

The University of Sheffield  
School of Education



**EVALUATION OF SHARROW SURE START  
PROGRAMME  
March 2003 - July 2004**

**FINAL REPORT**

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Report dated: July 2004

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Amanda Boughton-Brown, Anne Davies, Sally Fellows, Gwyn Fields, Wendy Kettleborough, Jean Kidner, Paula Williams, Jo Zasada.

### **Workshop Participants**

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

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This report is the product of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including Sharrow 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 past events on the Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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, Sharrow 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 Sharrow is a Round 3 Sure Start programme. In common with all Sure Start programmes Sharrow Sure Start is obliged to evaluate the service it provides. Therefore, in 2003 the Sharrow Sure Start programme committed itself to an evaluation to assist in planning further development of services and provide independent and objective feedback from the full range of stakeholders.
- 1.4 The Programme Manager for Sharrow Sure Start became a key driver setting up, and centrally involving Sharrow Sure Start in a Combined Evaluation of Six Sheffield Sure Start programmes. At the end of 2002, Six Sheffield Sure Start Programme Managers came together to constitute themselves as a community of Sure Start practitioners whose programmes would undergo parallel evaluation and shared development.
- 1.5 It was envisaged that evaluating Sharrow Sure Start as part of a combined evaluation of six Sheffield Sure Start programmes would offer many advantages to the individual programme and to the city of Sheffield and its environs more widely. A combined evaluation would open up opportunities for forging new insights into the respective concerns of service providers, build awareness relevant to negotiation over the roles and responsibilities of various agencies in fulfilling the Sure Start delivery targets and move all stakeholders along the road to the reconfiguration of children's services. That the Programme Manager for Sharrow Sure Start was willing to enter in to this process of open evaluation alongside other programmes, reflects the commitment to transparency that Sharrow Sure Start has brought to working partnerships based in the community.
- 1.6 In March 2003 six Sheffield Sure Start programmes jointly commissioned Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn to undertake their evaluations through the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. The evaluation of Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start's work**
- **promote collaborative and mutually beneficial evaluation practices.**

## CHAPTER TWO

# Our Approach

### Recognising context

- 2.1 Sharrow Sure Start programme is commonly agreed by the full range of stakeholders to have had a difficult start. A great deal of hard work has gone in to enabling the programme to get off the ground 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 now going from strength to strength.
- 2.2 Nevertheless, in order that accomplishments, strengths and any weaknesses of the programme evidenced through this evaluation can be fully appreciated and understood, we agree with the Programme Manager that it is necessary to outline some of the historic factors which have had a bearing on the programme's development in order to reference the observations we later make about how stakeholders currently perceive the programme and its processes and operation. This is important because many stakeholders have commented throughout the process of the evaluation that they have been confused about difficulties surrounding the early days of Sure Start in Sharrow.
- 2.3 To understand tensions that have had an impact upon the recent success of the programme we have taken advice from the Programme Manager, consulted with the full range of stakeholders and referred to relevant programme documentation including Risk Assessment information.
- 2.4 The complicated context in which Sharrow Sure Start has evolved is as follows. The Delivery Plan for the Sharrow Sure Start programme was drawn up and sent to Sure Start Unit in January 2001 and approved in June 2001. Shortly after this, the Accountable Body changed from Community Health Sheffield to Sheffield South West Primary Care Trust (SSWPCT) when Community Health

Sheffield reorganized and it became apparent that it would no longer have the capacity to act as the Accountable Body.

- 2.5 The Programme Manager for Sharrow Sure Start took up post in April 2002 - nine months after the Delivery Plan had been approved. Later rounds of Sure Starts have been able to appoint a Programme Manager before formal delivery plan approval. The present Administrative Officer took up post in April 2002, the Finance and Monitoring Officer was in post by August 2002 and the Deputy Programme Manager came in to post one week before the rest of the Staff Team (15) at the beginning of September 2002.
- 2.6 The programme quickly found capital spend extremely difficult to agree as land and buildings in the area reflect Sharrow's proximity to the city centre, and are therefore in much demand, expensive, and sold quickly. Sharrow Sure Start asked if it could be reclassified as a 4<sup>th</sup> Wave programme to allow for delays but the Sure Start Unit did not agree this.
- 2.7 A six-month Risk Assessment was carried out by the Sure Start Unit in November 2002, and assessed the programme as being low risk in spite of delays. However in a subsequent Risk Assessment carried out in May 2003 the programme was assessed as being 'high risk' mainly because of difficulties in capital spend and Governance issues relating to Partnership Board organisation and decision making processes.
- 2.8 The situation was further complicated because Sharrow Sure Start originally opted to constitute itself as a limited company and the Partnership Board registered Sharrow Sure Start as a limited company with Companies House. However, it became clear that the Partnership Board did not have the capacity at the time to take on all the administration which independent status would entail and the company was registered dormant at the time of the first company return as it had never opened a bank account, all monies from the Sure Start Unit were received by the SSWPCT. Sharrow Sure Start became busier, staff were employed and got on with the job of working towards meeting the Start objectives, and the Partnership Board became increasingly aware of difficulties involved in its constitution as a company limited by guarantee. The SSWPCT Director of Finance became involved in trying to unravel constitutional issues and it was ultimately agreed that the company should be dissolved on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2003.
- 2.9 A further level of difficulty was experienced by the programme when the Deputy Programme Manager and the Programme Manager were given authorised

absence from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2003. The Programme Manager arranged for informal support to be provided for team members during the period of authorised absence. In September 2003 this support became formalised as Supervision and the person providing it became Acting Team Leader in October 2003. The Programme Manager returned to work in November 2003, but at the time of writing, the date of the Deputy's Return is not known.

- 2.10** It is important to note that even in the difficult operational context outlined above, the programme has had some considerable success. It is indicative of the growing strength of the programme that Risk Assessment carried out in June 2004 at 18 months, indicates that the Sure Start Regional Office appreciate that there has been a great deal of positive change and that the programme has reverted to a low risk status which is an impressive achievement for everyone involved. Nevertheless, some lack of clarity prevails locally, about the strategic direction of the Sharrow Sure Start programme and we discuss this later in this report.
- 2.11** What is unanimously agreed by all stakeholder groups, is that there is very strong commitment to moving the programme forward in the service of local people. In this report, we feel it should be clear what steps must be taken to enable this to happen.

## Research Process

- 2.12** 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.
- 2.13** 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 principal methodological tool chosen in consultation with the Programme Manager was the *Process Evaluation Method [PEM]* (Dunn and Moore, 2003), which places emphasis on enabling open dialogue of issues prioritized by participants, including informal, covert and contested issues which often militate against developing inclusive practice. In this way we set out to engender cross stakeholder debate in order to help promote change and accelerate the Sure Start agenda of supporting children, parents and communities through the integration of early education, child care, health and family support services.
- 2.14** 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

- 2.15** Throughout the Project our main link has been with the Programme Manager for Sharrow Sure Start who briefed us on the scope and aspirations for the work

and facilitated the participation of Sure Start stakeholders in this study. The Programme Manager and administrative staff acted as liaison and provided us with all relevant background information to the project. We have very much appreciated their conscientious and thorough work.

- 2.16** 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

- 2.17** We undertook a documentary analysis of written materials relating to the programme including the *Delivery Plan* (January 2001), the *Sharrow Sure Start Action Plan* (2004-2005), Risk Assessment information and copies of the monthly Sharrow Sure Start newsletter. In addition, the *Sheffield Sure Start Mainstreaming Services* document (Davies 2003) has helped us to locate the programmes work within the context of the national early years agenda. Analysis of all of this information was used to build up a background picture of the programme's work and to help us formulate questions to be asked at data gathering workshops.

### SETTING AN AGENDA

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

### EVALUATION WORKSHOPS - PROCESS EVALUATION METHOD

- 2.19** 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)
- 2.20** 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.
- 2.21** The aim of workshops was to encourage stakeholders to self assess, in broad terms, ways in which from their perspective the Sharrow 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.
- 2.22** We found across the city that community group representatives had difficulties meeting together and were not available in sufficient numbers to participate in programme specific workshops. We therefore invited representatives of 41 community groups identified either by Sharrow 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 Sharrow programme from this information.
- 2.23** An initial working document was compiled to outline and review the perspectives gathered from each stakeholder group. This was circulated to all contributors who were invited to feedback on any matters of accuracy or interest. Account was then taken of numerous, often detailed written and oral submissions from respondents giving feedback or providing further information.
- 2.24** 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.

- 2.25 This event, called the 'Mixed Stakeholder Workshop', allowed for responses to the data emerging from different viewpoints to be shared with a view to maximizing collective thinking on the development of the programme. Our objective was to develop a future agenda for the programme based on the emergent and collective priorities of those who contributed to the evaluation.
- 2.26 The workshop structure was also intended to ensure that those who have taken part in the evaluation process are supported in their capacity to respond to what is learnt from each other.

#### PICKING UP PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS

- 2.27 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.
- 2.28 To gather this information in ways that would be easy and comfortable for parents, the Parents Forum was consulted to identify activities a roving researcher could attend to observe and talk with parents. The focal activities chosen for Sharow were a Baby Massage session, a Breastfeeding Session and a Stay and Play. Getting alongside parents in their everyday encounters with Sure Start turned out to be hugely informative, offering many more benefits from research enquiry than we had imagined. A spin-off of the contact between parents and the roving researcher has been that many parents we met indicated that 'next time' they might feel confident enough to be actively engaged in producing 'Sure Start snapshots' themselves and in developing their role as community researchers for subsequent evaluations.
- 2.29 As a direct result of the Programme Manager's commitment to an open process of evaluation and to mainstreaming good practice, we have been able to produce a Training Resource, based on the data collected alongside parents, over and above the requirements of our original tender document (see Annex). This resource entitled 'Maximising Inclusion in Sure Start' provides 'snapshots' of

everyday practice in the delivery of Sure Start activities drawn from across the six programmes looking at delivery issues together as part of the process of shared evaluation. We have presented this data separately, in descriptive format, in order to try to give readers - in as brief a space as possible - a feel for what delivery of a Sheffield Sure Start programme is actually like and to illustrate a variety of approaches to working towards Sure Start objectives and promoting participation and involvement. The material is drawn partly, but not exclusively, from Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start has been incorporated into our analysis.

#### TELEPHONE SURVEY WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS

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

#### SUPPLEMENTARY DATA ON THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

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

OTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- 2.32 In addition supplementary interviews were conducted in response to specific requests and when Research Directors felt it appropriate to explore particular view or opinion.
- 2.33 To further supplement the data, Research Team members attended a Sharrow Parents Forum meeting, attended 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

- 2.34 The Programme Manager was invited to take part in four additional research workshops aimed at making connections between issues raised by the data within the Sharrow programme and issues raised across the five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes participating in the Combined Evaluation. These 'Air and Share' workshops for Programme Managers focused on:
- issues raised by programme staff
  - issues raised by SLA partners
  - issues raised by Partnership Board members and
  - issues concerning parents.
- 2.35 The aims of the city wide Air and Share sessions were to
- identify common areas for development
  - develop awareness of obstacles to making a greater success of Sure Start which might persist for structural reasons rather than programme specific ones
  - explore possibilities for Programme Managers of evolving a shared response to emergent issues where appropriate and
  - initiate first stage development work around mainstreaming activities and good practice.

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

QUALITATIVE DATA

- 2.36 It is important to note that the methodology on which the majority of data gathering has been based is a qualitative one. This means we have been interested to understand people's experiences of how the programme works from their necessarily subjective positions in order to bring these into relation

with each other. Qualitative method does not however mean that data collected around individual views is not interrogated and 'triangulated' against those of others. We have used Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1998; Moore 2004) as a well-established method of ensuring that ideas and recommendations which we develop and make *emerge from*, and are *grounded in*, what Sharrow Sure Start stakeholders say, perceive and experience.

- 2.37 We knew that due to the newness of the programme, its systems for gathering quantitative data were in their infancy as this evaluation began to get underway and that quantitative data available to the evaluators would be embryonic at best. We therefore decided to prioritize a focus on the way that the programme is perceived and valued by those involved and to address issues surrounding the production of quantitative data as part of this process.

#### PARTICIPANTS

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

## Report Production

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

**CHAPTER THREE****Describing the Programmes Work**

- 3.1 This chapter outlines the nature of the Sure Start team operating in Sharrow 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.

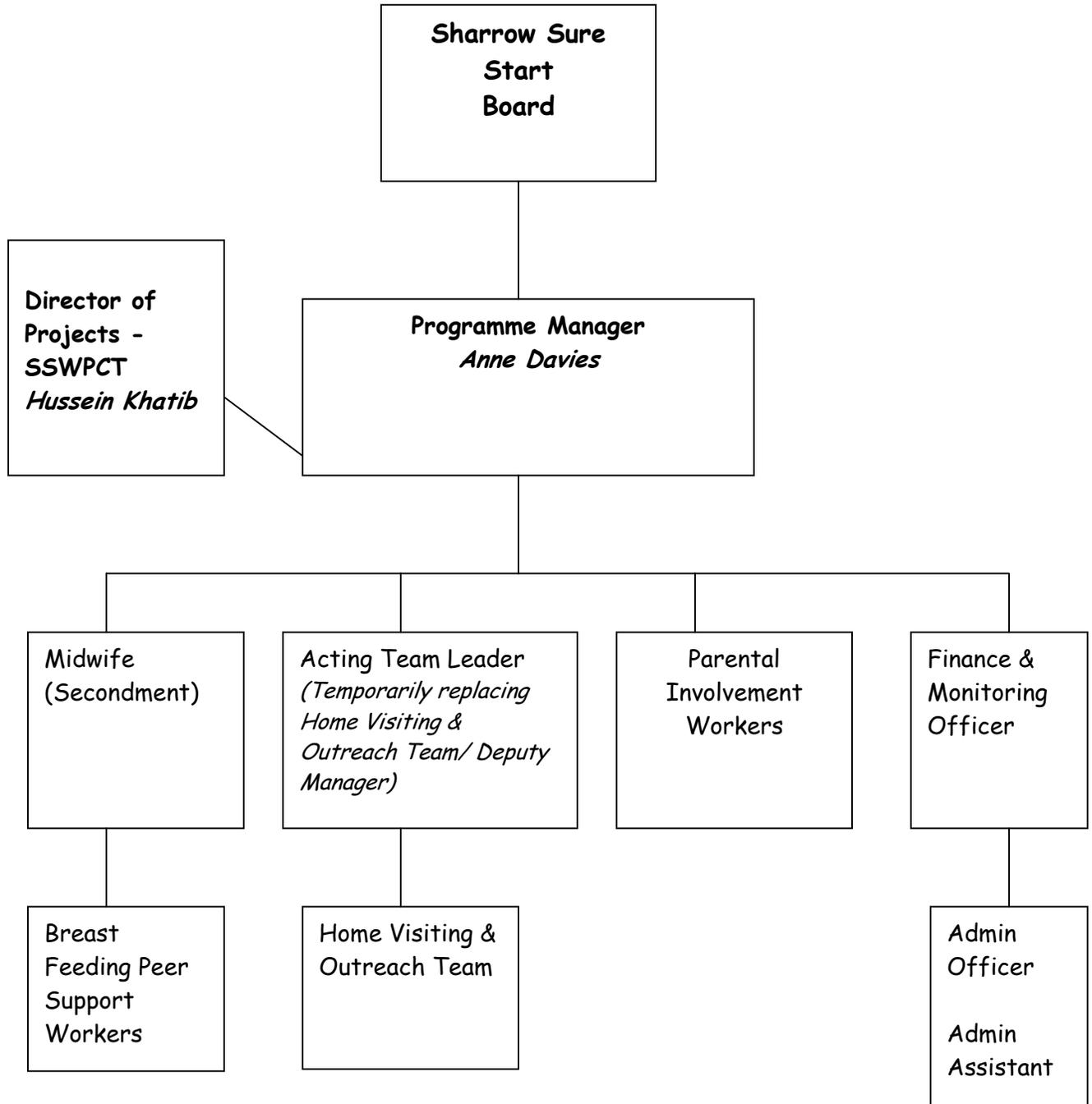
## THE SHARROW SURE START PROGRAMME

### The Sharrow Sure Start Team

The programme is delivered by a group of professionals to cover a number of specialisms; family support, health, parental involvement and management and administration. At the time of writing this evaluation (July 2004) the Sharrow Sure Start team consisted of the posts outlined in the Box below. All posts are full time and occupied by women unless otherwise stated. A Sharrow Sure Start Function Map is provided overleaf for illustrative purposes.

