

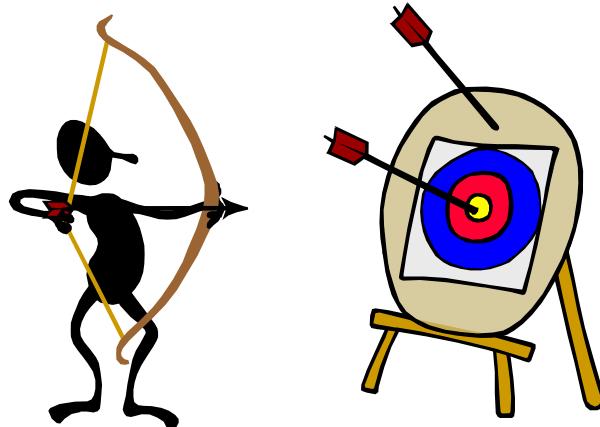


Southwark – Aylesbury Plus

## What makes for success?

Sure Start Aylesbury Plus partnership -  
changing the lives of families  
with young children

Summary of a range of evaluation exercises  
conducted  
January 2000 – December 2004



Report compiled December 2004

# **Introduction**

## **Sure Start**

Sure Start is a government funded programme working with families with children in the 0-4 age range and based in areas which are considered to be socially and economically deprived. The programme works to provide support to allow the children to have the best start in life and to be able to flourish when they get to school.

For parents and carers, the programme supports them in whatever life-choices they want for themselves and their families, including activities and stimulation for parents and children together; a range of high quality childcare options, as well as support in exploring and accessing educational, training and work options.

Not just a funding structure, Sure Start programmes aim to establish a new way of working within the community, forging a partnership with the whole range of existing agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which are involved in supporting families. Programmes also identify gaps in service provision and help to introduce new services as necessary.

## **Sure Start Aylesbury Plus**

Sure Start Aylesbury Plus is based on the Aylesbury Estate and a number of smaller surrounding estates south of the Elephant and Castle area in Southwark. South London. There are 1200 children under four at any one time in the area.

The Aylesbury Plus community is culturally very diverse. In relation to children under four, 50% of the population is black, with almost 40% of African origin. There is a total of 28% of white origin, with 8% Asian – primarily Bengali. 8% of the population of children under four is of mixed origin, with the remaining 6% of 'other' origin. There is a total of 35 languages other than English spoken.

There are twenty-eight different (funded) agencies within the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus partnership, plus a number of other agencies who are active within the partnership, but may not be in direct receipt of funding.

The programme provides a range of services including speech and language therapy, health visiting, oral health promotion, and support for children with special needs, as well as drop-in social, educational, and health sessions. It provides play and socialising opportunities for children and families, thus combating the isolation and loneliness which can be an impediment to progress for many families.

Opportunities for confidence-building, childminding training, community interpreter training, participation in decision-making and management processes are just some of the options available for parents and carers.

## **Evaluation – the context**

The national Sure Start Unit required that the Sure Start programme be evaluated at both national and local level. The national evaluation was conducted by Birkbeck College on behalf of the Sure Start Unit, and was intended to examine and determine the medium and longer-term impact of the Sure Start programmes as a whole.

Local evaluation of programmes was required to address:

- Progress towards the objectives and targets set by the national Sure Start Unit for all programmes, as well as locally set targets and objectives.
- The working practices/processes through which Sure Start is delivered.
- Assessing whether services provided achieve good value for money.

## **Evaluation – the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus approach**

While there was a specific requirement to undertake a local evaluation process, Sure Start Aylesbury Plus chose to take a very open-ended view of this requirement.

The programme is now in its fourth year of operation, and an ongoing process of monitoring, feedback and reviews has ensured that the services delivered to families have been refined, amended and adjusted so that they meet the stated and evolving needs of the community. The result is that the services provided are well used by a representative section of the Sure Start community.

Having established services that are both popular, ie meet a perceived need, and which help to contribute to a range of Sure Start targets, a series of specific evaluation projects was considered to be necessary to identify the particular elements within a range of services which ensured their success.

This report focuses on the results of those evaluations, which highlight the elements of the programme which have made it so successful.

## **Integration of evaluation**

Very early on in the programme it was decided – by a representative evaluation sub-group – that the evaluation process should be one that was an integral part of the programme, ie a process that would feed the cycle of change, growth and development, rather than as something that was ‘tagged on’ and seen as something separate from the day-to-day operation of the programme.

## **1. Planning and Development Exercise**

Adapted from what had been entitled a 'Needs Assessment Exercise', this was the first major step in the process of evaluation undertaken by Sure Start Aylesbury Plus.



The decision to change the use of language in choosing the title for this exercise was seen as significant. It established a principle, changing the emphasis from one that focused on problems and 'needs' to one that assumed that 'need' is an ever-changing concept and applies to all families. It introduced the premise that services need to be offered on a universal basis, so they can be accessed by any family at any time, depending on need at any particular time.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the exercise was to:

- Introduce the Sure Start programme to a significant number of families
- Establish levels of awareness of existing services for families
- Gather opinions about the services used by families
- Identify gaps in services as experienced by families

### **Design**

The exercise was devised as a semi-structured interview, ie a conversational guide used by the researchers to encourage parents and carers to talk in detail about a range of topics relevant to themselves, their children and Sure Start services.

