

SURE START TAUNTON

EVALUATION SUMMARY 2002-2005

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report summarises the evaluation that has taken place over the past three years on behalf of the Sure Start Taunton local programme. This report is designed to give an overview of the evaluation that has been carried out and action that has been taken as a result. For further detailed information regarding any of the studies mentioned, please refer to the web address noted on the acknowledgements page of this document.
- 1.2. Sure Start local programmes aim to break the cycle of deprivation that may exist in particular areas, and to increase the uptake of a range of children and family services so that long term gains can be made for children living in low income families. Sure Start Taunton is a round 5 programme and currently the programme has registered 65.3% of all potential households (478/732).
- 1.3. Children Centres are an important asset in further developing the work of the Sure Start Local Programmes and will provide what is known as a 'core offer'. As part of this core offer, Children Centres will provide the following elements:
 - 'Educare'/Early Education integrated with day care
 - Family support and parental outreach
 - Child and family health services
 - Links with schools and Children's Information Services
- 1.4. More recently a number of new outcomes have been published which will form the centrepiece of all Children's Services. These are part of the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework and are as follows:
 - Be Healthy
 - Staying Safe
 - Enjoy and Achieve
 - Make a Positive Contribution
 - Achieve Economic Wellbeing

2. EVALUATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 The evaluation for the Sure Start Taunton local programme is carried out by the Community Evaluation Unit which is based within Taunton Deane Primary Care Trust. There are benefits to this approach. Sure Start Taunton is able to benefit from a locally focused but independent evaluation approach.
- 2.2 Evaluation staff are full members of the Sure Start Taunton team, taking part in team events and attending team meetings. However, as they are based in a separate organisation to Sure Start Taunton and separately line managed, the programme is able to benefit from evaluators which are familiar with the local programme and area, yet able to offer an independent and unbiased opinion as evaluators.
- 2.3 The evaluation that has been carried out by the Community Evaluation Unit on behalf of Sure Start Taunton has responded to need and used a mixture of different types of research methods. A summary of the evaluation work that has been carried out and how the evaluation has been used to shape the development of the programme is detailed in the next section.

3 EVALUATION FOR SURE START TAUNTON BETWEEN 2002 - 2005

- 3.1 Evaluation strategies are often overcomplicated by using unnecessary or academic jargon. In all the Sure Start programmes that the team has worked with including Sure Start Taunton the evaluation strategy has steered away from labelling different types of evaluation in this way and instead chosen to be more explicit about the type of evaluation that is taking place and the reasons why it is being done. This has helped to make evaluation much more open and accessible to those working within the programme and the end users of evaluation.
- 3.2 The evaluation team have been involved with Sure Start Taunton right from the planning stages of the programme. Evaluation started prior to the programme being officially launched in order to allow community consultation to shape the action plan that was submitted for Sure Start Taunton.

Health Visitor Questionnaire and Focus Groups (Spring 2002)

- 3.3 A questionnaire was designed to collect feedback from parents about local services. The questionnaires were distributed through Health Visitors who had families on their caseload who lived within the Sure Start area. They were asked to target those families who did not access other services and therefore who would have not taken part in the focus group consultation that took place at the Halcon Family Centre or the Priorswood Resource Centre.
- 3.4 In total 96 questionnaires were completed. The majority of respondents were female. The results of the questionnaire were analysed by the Community Evaluation Unit and used to help shape priorities within the action plan for the programme. There was a great demand for subsidised home safety equipment by respondents, and this is an example of one area where the programme has responded to the original consultation by setting up what has become known as the Safe Start scheme. Another opportunity which parents were very keen to access was first aid courses. This has also been provided by the programme in response to the original consultation.
- 3.5 A number of focus groups were also carried out to inform the action plan. These groups were facilitated by those already working within the community and this eased the task of putting together these groups in a tight timescale. The main themes of the focus groups were summarised by the facilitators and these were fed into the action plan.

Community Questionnaire and Video (Spring 2003)

- 3.6 Once the programme had been approved and a programme manager appointed work got underway to carry out a community questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to provide a further opportunity for the programme to consult with the local community. As well as informing the programme about key priorities for local families, the questionnaire also provided baseline data to inform programme development and to help evidence the impact of the Sure Start Taunton programme. Parents were involved in helping to pilot the questionnaires and to design questions.
- 3.7 The questionnaire was sent to 3252 residents to gather relevant data from the local population. The questionnaire was sent to all households with Sure Start aged children, and to a random sample of households from GP records¹, in order to ensure that the wider community had the opportunity to participate in the survey. In total, we received 1353 responses, giving an overall adjusted response rate of 41.8%. We had responses from 216 Sure Start households, which gave a response rate of 60.3% amongst this group.
- 3.8 It was recognised that not all parents would be willing to complete a questionnaire and to provide a different way for parents to give their views a community video film was compiled with the support of a local participatory arts project. This film raised and discussed local issues which were identified by parents as important, and a CD containing this work is available on request.
- 3.9 The results of the questionnaire were shared widely, and in particular with those who are best placed to address particular concerns. Evaluators have a responsibility to those from whom they collect data to ensure that the information is provided to appropriate people and departments who may be able to address some of those issues. The questionnaire raised issues about just how wide ranging some of the issues were that parents and children face. However, the programme was able to respond to many issues and raise some of the issues that may have been outside of their remit or budget capacities (e.g. housing issues) with appropriate partner agencies in order to ensure that these could begin to be addressed.