HOURS	POST
FT	Programme Manager
28	Finance and Monitoring Officer
24	Parental Involvement Worker
24	Parental Involvement Worker - Punjabi Speaker
FT	Midwife
FT	Administration Officer
FT	Administration Assistant
30	Acting Home Visiting/ Outreach Team Leader - qualified Teacher
24	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker - Bengali Speaker
18.5	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker - qualified teacher
FT	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker NNEB qualified
FT	Home Visitor/ Outreach Team - Punjabi Speaker
18.5	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker NNEB qualified
18.5	Home Visitor/ Outreach Team - Punjabi Speaker
FT	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker - Punjabi Speaker NNEB qualified
22.5	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker - Somali Speaker
FT	Home Visitor/ Outreach Worker NNEB qualified

**Sharrow Sure Start Function Map**



### **Activities and Services Offered through Sharrow Sure Start**

These are described in Boxes 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. For example, Abbeytots Stay and Play sessions are listed under 'Early Years', but they have some input from the child psychologist, the community food worker and speech and language therapists.

The programme's SLA partners and arrangements are detailed, together with costs and resourcing information. Planned future activities are also outlined for further consideration.

## HEALTH ACTIVITIES

**Ante-Natal Relaxation** - one session per week in term time on Monday morning, held at the London Road shop. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

**Baby Massage** - Offered once per week in term time at the London Road shop on a Monday afternoon. Two Home-visitors have also been trained as Baby massage tutors and deliver sessions to parents who cannot make the Group Baby Massage sessions. A post-natal advice session is held at the same venue. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

**Nutrition Advice** - Offered by the community food worker twice a week at the London Road shop (Monday morning and Wednesday afternoon in term time). The programme is working with Sheffield University which has a SLA to provide a Community Food Worker supervised by the University (this replaces an SLA with the Dietetics service during 2003-2004)

**Aquanatal** - Held at Heeley Baths, every Tuesday afternoon in term time. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

**Swimming** during Summer School holidays is replaced with three sessions twice a week, with antenatal/new mother swim, an under 4's and mums swim, and a family swim (parents with children). Funded and delivered by Sharrow Sure Start.

**Women's Health and Keep Fit** - Held every Wednesday morning at the Everyone Centre, in term time. Originally began as a women's social drop-in group in a different venue. Involves mothers and grandmothers and aims to build up confidence in Sure Start as an organisation. Attended mainly by Asian women. 1 hour keep fit and one hour on an aspect of healthy living Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

**Babyfriendly Café** - Held every Thursday morning at Simunye Café on London Road. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

**Health Walks** - Organised by the Sharrow Sure Start Parent Involvement Workers in partnership with Rangers, Health Visitors and Medical Centres, to encourage accessible exercise and healthy family lifestyle.

**Smoking Cessation** - Midwife works with referrals from city-wide smoking cessation service of those parents and parents-to-be who wish to stop smoking.

**Women's Day** - Held at Broomhall Centre on Fridays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. during the financial year 2003/04. A variety of activities on offer, including aerobics class, English classes, health advice and childcare courses which was run in partnership with the Broomhall Centre - unfortunately many of the women attending were outside the Sharrow Sure Start area and it was hard to justify costs, now held the last Friday of the month with activities arranged. Funded and delivered by Sure Start.

## EARLY YEARS

**Abbeytots Stay and Play** - Six sessions held each week in term time at Abbeydale Primary School. The programme has an SLA with the school that pays for 2 workers to provide the service.

**Springfield Stay and Play** - Two sessions per week in term time, held at Springfield School. The programme has an SLA with the Springfield Play Partnership to provide this service. (A steady group of about 12 mothers and toddlers attend, although only 3 of these come from the Sure Start area).

**Lansdowne Stay and Play** - Held twice a week in term time, at Lansdowne Chapel on Cemetary Road. Funded by Sharrow Sure Start and delivered by a SLA with PLA

**Highfield Stay and Play** - Offered once a week in term time and is held at Highfield Trinity Church. Funded by Sharrow Sure Start and delivered by a SLA with PLA

**Toy Library** - Offered once a week at the Family Services Unit on Hanover Way, through the SLA.

**SHARE Course** - This course, around learning issues for parents and children, was run in the local library to encourage parental involvement in child development and use of the library. Delivered and funded through the SLA with the library.

**Sharrow Playgroup** - This playgroup established for many years, and delivering playgroup facilities is now managed by Sharrow Parents Action for Kids and funded by Sharrow Sure Start, parents contribute £2 per session where family means allow.

**Sharrow Nursery School Wraparound Care** provides care for 16 children around the nursery voucher sessions to extend these sessions to a school day, these sessions run three days a week and not five due to unavailability of premises. Funded by parental contributions and Sharrow Sure Start.

**Creches** running alongside training opportunities provide a good quality learning environment for children.

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

**Parents Forum** - Meets every six weeks. Aims to increase parental involvement and feed their views into Partnership Board meetings. It is hoped that this forum will provide parent representatives to stand for election to the Board, two extra parents are already attending Partnership Board meetings as observers. Funded and delivered by Sure Start, and held at various venues throughout the Sharrow Sure Start area to encourage attendance.

**Events in the Local Area** - The Parental Involvement Workers (PIWs) and other programme staff work in partnership with other agencies to co-ordinate local activities. These events provide an opportunity to raise awareness about Sure Start and engage parents in the programme. For example, the seven multi-agency theme days in Mount Pleasant Park in summer 2004 and the Sharrow Festival held in July 2004.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

**Bengali Support Group** - Held on Tuesday mornings in term time at Highfield Trinity Church. It was set up by a local Health Visitor, the Sure Start Bengali speaking Home Visitor/Outreach Worker, and a Bengali advocacy worker employed by the SSWPCT. Expenses such as room hire funded by Sure Start, delivered by Sure Start in partnership with Health Visitor and the Bengali Advocacy worker.

**English Classes** - Held in term time on Thursday mornings at the Everyone Centre. Introduced after requests by local mothers. Funded by Sure Start, delivered by SAVTE.

**Credit Union** - Sure Start provides a venue for this on Monday afternoon at the London Road Shop. This gives the Union and parents a local collection point and encourages families to save with them rather than 'loan sharks', thus maximising potential for local capacity-building and potential household incomes.

**Home Start** - A home visiting, enabling and befriending service provided by volunteers who are given training and supervision through an SLA with the organisation Home Start. The SLA also recruits and trains volunteers from within the local area, thus helping to build local capacity.

**Jobnet** - Held at the London Road shop, every Tuesday morning. This is an employment initiative set up to support individuals to get back into work. Jobnet works with Jobcentre Plus but is more supportive on an individual level. Sure Start refers parents to Jobnet as they find the 1:1 support builds confidence and skills.

**Summer Holiday Fun Activities** - Programme workers are planning these activities, working in partnership with other providers to ensure effective co-ordination.

**Childcare Extravaganza** - Delivered in April; organised by Sure Start PIW in partnership with Sharrow Forum, Early Years and Childcare, and Sheffield College. Expenses and organisation funded by Sharrow Sure Start.

**Dalton Court Support Group** - For parents of children with additional needs, to meet other parents and access help and information. This group ran for some months but eventually folded, venue availability times played some part in this but the parents preferred one to one home visitor support, respite childcare and help with accessing other services.

## HARD TO REACH

It is important to note that the nature of the local area, consisting of a large number of families from minority ethnic groups, means that the programme finds it particularly difficult to encourage parents (especially women) to leave the family home and engage in group activities. Although there are many different community groups in the area, very few exist that provide services for families with young children. The Sure Start programme not only works towards filling this gap in provision, but also tries to ensure that barriers to engagement are broken down wherever possible. So, for example, the Abbeytots play and stay sessions serve an exclusively Punjabi community, and thus provide a service for a group that could be classed as 'hard to reach'. Likewise, the Parents Forum meetings are supported by speakers of minority ethnic languages who can act as interpreters. For those parents and carers who are not able to access group sessions, the programme provides services in the home where appropriate, e.g. baby massage is available via specially trained home visitors.

From July 2004 onwards, the programme plans to liaise with Health Visitors to ensure that families who do not respond to invitation letters do know about Sure Start. Non-responders may be working parents or the socially excluded parents who are most in need of the services on offer.

The London Road shop has proved to be useful in providing a focus for parents, particularly mothers, to drop in and meet staff or ask general questions. The programme tried to run a Fathers' Group from the shop, but didn't have the staff capacity to offer the service when the fathers wanted to meet, which proved to be in the evenings and on Saturday mornings.

Staff training is planned before the end of 2004 that will increase workers' skills in using other organisations and building confidence in working with families affected by domestic abuse, and 2 team members are to attend a DAWN workshop on Divorce and Separation to improve their ability to meet the needs of parents affected by relationship breakdown.

## SHARROW SURE START TRAINING

**January - March 2003**

Home -Learning Gallery, Child development and photography  
 Story sacks for women, making creative learning resources for nursery children in partnership with Sharrow community teacher  
 The importance of play  
 Creative English (ESOL)

**May - July 2003**

Parenting Course run by a Sure Start staff member (10 weeks)

**September 2003**

Story Telling workshops in Partnership with Simunye (4 Sessions)  
 First Aid  
 Cook and Eat Sessions, Basic Skills Numeracy and Literacy skills (10 weeks)  
 English As A Second Language (10 weeks)

**October 2003**

Family Learning Weekend - Several sessions organised by Sure Start in partnership with Sharrow Community Forum, Highfield Library, Simunye, Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet, SPARK and Friends of General Cemetery.

**April 2004**

First Aid  
 Childcare Extravaganza: Information event on opportunities for training and careers in childcare, in partnership with Sharrow Community Forum, SPARK, Sheffield College.

**April - July 2004**

English As A Second Language in partnership with SAVTE (10 weeks) Health, Nutrition and Diet sessions with Sure Start's Community Food Worker (10 weeks)

**June - July 2004**

Parenting sessions at the Sure Start shop run by the Sure Start Behaviourist and a Home Visitor.

**August 2004**

I.T. in partnership with Sheffield Women's Education and Training (5 Taster sessions)

September 2004

English As A Second Language in partnership with SAVTE (10 weeks)  
 Health, Nutrition & Diet sessions in connection with Women's Health Outreach (10 weeks)  
 Confidence building in partnership with SPARK and SCEDU (10 weeks)  
 Dealing with challenging behaviour in partnership with SPARK and SCEDU (10 weeks)  
 I.T. in partnership with Sheffield Women's Education and Training (12 weeks)

*TRAINING continued*

The programme has arranged and funded a three day UK Baby Friendly Breast Feeding Training Course. 7 midwives, 8 health visitors and 3 Sharrow Sure Start NNEB qualified staff completed this.

The programme trained 10 local mothers, 1 Home-Visitor Outreach Worker, and 1 Link Worker in partnership with the NCT and University of Sheffield, using an enabling approach model to be Peer Breast Feeding Supporters. 9 of these local mums are now employed under a flexible bank contract

## SLA PARTNERS

Sharrow Sure Start has Service Level Agreements with the following partners:

<b>SLA Partner</b>	<b>Service Provision</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>Home Start</b>	A home-visiting, enabling and befriending service provided by volunteers who are given accredited training and supervised by a paid co-ordinator. Volunteers visit one family once a week (for about 3 hours). The service is offered to parents whose needs are more long-term and less complex than those seen by the Home Visitors or by FSU. SLA also provides for a number of volunteers to be recruited and trained from the Sharrow Sure Start area.	<b>£16,000</b>
<b>Family Service Unit (FSU)</b>	This organisation has been working in the area for many years. When this Sure Start programme was in the planning stage, it was estimated that some 10% of local families with children under 4 might require in-depth preventative intervention. FSU's SLA aims to provide experienced workers to meeting the more complex needs of some families, such as those with substance abuse or domestic violence issues.	<b>£35,000</b>
<b>Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)</b>	This SLA provides 2 p/t workers (one of whom is a Punjabi speaker) to work specifically with parents from the Sure Start area. Other CAB workers also work with Sure Start families. The SLA was set up to maximise take-up of benefits among Sure Start families, and provide access to skilled, experienced advocates.	<b>£30,000</b>
<b>Pre-School Learning</b>	This SLA provides an experienced worker who helps to set up and maintain new Play	<b>£15,000</b>

<b>Alliance (PLA)</b>	and Stay activities.	
<b>Abbeydale School</b>	This SLA pays for 2 workers to provide Stay and Play sessions ('Abbeytots') 6 times each week.	<b>£10,000</b>
<b>Springfield Play Partnership</b>	The agreement pays for a worker to run 2 sessions each week at Springfield School.	<b>£4,000</b>
<b>Psychologist</b>	This SLA provides the team with expert help around parenting issues, as well as training for Health Visitors and Home Visitors. The Psychologist does some 1:1 work with families in addition to group work, and is with the programme one day a week.	<b>£15,000</b>
<b>SPARK</b>	There are 2 agreements with this organisation. One is to fund a playgroup (2 sessions per week for a maximum of 8 children) and the other is to provide 3 sessions of childcare for 16 children per session, built around the nursery attendance of 3-4 year olds at Sharrow Nursery School. This extends the length of daily provision for these children to that of a full school day.	<b>Playgroup £8,000</b>  <b>Wraparound £16,000</b>
<b>Dietician/ Community Food Worker</b>	This amount of money is set aside to provide work around diet/weaning/healthy eating during pregnancy and childhood obesity. The SLA was with the Dietetics service in 2003-04, but was very little used by health visitors for referring on patients within the community. The work was taken over by a multi-lingual worker through an SLA to provide a community food worker, but this only ran for three months since the worker concerned is relocating. The community food worker will be replaced as soon as possible.	<b>£8,000</b>
<b>Midwife</b>	This agreement with the Jessop Wing	<b>£35,000</b>

	provides a midwife who is a fully integrated member of the Sure Start team even though she is employed by the hospital Trust. This arrangement ensures that the midwife does not lose any employment rights and can maintain her practice training.	
<b>Speech and Language</b>	This agreement is similar to the SLA's of most of the other Sheffield Sure Start programmes with the Speech and Language Service, i.e. it provides for training for the team, some work in the community, and some 1:1 sessions in the home.	<b>£15,000</b>
<b>Cot-age</b>	This SLA provides for the programme's safety equipment fitting service.	<b>£11,000</b>
<b>Library</b>	This agreement funds a p/t dedicated library worker to work with under 4's and their families in the Sure Start area. This SLA has facilitated (together with the work of the Home Visitors) a 74% increase in library registrations within the Sure Start area in the first year of the agreement.	<b>£15,850</b>
<b>Child Health Post</b>	This arrangement is not strictly speaking an SLA, but the £2,500 is a contribution towards the employment of a clerical worker who supplies all the data that Child Health Services can provide for the Sheffield Sure Start programme.	<b>£2,500</b>

**COSTS AND RESOURCING**

Management and Administration	109,412
Development and Evaluation	68,736
Premises costs	37,130
Outreach and Home Visiting	189,161
Community Health Care	80,508
Parents and Families	100,104
Play, Learning and Childcare	103,617
Transport, Expert Help with Capital Development programme, professional fees	39,137
<b>Total</b>	<b>727,805</b>

### **PLANNED FUTURE ACTIVITIES FROM JULY 2004**

**Baby Group** - A baby group will be developed to feed into established Stay and Plays, thus renewing members whose children move on to nursery and to build on the parental support networks established in ante-natal activities. Aim is to have 6 members by August and 8 members by end of 2004.

**Emotional Literacy Workshops** - To be delivered with nurseries and Stay and Play sessions to encourage parents to understand the importance of social and emotional development and needs of children. Aim is to start one workshop by end of September and another end of March 2004.

**Dads' Group** - Development of a sustainable group, to encourage fathers to be active in parenting in all ethnicity populations. Aim is to establish the group by October 2004.

**SPARK Training** - Working in partnership with SPARK, the aim is to provide training courses delivered by SCEDU around issues relating to children at school, supporting learning, etc. These should be starting in September 2004.

**Nutritional Assessment Tool** - To be developed by March 2005 with the University of Sheffield, in conjunction with other Sure Starts in the city, for use with pregnant BME women.

**Sure Start Information Seminars** - Sharrow Sure Start aim to have delivered health information work with extended families, looking at the Sure Start objectives, by arranging a seminar with the Pakistani community. This will involve SSWPCT, AWA, and Father Figures. If this is successful, similar events will be arranged with Somali and Bangladeshi communities.

**Play Sessions in The Home** - These, along with age-appropriate play bags, are to be developed for Home Visitors to take into the home.

**Family Learning Week Activities** - To be delivered in October 2004, organised in partnership with the Library and other local organisations as appropriate.

**Work Around Local Employment Issues** - By August, it is planned that the PIW will have identified skills deficit within Sharrow, and employment opportunities with JobCentre Plus and Jobnet. Training to be arranged to meet needs, or signposting on to suitable opportunities. Courses to be organised for parents, in partnership with training providers, from September.