### **The team**

A team of four research assistants was recruited to conduct the exercise. They undertook an extensive induction process to familiarise themselves with the area and with the Sure Start services.

### **Participants**

Participants were the main carers of a child under four years of age living in the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus area, recruited from the Sure Start Health Visitors' database.

Potential participants were sent an introductory letter and information pack. Where parents or carers were non-English speaking, letters were translated and interpreters available to facilitate three-way telephone conversations.

### **Participation**

The exercise achieved a participation rate of 81%; 257 interviews were completed.

## **The results**

The results provided substantial information about the area and about the families that would constitute the Sure Start 'family'. The following is an example of the types of issues covered by the survey:



- Housing and housing conditions
- The composition of families – lone parent, two parent etc
- Social and employment status of families
- Ethnic breakdown and language base
- Main carers – physical and emotional health
- Children – physical and emotional well-being
- Awareness of service availability
- Relevance of services
- Cultural sensitivity of services
- Availability and use of childcare and play services
- Gaps in services

## **Purpose and use of the evaluation**

This exercise:

- Provided considerable baseline data
- Introduced Sure Start to a range of families
- Helped shape the Sure Start vision
- Helped to shape the development of services
- Helped introduce the concept of universal services for universal need to families, workers and managers
- Helped introduce the concept of families as essential shapers of services and means of delivery, rather than as recipients of standard services

The findings of the exercise are contained in both full and summary form as (name the reports).

## 2. Health Visiting Service – 2002-3

Because of the specific age range of children targeted - 0-4 years - the health visiting service was designated the core service within the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus partnership. Health visiting is established as the statutory service which has the greatest access to, and contact with, families with children in this age range, therefore Health Visitors act as key workers within the programme.



### The Sure Start Health Visiting team

The Sure Start Aylesbury Plus health visiting team consists of five Health Visitors, three Child Development Workers, one Administrator and the Professional Supervisor. The service was re-structured in this way as part of developing the Sure Start partnership.

### A re-structured practice

As part of the principle of delivering a different service to families, the health visiting operational practice was changed. Previously, it had been a GP-attached practice where Health Visitors support all the registered patients of a particular GP practice. With the advent of Sure Start, it was changed to a geographical, patch-based system, working within the boundaries of the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus area.

### Caseloads

Re-structuring, combined with additional resources, also meant reducing the caseloads for Health Visitors, so that each works with about 200 families. This allows for more frequent visits, particularly ante-natally and within the first year of a child's life.

### Additional skills

The addition of the Child Development Workers has meant that there is a skill mix within the team that is often not available to a health visiting service. Their role includes undertaking development assessments and providing parenting and childhood development support to families either through group work (predominantly) or home visiting (much less so). They work with a focus on play and the role it has in children's learning and development, and also how it can be used to support and strengthen the parent/child relationship.

### Evaluation of the Sure Start Health Visiting service

Evaluation of the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus health visiting service was designed to examine the impact of the patch-based model of delivering a health visiting service. What difference had it made to adopt this multi-disciplinary, geographically based approach to delivering a health visiting service within the context of the Sure Start partnership?

## Main differences compared with GP-based practice

- **Caseloads** – the average caseload of 180-200 for Sure Start Health Visitors is significantly less than that of non-Sure Start Health Visitors, who estimate caseloads at about 320.
- **New births** – Sure Start Health Visitors tend to visit on the sixth day after birth, followed by four to five visits within three weeks. Non-Sure Start Health Visitors tend to meet mothers and their babies within ten to fourteen days of birth and then once again at four weeks.
- **Area** - Sure Start Health Visitor, being 'patch-based', can walk to all appointments and also maximise the opportunity for informal meetings of families. Non-Sure Start Health Visitors, attached to a GP practice, cover a much larger geographical area and quite often may need to drive some distance.
- **Visits** - Sure Start Health Visitors undertake the majority of their professional practice through home visits by prior arrangement with families. Non-Sure Start Health Visitors undertake much of their professional practice through set clinics that clients must attend.
- **Referrals and resources** – in general, non-Sure Start Health Visitors and GPs do not have access to Child Development Workers. While they can make referrals to Sure Start services, some specialist services, eg speech and language therapy can only take referrals for families who live within the Sure Start area. Outside the Sure Start area, the waiting time for speech and language therapy services is estimated at between six and twelve months.

## Participants

In all, five interest groups were included:

- **Families** – 200 families were interviewed by a team of seven trained Sure Start parents. They were asked about their experiences and opinions of the Sure Start health visiting service, and any experience they had of a different model of health visiting delivery. They were also asked about any changes they would like to see in the service.
- **Sure Start partners** – a focus group gathered the experiences and opinions of a variety of Sure Start partners, particularly those who could provide a comparison with working with other models of health visiting. The partners included representatives from both the voluntary and statutory sectors.
- **Aligned health professionals** – two local GPs and three non-Sure Start Health Visitors were included. Although not actively engaged in the programme, the GPs have contact with many of the Sure Start families. Non-Sure Start Health Visitors will also be aware of the impact of the Sure Start health visiting service in the area.
- **Health Visiting team** – an away day was organised to gather opinions, feelings and thoughts about this way of working and to compare it with any experience of other ways of delivering a health visiting service.
- **Sure Start management team** – this included the Sure Start Director, Assistant Director and Monitoring/Systems Administrative Officer. The Community Manager for Southwark PCT also attended.

