the collection of health data.

4.162 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.

4.163 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.

4.164 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.

- 4.165 As we have found is common to many Sure Start programmes in the early stages, it is the case that Woodthorpe & Wybourn monitoring and evaluation systems require strengthening. Problems with the collection, storage and accessibility of data for target evaluation and programme planning have been identified. The magnitude of these problems is such that at the time of commissioning this evaluation, and perhaps still in our view, it would not be possible, for evaluators to conduct any kind of meaningful or reliable impact analysis.
- 4.166 There is evidence that all partners providing services know value for money is important; they are also clear that it is a double-edged sword. They are clear that to take the value for money agenda seriously means to implement sound evaluation procedures that cannot but rely upon positive joint working practices with the programme which should enable this. Until recently at least, circumstances for satisfactory monitoring have been far from ideal:

'... we've had funding from Sure Start for our child care programme. So it's been for quite a considerable amount of time - eighteen months - and there's been very little contact. We were given funding and then they did an evaluation, but I don't know what happened to that. I don't know where that information went or what that was used for.'

Local service provider

'There's a lot of 'can you just give us this, and can you just give us that?' and we don't always know how they want it or what for '

Local service provider

- 4.167 The lack clarity that has emerged in relation to monitoring and evaluation procedures is likely to be related to the confused contractual arrangements which service providers have been operating under (previously discussed). Yet the programme can only tell if it is delivering services appropriately by monitoring and seeking the views of service users. Therefore it must consider what changes can be made to ensure monitoring and evaluation is carried out effectively.

- 4.168 The feeling that nothing has been 'given back', in the way of evaluation feedback, after Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start requests data was endorsed by others:

'Well, we didn't actually get any feedback ... I don't think it went anywhere, you know. If it did, I don't know about it...'

Local service provider

There is clearly a gap between data collection as an activity to benefit Sure Start and developing ideas and practical actions to ensure that data monitoring and evaluation exercises also prove useful to agencies tasked with providing that information.

- 4.169 Following on from this concern has been expressed about the practical demands and financial costs that evaluation procedures for Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start impose upon organisations; small agencies in particular can find these hard to bear:

'I feel sometimes they demand or ask things of us, but they don't give a lot back. Perhaps I'm being a bit unkind, but it does seem to me that they ask for statistics from me but I never know really if that's going to be used in a constructive way.'

Local service provider

'It's taken our computer team a lot of hours to get statistics for them, and I've had to go on my knees a bit to them for things I need, saying 'you know, it really is important that we try and get these figures for Sure Start.' But I've had to be diplomatic about what I ask.'

Local service provider

- 4.170 Inflexible monitoring systems invariably strain the good-will of partner agencies on occasion. The programme needs to establish what partnerships are required to ensure that the information it needs can be extracted in sensible ways that do not impact negatively on collaborating organisations.

- 4.171 It will be helpful for the programme to gather further information about monitoring and evaluation queries that still need addressing. There are specific queries concerning data required to monitor health targets:

'I feel confused because there were certain figures that had to be collected, postnatal depression, smoking cessation, etc., health related and at the time the Programme Manager collected these things, and it was confusing'.

Local service provider

- 4.172 More general questions are also being asked about 'value for money' within Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start itself, particularly concerning the basis of how funding is allocated to and distributed among partners. The programme should take positive measures to address these issues with relevant stakeholders.

MAINSTREAMING

The Programme is sharply focused on defence of Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn and with recognizing and dealing with its day to day problems. The imperative for change linked to city wide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services is, however, an essential focus for continued development and improvement.

4.173 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. **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).

4.174 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)

4.175 **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.

- 4.176 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 form 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.
- 4.177 It is important to note that all stakeholders consulted as part of this evaluation say they are keen to extend and develop two-way relationships between Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and other local agencies.
- 4.178 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start Partnership's remit, but which their own services and efforts are often very connected to.
- 4.179 Mainstreaming of services is fundamental to the Sure Start vision. Again, the difficulties experienced by the staff team over the last year 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 Woodthorpe and Wybourn. Mainstreaming has only been mentioned in passing by most stakeholders, although it undoubtedly should be 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 there is work to be done on addressing the difficult questions of who - specifically can help forge mainstreaming links and how to advance this agenda.