**Community Translation Unit** - Programme to look at using innovative translation software

**Parental Satisfaction Survey** - This is to be devised and sent out, reviewed, and services adjusted where necessary, by November 2004.

## 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow in making life better for children, parents and communities in the area.
- 4.6 Some of the Sure Start work we have witnessed in Sharrow is immensely powerful in challenging understanding of what is involved in delivering local programmes. The programme faces many challenges 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:

**Accountability**

**Communication and Team Working**

**Developing a Community Presence**

**Cultural and linguistic diversity**

**Involving Parents**

**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 Sharrow Sure Start programme has experienced considerable difficulties since being approved. In addition, during the evaluation period the Programme suffered from the temporary absence of Senior Management.
- o The Partnership Board has until recently been perceived as weak. Inconsistent representation of the Accountable Body at Partnership Board meetings has been perceived as inhibiting transparent decision-making. An Accountability Agreement and Terms of Reference for the Partnership Board agreed in January 2004 looks set to vastly improve the functioning of the Partnership Board.
- o During the course of the evaluation the programme's relationship with the Accountable Body [SSWPCT] has strengthened considerably.
- o Inequity in relation to contracts and terms and conditions for staff has an adverse affect on the team. This has a direct impact of the capacity of the Programme to deliver services in accordance with targets and key objectives.
- 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 SLA providers are predominantly positive about working with Sharrow Sure Start and have a number of suggestions for strengthening their relations with the programme.
- o Systems of monitoring are immature and improvements are needed.
- o Monitoring of SLA partners has been experienced as disappointing and the programme needs to improve relationships with service level agreement providers in respect on giving feedback on services received.

- o Relationships between the Sharrow Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team actively and successfully seeks to maximise opportunities to engage with the local community.
- o Cultural and linguistic diversity presents the Programme with challenges additional to those of some of their counterparts across the City. Bi-lingual workers help to ensure that the needs of the most common community language speakers are met but providing interpreters for every language at every activity is proving impossible. Sure Start local programmes receive no extra financial support for meeting the costs of translation and interpretation. It is recognized that a lack of routine support for translation and interpretation compromises the entitlements of some parents to participate in Sharrow Sure Start. Effort has been focused upon making information accessible.
- o Parents were strongly represented at the Steering Group and Partnership Board initially but parent involvement with Sharrow Sure Start has declined in recent times. Staff clearly think that some community members stopped participating when it became clear that Sharrow Sure Start could not meet their particular communities' agenda. Efforts to understand this situation and to raise participation need strengthening.
- o There is work to be done on widening participation of parents in the Programme at all levels and in respect of all governance structures.
- o The Programme Manager has demonstrated willingness to engage in city wide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services. In so doing she blends defence of the Sharrow programme with a recognition of its problems and the imperative for change.

**The data which has informed these findings is now explored.**

## Accountability

Note: There is widespread agreement that the Sharrow Sure Start programme has experienced considerable difficulties since being approved. In addition, during the evaluation period the Programme suffered from the temporary absence of Senior Management.

The Partnership Board has until recently been perceived as weak. Inconsistent representation of the Accountable Body at Partnership Board meetings has been perceived as inhibiting transparent decision-making. An Accountability Agreement and Terms of Reference for the Partnership Board agreed in January 2004 looks set to vastly improve the functioning of the Partnership Board.

- 4.10 Difficulties with the operation of the Partnership Board undoubtedly stem from the programme's complicated history which has already been outlined in Chapter 2. Terms of Reference in use since January 2004 describe the membership and responsibilities of the Partnership Board very clearly, link clearly with the Accountability Agreement agreed by the SWPCT and Sharrow SureStart at the same time, and have helped to involve new members and encourage the Partnership Board to take responsibility effectively. The Director of Finance left the SSWPCT in late February 2004 and since that time representation of the Accountable Body on the Partnership Board has been unclear. However the Director of Projects, newly seconded from the Children's Hospital Trust is very keen to ensure that Sharrow Sure Start receives the support of the SSWPCT in every way it can. This Director has been responsible for line managing the Programme Manager since May 2004 and is the SSWPCT's representative on the Board, along with a health visitor member of the PEC.
- 4.11 Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the effectiveness of the Partnership Board in the past has been queried by all stakeholders. Partnership Board meetings have been typically described as events where:  
*'nothing moves and a lot of paper shuffling happens'.*

There is optimism amongst Board members that the functioning of the Partnership Board is improving now:

*'there's a robust Partnership Board that meets and makes decisions, albeit sometimes a little bit muddly, but it's rolling on and there are people who turn up who are very committed to Sharrow Sure Start'.*

- 4.12 Regardless of recent improvements, lessons must be learned from what past difficulties with the functioning of the Partnership Board. A general point has been made that mechanisms for improving communications would be helpful :

*'meetings have been too unfocussed and nobody takes responsibility for the nature of discussions. Where the focus is poor we lose parents - and we also lose each other. More discipline is needed about papers tabled'*

Board Member

- 4.13 Specifically, some Partnership Board members articulate that they don't feel a sense of knowing what all the SLA partners are doing and offer practical suggestions about this :

*'I don't feel a sense of us all knitting together through the Partnership Board meeting process and this could be improved through fairly simple practical methods: people doing presentations at the Partnership Board about what they've done would be helpful - a rolling slot on this would allow members to get a bit more depth on projects. Also a paragraph update for every project to the Partnership Board would also be helpful to give a sense of what's happened since the last meeting'*

Board Member

- 4.14 The general consensus seems to be that the Partnership Board practice of consensual decision making has not been entirely effective:

*'one of the criticisms that's been made is that we're not good at decision making and I think that's true ..'*

*'It obviously hasn't been that effective as a process because we run out of time.'*

Parent member

- 4.15 A range of stakeholders have commented to the effect that they *'often leave the meetings feeling 'I'm not quite sure what that was all about'*. In large part this is associated with the complexities of the capital spend issue the programme has had to contend with:

*'The Partnership Board have been very bogged down by the capital spend issue - we've had this hanging over us and it's meant we can't really get down to what we're really about which is supporting children and families ..'*

Partnership Board Member

*'We have to constantly try and deal with the Sure Start Unit's perspective - our risk assessment was high not least because of capital issues and so if we try and deal with those issues that the Sure Start unit has raised as being crucial it means that all the interesting things that everyone around the table wants to discuss have to be put to one side'*

Partnership Board Member

The comment was made that the Board needs to

*'balance Partnership Board meetings - focus on what's of core interest to the programme and what's servicing the Sure Start Unit.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.16 Frustration has been specifically expressed with the lack of progress on capital spend and on installation of play equipment in the park:

*'I know 'things have to be taken into consideration', but I've been taking things into consideration for three years now and I'm just gong to keep saying 'Why haven't we got this and why haven't we got that?' I've been putting in my time and commitment and now I feel like I want to see some results.'*

Parent Partnership Board Member

- 4.17 historically, there have also been perceived organisational inefficiencies, such as papers not sent out sufficiently in advance of meetings. Consequently staff are working hard to ensure that papers get sent out at least 7 working days in advance. That this happens can now be corroborated by the post book in the Sharrow Sure Start offices. A new full-time admin staff member appointed to the programme in July 2004 will help to further improve administration of the Board. Of course the question of 'what information is needed, by whom, and when, in order to make participation in decision making effective?' is difficult to judge; some Board members require a lot of information whereas others do not. Recently the Partnership Board requested financial information in a simplified form which does not necessarily allow members to see spend in all areas of the programme and this will be monitored.

- 4.18 There has been a perception that in the past the Partnership Board failed to take a lead on what are considered to be key strategic decisions like the organisation of premises. Yet some Partnership Board members feel this is somewhat unfair. Delays over implementing the original plan, for the programme

to move into the Hub at Mount Pleasant, a site identified in the original delivery plan by parents as being at the centre of the Sharrow Sure Start area are reported to have been *'very frustrating for us all'*. Although it was agreed by the Sharrow Project Steering Group in 2002 that this move should happen, circumstances beyond the programme's control have resulted in Sharrow Sure Start being unable to use The Hub. The Capital Group then investigated the possibility of a modular building before identifying the 'Tuxedo Blue' building as a suitable alternative. Buying 'Tuxedo Blue' has been a process beset with difficulties as its owners are a multinational organisation which stands to make a substantial paper loss on the sale. Negotiations continue and there is clearly a need to achieve as much transparency as possible over ongoing complications in order that key stakeholders do not lose confidence in the Partnership Board again. Capital plans are on schedule at the time of writing according to the milestones specified in the Capital Business Plan.

- 4.19 The Evaluation Team picked up confusion about the workings of the Board's sub-groups. The only Sub-group that is still meeting is the Capital Sub-Group. Sub groups that were originally meeting to look at service delivery and personnel issues became very small in membership/attendance and did not carry on after the first three months of the Programme Manager's appointment. Some stakeholders are unclear about how and why sub-groups were discontinued, indeed some refer to them as still operational, and it will be helpful to establish clarity about this.
- 4.20 Clear avenues of communication between the Board and the staff group are being newly established. During the period of the Programme Manager's authorised absence, the staff team welcomed strenuous efforts made by the Board's Chair to ensure contact with the team. As the period of evaluation drew to a close in August 2004, it is evident that a greater understanding by the Board and the Staff of each other's role is emerging and there is evidence that the staff group is gaining confidence in the Partnership Board.
- 4.21 An Action Plan for Sharrow Sure Start 2004-2005 was presented at the SSWPCT Board Meeting in July 2004 and was endorsed and accepted. It was later presented to the Partnership Board. The Action Plan will facilitate reporting back by Programme Staff against the actions laid out for the year, all of which are consistent with national Sure Start Unit targets. Staff have been asked to prepare reports on activities to the Board and the requirement to be accountable for actions is being accepted.
- 4.22 Some confusion about the role of, and the responsibilities exercised by, the Partnership Board persists. The Accountability Agreement and Terms of

Reference for the Partnership Board agreed in January 2004 do look set to vastly improve the functioning of the Board. At the time of reporting these had not yet had time to fully embed but it is positive to note that Partnership Board members are willing to articulate recognition of their own role in bringing about positive change:

*'a lot of people still go there, sit and listen and go away again and none of us have particularly taken responsibility for our role. It doesn't feel as if the Partnership Board is leading the strategic thinking which is what it should be there for. It seems to be adding a layer of complexity for programme staff to deal with but not at the moment leading a strategic vision that the staff can work with and we should change this.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.23 here have been consistent problems with representation from social services. This is a familiar problem for Sure Start programmes in Sheffield and is not exclusive to Sharrow. Health sector input has also been patchy. Representation from the Young Children's Service, now known as Early Education and Childcare, has been consistent for the past year or so, although the representative has changed. Inconsistency of membership inevitably has an impact on interpretations of what happens and thus militates against optimum partnership working. Where agencies have been given representation at Partnership Board level the efficiency of the Partnership Board is undoubtedly undermined if they then do not participate.

- 4.24 Although there was broad representation of all agencies in the early stages of Programme development, this has not been sustained during the delivery phase:

*'At the early stages it's all about getting the delivery plan sorted and there's people there thinking, 'Well, what's in it for me?' as it were, you know, vested interest. But then when you get down to the business end of it, you know, you've set things up, you've got your services up and running, it's like 'The service is now set up. Why do I need to attend?'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.25 If all parties who have a stake in the success of the Sure Start Programme are to have belief in, and support the further development of, Sharrow Sure Start, they must feel that they understand how decisions are made and by whom. They also need to understand how they can make their own voices heard in the decision making process. This requires both transparency of process - of how decisions are made - and clarity and accessibility of outcomes - which decisions

are made and what they mean for different people. It also requires effective communication within Sharrow Sure Start and between Sharrow Sure Start and other interest groups. We have picked up a widespread concern about the lack of transparency in key areas of Partnership Board/SSWPCT activity. There is evidence that steps are now being taken to address this matter via the Accountability Agreement and Terms of Reference.

- 4.26 Systems are now in place ways to make explicit any potential conflicts of interests. Some SLA providers, for example, have voting rights on the Partnership Board, leading to the potential for a conflict of interests:

*'I think it's difficult when the discussion is literally to do with your SLA. You have to be very careful about lobbying for your own interests.'*

Partnership Board Member

Board Members have been asked to declare other interests and this information is placed on permanent record. This has not always been so explicit.

- 4.27 Inconsistent representation of the Accountable Body at Partnership Board meetings has been felt to seriously inhibit transparent decision-making. Some Partnership Board members are concerned that considerable effort has been wasted when decisions have been taken that are not subsequently supported by the Accountable Body and a call for consistency and continuity in representation from the Accountable Body in the future has been made:

*'the accountable body should have a representative at each and every board meeting I suggest, because if a decision is taken when we don't know technically what the position of the accountable body is in relation to that decision, that decision is useless.'*

Partnership Board Member

New terms of reference allow for only one voting representative, the vote being lost if they don't turn up and one named substitute who cannot vote - this is to encourage continuity of and consistency in representation.

- 4.28 Ensuring effective representation is an essential starting point for a more efficient Partnership Board, however, consistency of representation is also considered to be very important:

*'It's very hard to [deal] in honest relationships with people where the face changes all the time and they're still representing the same place and they're not up to speed on what you're discussing.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.29 The consistent attendance on the Board of representatives from some voluntary organisations, who work closely with the Sharrow community, has been appreciated. However, it is unclear how decisions about community representation were made when the Partnership Board was first convened. Some faith communities are represented:

*'The Methodist minister in Sharrow and Gleadless Valley ...they're a church and very interested in the community. The reason that (the Church representative) is on the Partnership Board was because (she) helps to represent the community and she sees her role as a link with parents and an enabler and a facilitator. And she does have access to property in Sharrow and knows quite a bit about properties.'*

Partnership Board Member

The new terms of reference document allow for an AGM and the voting on of representatives.

- 4.30 Other faith communities do not have such strong representation, despite attempts to encourage their involvement. While we would whole-heartedly welcome the energy, enthusiasm and locality knowledge that community representatives have been able to bring to Sharrow Sure Start, it is clearly critical that the Sharrow Sure Start Partnership Board actively explores new strategies for broadening community representation at Partnership Board level. At the AGM planned to be held in September 2004, representatives will stand for election.

- 4.31 The present lack of representation from Sharrow's diverse ethnic communities on the Partnership Board is recognized to be problematic:

*'You know when you look round the room it's a group of white people making decisions on a community that's not white.'*

*'if we're not addressing the issues that enable other communities to input, then we're putting barriers up and it isn't just as simple as encouraging people in. I don't know if it's that our processes are inhibiting people or if we're just not encouraging people enough.'*

Partnership Board Members

It is important for the Board to find ways of taking this issue forward.

- 4.32 Anxiety was voiced about the Board's ability to 'withstand pressures from organisations'. An example given, concerned the resolution of a locality issue by the Early Education and Childcare Service (Education Directorate) in a manner that contradicted the expressed priorities of Sharrow Sure Start parents. In planning for the development of a Children's Centre:

*'one of the strongest things that the parents in Sharrow have said is that Broomhall Nursery isn't in Sharrow and they don't use it, but ..... the decision's been made that that's where it should be and that Sharrow Sure Start has to co-operate with that decision. Now, how do you maintain that decision making has any point if some of the decisions that impact on the Board aren't responsive to the things that local people are saying?'*

Partnership Board Member

The above remarks, which were endorsed by others, also go some way towards explaining a perception that the willingness of some community members to participate in the Partnership Board may have been adversely influenced by a perception of the Board's weakness, and dominance of particular interest groups within it. Without the hope that they can stimulate real change within the Partnership Board and the broader Programme, some potentially critical community voices may have been dissuaded from involvement:

*'People who might have had a critical voice have left us saying 'life's too short. We'll go somewhere else,' sort of thing.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.33 Communication between the Partnership Board and the Sharrow Sure Start Programme is via the Programme Manager. While the Programme Manager therefore clearly occupies a pivotal role, there is confusion among team members about what their responsibilities to the Board are:

*'I go just to input information and am not always involved otherwise - not quite sure what the rules are about my input!'*

Staff Partnership Board Member

This is being addressed as new Terms of Reference are put into practice.

- 4.34 Although some Partnership Board members have made individual attempts to promote communication, communication between the Partnership Board and partner organisations appears to be variable. There is no evidence of a consistent mechanism for disseminating Partnership Board decisions - and the implications of these - to the wider Sharrow community. Although the recently acquired Sharrow Sure Start shop premises make this process more viable, a strategy for dissemination needs to be considered by the Board as part of a wider process of communication with all agencies and interest groups:

*'I think there's a question there about what needs to go out and we need to be sure of how we handle that ... I think we've worked hard at making ourselves work and these are the next steps.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.35 A clearly articulated communication strategy will strengthen the community's belief in, and participation with, the Sharrow Sure Start Programme.