## **Summary of findings**

It is clear that the patch-based model of a health visiting service is perceived as delivering benefit to the local community.

- **Parental satisfaction** - **90%** of the parents were satisfied or very satisfied with the health visiting service. This increased to **95%** for those that received the services of the Child Development Workers.
- **Comparison with other models** - **67%** of the parents consulted believed that this health visiting model delivered a service that better met their needs than other models they have experienced. Factors contributing to this level of satisfaction include:
  - ◆ Receipt of the Sure Start handbook
  - ◆ Intensive home-visiting service
  - ◆ Health Visitors awareness of what is available in the area
  - ◆ The relationship between themselves and their Health Visitors
- **Successful referrals** - Health Visitors felt that this way of working provides opportunities for more appropriate and successful referrals compared with experiences of working elsewhere. They particularly cited the reduction of waiting times for speech and language therapy and other services.
- **Better health outcomes** - the perception of the health visiting team and aligned health and social care professionals was that this model is more likely to deliver better health outcomes, especially in relation to reducing post-natal depression, encouraging parents to access services and improving children's speech development.
- **Job satisfaction** - the health visiting team have a very high degree of job satisfaction, feeling that they are learning and developing and providing a high quality service that meets the needs of families.

## **Recommendations for future action**

There were a number of areas identified as needing to be addressed to maximise the effectiveness of the model.

**Communication with other health professionals** – it was felt that communication needed to be improved with GPs, midwives, GP-attached Health Visitors and Social Services.

- i. Midwives – since this evaluation was conducted, a system of regular meetings between the health visiting team and the local midwifery team was established. This helps to ensure the earliest possible referral of pregnant women into the Sure Start programme and thus enable access to all Sure Start services.
- ii. GPs and GP-attached Health Visitors – the relative lack of understanding of GPs about Sure Start and the poor level of communication both ways was recognised. Ways of improving communication and information-sharing continue to be explored.
- iii. Social Services – it is important to continue to find ways to enable Social Services to have a practical engagement with, and benefit from, Sure Start networking and also to become engaged at a more strategic level in the Partnership Board.

**Child Development Workers** – it was considered worthwhile exploring how the support of the Child Development Workers could be maximised, including enhanced referral opportunities from other agencies.

**Purpose and use of the evaluation**

- The evaluation exercise confirmed that this patch-based model of health visiting was essential to the recognised success of the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus programme. (The programme consistently exceeds the average reach of other programmes when compared in national monitoring exercises.)
- Health visiting has continued to be supported as the key service within the programme. The service has been a key member of the Ante and Post-natal Working Group. This group consists of a range of other statutory and voluntary agencies which work with families particularly in the ante and early post-natal period to ensure the effectiveness of early interventions, particularly with vulnerable families. The group continually reviews the referral process and, in particular, tracks the progress of families with complex needs and/or with children with rare or difficult-to-diagnose conditions, to ensure they are picked up and given appropriate referrals.

### **3. Responding Positively to Children's Emotional Needs - 2002**

A successful pilot project in delivering training in Responding Positively to Children's Emotional Needs in the South Southwark Nursery Project (1996-1999) showed that this type of training helped staff to become more child-centred in their approach. As a result, children became more confident, communicative and creative.

Based on the results of this pilot project, Southwark Early Years submitted a proposal to Sure Start to deliver this training in an Early Years setting.

#### **Aylesbury Early Years Centre**

Aylesbury Early Years Centre provides a full-time nursery service for sixty children. There is a cross-cultural, multi-ethnic mix of children in the Centre, and includes those with special needs. The Centre was chosen for this project as it was situated at the heart of the Sure Start area and is the single largest full-time childcare provider in the area.

#### **Aim of the Project**

The project provided intensive on-site training for the staff in the Aylesbury Early Years Centre. The project aimed to:

- ◆ Improve staff-child relationships by encouraging a child-centred approach, eg for the staff to follow the child's lead in play and learning
- ◆ Help staff to apply their parenting skills to complement their other professional skills
- ◆ Support staff in developing their ability to respond sensitively to children's emotional needs, ie a child's need for warmth, love, security
- ◆ Support staff in developing their ability to respond sensitively and effectively to children's behavioural difficulties

#### **The training programme**

The training combines strategies from two different training programmes:

1. ***The Incredible Years Program*** emphasises two fundamental points:
  - **Play** is a child's way of learning. It is therefore also the easiest way of establishing a relationship with a child.
  - **Praise** emphasises and encourages a child's positive achievements and makes him/her feel positively about themselves and more likely to behave well.
2. ***Video interaction guidance*** - an adult and child are videoed in ordinary situations, eg playing, having a meal etc. The video is then played back to the adult, using sections of tape where the relationship is going well. This distinctive feature of focusing exclusively on the positive has the same effect as the use of praise in the Incredible Years Program. In this way, the member of staff becomes more aware of their strengths and their capacity to be sensitive and attuned to the child, which encourages a positive response from the child.