- 4.180 There is a concern that much of the business that the Partnership Board, undertakes remains focussed on it's immediate priority to *'run Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start'*. The additional demands of the mainstreaming agenda do not yet feature strongly in discussions and in our view this will need to change.
- 4.181 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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.
- 4.182 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 wherever it facilitates links with existing groups.
- 4.183 There is a genuine concern on the part of Partnership Board representatives to enable people to feel involved in development and planning and this is a positive finding.
- 4.184 The Programme has committed to a process of reciprocal sharing of evaluation findings 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 which willingly forgoes 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. We have found that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start is, however, for the most part focussed on its local work.

Consequently there is evidence of indecisiveness about the capacity of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start to contribute as a significant player to the mainstreaming agenda through research action. In our view this is a major weakness as we explain below.

- 4.185 As a direct result of the willingness of six Sheffield Programme Managers to have evaluation of their own programme conducted as part of a city-wide Sure Start evaluation, tangible progression for the programmes on significant mainstreaming initiatives has been achieved. This includes:
- 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
- 4.186 All of these initiatives offer substantial prospects for the development of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start on aspects of service delivery with which we know - from their input to the evaluation - local stakeholders are concerned. As the programme has wanted to focus its attention to resolving local difficulties it has been less proactive in the seeing through of these initiatives than other programmes. Yet our investigations have uncovered many areas of the programme's work needing to be developed in relation to shaping mainstream service delivery.
- 4.187 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. Other agencies need to be clear about how Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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. We are concerned that the Woodthorpe & Wybourn programme has not yet fully engaged with these commitments.
- 4.188 Clarity over the Partnership Board's remit and the role of the Accountable Body is essential to both the future planning of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start and to its interpretation of the mainstreaming

agenda. It is important that the Partnership Board communicates 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.

- 4.189 The Programme Manager is well aware that the imperative of mainstreaming is already firmly with us and indeed her predecessor placed the programme at the forefront of city-wide developments on this by entering in to the Combined Evaluation process. The extent to which Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start can remain at the forefront of citywide developments will be largely determined by how it positions itself in relation to the continued work of other Programme Managers from across the city.
- 4.190 As Children's Centre developments progress in Sheffield, the extent to which Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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, particularly in relation to this programme where local community groups and organisations have witnessed the programme's difficult start and consequently some stakeholders have developed misgivings about what the programme can realistically achieve.
- 4.191 We are pleased to conclude that Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start has not been overwhelmed by the series of structural and operational complications that have beset it's early development. Over the course of its next evaluation it does need to evidence that it has learned from experience, taken stock of its focus and put a range of strategies in place to position itself as a programme growing in strength and capable of leading the mainstreaming agenda.

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 Woodthorpe and Wybourn.

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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 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

- Review strategies for systematically taking account of staff training needs. Training should enable individual and team development.
- Set up communication systems which will effectively serve the team's needs for managing information as it develops, and particularly, when it moves to new premises.
- Work towards increased 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start with the aim of addressing the specific blocks to participation.
- Encourage strategic alliances with local schools to promote working together on changing priorities for the programme and related providers. SENCOs are keen to extend their links with Sure Start programmes.
- Carefully monitor (i) workloads and (ii) increasing referral rates.

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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 in the context of the Children's Centre Plan. We suggest this process is initiated through a dedicated series of away days and specifically involves representatives from the Accountable Body.
- Clarify all roles, responsibilities, purposes and functions with all members of the Partnership Board.
- 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.
- Identify a named person to monitor the effectiveness of the revised Terms of Reference.
- Monitor and make public activities which are undertaken to optimise links with targeted groups currently under-represented on the Partnership Board.
- Set up new opportunities for parent involvement in the Partnership Board - for example following the suggestion that some parents are willing to help out on a flexible or one-off basis. Work with parents to evolve practical ideas for ways forward on this.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of SLA Partners

The Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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.

- Review strategic plans for encouraging SLA partners to develop their relationship with the programme. This will involve reviewing contracting arrangements. 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start targets. 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 and expanding targeted services.
- 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 Woodthorpe and Wybourn, families seeking asylum or refuge, and disabled children and parents, have been identified as groups currently missing out on Sure Start provision.