- 4.36 A good communication strategy could also help to overcome barriers to participation which parents identify. For example, the use of jargon is commonplace and makes people feel that they are not able to contribute effectively:

*'people have an immense tendency to start in English and end up in a language that's only understood to their profession.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.37 Although it is difficult to reduce the amount of jargon people use, the growing confidence of the Chair (a Sharrow parent) and willingness to challenge the use of jargon, is praised. However, it seems clear that the Partnership Board's working practices are not fully inclusive, which makes it difficult for parents and community members to participate unless they have relatively high levels of confidence and assertiveness - and possibly prior experience of large meetings:

*'if you weren't very outspoken you could kind of get lost in the meeting. It takes a lot of confidence to say 'I don't understand that - can you just step back a bit.' Now I feel very confident that I'm in that position. I'm lucky that I've come from every time I speak going red in the face to actually now being able to say 'right can you just explain what you're going on about now'. Whereas at the beginning a lot of us thought, 'Oh no, it's going over my head .. such a lot of technical speak.'*

Partnership Board Member

A coherent support and development structure to promote parental and community participation will improve the potential for inclusion. In addition, the Partnership Board may wish to address immediate needs for any further changes to its working practices.

Issues surround parent participation in the Partnership Board are discussed further in the section on Parent Involvement.

- 4.38 Board members are right to say that significant improvements have already been made to the way in which the Partnership Board operates. Greater clarity about the role of the Partnership Board and its working processes is being secured. While this is to be welcomed, there is still much to be done. Suggested Action and Implementation Plans for all members of the Partnership Board including the Accountable Body are offered in Chapter 5.

## RELATIONS WITH THE SSWPCT

During the course of the evaluation the programme's relationship with the Accountable Body [SSWPCT] has strengthened considerably.

Inequity in relation to contracts and terms and conditions for staff has an adverse affect on the team. This has a direct impact of the capacity of the Programme to deliver services in accordance with targets and key objectives.

- 4.39 As with the Partnership Board, it is important to note that improvements in the relationship between Sharrow Sure Start and the Accountable Body have been observed during the course of the evaluation:

*'we're ahead of a lot of the other Sure Starts that work with PCTs in having written [contracts]. Being with the SSWPCT has sharpened up how we work and made us think things through like membership, accountabilities and the sort of organisational side.'*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.40 There is a feeling that this improvement in the relationship with the SSWPCT may provide the leverage to improve working relationships with other, statutory organisations:

*'it will make some of the other people ... the statutory people who haven't always been responsible in having links with Sure Start, to think more clearly about it because their responsibility's not just to a local group, but to a group who are accountable [to the] PCT and have a reference in there and I think that could improve all sorts of other things in the long term'.*

Partnership Board Member

4.41 However, it is true to say that until recently staff have felt that the SSWPCT has not provided sufficient support to the Sharrow Sure Start programme. Staff report lack of clarity over lines of communication and have routinely felt 'passed from pillar to post' in dealings with the SSWPCT. Recent changes have instilled growing confidence that staff will know who to deal with at the SSWPCT from now on.

4.42 It is essential to acknowledge that both the Partnership Board and the Accountable Body were working in very difficult circumstances during the authorised absence of the Programme Manager. Difficulties included a lack of information about the Programme Manager's absence for the Board. Partnership Board Members found this frustrating:

*'I think we had a right to know about the issues concerning our Programme Manager. How can it be that the Partnership Board should have ownership of the Sure Start objectives if it doesn't have all of the information in front of it about the programme? If the Board is excluded from certain information it is difficult to see what the role of members should be.'*

Partnership Board Member

It will be important for the SSWPCT to assure all stakeholders of its commitment to a transparent and inclusive approach to Sharrow Sure Start. We acknowledge that there may be difficult issues involved in establishing a culture of openness - particularly relating to personnel issues - but these cannot be viewed as insurmountable.

4.43 There has also been disenchantment with SSWPCT procedures in the past, particularly relating to the situation whereby some team members have been in post without contracts. Staff in this situation have reported feeling undervalued and anxious about working terms and conditions.

4.43 Difficulties concerning working terms and conditions have not yet been resolved. SSWPCT policies have given rise to inconsistencies in working terms and conditions for staff. For example, the NNEB Qualified home visitors/outreach

workers are paid on a nursing scale, which has more holiday entitlement than allowable for administrative and clerical staff and other home visitors - mostly the bi-lingual workers - who are paid on a non-nursing scale. This anomaly was known to the SSWPCT HR department when they drew up the scales but not pointed out to the committee that was drawing up job descriptions. In another part of Sheffield, the NPCT has allowed a Sure Start programme to have its own Sure Start Payscale which has eliminated this problem, but SSWPCT has not allowed Sharrow to do this. There is, understandably, unhappiness about this situation, not least because the same people work in the HR department for both areas as the SSWPCT host the NHS HR department which covers the whole city. Anomalous conditions are a potentially divisive influence within the team, it is anticipated that the Agenda for Change will address these differences, but action will need to be taken to establish a Sure Start Payscale for the Sharrow programme and similar working conditions for all staff if this is not the case.

- 4.44 The above-mentioned example may help to explain why a range of stakeholders perceive the SSWPCT as inflexible, wedded to procedures and ways of working that, though fitted to the provision of health services, do not support the Sure Start vision for wide-ranging health and social care. The comments *'they are only really interested in making sure we don't bring the PCT into disrepute'* typify the views of several Partnership Board members who contributed to the evaluation. Inflexibility has been reported at a number of levels.
- 4.45 At the level of service planning and strategic activity staff consider that the SSWPCT has, in the past, created delays and placed unnecessary constraints on what is possible. Staff feel that they have been told that they cannot do things that they see as appropriate. *'You should be doing it like this'* or *'you can only do it one way'* are said to have been common responses from the SSWPCT. One example cited concerned the SSWPCT's reluctance to endorse staff ideas for the provision of incentives to help widen parent involvement in the programme.
- 4.46 At the level of service delivery lack of flexibility from the SSWPCT has caused delays and has, on occasion, prevented staff from meeting urgent client needs. A situation was described in which staff were prevented from arranging the loan of a piece of equipment to a family required for child protection purposes. The loan was unable to go ahead because the 'right' forms were not available:

*'a loan agreement was drafted 'using information we got off another organisation doing loan things which I got sent to speed things up but the response was 'No, it's not in our format. You've got to do it in our format.'*

Member of staff

- 4.47 There are strong indications that the SSWPCT is improving its relationship with Sharrow Sure Start and this is clearly to be welcomed:

*'Relations with SSWPCT have improved enormously lately - there are people there who are committed to improving community based working and this has been beneficial'.*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.48 An employee of the SSWPCT recently attached to the Sharrow area has worked well with Sharrow Sure Start staff and has worked jointly with the team on activities designed to increase families understanding of health issues.

## Communication and Team Working

- 4.49 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).
- 4.50 Stakeholders working both within the Sure Start team, and those seeking to work with Sharrow 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. It is widely agreed that there is work to be done on getting communication and team working right both within the programme and beyond the programme in relation to its links with other agencies in order to best equip the programme to meet its key objectives.
- 4.51 This section assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the Sharrow programme in respect of its capacity for communication and partnership working with staff and SLA partners. It is evident that stakeholder views discussed below and shared at various intervals during the process of this evaluation, if properly engaged with, will provide instructive insights to help the programme as a whole make a better success of Sure Start and translate service provision successfully from an area based focus to a generic mainstream approach.

### Communication and Working in Partnership – Staff

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.

- 4.52 Staff team members describe themselves as having experienced a steep learning curve since taking up posts on the Sharrow Sure Start programme. Members of the staff team who were employed when the programme was first established felt they benefited from a relatively long induction and initial training period spread over two and a half months. This allowed them to begin to think carefully about '*how would we do it and how we would want to do it*'.
- 4.53 However, staff members who were appointed when the Programme Manager was away describe their induction as more piecemeal. During the period of the Programme Manager's authorized absence no clear training programme was provided for new employees. It has subsequently been recognized that the absence of a clear pathway into the job has posed a considerable challenge for three new workers and the Programme Manager now personally supervises the new Parental Involvement Worker and arranged for the supervision of those team members unsupervised during the period of absence.
- 4.54 Effective lines of training, management and accountability are important to all Sure Start programmes and the Sharrow staff group are very aware that these issues have all required - and lately received - urgent attention within their programme. It has been noted that staff are increasingly taking responsibility for speaking for themselves and using the staff management structure to resolve dissatisfactions. We have set out below our understanding of the support that team members feel they need to enhance their development both individually and as a programme team. Since returning to post the Programme Manager has been able to put much of this support in place and it will remain for a subsequent evaluation to comment on the effectiveness of changes implemented.
- 4.55 Overall, the staff team have presented a very united and coherent face throughout a difficult year and have remained positive about their involvement in Sharrow Sure Start, saying, for example:

*'I feel really glad to be working in this team'*

Member of staff

However, on an individual level, tensions and conflicts have been evident in what people say and a recurring concern is that some parts of the team are better organised and supported than others. The work of the home visiting team is felt to be particularly well organised and supervised. Lessons can be drawn from these positive observations to help strengthen other parts of the team.

- 4.56 Although recent disruptions experienced in the programme have meant that there has been little opportunity for the current team structure to bed down, it was agreed that there may still be a need to consider the appropriateness of the current staffing structure with a view to re-structuring if appropriate in due course.
- 4.57 A Core Group, consisting of the Programme Manager, Acting Team Leader, Parental Involvement Workers, Finance and Monitoring Officer and midwife has been established. The group meet fortnightly and this has helped a great deal with communications and co-ordinating work.
- 4.58 The staff team holds weekly team meetings that enable regular, sharing of information and ideas:

*'throwing ideas in and discussing what's worked and what hasn't and how we can do things differently'*

Member of staff

Meetings are minuted and these minutes are made available to all members of the team in a minute book. All team members have an in-tray for information and information received by post is kept in the post box before filing. There is evidence to show this system has now improved communications and all information is filed under appropriate headings in a dedicated filing cabinet.

- 4.59 Recently, the staff decided to open their meetings to other workers working with them such as midwives, health visitors and workers of the Service Level Agreement Providers. In addition, workers outside the staff team are invited to an informal lunch before the regular team meeting. The purpose of this is to maintain contact and to give opportunities to discuss any relevant issues.
- 4.60 Some members of the staff group have been able to take advantage of a broad range of training opportunities. This training is being disseminated through the staff team, for example, training to use a speech and language development questionnaire has been undertaken and shared. Members of the team working alongside a speech therapist currently deliver speech and language support; in the near future, they plan to do this on their own.

- 4.61 While members of the staff group have valued these training opportunities, staff are aware there needs to be a strategic vision in place to inform training aspirations and processes. At the moment individuals take up ad hoc opportunities whenever these can be identified. A more formal, strategic approach was suggested:

*'I know some of the other unqualified staff have nattered about getting training to NVQ level 2, which is like what crèche workers have, or NVQ Level 3. That was looked into, oh ages back, but with there being no management for a while, nothing has happened about it.'*

Member of staff

- 4.62 A needs-led approach to enabling more systematic training and development opportunities will be helpful. Some members of the team lack the skills and confidence to use email and this needs tackling in the interests of efficiency.
- 4.63 The staff group are clearly ready to consider a more strategic 'pathway' of training which might begin, for some, with confidence building, and progress through a variety of training courses to develop a range of transferable skills (including language skills) that are appropriate to particular communities and individuals. An appraisal system insisted upon by SSWPCT will identify individual training aspirations and needs which can then be matched by managers against targets and the programme's Action Plan.

### Communication and Working in Partnership with SLA providers

SLA providers are predominantly positive about working with Sharrow Sure Start and have a number of suggestions for strengthening their relations with the programme.

4.64 All stakeholders recognise that the authorised absence of both Programme Manager and Deputy Manager has resulted in a period when the programme has been less well coordinated than desirable. Communication difficulties have arisen and are being tackled now the Programme Manager is back in post.

4.65 All Sure Start Programmes are liable to experience some differences in the priorities and systems of working that guide the practices of other agencies. However, the absence of the Programme Manager combined with limited partial cover provided by the person standing in from the SSWPCT, has frustrated the smooth operation of Sharrow's Service Level Agreements:

*'there hasn't been a person that's had overall responsibility for keeping things running smoothly'*

*'things haven't got off the ground.'*

SLA partners

4.66 Some difficulties in the relationship between Sure Start and SLA providers are relatively perennial. For example, SLA providers say administrative difficulties getting SLAs in place and the relatively short-term nature of planning which occurs because Sure Start programmes - not just Sharrow - are generally reluctant to agree SLA's that last for longer than a financial year can make it difficult to think ahead:

*'it's very difficult to get anything up and running and on the go because you're frightened that it's going to suddenly end, aren't you?'*

SLA Partner

Of course, this is true of any SLA agreement - most of the SLA's in Sheffield will be only for one year.

4.67 Providers know that any SLA can be stopped with three months notice on either side, and this is no different from any other funding source. Although the period of the SLA is not different to any other SLAs a longer period would be beneficial to recruitment:

*'it's an issue when you're recruiting staff for a six month period or something. It does affect the quality of people who apply just for six months. You know, it can have a knock-on effect if that's within a year's Service Level Agreement.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.68 Those with experience of negotiating SLAs with organisations other than Sure Start recognise these problems are common:

*'it's not just Sure Start. It's the nature of the beast'.*

SLA Partner

The Programme Manager realizes there is no room for complacency on this issue however, and collaborative action to expedite SLA negotiations is being taken with other Sure Start Programme Managers across the city.

- 4.69 SLA representatives clearly feel that they are able to bring specialist expertise, in key areas, to supplement the skills of the core team in the Sharrow Sure Start programme:

*'in terms of what our service contributes, we bring different expertise that is required'*

*'what I'm providing is a second stop as sort of more expert advisor or consultant'.*

SLA Partners

- 4.70 Some SLA partners are providing both a direct service to Sure Start clients and a training and development service to the Sure Start team. These activities are not, of course, always distinct in practice. Different SLA partners have arrived at a different balance between direct work with clients and training and development of Sure Start team members. For example, the CAB provides an advice worker and they have also provided short training sessions for the home visiting/outreach workers at Sharrow Sure Start which allows the home visiting/outreach team to *'pick up any difficulties that the family have been having that the CAB could help with'.*

- 4.71 Similarly, the Pre-School Learning Alliance is working to the Sure Start objective around learning and play *as well as* helping to develop the skills of home-visiting and outreach team members in providing play setting and group work skills and engaging with the staff team through going to their meetings.

4.72 Some providers have prioritised skills development within the core Sure Start team. A general observation made was that SLA providers have noticed the importance of *'just helping think about families and needs'* which also constitutes a form of *'training for the team.'*

4.73 At the request of the Acting Team Leader Home Start provided training for Sure Start staff when few volunteers from the community could be recruited.

4.74 Other SLA partners have made service provision to clients their main concern, for example, in relation to Highfield library:

*'[the worker] has been out and about trying to encourage people to use the library. She's given library cards out so that people don't have to come in and fill the forms. Things like that to try and encourage use of the library. There have been various sessions going on at the library. Family Learning Sessions for example.'*

Member of staff

4.75 SLA partners who have only a small amount of time to contribute to the Sure Start programme are particularly reliant on the core team accessing their skills appropriately:

*'some of the team members are using me very appropriately as somebody with a different kind of knowledge that they can utilise.'*

SLA Partner

4.76 Aspects of communication between SLA providers and the team are viewed positively, for example, referral from the team works well:

*'the actual inter referrals - when they're working well - are brilliant! Sure Start are able to access women that otherwise wouldn't get to the service. We are able to organise home visits and deal with things. We're able to deal with some of the really, really difficult issues that the Sure Start clients in this area are facing and that's a real satisfaction for me to see the workers really doing that inter referral role and seeing that it works.'*

SLA Partner

4.77 In other areas, inconsistencies in referrals have been experienced and one SLA representative recognised that they did not know how members of the team carried out assessments, and therefore, how they identified referrals, saying:

*'I don't know how they conduct the assessment and that's something we ought to know, isn't it?'*

SLA Partner

Hopefully, having identified this gap in knowledge, SLA partners can be encouraged to ask for answers to questions about which they are unsure.

4.78 A Referral Protocol with Social Services is being drawn up and training arranged for staff. This is to meet outstanding issues from the programme's previous Risk Assessment.

4.79 Staff and SLA representatives agree there is a 'knowledge gap' between the team and the SLA providers:

*'I'm sitting here [in the evaluation workshop] finding out about some things that have been going on, which I didn't know about ...'*

SLA Partner

Everyone present agreed with this view. It has been suggested that Sure Start workers might find it useful to 'shadow' SLA partners, and make joint visits to families, to increase familiarity.