## **The training**

The training was divided into three stages:

- ◆ **Managers** – were trained first, so that they could support staff in their training and provide support when the Project Worker wasn't available
- ◆ **Staff** - the Centre is divided into four rooms, each catering for a specific age range – 6 months to 18 months; 18 months to 2½ years; 2½ years to 3½ years; 3½ years to school age. Staff training began with those working with the oldest children
- ◆ **Domestic staff** – received a modified form of the training.
- ◆ **Parents/carers** – received two sessions of training.

## **Relationships and Trust**

Because of the nature of the training, which involved scrutinising practice and recording practice on video, it was considered essential to build up a strong and trusting relationship between the Project Worker and the managers and staff in the Centre.

In order to support the establishment of these relationships, Sure Start funding ensured that the project worker was on-site in the Centre for ***three half days each week for two years***. This allowed time for the project worker and the staff to get to know each other and for Deborah to get to know the everyday work and practice in the Centre. Funding also included the capacity to fund agency staff to provide cover to allow all the permanent staff in the same room to receive training at the same time.

## **Outcomes**

**The Manager** - felt that the project had a major impact on the Centre and continues to have a major impact:

- Confidence has grown markedly for both staff and children
- Relationships between staff and children are richer
- Teamwork is stronger; staff encourage and support each other more
- Staff acknowledge each other's strengths and build on them
- Staff are more consistent in facilitating children's emotional needs
- Staff are more consistent in dealing with children's behaviour problems
- Staff and parent/carer relationships are stronger, with staff sharing more advice with parents and carers
- Children are able to problem-solve in a more constructive manner
- Parents and carers have become more involved in the Centre

**Staff** reported that:

- They were enabled to see how positively children respond to praise
- They learnt useful strategies to help them respond to children's difficult behaviour. The children also learnt to create their own strategies.
- It improved staff confidence – they focused on how much they attend to the children and follow their lead
- It allowed them to appreciate how much they know about each child and how this helps them respond in specific ways to different children
- Their confidence has improved through seeing that they are continually making sensitive decisions about how to respond to a child, based on the child's individual needs

**The Project Worker** reported that:

- Staff are more confident
- Some of the stressful nature of the work, caused by the everyday demands of children's development, has reduced
- The staff enjoy being with the children more, which helps the children grow in confidence
- Staff are very creative and adapt their training to a variety of circumstances and situations, including using the successful strategies with each other and with parents, as well as with the children

**Parents and carers** felt that:

- Staff are more positive
- Staff give them more advice and explanations
- Seeing how their children responded to particular approaches by the staff, they have used similar strategies themselves and found them to be successful, which has increased their own confidence as parents and strengthened their relationship with their child/ren

**Independent Inspectors** - the Children's Act Inspection in June 2001 reported that:

- 'It was noticeable immediately... that children had become more confident, more communicative and more imaginative in their play.'
- 'The quality of the activities showed a marked improvement on what had been seen previously. Children were actively involved and staff responded in a positive, quiet and encouraging way.'
- 'Those staff still to receive their training are eager to begin as they see the way the training works with other groups.'
- 'The project is effective, well organised, excellently led and superbly practical.'

## **Ongoing progress**

Support training has continued in the Centre to allow the benefits of the training for managers, staff and parents to continue and also to ensure that new members of staff can be inducted in this way of working. The Centre consistently gets excellent Ofsted reports.

## **Purpose and use of the evaluation**

- This training was an acknowledgement that nursery practitioner training, while focusing comprehensively on child physical and educational development, does not give the same emphasis to addressing children's emotional or social needs.
- The responses of everybody involved in either a central or peripheral way shows that this way of working with children can be immensely rewarding for staff, children and parents.
- A number of presentations and mini-training sessions have been conducted by the Project Worker and the Centre Manager to help spread awareness of the training and its benefits to Sure Start workers, managers and other childcare providers.
- The Sure Start programme would wish to implement this form of training in *1<sup>st</sup> Place*, the new Children and Parents' Centre currently being developed, which will provide a range of childcare and training opportunities for the local community.

## **4. Best Start for Babies; Best Start for Toddlers - 2003**

This report focuses on the evaluation of the Best Start for Babies and Toddlers programme, delivered by LLU+, one of the range of voluntary sector agencies within the Sure Start Aylesbury Plus partnership. The evaluation was undertaken in association with Cordis Bright Ltd.

### **What is Best Start for Babies and Toddlers?**

LLU+, a family learning organisation based at South Bank University, delivers the Best Start for Babies and Toddlers service. The sessions provide a range of creative activities for parents/carers with their babies and toddlers. There are three separate groups:

- Best Start for Babies (0-12 months)
- Best Start for Toddlers (1-2 years)
- Best Start for Toddlers (2-3 years)

The sessions are divided into a number of sections:

- (i) Parents participate in a creative activity – making books, toys, cards etc while the children are looked after in a crèche.
- (ii) Guest speakers are invited to present on a variety of topics, eg child development, sleep, nutrition, toys, health and safety etc.
- (iii) Parents and children come together at the end of the session to participate in a joint activity, eg using play dough, singing etc.