Barriers to Library Use (Summer 2003)

- 3.10 Given the prominence given to increasing library use by Sure Start families, it was felt by the programme that we needed to investigate possible barriers to library use to inform the programme's development. A consultation exercise with young children and their parents was carried out at a fun day to ask people what they thought would help to make the 'world's best library' and the 'world's worst library'. Children and their parents attending the fun day were invited to play our game which involved throwing bean bags onto targets in a pretend pond as shown below.

¹ Sampling fraction 1 in 2



- 3.11 Twenty responses were received in total and these were used to design the next stage of the study in order to explore potential barriers to library use further. In an attempt to involve parents and identify specific barriers that Sure Start families may face, we ran a mystery shopping exercise. A team of 12 mystery shoppers were recruited from Sure Start eligible families.
- 3.12 The results of the study were fed back to the programme and the County Librarian in order to inform the development of library services for children and their parents locally and across Somerset. The study raised both positive and some more challenging and sensitive issues which may act as barriers to library use. By linking in with the County Librarian, Sure Start Taunton has been able to provide added value with the evaluation work that they fund and provide useful information not just locally but to inform developments locally and at a county level.

Health drop in study (Summer 2003)

- 3.13 There was a need to collect information in order to see whether there was a demand for a young persons' health drop in clinic in the area. The target group for the study was young people who lived in, or accessed services in the Sure Start Taunton area.
- 3.14 A self completion questionnaire was used to collect the views of young people. These questionnaires were distributed to three secondary schools and youth workers within the area. 1325 responses were received in total of whom 51.9% (658) were male and 48.1% (609) were female.
- 3.15 The study established that there was some uncertainty about whether such a service would be used with 44.5% of respondents who would like to see a young persons' health drop in clinic set up, 11.4% (150) who would not like to see the service set up, and a further 44.1% (581) who were unsure. The most popular location for the service was in a doctor's surgery.

- 3.16 The programme was able to set up a drop in service and negotiated space within a doctor's surgery in response to the most popular location for young people. Interestingly, things do not always go according to plan and after running the service from a surgery it appears that there is a 'culture clash' between the atmosphere within the surgery and young people. Plans are therefore underway to establish the service within another venue more suited to young people.

Child Safety Scheme (Autumn 2003)

- 3.17 In order to reduce the potential for accidents within the home, and in response to previous consultation with families, Sure Start Taunton introduced a home safety scheme. As part of the scheme Sure Start team members carry out home safety visits to discuss a range of safety issues and identify potential problems in the home. The scheme was evaluated to consider whether the scheme was able to reach the needs of Sure Start families, and whether it was being implemented in the most effective way possible.
- 3.18 Several methods were used to gather feedback on the scheme. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 3 key members of staff and telephone interviews were carried out with a sample of 50 families who had received a Safe Start visit.
- 3.19 A working group was set up to consider the recommendations of the evaluation and whether any changes needed to be made to the Safe Start scheme as a result. A number of changes were made to the scheme as a result. Two examples of the changes that were made are noted below:
- Link Workers were given the discretion to provide additional vouchers where it was felt this would be beneficial to the family.
 - Link Workers to follow up Safe Start visits after one month with a telephone call to reduce cases where the vouchers are not used effectively

Training and Support for Practitioner Evaluation (Spring 2004)

- 3.20 Two evaluation support days took place in the early part of 2004. The first day provided an overview and introduction to evaluation for staff. In addition a second day was provided. This gave staff the opportunity to discuss with evaluation staff their ideas about evaluation and particular projects in more detail. A number of staff have, with the support of the evaluation team, undertaken their own evaluation of services that they provide. This has helped to increase the capacity of the programme to undertake evaluation and reflective practice, as well as provide a better understanding about the evaluation that the Community Evaluation Unit carries out for the programme.

Staff Survey (Summer 2004)

- 3.21 The programme recognises that the staff team are a most important asset and one on which the success of the programme is based. Staff requested that a staff survey was carried out in order to look at the working environment of the programme. The staff survey was carried out in response to this request. The data from the questionnaire survey is currently being analysed and the findings will be used to plan and improve the working environment for staff in response to their requests where this is feasible to do so.