4.80 The importance of improving communication between the team and its SLA partners was agreed :

*'the sort of danger you can get into is that you can get a 'them' and 'us' feeling. You can have a kind of core provision that is taking a lot of the credit and then around that you get the satellite of SLAs and if you don't get the communication systems working well, then people start to feel isolated and so when issues arise, you don't feel as though you've got routes in to deal with things in a low grade way .. it always ends up being a crisis rather than having systems that you can easily be part of and feed in to'*

*I think it's really important when you have an SLA, when you're supposed to be integrated into a service, that you should feel some ownership of what everybody's been doing. I've been making notes to myself sort of 'We need to get in touch with such and such because maybe we could work together on something.' Now we don't seem to have the mechanisms for actually enabling that to happen and I think we could probably come up with those fairly quickly. The communication process - disseminating information, enabling people to share the progress they're making, because there's a lot of really good stuff going on. We can actually benefit from each other's progress - I think that's an issue we could improve on.'*

SLA Partners

- 4.81 Not only do some of the SLA representatives feel that they are not receiving sufficient information, but feeding information *into* Sure Start can also be difficult:

*'I've found it immensely frustrating to try and disseminate information to Sure Start as an entity.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.82 In some circumstances, individuals are able to overcome the lack of clearly identifiable structures to improve communication with a particular SLA partner:

*'the member of staff who's working for me is able to feel more part of the Sure Start team because she's been involved in the training provided for Sharrow Sure Start staff ... and that's helped bridge the gap between us'*

*'things have improved on a level with individuals - you focus on those individuals you know get back to you.'*

Members of staff

- 4.83 The fact that many of the SLA workers only work part time for Sharrow Sure Start is a complicating factor:

*'being only one day a week, that's even more difficult to know where you fit in and what you do.'*

SLA Partner

This can lead to tricky decisions about how best to use time:

*'You know, I'm there for team meetings. Although in some respects that's not a very cost effective use of my time, it has meant that I do feel as I am part of the team in some way'*

SLA Partner

- 4.84 The upshot of these difficulties is that SLA partners feel they do not always have sufficient information about Sure Start and are not kept consistently well-informed of what is happening within the Programme. For example, in relation to the authorized absence of the Programme Manager:

*'we weren't told anything. Nobody actually wrote to us saying this has happened, you know, and we felt well ... that things were being hushed'*

SLA Partner

- 4.85 Perhaps not surprisingly in view of issues around communication there is concern that overlap can occur between areas of work:

*'in terms of the parenting groups that we've tried to get up off the ground in the past, I feel like I've been trying to do one thing kind of and Sure Start have been trying to do a similar thing, the same thing. ... I think if we could have started from the beginning together it might have made our provision more effective.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.86 Overlap can arise when SLA providers are not aware of activities organised by the Sure Start team, and when activities are organised with initiatives within the community which are outside of familiar loops. There is a strong feeling that having the Programme Manager back in place will bring a coherent system of coordination into place which all SLAs can become familiar with and feed in to:

*'what's lacking is just an overview of everything going on and getting people together and co-coordinating us all.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.87 SLA representatives would value more communication and coordination with the programme :

*'it should be something that they are insisting on'*

*'I was expecting initially, very early on, to have meetings like this really where we all talked and we all got together. We have started going to the team meetings once a month. That's a very new thing, which I think is excellent. It's an excellent idea.'*

SLA Partners

- 4.88 To improve communications, the Sure Start team have produced an information pack in partnership with Family Support Services (Education) that service providers have access to. In addition, as mentioned, SLA representatives have recently been invited to attend the monthly get together meetings, where people working with Sharrow Sure Start are invited to bring sandwiches to the last Tuesday in the month lunch-time and meet Sharrow Sure Start workers. A feeling came across that these meetings need to be more structured and the *purpose* of participating clearly decided and communicated to all:

*'I'm confused about who's being invited to the monthly team meetings and about what the purpose of that is. I actually went to the one because I thought it was for people that had got Service Level Agreements, when actually there were a lot of outside agencies as well, which was useful, but I thought that should have been separate .. there were things that I wanted to talk about in that meeting that I felt we couldn't talk about because it wasn't relevant to half the people there.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.89 We are pleased to note at the time of writing that the Partnership Board now receive a Programme Managers report and have done for the past 6 months.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Systems of monitoring are immature and improvements are needed.

- 4.90 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.
- 4.91 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.
- 4.92 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.

- 4.93 The work of all Sure Start staff teams is guided by national, regional and local targets, which are turned into local action plans and service initiatives. However, in a year that has been fraught with management difficulties, the

Sharrow Sure Start staff team say they have '*just had to hold ourselves together*' and the team agree there has, consequently, been a period of limited focus upon targets.

- 4.94 A lack of clarity about the role of the Regional Sure Start Unit in helping to attend to targets has been reported by a range of stakeholders, who feel the Regional Unit could have played a more supportive role during the period when the programme's management structure was temporarily in some disarray. The only known point of contact with the Regional Unit occurred when a regional representative visited the programme to undertake Risk Assessment. This led team members to feel divorced from the bigger Sure Start agenda and unsure about the extent to which they need to engage:

*'someone comes in and the Managers have done their things with them and they're in and out and you feel 'are they for us those people or are they not?'*

Member of staff

- 4.95 It is clear that during the period of the Programme Manager's authorised absence the staff group, as a team and as individuals, feel they lacked the strategic guidance that they would like. Until the return of the Programme Manager this had a direct impact on the capacity of the programme to deliver services in accordance with targets and key objectives.
- 4.96 For the Sharrow staff team to realise the Sure Start vision, all members need to be clear about the overarching Programme aims and objectives and their responsibilities within this broad agenda. To this end, the Programme Manager immediately held two 3 hours sessions upon her return to work, which re-focused the staff team on the targets and objectives and clarified what part of the work being done by the staff team met which objective. This helped staff to take stock of accountability issues and assess the extent to which they are able to make autonomous decisions in their work. The sessions assisted staff seeking to confidently balance wider agendas with individual priorities, and those of the communities in which Sure Start operates. Accountability is now better defined within the programme structure and attention has been paid to clear delineation of decision-making responsibilities.
- 4.97 The Programme Manager seeks to establish that staff should work together and that whilst certain job roles take responsibility for certain objectives the Programme Manager seeks to allow individual staff the flexibility to be innovative whilst ensuring a cohesive team which co-operates at all times.

- 4.98 New arrangements currently being established to improve reporting to the Partnership Board on targets and achievements will help to achieve clarity about the sorts of decisions made - strategic, operational and service delivery decisions - at different levels of the Sure Start organisation. Since the return of the Programme Manager this has been happening and will be further improved following the approval of the Action Plan, clarifying the supervision process for all team members: Programme Manager supervises Parent Involvement Workers, Midwife, Acting Team Leader and Finance & Monitoring Officer; Acting Team Leader supervises all home visitors/outreach workers. Closely focused supervision requires staff to account for the time spent on certain tasks.
- 4.99 It has been recognized that Home-Visitors can be especially hard pressed to complete and submit all activity monitoring sheets to the Finance and Monitoring Officer. The programme has therefore purchased handheld devices that should allow them to keep on top of monitoring more effectively.
- 4.100 There are indications that staff experience problems with accessing data at the population level. Though staff feel that there is now an effective system for notifying births following years of hard work by Foxhill Parson Cross SureStart Staff and the Programme Manager for Firth Park and Shiregreen Sure Start. The Sharrow Sure Start Midwife has recently made progress towards getting all midwives working in the area to forward information to the programme and to get Sharrow Sure Start information to pregnant women. This is clearly a vital improvement as without adequate data, the staff team are aware that they will find it difficult to plan and implement early and appropriate interventions. All eight Sheffield Sure Start programmes have similar problems and therefore the City-wide Sure Start Co-coordinator is working on resolving the problem.
- 4.101 Whilst the Programme Manager feels national, regional and local targets are clear, many stakeholders assert that gathering baseline information is *'an absolute nightmare - and particularly bad for Sharrow Sure Start'* because the area the programme covers falls within three PCT's and parts of two wards. Further, some of data is not routinely collected, for example postnatal depression rates, but again this is a problem common to all Sheffield Sure Starts which is being tackled at a City Wide level. Difficulties are compounded for Sharrow because of the complexities of its boundaries.

Monitoring of SLA partners has been experienced as disappointing and the programme needs to improve relationships with service level agreement providers in respect on giving feedback on services received.

- 4.102 Some SLA representatives say they are confused about what their SLA includes:

*'I'm really not sure what my Service Level Agreement is.'*

SLA Partner

Arguably responsibility for disseminating this level of detail lies with the organisation the SLA partner works for, but there is clearly a role for Sharrow Sure Start to play in encouraging its SLA partners to seek clarity about their agreements.

- 4.103 Detailed information about SLAs is not necessarily shared with all members of the staff team and SLA providers query the extent to which those who work with them do - or need to - know and understand the specifics of the relationship between an SLA, Sharrow Sure Start's delivery plan and Sure Start targets.

- 4.104 Amongst SLA providers who contributed to the evaluation there was some general dissatisfaction about how the services that SLAs provide would be evaluated in terms of 'value for money'. Counting of contacts, although necessary, is known to be far from straightforward:

*'you could have fewer families, but put in an awful lot of work into making a big difference in a particular family, whereas, you know, you might have 10 families where they're visited and okay, it's helping, but you might have 2 families for whom there's a huge difference going on .. the knock-on effect of that is not easily evaluated'*

SLA Partner

- 4.105 Decisions about what constitutes 'the most appropriate' use of an SLA providers' time are considered at Review Meetings between the SLA provider and Programme Management. Monitoring figures are used to help assess use of the service and to reach agreement, for example, on the best balance between providing direct client services and developing the core team.
- 4.106 Although individuals working to SLAs recognize their obligation to complete and return forms recording activities, there is some doubt about whether these adequately represent their contributions:

*'we return forms, but I feel the monitoring side of it doesn't actually cover quite a lot of the outputs that I think are useful as well ... that doesn't mean that we aren't delivering - it means that we haven't been asked the right question.'*

SLA Partner

SLA partners in this situation are encouraged to provide a short written report providing complimentary qualitative data about their activities in addition to the data detailing their activities in quantitative terms as required by the Sure Start Unit. It has to be noted, however, that Sharrow Sure Start are judged on the basis of quantitative information by the Sure Start Unit.

- 4.107 SLA partners appreciate the flexibility they can achieve through working with Sharrow Sure Start but again this creates monitoring headaches. An SLA representative, talking about what was really important about working with the Sure Start programme, referred to:

*'the flexibility over how we operate with the Service Level Agreement ... we are allowed to sort of be flexible - if some of the Sure Start families need a Somali speaker to advise them, I can use my Somali worker and I can include that as an output. Similarly, if there is an elderly woman that needs help that isn't Sure Start's role, but needs a bilingual Urdu / Punjabi speaker, I can [allot our Sharrow Sure Start funded worker] to do that.'*

CAB representative.

- 4.108 The very real needs of potential clients who do not come within the Sure Start remit can make important demands on the time and commitment of some SLA workers that are not easy to calculate:

*'we have people that come to us that are not in Sure Start's area and that's not a problem. They come and they enjoy it, but they go onto our nurseries. So I don't have a problem with that and nor do Sure Start. And in fact one particular family lives out of the mapped area, but we have a worker that comes to the Toddler Group to work alongside [the Sure Start worker] and with this particular family. So we sort of see them at the toddler group because the Sharrow Sure Start worker is obviously not allowed to go and see them at their house because it's out of their area, but she can come and help the family in the Toddler Group. So it works that way.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.109 It is widely acknowledged there will always be difficult issues to deal with in Sure Start programmes that are required to work within defined, and relatively

arbitrary, geographical boundaries. On the whole, SLA representatives who have contributed to the evaluation place a high value on flexibility such as described in the above scenario. However, the way in which border issues have to be managed at times also sparked some criticism:

*'just to give you an example where it isn't flexible .. we had to recruit a number of volunteers from the Sure Start area. You get a border line road and two people were from the wrong side of it and they weren't counted, which I feel is very inflexible because those people are there to work in the area and they're literally on the line - the line was on the road they live on and that was, I think, too inflexible'*

SLA Partner

- 4.110 Of course it is well understood that this problem relates back to Sure Start Unit policy which specifies that programme's can count only work that happens within the Sure Start area for the purposes of monitoring returns. Nonetheless, SLA partners, parents and programme staff are in agreement about the difficulties presented by geographical boundaries and about the constraints Sure Start Unit policies impose upon flexible working.
- 4.111 Similarly, activities that bring community members together may be valued in terms of community development by SLA partners, but they may not continue to be supported by Sure Start if they do not enrol sufficient numbers from the precisely defined Sure Start area. There is clearly a tension here, again arising from Sure Start Unit policy that merits further consideration for making a greater success of links between SLA providers and Sure Start.
- 4.112 SLAs contract for the delivery of services and activities that are predicted to meet areas of identified need in a community - that is, the solutions to problems are identified in advance and form the basis of the contract with provider organisations. SLA workers have to deliver these solutions. However, the discussions held during the course of the evaluation suggest it will also be useful to explore how the experience of SLA workers in the Sharrow community can be effectively fed back into the process of modifying these solutions. Up to this point, SLA providers feel they have expended considerable effort in teaching about what their agency currently provides:

*'in terms of our service, it's kind of me contacting them and saying, 'I've got the space to take on some more families. Have you got anyone that'll fit our criteria?'*

SLA Partner

- 4.113 When clients 'fit' what is on offer, there is clearly felt to be a '*mutual benefit*' to Sure Start and to the SLA organisation: for example, CAB training is assisted by the work of outreach workers at Sharrow Sure Start who:

*'pick up any difficulties that the family have been having that the CAB could help with .*

SLA Partner

- 4.114 Links with Sure Start are seen to enhance local services. In respect of the library, Sure Start resources are felt to have pulled in additional visitors, at least in the short term:

*'the main benefit I've found of having a Service Level Agreement with Sure Start is that it's actually given me more resources to be able to do things - money, staff, everything. I've worked for libraries for an awful long time and, you know, all the time I've worked with them, they've been short on staff, short on money and I think having a Service Level Agreement with Sharrow Sure Start has given us the ability to get out into the community, organise special events to get people in .. getting people through the doors that wouldn't normally come through the doors. Since we started, since the original Service Level Agreement, the under 4s borrowing figures for the library have gone up. The under 4s registrations have gone up.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.115 Similarly, one of the SLA representatives reported that they have:

*' been able to link our Sure Start clients into other services that we provide .. we have an ICT Learning Centre and we've been able to link in parents into the ICT learning ..... One of the reasons we wanted to get involved in this process was that we would argue that we do bring added value through an SLA. It's not just the kind of task that you're giving. You can extend the support to include other aspects of what you provide as a service generally.'*

SLA Partner

In such instances it is important that SLA partners are aware of the importance of telling the programme about the linked activity as this can usefully be included in the programme's returns to the Sure Start Unit. SLA partners have not necessarily always realised this.

- 4.116 The Sharrow Sure Start Finance and Monitoring Officer has been receiving activity reports since August 2002.

- 4.117 Due to operational difficulties there was no review process for SLA partners between April 2003 and December 2003. The programme is now working to continually improve information gathering and sharing and to ensure that all stakeholders participate in reviews with a good set of appropriate information.
- 4.118 SLA partners who have contributed to the evaluation say they would be willing to be involved in improving auditing and monitoring of their activities and services:

*'it would be useful to find ways and means of not just having SLA review meetings but also meetings that are sharing updates about what we're doing so that it feels we're putting our progress into the progress of the programme. Mechanisms are developing which give us better recognition but there is so much going on that isn't getting any recognition.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.119 Concern has been expressed over the programme's collection of quantitative base-line data by those who see this kind of information as important for assessing impact. The collection of meaningful base-line data is of course, an immensely difficult task and the programme has benefited from advice given by Health Promotion Specialist in respect of strategies for improving this. When all is said and done, however, Sure Start should be broadly measuring success by its impact on individual lives rather than numbers reached and targets reported to Government office. It is important that - despite the significant pressures to the contrary - the programme does not lose sight of this and the comments below are significant in respect of this :

*'the current target driven mentality needs complimenting to allow a social accounting type of outcome driven approach to looking at what we do which acknowledges the work we are doing towards meeting targets but more importantly keeps an eye on not just whether we're meeting the targets but whether long term we are providing a service that local parents want and need'*

*'we need to start measuring some other things - yes we can count the things Sure Start want us to count but we can also start to take account of what things the people in our community are valuing - developing more community driven targets rather than those that come down from Sure Start offices. We are using their narrow definition of targets to pilot what it really is local'*

*parents want us to be delivering - this comes right back to the necessity of the Partnership Board being able to work on a strategic vision.'*

Partnership Board Members

### Developing a community presence

Relationships between the Sharrow Sure Start programme and local community groups and organisations provide evidence that the team actively and successfully seeks to maximise opportunities to engage with the local community.