There is also the opportunity for participating parents to join the 'Peachers' training (ie parents as teachers).

### **What Sure Start targets?**

The Best Start service contributes towards the national Sure Start targets which require programmes to:

- Ensure that 100% of children have access to good quality play and learning opportunities
- Reduce the number of children who need specialist speech and language support by the time they start school
- Provide parenting support and information for all parents

### **How did we evaluate?**

Sixteen local parents volunteered to act as community surveyors, conducting face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire of approximately 20 minutes duration.

The questionnaire was compiled through consultation with a number of key people, including facilitators, the Sure Start team and, crucially, parents/carers who attend the sessions.

Training was provided by Cordis Bright to standardise the approach and techniques and to ensure that surveyors felt comfortable with the methodology.

## **Summary of results**

- **Parental satisfaction** - 100% of parents and carers questioned said that they are satisfied with the service
- **Motivation** - the main motivating factor in attracting parents to the groups is the social aspect, both for themselves and their children
- **Irrelevance** - the fact that the service is delivered by a family learning organisation, with objectives to meet Sure Start targets, is irrelevant to parents
- **Learning outcomes** - although these are stated as a welcome and satisfying aspect of the service for both parents and children, they are not a major motivating factor in attracting people to the service
- **Facilitators/atmosphere** - the importance of the facilitators and the atmosphere created are as important as any 'teaching' that occurs, with **79%** of parents and carers saying that it was the 'friendly, welcoming atmosphere' which made the sessions so successful
- **Training** - it became clear that the training aspect of the service needs to be promoted in a different way. A relatively small proportion of parents and carers appeared to be aware of the training opportunities on offer.

## **Recommendations**

- **More!** - recommendations or changes suggested by parents and carers focused on increased opportunities and/or space for more of the same, reflecting the extremely high levels of satisfaction with the service
- **Learning for others** - for new services or projects setting out to deliver set outcomes, the needs of parents and carers need to be taken into consideration, eg, the apparently overwhelming need for socialising opportunities and the opportunity to provide resources and activities not normally available to individuals in their homes.
- **Facilitation** - the importance of finding the right organisation and facilitators/tutors, who are willing and able to provide what parents and children want, as well as delivering Sure Start targets

## **Purpose and use of the evaluation**

- This evaluation emphasises the importance of providing a range of open-access, drop-in services and their importance for families which would not otherwise be considered 'in need'.
- It also helped to highlight the importance of publicising services in ways that appear to be most attractive to parents, in this case, an opportunity to meet other parents and have activities provided for children. The fact that the provider organisation is primarily a family learning organisation, and that training opportunities were also available did not seem particularly relevant to parents initially, although, of course, these might have become more important as time went on and parents' confidence increased.

## **5. Bookstart Plus - 2003**

Bookstart Plus encourages parents/carers to read books with babies and toddlers. Sessions are held once a week at the Aylesbury Health Centre, alongside the Sure Start Parent/Carer and Toddler group, which is facilitated by the Child Development Workers of the Health Visiting team.

On a Wednesday, two Bookstart Plus sessions are held in the local library. At these sessions, there is also the opportunity for parents/carers to borrow books or other resources from the Library, as there is a dedicated librarian available for the sessions.

Before each session, the facilitator (who is a trained nursery nurse), sets out a variety of books for different ages, as well as rugs, cushions and chairs for adults and children to sit on. She will read stories to parents/carers and children, encouraging everybody to sing, chant, make actions and join in with the story.

Parents/carers may also be encouraged to make their own books, eg collecting photos and pictures of their children and making an album, with simple words to accompany the pictures. They are then encouraged to share these books with their children at home.

### **What Sure Start targets?**

These sessions contribute towards the national Sure Start targets which require programmes to:

- Increase the numbers of parents/carers reading with their children
- Increase library membership amongst 0-4 years olds and their parents/carers
- Ensure that 100% of children have access to good quality play and learning opportunities
- Reduce the number of children who need specialist speech and language support by the time they start school

### **How did we evaluate?**

Sixteen local parents volunteered to act as community surveyors, conducting face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire of approximately 20 minutes duration.

The questionnaire was compiled through consultation with a number of key people, including facilitators, the Sure Start team and, crucially, parents/carers who attend the sessions.

Training was provided by Cordis Bright to standardise the approach and techniques and to ensure that surveyors felt comfortable with the methodology.