- Regularly update information on Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start's provision to avoid duplication of activities.
- Establish a network of SLA partners who will work in consultation with the programme to promote links into local schools.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Community Groups

The Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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.

- The overarching question of interest to Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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. It could be worthwhile to 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 do receive publicity material and are engaged in a strategy for making those in their organisations aware of what Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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.
- 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 Woodthorpe and Wybourn.

- 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.

Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Parents

The Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 new parents within the organisation and to further position family members as the principal architects of Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for maximising the participation and involvement of children in the work of the programme.
- Strengthen contact between the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Parents Forum and parents groups from other Sure Start programmes in the city.
- Work with parents to tackle the issue of developing targeted services.
- Set up fact finding to identify new information counters for promoting the programme in Woodthorpe and Wybourn. 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme is still evolving and has clearly been experienced positively by many stakeholders. Strong leadership and effective team working are seen as crucial to the programme's future success. The Programme Manager will need to take clear and effective responsibility for liaising with the Accountable Body, national and regional units, the Partnership Board as well as the programme staff team in order to make a greater success of the programme.
- 6.2 There has been confusion and disappointment about Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start in the past. At the time of going to print, however, the Programme is making great strides in moving beyond these difficulties. Networking and partnership working are clearly crucial in continuing to turn the programme around and we have made recommendations in respect of this in the section on Action and Implementation plans of this report.
- 6.3 Having acknowledged that there needs to be a final push to drive the programme once and for all beyond its difficult beginnings and an especially complicated period, 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 involvement of parents and imaginative services which support men, provide useful 'best practice' exemplars for other programmes to utilise.

It is agreed and evident that processes of achieving consensus about future directions for the programme increasingly feel genuinely open to those who are involved with the programme.

- 6.4 At the point of drawing the evaluation to a close the programme is increasingly providing imaginative services around early education, childcare and family support which look set to have favorable and enduring consequences for the under 4's of Woodthorpe & Wybourn and their families. Health services have lagged behind but action is being taken to remedy this.
- 6.5 It will be important to assure the team, parents, and partner and community agencies of the commitment of the Accountable Body and Partnership Board to maintaining an open, transparent and inclusive approach to the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme.
- 6.6 As discussion has developed through this evaluation reflections on key processes have been forthcoming and clear ideas have emerged about what might improve practice. There are already strong features of the programme as we have mentioned. Yet what is communicated about what the programme achieves in terms of outcomes is what its work will ultimately be judged on and there is work to be done on enhancing monitoring processes and consolidating a training and development portfolio for staff. Since the programme was launched in Woodthorpe & Wybourn, it has coped with a great deal of change and uncertainty. During the course of this evaluation management structures have been through a period of turmoil and the programme's aspirations and milestones have been disrupted. We are confident that the programme is now getting back on track and that structures are firmly in place for it to go from strength to strength.
- 6.7 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.
- 6.8 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn 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 Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start at the leading edge in terms of being able to provide practice pointers for other providers
- The programme rethinks its participation in combined evaluation alongside other Sheffield Sure Start programmes. The advantages of continuing with a joined-up approach to evaluation are obvious in relation to the headway that can be made through the willingness of participating programme's to work collaboratively towards advancing the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services. Yet the Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start programme would not be best served by participation in a combined evaluation if it prefers its priorities to remain singularly focused upon local development. If this is the case, a conventional local community evaluation would suffice for the purposes of the programme's next evaluation.

6.9 The Programme Manager is clearly asserting proper methods of consultation. Her ability to bring the programme forward and revitalize the confidence of its key stakeholders 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 some of the challenging messages outlined in this report. This will position Woodthorpe & Wybourn Sure Start as a programme capable of coming through difficult experiences to make a success of Sure Start in Woodthorpe & Wybourn. The next decision to be made will concern whether the programme wishes also to make a pivotal contribution to the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services which is now focused city wide on the Children's Centre initiative.

Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn, September 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

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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, including Burngreave and Firvale, 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 Burngreave and Firvale 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!'

COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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

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'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'.

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.

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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