- 4.120 There is very high praise for the work Sharrow Sure Start has undertaken to develop its community presence:

*'of all the agencies around Sharrow, Sure Start makes more effort than anybody else to engage the local community .. Sharrow, Sure Start manages to get parents to Board meetings and are only working with around 800 children. Bigger agencies like ours, working with some 10,000 people only manage to get workers along to our meetings'*

Community Organisation Representative

- 4.121 The staff team have made considerable progress linking with local groups and organisations including the local swimming pool, community forums, Neighbourhood Learning Forum, After School clubs, nurseries, playgroups and so on. Many of these links are facilitated by personal, informal relationships, though formal representation on advisory bodies is expanding.

- 4.122 Generally relationships between Sharrow Sure Start and local community groups interviewed are described as positive:

*'we are very pleased with Sharrow Sure Start and hope they are around for a very long time'*

*'relationship between Sharrow Sure Start and our organisation is very special...the midwife is very committed and tuned into what we can deliver....'*

*'we are looking forward to the continued association we will be having with Sharrow Sure Start'*

Local Community Group Representatives

In addition, the staff working within the Sharrow Sure Start team were also praised and described as *'very approachable'*.

- 4.123 All of the groups involved in the evaluation are groups known to Sharrow Sure Start and have some type of existing relationship with the programme. These

groups have become involved with the programme in a number of ways. When asked who made the *initial* contact, a quarter of the groups surveyed highlighted that Sure Start had contacted them about possible involvement/cooperation. A minority describe themselves as having made the initial contact.

- 4.124 The majority of the groups surveyed described their current contact with Sure Start as being regular. This contact varied in nature and included contact by phone, leaflets and letters by post, meetings at outreach events, at meetings for community groups, at Partnership board meetings and visits by Sure Start staff:

*'We have regular contact by phone'*

*'We have developed an outreach there every Thursday'*

*'Many of our women have childcare every week from Sure Start'*

*'Sure Start visit us with promotional material and there's a community member who sits on their Partnership Board. We also attend meetings.'*

Local Community Group representatives

- 4.125 All of the groups interviewed were aware of the Sure Start offices and bases, one quarter had visited the new base on London Road. Of the twelve groups surveyed 10 of the groups were able to name a Sure Start member of staff with whom they are in regular contact.

- 4.126 When asked if they would like to have more contact with the programme over half of the groups interviewed stated that they were happy with the present level of contact:

*'we have about the right amount of contact'*

*'we have the appropriate amount of contact'*

Local Community Group representatives

- 4.127 A small number of the groups surveyed felt that the contact they had with the programme was not regular and that there was room for improvement. Two of the groups interviewed would like to increase the level of contact with Sure Start, with one group stating:

*'we would like to find out about ways we could refer members of our community to the services that Sure Start offers and has access to'*

Another highlighted that they would like contact:

*'..not specifically around the one-off big event but around other activities - we have already started to link with Sure Start in terms of some joint project work with 0-5 year olds'*

Local Community Group representatives

4.128 Community group representatives place emphasis on the importance of two-way knowledge and understanding in their relations with Sure Start. Programmes need to be aware of local and city-wide groups working with families with young children, and these groups need also to understand what Sure Start delivers. Effective communication systems are seen as vital in order to improve links between community groups and Sure Start.

4.129 Almost all of the groups contacted were familiar with the basic Sure Start aims and objectives. Encouragingly, the vast majority of groups surveyed referred to the fact that the initiative sought *to support families with young children*. Many of the groups highlighted that Sure Start works *in the community* and referred to its wider aims, for example, issues such as *improving education, health-related outcomes for children* and the *training and employment of parents*:

*'it is helping the community, getting parents in the community out and about, funding nursery places and getting parents back into work'*

*'working with parents and children 0-5..they deal with anything that impacts on the lives of 0-5 year olds....education etc.*

*'to support families under 4...deal with health issues...breastfeeding....'*

*'it's government funded, locally based and is a programme aimed at 0-5 year olds'*

Local Community Group Representatives

4.130 There is some confusion about the age of children the programme supports. It is of note that a number of groups thought that the Sure Start initiative dealt with children of 5 years of age and under. This could be due to the Children's Centre Initiative, which has been talked about since Autumn 2003 in some family support and pre-school circles.

4.131 Community group representatives feel clarity about roles and responsibilities for information-sharing is essential if their organisations are to work well with

Sure Start programmes. A lack of knowledge about what respective agencies offer can create difficulties and impact negatively on relationships. Mutual understanding of what Sure Start and community groups provide, helps agencies to achieve the aim of working together effectively.

- 4.132 Community group representatives identify the building of trust between individuals and organisations as crucial to the development of good inter-agency links. It was pointed out that if trust breaks down between agencies, it is invariably difficult to rebuild.
- 4.133 Community group representatives operating 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 Sharrow. The Sharrow Sure Start programme has been proactive in arranging social get-togethers for the team and members of other groups they are linked with and barriers between agencies are subsequently being reduced. For example, it has been seen in Sharrow that improving the quality of the relationship between a Sure Start programme and a community group through relatively informal strategies meant workers became able to make referrals more appropriate to the respective services. Informal contact between community groups and Sure Start programmes can offer opportunities for developing mutually important understanding of roles and responsibilities. Sharrow Sure Start's open lunch, the last Tuesday in the month just before the team meeting, is identified as good practice.
- 4.134 Building up opportunities for formal interaction promotes effective working. Attendance by community group representatives at Sure Start meetings and participation in Sure Start team training and development activities is found to assist a growing relationship between the two agencies. It is recognised that the provision of reports to Sure Start Partnership Boards enables community organisations to have an important input.
- 4.135 A number of the groups interviewed about relations with Sharrow Sure Start identified that there were benefits to be gained from linking up. One group stated that the main benefit of contact was the opportunity to work *in partnership* and give each other advice, whilst another mentioned the value of reciprocal support. It was also pointed out that working together would raise awareness about the issues Sharrow Sure Start sets out to tackle.
- 4.136 A number of groups recognise that Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start. A number of groups, however, were unsure or doubted whether Sharrow Sure Start told relevant families about their services.

- 4.137 A high proportion of the groups interviewed stated that Sharrow Sure Start is having some success supporting families and developing community links. Outreach to families and to the community groups themselves was held in high regard and one group explained that what worked well was:

*'outreach to parents and supporting activities... especially ethnic minorities particularly the Somali community'*

Local Community Group Representative

- 4.138 Sustaining close links between Sure Start and community organisations can be a demanding business. For example, community group representatives often report finding it difficult to regularly attend Sure Start meetings - and this can be the case even where links are cemented through an SLA. It can particularly be a problem for sessional workers to attend Sure Start meetings or to fit in with a programme's meeting timetable. All this can make it hard to 'get communication going'. Attendance at meetings can also be compromised if community group representatives feel only a small part of a programme meeting is of relevance to their organisation. Representatives of some community groups feel obliged to prioritise the provision of parent support over and above attendance at meetings in order to protect their own resources. This is particularly true of smaller voluntary sector groups where capacity is a real issue. There is a tension here around the need for strategic planning and hands on work. Whilst Sharrow Sure Start cannot make special arrangements for all of the varying interests and commitments of community groups, there may be a way of instigating changes to the way meetings are organised that take into account some of these issues.
- 4.139 Involving community groups in Sure Start evaluations is seen as beneficial in terms of facilitating links with local programmes and with other groups operating in Sure Start areas - it signals a willingness to take the views of community stakeholders seriously.
- 4.140 One-off events can help cement relationships e.g., a recent job training fair held by the Sharrow programme in partnership with Sheffield College was

attended by a wide range of agencies and individuals, targeting those providing training for childcare and education qualifications.

- 4.141 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 Sharrow to reinforce personal relationships.
- 4.142 Clear and swift referral pathways are vital for effective inter-agency working. These are dependent on sound understanding of the differences between organisations. Representatives point out that there can be complex and sensitive nuances in the different ways that groups operate and what they offer e.g., 'practical' vs. 'emotional' support. Referrals should be made both ways - i.e., to and from - Sharrow Sure Start and local (and city-wide) groups. Community groups feel referrals to any Sure Start programme must be acted on immediately. They wish to be notified if referrals they make cannot be dealt with promptly. Some attention should be given to how programmes provide feedback to groups concerning their involvement with individuals referred on.
- 4.143 It is to the programme's credit that the majority of the groups surveyed were aware of and receive publicity material produced by Sharrow Sure Start. Most of the groups were brought or sent leaflets and flyers on a regular basis. One group stated:

*'I've yet to get over and look at the base on London Road but we usually get leaflets brought to us by staff advertising groups, toddler events and things. They come to see us regularly'*

*'they do periodically drop information in - things on parenting courses and so on.'*  
Local Community Group Representative

- 4.144 A number of groups report that they work jointly with Sharrow Sure Start to produce publicity for events and activities. Indeed, several groups highlighted the strong communication skills of the programme and consider the programme's marketing of events and publicity as particularly effective:

*'they are good at keeping in contact and letting us know what is happening'*

*'they are good at marketing services.....they are visible'*

*"they are very good at marketing themselves'*

Local Community Group Representatives

Community group representatives find it helpful if publicity can be a mutually beneficial promotional process for them and Sharrow Sure Start. Reciprocal dissemination of information provides a valuable opportunity to enhance the work of the full range of agencies.

- 4.145 On the other hand, a few groups mentioned communication-sharing as an area that could be improved, so the experiences of local organisations appear to be somewhat mixed. More targeted promotion is felt to be required, not necessarily involving leaflets which the programme has realized do not always work successfully. For example a leaflet campaign was not particularly successful in promoting a 'Healthy Walks' initiative.
- 4.146 A number of suggestions for improving communication were made including the request for a list of all groups involved in the Sharrow Programme and a current list of services. One group highlighted that the new base on London Road would help aid communication and provide a focal point for the community . In fact, the new base on London Road was described by one group as:

*'right at the heart of the community which has to be a good start'.*

Local Community Group Representative

- 4.147 Some community groups operating on a city-wide basis but without specific connections to a named local programme do not receive publicity materials and consequently do not always have a clear, up to date picture of the services that Sure Start is offering across the city. A regular city wide Sure Start newsletter would be welcomed.

## Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Cultural and linguistic diversity presents the Programme with challenges additional to those of some of their counterparts across the City. It is recognized that a lack of routine support for translation and interpretation compromises the entitlements of some parents to participate in Sharrow Sure Start at all levels. Effort has been focused upon making information accessible.

4.148 The Sharrow area is ethnically diverse and at least 60 languages are known to be used in the community. Some are spoken dialects. This factor has a critical bearing on the programmes ability to meet each of the objectives it is tasked with. Language support and confidence are the building blocks of learning and development just as linguistic accessibility is the first base which any publicity or information about services must pass to be effective in any capacity. The need to engage people from different cultures, with different belief systems and who use different languages is a key concern.

4.149 Cultural and linguistic diversity makes the task of delivering the Sharrow Sure Start programme particularly complex. The delivery plan is not culture specific and recognises diversity in the community.

4.150 Sharrow Sure Start has approximately 1000 children under 4 in its area. There is considerable cultural and linguistic diversity amongst the target population. For example, 33% of children in the area were born to Punjabi mothers, 10% Bengali, 10% Somali origin and there are smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups. A number of asylum seekers and refugees are also resident in the Sharrow Sure Start area and there is a perception that this group may be increasing.

4.151 The Sharrow Sure Start programme covers a geographical area that is intersected by a number of major roads. Staff describe these roads as dividing the communities of the Sharrow Sure Start area and the divisions make communication across the Sure Start area difficult. There are poor transport links between different parts of the Sharrow Sure Start area. These features give rise to discrete geographical pockets that staff feel have influenced the way in which early phases of the Sharrow Sure Start programme has been delivered.

4.152 The Programme team also recognizes that members of some of the different ethnic groups within the Sharrow Sure Start area are unaccustomed to coming together with others to share events. This poses considerable challenges and

difficulties for team members and staff know that considerable sensitivity and creativity is needed to recognise and work with local groups. Diverse cultural attitudes to personal and family support require careful consideration:

*'A surprise actually has been working with some Asian families. They don't want people to know their business and prefer to keep everything about the pregnancy and child birth very private. Once I realised this I began to understand that maybe they wouldn't want to come and share a lot of things.'*

Member of staff

- 4.153 The staff group is well aware of the diversity within the population that they serve. There have been difficulties getting information about what Sure Start can offer to people whose first language is not English. The programme has bi-lingual workers to work with the largest groups of community languages. Sharrow Community Forum has counted over 60 languages as being spoken by the Sharrow population and so the programme has always used interpreters from SCAIS. Effort has been focused upon making information accessible.
- 4.154 The team includes bi-lingual workers who speak Urdu/Punjabi, Somali and Bangladeshi, there are more Urdu/Punjabi speaking workers as mothers from this community make up @ 33% of mothers in area. In addition, software packages are available which will enable information to be produced for people who read Urdu and Bengali (Punjabi a spoken dialect). At present, the bilingual parental involvement worker is translating main points about the support available from Sharrow Sure Start into Urdu.
- 4.155 The programme has a Somali worker, and links with the Somali community and a Bengali worker to work with the Bengali community. The Somali worker has reduced hours and is now off sick so short term arrangements have been made with the Somali speaking Homestart worker to help provide cover. The Bengali worker now runs a group for Bangladeshi women with a health visitor and the SSWPCT Bangladeshi advocacy worker.
- 4.156 There are very few Chinese babies and young children within the area, although there is a Chinese Community Centre. In 2001-2002 there was only one Chinese infant born in the in the Sharrow Sure Start area , and this child's mother is a member of the Sharrow Sure Start Partnership Board. Most Chinese families live outside the Sharrow Sure Start area and travel in to use the Chinese Community Centre.
- 4.157 The team have tried to build up trust in the Asian community by offering a women's group which attracts both mothers and grandmothers.

- 4.158 The programme is looking at the possibility of using women trained in supporting others through childbirth (Doolahs), with the added advantage that some would speak the same language as the mother they were supporting and therefore be able to interpret for them in childbirth.
- 4.159 All bi-lingual workers have same job descriptions as other co-workers and so are generic workers who can work with all families.
- 4.160 A Dietetic SLA was not delivered as intended because the requirement to adapt work to work with clients from BME communities could not be met. A SLA is now in place with a Community Food Worker supervised by the University of Sheffield.
- 4.161 Hard to reach groups are likely to include those families with the highest level of need. This represents a real challenge to the Sharrow Sure Start programme. To date, the principal focus has been upon delivering universal, non-stigmatising services. However, staff realise there is a need to identify and focus upon those sections of the population who do not currently access Sharrow Sure Start services. Common Sure Start problems are magnified for Sharrow Sure Start because of cultural differences around women leaving the home and acceptable places for them to go.
- 4.162 Cultural diversity has been highlighted as a key factor for delivery of Sharrow Sure Start services and parent users of the services are from a wide mix of social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The programme is achieving a high level of inclusive provision. In one session the three mothers who turned up were from entirely different cultural and social backgrounds. Nevertheless the session was overtly sociable and the focus on babies prompted conversation whether verbal or non-verbal, to evidence that there is a relaxed and inclusive dynamic at work in the Sure Start settings parents come to in Sharrow.
- 4.163 Parents stress the importance of the social side of being involved with Sure Start. They feel Sure Start in Sharrow could still be better known and is not always well understood by local people, suggesting publicity could be better and that stronger links need to be made to some cultural minority groups living in the area.

### Involving Parents

Parents were strongly represented at the Steering Group and Partnership Board initially but parent involvement with Sharrow Sure Start has declined in recent times. Staff think that some community members stopped participating when it became clear that Sharrow Sure Start could not meet their particular communities' agenda. Efforts to understand this situation and to raise participation need strengthening.

There is work to be done on widening participation of parents in the Programme at all levels and in respect of all governance structures.