## **Summary of results**

- **Parental satisfaction** – 100% of those consulted were satisfied with the Bookstart Plus service. A number of key factors clearly contributed to the success of the service:
  - The quality of facilitation, which was regarded as excellent
  - The friendly, relaxed atmosphere
  - The benefits received by the children
  - The range of activities also contributed to the satisfaction levels
- **Speech and language development** - 77% reported that the Bookstart sessions have strong beneficial impact on children's speech and language development, increasing vocabulary, improving speech and building confidence.
- **Reading ability** - 73% also perceive improvement in children's reading capacity, increased interest in books, ability and confidence.
- **Reading at home** - 14% more parents and carers read to their children at home as a result of attending the Bookstart Plus sessions – bringing the total doing so up to a maximum of 100%
- **Library membership** - 50% of parents and carers have become members of the library since joining the Bookstart Plus sessions and 100% of these make regular use of the library services for both themselves and their children
- **Social networks** - while the parents'/carers' stated outcomes are very child-focused, there is also a very important 77% who stated that 'meeting other parents and carers' was among the most important aspect of the service for them. This confirms the importance of meeting the need for social contact and networking which is provided by Bookstart and other Sure Start services.
- **Facilitation** - the importance of the facilitator in providing a quality service is quite clearly brought out in this survey (bearing out the results of other Sure Start evaluations). The quality of the facilitator overcomes other considerations such as the lack of space and other inconveniences in the library setting.

## **Recommendations**

- The only changes that parents and carers have suggested, ie more space in the library setting and more time for the sessions – both duration and frequency - reflect the quality of the service and the positive regard in which it is held.

## **Purpose and use of the evaluation**

- As with the Best Start project evaluation, this exercise reinforced the importance of providing open-access, drop-in services for families.
- The success of this project, highlighted by this evaluation, has helped to ensure that the service has been adopted by all Sure Start programmes within Southwark.
- The evaluation has also been used as evidence to prompt the Library Service to recruit a full-time librarian to support the service in the area.

## **6. Shopping Basket Survey - 2003**

Unlike a number of other Sure Start programmes, Sure Start Aylesbury Plus does not have the services of a dietitian. However, the programme has a very popular and successful Oral Health Promotion project, which provides a range of workshops, advice and information on healthy eating, as well as on oral health in general.

In order to establish whether Sure Start families would like more specialist input about food and nutrition, it was decided that it would be useful to have information about the current shopping and cooking habits of parents/carers with small children and, in particular, what influence having small children has on shopping and cooking choices.

### **Sure Start Targets**

While there are no national Sure Start targets relating specifically to nutrition, there is a local target which aims to reduce the number of children who need dental treatment, eg fillings or extractions, by the time they start school.

### **Ability to respond to results of survey**

In 2003 a new kitchen was installed at the Aylesbury Health Centre – this can:

- Act as a base to provide cooking, food, nutrition and other workshops and sessions within the community (not just for Sure Start families)
- Provide the opportunity for social occasions, eg the celebration of various cultural festivals, sharing of different foods etc.

## **Summary of results**

- **Determining factors - where shopping is done** - the accessibility of shops (**77%**) and value for money (**63%**) are the two main determining factors in deciding where shopping is done.
- **Determining factors – what goes in the basket** - what the children/family will eat (**79%**) and value for money (**58%**). Advertising is also a significant factor (**44%**) in determining choices.
- **Health/nutrition factors** - (**49%**) are influenced by health/nutrition awareness. Food labels are read by **66%** of those questioned, mainly to discover the fat, sugar, salt and additive levels.
- **Influence of free fruit provision** - the provision of free fruit to all Sure Start group childcare provision has influenced the shopping habits of **54%** of parents/carers questioned.
- **Most popular items** - staple foods, such as potatoes (**92%**), rice (**85%**), pasta (**83%**) and bread (**66%**) rank highly amongst the top fifteen items bought. Cornflakes is the most popular breakfast cereal (**53%**). There is a preference for sliced bread (**56%**), with **59%** buying white bread and **41%** buying brown, wholemeal or granary.
- **Children's favourite meals** – these show a wide range of options, with pasta based dishes coming out on top – **26%**. One-fifth (**20%**) of parents/carers also stated that their children's preferred accompaniment for their favourite meal is rice/noodles.
- **Children's favourite snacks** – this is reported to be crisps - **40%**. However, there are significant cultural differences, with almost double this level of preference reported amongst the Bangladeshi, Black/Black British-African and Mixed White/Black African groups.
- **What children ask for** - when out shopping, children most frequently ask for sweets or chocolate - **72%**. The majority (**71%**) of parents/carers respond to this request 'sometimes'. The majority (**65%**) say they do this because 'a treat is nice for them'. There are, however, significant cultural differences, with **83%** of the Bangladeshi community saying that they respond to this request 'for a quiet life' and only **17%** stating that they do it for a 'treat'.
- **Cooking with fresh ingredients** - an overwhelming majority – **97%** - report that they cook from scratch, using fresh ingredients, rather than using pre-prepared meals. Over half – **53%** report that they do so every day. Cultural differences show that the White British community have the lowest level of cooking from scratch – **89%**, though this is still a significant majority, although only **19%** of this community report that they cook from scratch every day.
- **Want to know more** - **75%** of parents/carers questioned stated that they would be interested in knowing more about food, food labels and cooking, while **78%** said they would be interested in attending free cooking/nutrition workshops if Sure Start provided them.

### **Purpose and use of the evaluation**

This evaluation provided the evidence base for the formation of the Aylesbury Nutrition Group at the Aylesbury Health Centre. This group oversaw the development of the pilot Young Women's Food and Health Project supported by NDC funding.