Parent Participation (Summer 2004)

- 3.22 An interview and questionnaire study was carried out to consider the role of parent participation within the Sure Start Taunton programme. Interviews were carried out with 5 members of staff and questionnaires sent to all Sure Start households in the area. A 26.7% response rate was received (187/702). The purpose of this study was to look at staff views of how parent participation was working within the programme and also to look at the extent and level at which parents wish to become involved with the programme. The information from the study will be used to plan and review participation opportunities within the programme and the forthcoming Children's Centres. This will be carried out in conjunction with the key leads for participation within the programme.

Drop in Evaluation (Spring 2004)

- 3.23 Staff within the programme had expressed concerns over the low number of families regularly attending the drop in groups and it was therefore felt necessary to explore the reasons behind this. Telephone interviews and postal questionnaires were carried out asking both regular and irregular attendees about their experiences of the groups, positive or negative. Eight members of staff involved in running the drop in groups were sent a letter with a reply slip asking for their interpretation of the aims of the drop ins.
- 3.24 In total 19 responses were gained out of a possible 33 families, 10 of these were regular attendees and 9 were irregular attendees. The results of the evaluation showed that there were a wide range of reasons that influence people's use of the groups. After consideration with the programme it was felt that there was little specific action that could be taken to overcome some of the issues raised by parents (e.g. work commitments, lack of time). In fact, during the later part of 2004, the programme decided that the original aim of the groups (to provide a visible presence in particular areas) was now surpassed with a range of other activities taking place in those areas now that the programme was further established. The drop in groups were therefore revised from January 2005, with two being cancelled, and with the remaining two there are plans to enhance the service provided

Speech and Language Screen (ongoing)

- 3.25 Health Visitors within the Sure Start Taunton area are currently helping the evaluation team to collect data relating to speech and language needs within the local area. All Health Visitors administer a questionnaire with parental consent at the 7-9 month check. Each Health Visitor is undertaking a recognised speech and language screen of each child on their caseload. These results are used to determine whether a referral to the Sure Start Speech and Language therapist is required.
- 3.26 Data from all screens are sent to the evaluation team for collation and analysis. The data collection started in August 2004 and will continue for 12 months. Interim findings from the study will be available and fed back to the programme in spring 2005. The study will assess whether there is sufficient demand for a similar service to be provided as part of mainstream speech and language provision.

Home Start Evaluation (ongoing)

- 3.27 An evaluation is underway to look at the impact of Home-Start which is part funded by and operates within the Sure Start Taunton area. This evaluation is still ongoing and is using depth interviews, secondary data analysis and consultation with drop in group users to establish the impact of the Home Start work. The findings from this study will be made available to the programme to enable them to consider potential outcomes of Home Start.

What has enabled evaluation to work well?

- 3.28 A number of factors have enabled the evaluation to work well within Sure Start Taunton. The following elements have been beneficial in establishing evaluation in the Sure Start Taunton local programme.
- *Staff openness*
Staff have shown a willingness and interest in opening up their work to scrutiny and have supported the evaluation team in providing information and access to their work.
 - *Local approach*
The evaluation team are based locally and therefore have a good insight into the work of the programme. This enables evaluation to be relevant, timely and well informed.
 - *Evaluation as team members*
As team members of Sure Start Taunton, the purpose of evaluation is better understood than if the evaluation team were operating at a distance. Being team members helps in building rapport and trust

especially when sensitive issues need to be raised or discussed with regard to evaluation undertaken.

- *Evaluation integral to the programme*
Evaluation findings are presented back to the partnership (steering body) to inform progress and decision making. This provides an opportunity for staff to consider the findings in an interactive way, thereby increasing the likelihood that findings will be used.

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

- The challenge of establishing and measuring change over short periods of time.
- Lack of clarity and changing goalposts from the Sure Start Unit (e.g. around boundaries/targets etc).
- A rapid drive for a change in the focus of evaluation to an outcome focused approach from Sure Start Unit and NESS.
- Changing priorities for the Sure Start programme, leading to the need for a reactive and changing approach from evaluation often to tight deadlines.
- Lack of resources to carry out more in-depth and longer term studies to demonstrate the impact of the programme.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Sure Start Taunton has welcomed the opportunity to build in evaluation as part of their programme and to respond to the findings that have arisen from evaluation during the first few years of their development. The potential impact that evaluation can have is a two way process whereby the evaluator needs to provide timely and accessible information to the programme and the programme needs to be willing to take on board evaluation findings and to change and develop as a result. Sure Start Taunton has embraced evaluation and responded to challenges and issues that the evaluation has highlighted as relevant for them.
- 4.2 These are rapidly changing times for Sure Start local programmes and Sure Start Taunton must now ensure that it uses its evaluation in the most effective way possible, to ensure that it is able to consider how the services that it provides might be mainstreamed and support the new children's services agenda.