- 4.164 Parent involvement with the programme's steering group in 2001, and attendance at initial meetings of the Sharrow Sure Start Partnership Board, was high with approximately 8 parents attending meetings regularly. This number fell to 3 during 2003, but participation at Board level is rising again with 5 parents now regularly attending board meetings. Clearly, in spite of disruption the programme has been through, it is now establishing an increasingly healthy level of parental involvement.
- 4.165 Parent involvement is a key Sure Start commitment and considerable effort has been put into making the community aware of the presence of Sure Start within the Sparrow area. Staff report that that the launch event was a big success with an estimated 2000 people attending. A range of other events, including massage, relaxation techniques, exercise, aerobics, swimming, visits to parks and picnics have been organised. Women-only and mother and baby swimming sessions have been organised to allow mothers from the Asian community to take advantage of these opportunities. The Programme also has a minibus, which has been used to ferry parents to events, which is currently felt to be under-used.
- 4.166 There is a feeling within the staff group that Sharrow Sure Start is establishing a positive reputation within the community. One woman reportedly turned down the opportunity to move out of Sharrow to a bigger house because:
- 'she doesn't want to leave the Sure Start area because of the support she's already got.' She said 'where else can I go where I'll get this help?' So, it is coming out that Sharrow Sure Start is a good thing'*

Member of staff

- 4.167 Although as already said, large Sure Start events such as the Launch or the Pampering Day attract a lot of people, all of whom have had, or are having visits from a Sharrow Sure Start worker, staff have found on-going long term parent involvement difficult to sustain. The staff team are aware that early attempts to involve parents had not been as successful as hoped:

*'We have had a lot of things that we've set up and they've been a total flop.'*

*'Parents are very enthusiastic about Play and Stay sessions and English courses, but often when it come to it we've been disappointed because we're thinking we've got 12 people to do a course and then they don't turn up or maybe there's 1 or 2.'*

Members of staff

- 4.168 SLA partners also experience difficulties in some areas in drawing Sharrow residents into their services:

*'sometimes there are only two families that turn up and you feel like you want to tear your hair out.'*

*'although we'd recruited and talked to about 6 or 8 people, on the actual day that it started, only one came.'*

SLA Partners

- 4.169 The Sharrow Sure Start Monthly Newsletter is proving successful as a means of widening participation. As a means of 'getting dates out far in advance' the newsletter is having a noticeable impact on getting people involved in activities and groups.

- 4.170 One SLA provider's comments show they appreciate that what is on offer may not be what the community want and that constant reappraisal is essential:

*'I think the low take-up it's just .. the usual story ... you know you want to do these things and the reservation is it's not quite what they want or they're not ready to do it. You just have to keep revising your ideas and finding other ways of doing things'*

SLA Partner

- 4.171 English language classes are now well attended and two groups of women meet simultaneously at the Everyone Centre for these.
- 4.172 Staff are keen to explore the use of inducements to encourage participation, however as mentioned previously, they have been dissuaded from doing this by the SSWPCT:

*'other Sure Starts have used vouchers ... you know, £5 Early Learning Centre vouchers but the PCT doesn't actually want us to do that. They're very against that. They've just said that we can't do it.'*

Member of staff

- 4.173 In all areas of family support provision, the length of time that SLA workers can provide a service to clients is currently negotiated on an individual basis:

*'I listen to what they need in terms of if they need more long term support, I'm able to give that; or if they feel they don't need my support any longer, then I respond to that as well. So I think the views of the parents lead the service that I'm providing.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.174 The Family Support Unit provides direct client services for those with complex problems, and was set up to provide more in-depth help than that provided by the home visiting/ outreach team for the estimated 10% of Sharrow Sure Start families who were experiencing problems which in the future could lead to social services intervention:

*'we visit families who have parenting needs such as substance abuse, if there's any stress in the household, domestic violence, behaviour - if children have got behavioural problems. That sort of thing. [Our provider] doesn't actually visit everybody, she just visits families that need that sort of support. She's also been sort of organising groups and things and she's actually set up some parenting groups and she's also recently set up a toy library.'*

SLA Partner

- 4.175 It is clear that the staff team is committed to promoting the involvement of parents one way or another. To date, a considerable amount of effort has gone into first contact work, 'selling' the presence of Sure Start. This objective

seems to have been achieved, certainly with large sections of the population, and it is worth considering whether this should continue to be a major focus of work.

4.176 The programme has had considerable success in managing to deliver services in settings that parents feel comfortable with. The Simunye Café where the Breast Feeding Clinic is held is bright and warm, the air is filled with world music and the scent of fresh coffee, and above all parents say it feels completely safe. Parents find the café instantly appealing. Similarly a room at the rear of the Sharrow Sure Start office on London Road has a brand-new laminate floor, is very warm, light, beautifully decorated and relaxing. It is vital that Sure Start services are delivered in settings parents feel comfortable with and the Sharrow programme is making excellent headway with this.

4.177 The new Sharrow Sure Start shop has been a huge success as evidenced by a significant increase in new registrations. The shop is felt:

*'to have reached the heart of the community - lots of people have dropped in and said what a good space .. using it in different ways - to let their children play, to meet, to ask questions or register.'*

Member of staff

However staff point out that as many members of BME communities will not come out of their homes 'a shop on every street corner wouldn't help us reach these families' and there is recognition that new inclusive solutions for involving parents the programme is finding 'hard to reach' have still to be found.

4.178 The team is prepared to continually reflect on their strategy for widening participation of parents:

*'we've developed an ability to play around with something that's not working.'*

Member of staff

4.179 The team is in the early stage of re-thinking aspects of their parent contact strategy, recognising that there is a need for confidence building to enable parents to participate in Sure Start activities:

*'actually we might be better doing a lot more in the home with families rather than expecting people necessarily to come out. Better to build their confidence at home and then see how we can enable them to go onto the next thing.'*

Member of staff

4.180 A problem the programme continually grapples with is how to encourage parents to mix with each other in social situations outside family home, to build their confidence and allow the programme to spread parenting knowledge to a wider audience than one-to-one in the parent's home.

This might involve more 'joined-up working' between different elements of the staff group so that some members:

*'get them there and hold their hand so that workers support those providing the training in a more linked up way'.*

Member of staff

4.181 The programme is taking action to increase the participation of men in its work. Events were organised around Men's Health Week and a questionnaire has been devised to identify men's interests in Sure Start agendas. Contacts have been made with Men's Project Workers from another Sheffield Sure Start programme.

#### INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

4.182 Effective representation and participation at Partnership Board level, of all interested parties, and particularly of parents of young children within the host community, is fundamental to the principles on which Sure Start is based. In Sharrow, the Partnership Board was initially set up with 24 members: 8 professionals, 8 community representatives, 8 parents. The expectation has been that this will gradually evolve over time so that, as parents come to constitute a larger percentage of the membership, representation from statutory agencies will decline. Eventually, half of the membership is expected to be made up of parents and half from other stakeholders.

4.183 The Chair of the Partnership Board is a parent, and there are three other regular attendees of the Board who are there as parents or grandparents. The staff team are aware that the Partnership Board can seem off-putting and that meetings *'can be very difficult with lots of professional people talking a lot of jargon'.* A separate parents' group, which would advise the Partnership Board, was suggested as a way around this difficulty.

4.184 The Board agreed that a Parents Forum be established to feed into the Board, this now meets two weeks before the six weekly Board Meeting to allow the parent Board members and those parents attending the Parents Forum to meet together to exchange views. The Parent Forums are held alongside Stay and Play sessions to maximize participation. These arrangements take account of the fact that not all parents want to be on the Partnership Board. Once the Parents

Forum is working well there will be better representation of parent's views into the board via designated parents. Minutes of the Parent's Forum meetings will also be distributed to the Partnership Board to help ensure that parent's issues get heard.

- 4.185 Innovative strategies are being used to pick up parents views. For example, a Parents Lunch was held which 25 families attended from a wide diversity of community backgrounds and their views were fed back to the Parents Forum - and from there into the Partnership Board:

*'the growing number of people coming together lately is impressive - it came out at the last Parents Forum meeting that there is a real feeling of a network of parents being there for each other .. we are starting to make some very positive links'*

Member of staff

- 4.186 The staff team are concerned that parent representation on the Partnership Board to date has not been ideal. A concern was expressed that parent representatives from different ethnic groups may feel split between their own community agendas and a commitment to Sure Start priorities. The withdrawal of Somali representatives coincided with the Programme Managers decision that she could not support a suggestion that Sharrow Sure Start build a mezzanine floor at ISRAAC (the Somali Community Centre) because she could not justify spending approximately one-third of its capital on an initiative which would benefit only 10% of local families. Sharrow Sure Start is firmly committed to finding ways of rebuilding links with the Somali community.
- 4.187 A perception parents hold is that Board members appear to have been appointed on a rather ad hoc basis because over time people have gradually replaced other people from the same organisation who were part of the original Partnership Board and Steering Group. While this strategy has its strengths as a level of continuity is achieved, there are inherent dangers of potentially narrowing participation. It is essential that the process for defining effective representation, and for recruiting to the Board, is explicit and transparent if Sharrow Sure Start's clients are to feel that the Board can reflect their interests appropriately. Terms of Reference recently put in place help to make the nature of Board Membership quite clear.
- 4.188 A small core group of parents have remained committed to the Sharrow Sure Start Partnership Board over the last years, and praise is given to the Parental Involvement worker for supporting them through a difficult period. However, at least one parent has said that given a small numbers of parent

representatives, there is a real danger that their participation becomes tokenistic:

*'We've been through so many kind of peaks and troughs of parent involvement that at one point I felt like this is great 'power to the people' kind of thing, and then it really petered off and then I felt like I was just going to meetings and I wasn't fulfilling any role other than ticking their boxes to say there was parental involvement'.*

Local Parent

- 4.189 New ideas are beginning to surface about how to make Partnership Board membership less of a pressure for parent members. Many stakeholders assert that problems over parent participation arise because the Sure Start Unit has unrealistic expectations of how many parents can be involved in the board.
- 4.190 There is general agreement that the involvement of parents has diminished over time. The energy and enthusiasm that was harnessed in the development of the delivery plan for the Sharrow Sure Start Programme proved difficult to sustain when the Programme moved into the service delivery phase. It appears that long-term work is needed to re-establish interest amongst parents in the area and to persuade them to become - and stay - involved:

*'In the beginning, [the] consultation we had a lot of people involved, but we seemed to lose that'.*

*'I'm not sure how we lost some of the parents who were very involved. Some of them have moved on because they've got work or they've got other issues, but there are some parents who were very involved and just disappeared altogether and I'm not sure how. I don't think we as a Board or an organisation really know how to address it'.*

Partnership Board Members

- 4.191 Some alternatives to direct participation in the Partnership Board have been suggested in the past, but it is not always clear what has happened with these suggestions. For example, a 'Check it out Group' was formed early in the Sure Start Programme to provide a less intimidating forum than the Partnership Board in which parents could informally *'thrash it out without anyone else there'*. Their views were then to be conveyed to the Partnership Board by parental representatives:

*'that's part of where we got lost ... when we first set up the Board the parents Check It Out group ran and met in someone's house and they had a*

*coffee and it worked really well and then that disappeared for all sorts of reasons'*

Partnership Board Member

4.192 It has not been possible to clarify what happened to these groups. There is a general feeling that it is probable that they disengaged and eventually dwindled with the delay in appointing a Programme Manager and the lack of visible achievements in late 2001. However the Parents Forum is now established. The Parents Forum has met at least three times during the evaluation period and discussions have been minuted. It has been attended by parents, including parent members of the Partnership Board who then feed issues back to the Board.

4.193 There is awareness that a concerted effort is being made to promote parental involvement and 'Parents' Issues' have been an agreed agenda item for the Board for some time. It is recognized that creating the conditions for wider participation takes time:

*'my understanding is the Parental Involvement Workers have got more parents to introduce to the Board who then will be more specifically supported than those who are presently there, but that's an going process'.*

Partnership Board Member

4.194 Respondents indicate that any strategy for involving parents on the Partnership Board must be matched by action. Similarly, action - developing interest amongst parents, often through one off events, - if not tied to a coherent strategy for promoting their active involvement in the Sure Start Programme only has a limited affect and may ultimately undermine parental and community enthusiasm and support for Sharrow Sure Start Parents Forum.

4.195 A system of mentoring parents, pre-meeting, was suggested in April 2002 but only two Partnership Board Members volunteered to be mentors, one of whom was then redeployed. This is giving rise to considerable frustration amongst parents who feel promised support has not materialised:

*'We were going to get support for parents - existing Board Members were going to take on the role of supporting new members [but] a few months later nothing had been followed up about it and it all dropped off'.*

Parent Board Member

- 4.196 It will be helpful to encourage parents to say if they wish to have a mentor to ensure that levels of support can be planned.

### **BEST PRACTICE ON INVOLVING PARENTS AT PARTNERSHIP BOARDS**

- 4.197 The Sharrow Sure Start programme has made considerable efforts to involve parents in Partnership Boards. This is a very positive finding because parent involvement is at the heart of the development of genuine partnership in the local Sure Start programme and community. Nevertheless, involving parents in Partnership Boards is not an easy matter and the programme would like to have more parents involved. Although the actual number of parents involved to a significant degree in programme governance is limited, attendance at Parent Forum meetings is recently increasing.
- 4.198 Parents feel that Sharrow Partnership Board meetings are '*friendly but have been bogged down with constitutional issues in the past*'. There is something of an insoluble dichotomy here, as many of the constitutional discussions have been needed in order to put the right structures in place to maximize involvement of parents. Now that Terms of Reference have been agreed it is possible that constitutional considerations will occupy less time.
- 4.199 More needs to be done to accommodate the translation and interpretation requirements of many local parents in order for them to feel comfortable about participation in meetings:
- 'Board meetings are going to have to change, because a lot of women who don't speak English need to get involved. And when you have an interpreter in the meeting that's going to change how it works. If you're going to have time for more parents' views it's going to have to work differently.'*
- Parent Board Member
- 4.200 Parents are conscious that participation in the Sharrow Sure Start Partnership Boards falls to the 'same few' and that many other parents are missing out on the opportunity to be involved in governance through Partnership Board membership. They say ways need to be found of facilitating participation by people who do not have English as their first language as a matter of urgency.
- 4.201 They note that parents from the local Somali, Asian and Arabic communities are currently under-represented on the Board and so excluded from governance of the programme.

4.202 Sharrow parents say their participation in Partnership Boards is maximised when efforts are made to make sure all information about the board and going to the board to presented in accessible ways -short papers are preferred, sent well in advance, clearly written in plain English, marked as for (a) discussion, (b) information or (c) needing a decision. Parent board members feel most comfortable where they know they can ring a named member of the board or programme staff for advice or clarification to find out what things mean if they don't understand the documents. Parents appreciate being supported to 'catch up' if they miss meetings and not made to feel uncomfortable about non-attendance

4.203 Sharrow parents say they like to feel able to ask questions and recognise that they might need to ask more. Parents who participated in a Sharrow Sure Start training event involving an external facilitator found this very useful in respect of these issues:

*[the facilitator] helped to get us a stronger voice which was really good, we really enjoyed that, it really empowered us .. we felt very fired up and then we went to the Board and brought all of our stuff there and everybody was really fired up in general*

4.204 It is important to ensure that meetings are not too long and boring and the Programme Manager recognizes that one way to make the meetings less boring, is to bring topics parents find interesting such as summer holiday activities, and matters of real concern to parents to the Board so that parents can discuss and make decisions.

4.205 Creating an inclusive Board is not merely a matter of welcoming words, and Sharrow parents value the provision of a crèche for Partnership Board meetings. The provision of a crèche is vital as a tool for enabling participation.

4.206 The need for parents who are newcomers to Partnership Boards to have induction training is stressed. Existing members also feel 'refresher' sessions would be useful from time to time.

4.207 Two suggestions from parent members of Sure Start Partnership Boards across the city provide practical pointers:

*'have parents in to photocopy or sort papers so that they start to get involved and get a feel for what we do'*

*'the school PTA has 'once-only' membership and I think this would help people to get involved in the board without feeling they're suddenly going to be roped in for ever'*

Parents

4.208 Sharrow parents report that being a parent member of a Partnership Board does have positive outcomes for them. The following comments are typical:

*'I find it useful to me because it gets me doing something other than looking after my children which is really important to me. It's actually built up my confidence, because after I had my children I lost a lot of my confidence. And I've met lots of people and it's been useful for me to really know what's going on in my community.'*

Parent Board Member

### Mainstreaming - the new challenge?

The Programme Manager has demonstrated willingness to engage in city wide agendas and issues which connect Sure Start services to the reconfiguration of children's services. In so doing she blends a defence of the Sharrow programme with a recognition of its problems and the imperative for change.

4.209 The Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, places the challenge of mainstreaming best practice of initiatives such as Sure Start at the forefront of strategic planning for all children's services. The mainstreaming agenda for Sure Start in Sheffield is now focused city wide on The Children's Centre Initiative. The Sharrow Sure Start Programme Manager whilst on authorised absence wrote a mainstreaming paper which went to the Children and Young People's partnership board (Local Strategic Partnership) on behalf of the Sheffield Sure Starts. **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).