This project was aimed specifically at young women and focused on their own health and nutrition, as well as health and nutrition issues in relation to pregnancy and birth.

The Project Co-ordinator is a Sure Start parent who acted as a surveyor for the evaluation exercise.

The project has just been successful in attracting a further two years of funding, which will extend the project within the area and open it up to young men, who have expressed an interest in the project. The project will continue to focus on supporting young people to know more about food, nutrition, food labelling etc, as well as providing free cooking and nutrition workshops.

## **7. Evaluation of Partnership Working - 2004**

The evaluation study was commissioned by Sure Start Aylesbury Plus to examine and report on partner agencies' experience of working within the Sure Start partnership.

The study was based largely on interviews, with managers and workers from the twenty-eight organisations, statutory and voluntary, who are engaged in the work of the Sure Start partnership.

### **Seeking answers from evaluation**

The evaluation exercise sought answers to a number of questions:

- What elements of the partnership structure facilitate the partnership relationships and partnership working most effectively?
- Do these relationships influence/impact upon the work? If so, in what way/s?
- Has this way of working had any influence on job satisfaction?
- Has this way of working influenced managers' engagement with frontline workers/projects?
- Has this way of working had any influence on policy-making/strategic planning?
- What, if any, plans are in place to ensure the sustainability of the work beyond the life of the programme?

## **The definition and meaning of partnership**

Partners from a range of backgrounds, and with widely varying experience of collaborative working, had a broadly shared view of the essentials of partnership within the context of Sure Start Aylesbury Plus:

- A common subject and concern
- A shared vision
- An organisation to ensure that partners with different starting points and general objectives can operate effectively together
- Clarity about roles and responsibilities
- Equal status of partners while recognising that the contributions of each will vary at different stages of the project
- Filling gaps without duplication
- A commitment to joint working where it will add value
- Continually evaluating both process and effectiveness

## **What partnership working means**

Participants were clear about what partnership working means in this programme:

### **(i) Working with families**

Working closely and collaboratively with families is facilitated by:

- Home visiting, organised to permit early intervention
- Having the capacity to provide services tailor-made to individual needs
- Bringing together provision for parents and children that are commonly considered separately
- Workers having the time and motivation to be active and flexible
- Group work which develops solidarity and offers informal and more formal training
- The active support and development of parents contributes to the effectiveness of the programme

### **(ii) Networking**

Networking is encouraged by the provision of opportunities for both managers and workers to meet through the formal structure of committees and working groups. It is the characteristic mode of promoting and delivering collaborative effort. Networking:

- Ensures familiarity and ease of communication between agencies and individuals, and between and within agencies themselves
- Is one of the chief means by which grass roots practice and management decisions influence each other
- Facilitates mutual support
- Stimulates new projects

### **(iii) A reliable system of referral and joint working**

Referrals are facilitated by:

- Networking, as outlined above, greatly facilitates the referral process as all partners are familiar with the work of other agencies, and also have personal working relationships with workers/managers in other agencies.
- Health Visitors, working a patch-based system, provide a universal service with the ability to visit according to need
- Any agency within the partnership can also act as a source of referral to any other agency

## **What makes the partnership effective?**

Participants in the evaluation study were asked to identify what elements within the partnership structure facilitated effective working. Managers and workers alike attach great importance to having a structure which involves all concerned and is effective in conducting the partnership's business. The answers to this question were quite clear:

### **(i) Structures**

- The **Partnership Board** represents all twenty-eight partners. All twenty-one members who responded attach high importance to the Board, and almost all go to great lengths to ensure that they attend. There are domestic rules about attendance, but it is the professionalism and usefulness of the conduct of the Board and its meetings that ensure strong support.
- The **Executive** is clearly accepted as a necessary and effective body, particularly in preparation of material for the Board.
- The **Working Groups**, topic based, were agreed to be useful - though there was some sign of uncertainty in detail.
- The **Workers' Group** is strongly supported by workers themselves, their managers, and the Sure Start team. It is a key instrument for communication between professions, and for ensuring that grass roots experience is taken account of at managerial level.

### **(ii) Sure Start team**

The **Sure Start team** is strongly commended by all respondents, and given the highest rating of any element in the partnership. Partners commented particularly on:

- Clarity of purpose and strong leadership
- Grip on the programme and its many elements
- Accessibility and responsiveness

## **Impact of partnership working**

### **(i) Meeting formal performance indicators**

The evaluation of formal performance indicators related to central Sure Start health, education and social care targets was not part of this study. However, it was noted from other sources, including regular monthly, quarterly and annual reviews and reports that these targets are being met, particularly in terms of reach and satisfaction of parents with the programme. The meeting of these targets also helps to contribute to more specific performance indicators within Health, Social Services, Early Years Education and other strategic agencies in the area.

### **(ii) Improved understanding between statutory and voluntary organisations**

This aspect of partnership working was highlighted within the evaluation report as a significant impact of partnership working. It clearly contributed to the value placed upon this way of working by all partners.

### **(iii) Participation of parents**

Feedback from participants in the evaluation exercise was consistent in acknowledging the meaningful and developing role of parents in the partnership:

- The work of the programme has developed the self-esteem of parents
- The growing capacity of parents has enabled them to take charge of their family, work and training life, and to undertake key roles within the partnership

### **(iv) Influence on work within partner agencies**

The evaluation report confirmed that many partners found their ways of working reinforced. However, several reported new ways of working with a clearer focus derived from clarity of purpose and the collaborative approach required by the Sure Start framework.

For example, Oral Health has adopted a more active approach of reaching out to individual families. Others, including Tykes' Corner, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), LLU+ and Southwark WelCare have begun to provide services beyond their original contract, inspired by the work of the Sure Start model.

## **Absent partners**

The evaluation exercise showed that some key partners either had not participated in the partnership at all, or had done so only patchily. In the case of adult mental health services, this was a gap identified in services, to be addressed at a future date.

### **(i) Social Services**

For the first two to three years of operation, the Partnership tried to secure Social Services involvement, but resource constraints prevented this. There is a strong case for Social Services representation at Aylesbury at least at strategic level if only for them to see how it has been possible for this programme to provide a service for families, through partnership working with voluntary organisations, that is more innovative and preventative.

### **(ii) Education**

Over the past two years of operation of the Sure Start programme there has been less consistent involvement of Education and very patchy attendance at meetings. The fact that Education is still an active element within the partnership has been due to the commitment of individuals at operational level from within Early Years, but with little or no back-up at strategic level.

### **(iii) Adult mental health services**

The evaluation report helped to identify that there is a lack of services for adult mental health which impedes work with the children of the adults concerned.

## **Crucial learning points from these evaluations**

In summary, this series of evaluations demonstrates the following:

- The key role played by the patch-based model of health visiting in ensuring that all families receive a universal, enhanced service, which also acts as an introduction to the wide range of other services available.
- The ability of true partnership working to deliver services which meet the changing needs of a community and support that community in becoming more cohesive, confident and able to participate in decision-making processes relating to its health, education and social care requirements.
- The importance of ensuring true parental involvement which allows confident and informed parents to fully participate in all decision-making processes. (This requires considerable time and input.)
- The importance of voluntary sector contribution to delivering services which have a significant and long-term impact on families. Sure Start Aylesbury Plus is recognised as being a particularly successful programme – two-thirds of the partnership comprises voluntary sector organisations.
- The importance of frameworks and structures which facilitate statutory, voluntary, community and parental participation on an equal basis:
  - (ii) These reports contain incontrovertible evidence that such an approach has resulted in the creation of a unique way of working which delivers positive outcomes for all participants.
  - (iii) This approach also facilitates a similar, informal structure of relationship-building, information-sharing and referral between workers, managers and volunteers in voluntary, statutory and community agencies, which, in turn, creates an ease in providing services for families rather than working within more formal assessment and/or referral procedures.
- The importance of providing a range of informal, open-access, drop-in services which create an environment in which parents and children form their own social and support networks, build confidence, access information and opportunities for development in training and/or employment.

## **The transition to Children's Centre framework**

Adopting the approach to evaluation outlined in this report has contributed to enabling Sure Start Aylesbury Plus to plan and facilitate a programme that has grown organically and healthily, accommodating the changing needs of a community which has itself changed and developed as a result of the presence of the Sure Start programme.

The evidence presented by these evaluations has helped Sure Start Aylesbury Plus to shape a programme encapsulating the concept which has now (December 2004) been made manifest in the government's Children's Centre framework.

The evidence of these evaluations, as well as the strength of the Partnership, places Sure Start Aylesbury Plus in a position to potentially influence the structure and processes of the new local authority Children's Centre commissioning framework, which is currently being established.

### **Children's Centres**

From March 2006, Sure Start type services will be delivered via a new framework of Children's Centres. All Sure Start programmes are required to convert to Children's Centres. This new framework is an acknowledgement by national government of the importance and success of Sure Start in providing valuable services to families with young children. The objective of the Children's Centre framework is to roll out such services to all families, rather than focusing on targeted areas as the Sure Start programmes have done.

### **New commissioning framework**

In order to deliver the Children's Centre framework, it is planned that in future government funding – approximately 70-80% of each Sure Start programme funding, plus some extra Children's Centre funding – will be channelled through local authorities. (Sure Start programmes have been working with independent budgets.) Local authorities are required to establish a commissioning structure to ensure the delivery of services.

The current proposal in Southwark is that a twelve person commissioning panel will have three representatives from the voluntary and parental sector, with the remaining nine representatives coming from Health, Education and Social Services. Based on the experience of Sure Start Aylesbury Plus and the evidence presented in the preceding evaluation reports, this composition does not reflect that most likely to deliver the services that best meet the needs of the community. A major cause of concern is that some of the proposed representatives from the statutory sector have not been fully involved, either operationally or strategically, in the Sure Start partnership framework to date.

The proposed structure also considerably under-represents the importance of the voluntary sector and parental involvement in ensuring that services are appropriate and accommodating of change.

One of the crucial lessons of the Sure Start experience is that its success depends on process at least as much, if not more than the availability of funding. This crucial lesson must be incorporated in the new Children's

Centre framework if it is to be successful and truly carry on the innovative new work of Sure Start programmes.