4.210 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)

4.211 **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.

- 4.212 Sharrow Sure Start is not alone here and, as Davies notes, given that Sure Start funding will only just begin to taper for the Trailblazers in 2004, there ~~is~~ has to date been no time imperative to persuade statutory services to accommodate successful Sure Start initiatives. Nevertheless, in meeting the Sure Start objectives effective working practice with other agencies is essential, and the programme will need to direct significant attention to this in the coming year. Below, based on the data we have collected from a range of stakeholders, we set out how this may be achieved - whilst at the same time noting what is working well already to take the programme in this direction.
- 4.213 We note that all agencies are signed up to the Delivery Plan. However the programme encounters difficulties with getting agreement to mainstream services. Nevertheless, all stakeholders consulted as part of this evaluation say they are keen to extend and develop two-way relationships between Sharrow Sure Start and other local agencies.
- 4.214 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start Partnership's remit, but which their own services and efforts are often very connected to.
- 4.215 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 Sharrow. Mainstreaming has only been mentioned in passing by most stakeholders, although it is clearly at the front of the Programme Manager's mind. The problem of how relationships with other agencies can be fostered to ensure mainstreaming of key services and initiatives is key and the programme is already addressing the difficult questions of who - specifically can help forge mainstreaming links and how to advance this agenda.
- 4.216 The rapidly changing environment in which the Partnership Board operates, and especially the introduction of the Children's Centre initiative, bring the mainstreaming agenda clearly into view for Sharrow Sure Start:

*the role of the Early Years Education Childcare Service on the Partnership Board is very much to do with looking at the Children's Centre initiative which is obviously working its way through at the moment and to look at the impact on Sharrow Sure Start and to be able to encourage an open debate around [that] on the Partnership Board, but obviously there is going to be a major impact [for] Sharrow Sure Start.*

Partnership Board Member

- 4.217 There is a concern that representation on the Partnership Board, and indeed much of the business that it undertakes, is increasingly being directed by these external influences and the Partnership Board is felt by some members to be struggling to focus upon its 'main priority' to 'run Sharrow Sure Start'. These developments are therefore bringing additional demands on Board members' resources and require skilful and considered balancing of potentially competing demands.
- 4.218 How to maximize impact thorough developing a coherent city-wide approach to Sure Start is of great interest to all groups who contributed to this evaluation. Yet most sensed a lack of a clarity about any city wide strategic direction for Sure Start. Barriers produced by different funding systems and administrative hoops to jump through - which are especially burdensome for organisations working with more than one Sure Start programme and encountering different systems are all cited as barriers to effective joined up working which seem to stem from a lack of city-wide coherence.
- 4.219 Links between Primary Care Trusts and Sure Start are said to bode well for coherent strategic development - the current development of strategy for Maternity Services across the city has been singled out as indicative of positive change.

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

- 4.220 Programme stakeholders across the board are already asking themselves difficult questions about their role in determining strategic direction - and this is very positive. The Partnership Board is taking a lead here by considering the scope it has to facilitate links with existing groups. Mechanisms for ensuring that Partnership Board representatives are people who are sufficiently 'hooked into' services in the area so that expertise can be brought in *through* the community are being enhanced and will be strengthened through forthcoming elections.

- 4.221 terms of how strategic direction is decided upon, representatives of the Partnership Board hope to influence Sharrow Sure Start policy and practice through ongoing discussions. Members say they are getting better at making their views known. It will be important to consider this further and to look at the extent to which development plans and outcomes are fully shared with the Partnership Board.
- 4.222 There is a genuine concern on the part of Partnership Board representatives to enable people to feel involved in development and planning.
- 4.223 The Programme Manager has committed to a process of sharing the emergent lessons from this evaluation of the programme with five other Sheffield Sure Start programmes. Engaging with a comparative model, which necessitates a very open look at what works well but also at what works less well in an individual programmes requires a genuine commitment to the mainstreaming agenda. It also requires some nerve on behalf of the participating Programme Managers who willingly forgoe the privacy of a lone evaluation in order to make the strongest possible contribution to rolling out best practice across the city and hopefully across Sure Start nationally.
- 4.224 As a direct result of the Programme Managers willingness to locate the evaluation of Sharrow as part of a city-wide evaluation she has, by working together with other participating Programme Managers, secured tangible progression for the programme on significant mainstreaming initiatives. These include:
- Action to collectively consider ways of bringing parents into networks with other Sure Start programmes
  - Action to develop joint commissioning, monitoring and evaluation of SLA contracts
  - Action to identify specific possibilities for joint working with regard to four agencies: Speech and Language Therapy, Pre-School Alliance, Cot-Age and Home Start.
  - Action to develop a Training Resource to look at 'Maximizing Inclusion in Sure Start' (see Annex)
  - Action to ensure collective representation of Programme Manager's views to the Lead Strategic Officer(s) for Sure Start in the Local Authority

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

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

- 4.225 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 local agencies need to be clear about how Sharrow Sure Start fits in terms of their own remit if targets around mainstreaming are to be met. Sure Start needs to contribute its expertise in particular areas and lobby for the development of those groups which will help them contribute to mainstreaming agendas for young children's services.
- 4.226 Clarity over the Partnership Board's remit and the role of the Accountable Body is essential to future planning of Sharrow Sure Start. 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.
- 4.227 The Programme Manager and her team are well aware that the imperative of mainstreaming is already firmly with us and are at the forefront of city-wide developments on this. Whilst community groups and other agencies are realistic about the problem of instability in changing contexts, and are in particular familiar with short term funding of services, the extent to which Sharrow Sure Start can be clear with its partners about how its role will develop will determine the level of confidence of those engaging with it.
- 4.228 By way of conclusion here it is important to note that tensions around continuity and stability create difficulties for working practice. When agencies are, for example uncertain about their future, effectiveness can be rapidly impeded. As Children's Centre developments progress in Sheffield, the extent to which Sharrow 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.

4.229 Sharrow Sure Start has not been overwhelmed by the series of structural and operational complications that have beset its early development. Instead 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 have not suggested an order of priority in respect of suggested actions. Instead 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, decide which suggestions it is important to move into action soonest, 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 Sharrow.

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 Sharrow programme Staff Group to continue the collective process of critical self-reflection in which they have become engaged through participation in this evaluation process.

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

### The Staff Group could

- Develop a strategy to maximise liaison between members of staff and the Accountable Body. There is currently an enormous amount of goodwill on both sides but we feel there is a need to clarify the lines of communication with the SSWPCT through named contacts.
- In the spirit of maximising a climate of openness and trust we propose reflection on how effective communication between the staff group and the Partnership Board can be organised. We recommend setting up a system of rotating representation on the Partnership Board to ensure the participation of *two* representatives of the Staff Group at each Partnership Board Meeting. It is acknowledged that there may be issues around having staff members regularly attending Partnership Board meetings in terms of confidentiality - particularly relating to personnel issues - but we do not view these as insurmountable.

- Early on in Sharrow Sure Start's active delivery, staff were not required to account for their activities in detail to the Board but this is now a requirement. It would be timely to develop a strategy for reporting to the Board in which staff can take pride that will raise the profile of individual and collective staff efforts and increase confidence in the report process.
- Review strategies for systematically taking account of staff training needs. Training should enable individual and team development and respond to the wish expressed by staff for clear progression pathways.
- Work towards clarity on how partners can most efficiently be included in meetings. Consider what purposes are to be served by the monthly lunch time session and whether this popular mechanism for bringing people together could be managed more purposefully.
- Set up further systems to compliment the Resources Folder which will improve and formalize information sharing and effectively serve the team's needs for managing information as it develops, and particularly, when it moves to new premises.
- Work towards clarity on how events and activities can become the building blocks for sustainable target-oriented service delivery in order to identify ways in which staff can take part in assessing the sustainability and the potential for mainstreaming of services.
- Review strategic plans for engaging with families with under 4's who have marginal or no contact with Sharrow Sure Start with the aim of addressing the specific blocks to participation.
- Encourage strategic alliances with voluntary agencies to promote working together on changing priorities for the programme.
- We encourage all programme staff to work together to protect the growing climate of openness and trust which has been observed during the course of the evaluation. To this end we suggest the staff team participate in an ongoing process of training to support team building in the context of ongoing rapid change.

### Action and Implementation Plans for the Partnership Board

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

- Undertake to clarify the Partnership Board's shared vision for the programme. We suggest this process is initiated through a dedicated series of away days and specifically involves representatives from the Accountable Body with the aim of removing uncertainty about its role and commitment. There is a shared feeling that the Partnership Board does need time for development. In the context of recent and substantial uncertainties which the programme has faced, the Partnership Board could usefully produce and disseminate a new Mission Statement. Strengthening of the Partnership Board is seen as both timely and imperative.
- Clarify all roles, responsibilities, purposes and functions with all members of the Partnership Board.
- Review decision making processes to maximize efficiency.
- Develop, disseminate and implement a clear Strategic Plan detailing activities that the Partnership Board wishes the programme to prioritise through the next planning cycle. Specifically we would expect these to include
  - a review of the key needs for service planning and delivery for reaching and consulting with currently underrepresented children and their families,
  - identification of appropriate mechanisms for consulting with parents and children.
- Identify a named person to monitor the effectiveness of the new Terms of Reference and Accountability Agreement. New practices for reporting financial information to the Board should also be kept under review.
- Specifically return to the issue of installation of play equipment in the park because this has been an expressed priority of a parent member of the Board

for several years. New guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on developing accessible play space will be a useful point of reference and is available free from [odpm@twoten.press.net](mailto:odpm@twoten.press.net). Assign a named member of the Board to pursue this.

- Revive plans for a system of mentoring parents which appear to have fallen by the wayside despite parent interest.
- Insist on resolution of inconsistencies regarding pay scales and working terms and conditions with the SSWPCT as a matter of urgency.
- The Board should find ways of ensuring attendance of a member from Social Services.
- Monitor and make public activities which are undertaken to optimise participation by faith and community groups currently under-represented on the Partnership Board.
- Consider strategies for wider dissemination of Partnership Board activity. A standing item in the Sharrow Sure Start Newsletter would be helpful. This should be part of a wider discussion on how to improve the Board's communication strategy.
- Respond to the expressed wishes of parents for routine involvement of interpreters in meetings to widen participation.
- Set up new opportunities for parent involvement in the Partnership Board - for example following the suggestion that some parents are willing to help out with administration on a flexible or one-off basis. Work with parents to evolve practical ideas for ways forward on this.
- Find ways of maximising the focus of Board meetings on topics which parents prioritise.

### Action and Implementation Plans in respect of SLA Partners

The Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 the structures and processes SLA providers need in place to communicate effectively with the team and each other. The review should be set up to enable SLA partners to help the programme team to shape and fine tune services that they provide to meet Sharrow Sure Start targets. An important aim of this work will be to close the knowledge gap between SLA partners and staff about what each party can bring to the programme.
- The programme should find ways of capitalizing on some excellent work SLA partners are carrying out and of giving feedback on the input of SLA partners. A review of how SLA partners would like their work to be monitored and evaluated in line with Sure Start requirements and also to show 'added value' would be timely.
- Establish joint initiatives to ensure the experiences of individual SLA providers working with the team and with the client population feed back into the process of reviewing activities and also inform the process of reviewing the SLAs themselves. In relation to this it is important to set up systems that enable SLA partners to ensure they can identify and respond to client needs which do not 'fit' into existing patterns of service provision. All of this is crucial for sustainability.
- Monitor the difficulties SLA partners articulate concerning competing demands on their time and expertise with the aim of better enabling them to meet the requirement of Sharrow Sure Start. Convene a forum for discussion of these issues.

- Model good mainstreaming practice - take stock of lessons to be learned from the process of negotiating SLAs with other Sure Starts. Work with SLA partners to develop a set of concrete practical guidelines to inform the development of SLAs and to identify principles of good commissioning / contracting practice that would help to make a greater success of their work with Sharrow Sure Start.

## Action and Implementation Plans in respect of Community Groups

The Sharrow 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start and Community Groups concerns how to 'join things up' to make the most of hard-pressed resources and expertise already available in the area, to enhance the experience of disadvantaged families and young children. In respect of this, a review of participation and involvement of community groups in the work of the programme and of existing co-operative arrangements the programme has with the voluntary sector, should be set up. Launch a strategic plan for widening participation of community groups in the work of the programme.
- Take stock of the programme's existing communication strategies to ensure that its aims and objectives are communicated clearly and concisely to all relevant local groups. Check that all known local groups receive publicity material and are engaged in a strategy for making those in their organisations aware of what Sharrow 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.
- Involve community representatives and local people in discussions concerning use of the new 'Tuxedo Blue' facilities.
- Community Groups stakeholders say they would find a regularly updated list of all the services and activities the programme provides identifying all the partners involved very useful. This could be a standing item in the Sharrow Sure Start Newsletter.

- 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 Sharrow.
- 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start programme continues to go from strength to strength.

- Clarify strategic plans for maximising the participation and involvement of parents in the work of the programme at all levels. Specifically we would expect this to include review of plans to raise the profile of parents within the organisation and to position family members as the principal architects of Sharrow Sure Start.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for maximising the participation and involvement of children in the work of the programme.
- Undertake to clarify the programme's plans for maximising the participation and involvement of men in the work of the programme.
- Strengthen contact between the Sharrow Parents Forum and parents groups from other Sure Start programmes in the city.
- Work with parents to plan further progress with improving local play space.
- Involve parents in plans concerning use of the new 'Tuxedo Blue' facilities.
- Find ways of raising the routine availability of interpreters as parents feel language barriers are perpetuating exclusion.
- Set up fact finding to identify any new information points for promoting the programme in Sharrow. 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 Sharrow Sure Start programme is still evolving and has clearly been experienced positively by many stakeholders. However, from the perspective of many stakeholders there has been confusion about the programme due to changes of the Accountable Body, and to the recent authorized absence of the Programme Manager. At the time of going to print, the Programme is making great strides in moving beyond these difficulties. Networking, publicity and information are clearly crucial in changing this perception and the programme is using these means to improve perceptions of the programme to good effect. There is scope to further develop innovative approaches to widening participation in the programme and we have made recommendations in respect of this for all stakeholders in the section on Action and Implementation plans of this report.
- 6.2 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 year, 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 community relations and imaginative services which support the four sets of Sure Start objectives 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.
- 6.3 At the point of drawing this phase of evaluation to a close the programme is providing imaginative services around early education, childcare, health and family support which look set to have favorable and enduring consequences for the under 4's of Sharrow and their families.

- 6.4 It will be important to reassure the team, parents, and partner and community agencies of the commitment of the Accountable Body to an open, transparent and inclusive approach to the Sharrow Sure Start programme.
- 6.5 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; initiatives to enhance personal, social and emotional well-being of young children and the standard of new accommodation achieved deserve special mention. 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 the training and development portfolio for staff. Since the programme was launched in Sharrow, 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 unexpected turmoil and management aspirations and milestones have been disrupted. We are confident that the programme is now back on track and that structures are firmly in place for the programme to go from strength to strength.
- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 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 Sharrow 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 Sharrow Sure Start at the leading edge in terms of being able to provide practice pointers for other providers

- The programme continues to align its evaluation with that of other Sure Start programmes - because the headway made through the Programme's willingness to work collaboratively towards advancing the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services in this way has been impressive.

6.8 The Programme Manager is clearly asserting proper methods of consultation. This, combined with her willingness to work through difficult issues has impressed us as evaluators. A useful step to engage with next will be for the Programme Manager to write an open response to this evaluation which will set in motion the process by which the programme will move beyond some of the challenging messages outlined in this report. This will position Sharrow Sure Start as a programme capable of coming through difficult experiences to make a pivotal contribution to the mainstreaming agenda for young children's services which is now focused city wide on the Childrens Centre initiative.

Dr Michele Moore and Dr Karen Dunn, August 2004.

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ANNEX A - TRAINING RESOURCE

**MAXIMISING INCLUSION IN  
SURE START**

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### **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 only one person's viewpoint, but nevertheless have great potential for transferring both user and provider experiences of participation in Sure Start

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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'
- Learning from experience

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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**

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### 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.

# COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

## 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

# COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

## **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.'

# COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

## 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?'

## **COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE**

'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.'

# COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

## 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

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### 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.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

'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,

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### 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'

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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'.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### 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.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### HOME VISIT May 2004

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

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

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

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

Cheryl shows us through to her front room.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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.'

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### 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.'**

## **COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE**

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.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

### 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

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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.

# COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

## 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'

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

## 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.

## COMBINED SHEFFIELD SURE START EVALUATION TRAINING RESOURCE

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.

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### WHO'S MISSING ?

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

Specifically

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

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