

***Kirklees District
Sure Start Thornhill
Evaluation Report***

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Executive Summary

This is the third and final report of a three phase evaluation of Sure Start Thornhill. Previous evaluation activity and reporting clarified and refined our understanding of some of the specific ways in which this scheme is meeting its declared objectives, and also identifying, in explicit terms, areas where any difficulties exist. We have also sought to provide practical recommendations, based on the extensive data we have gathered from local parents, staff members, and other agencies, in order that our evaluations can give both an overview of the impact of the programme, and also suggest detailed ways in which additional positive outcomes can be achieved. Whilst that purpose clearly still remains relevant for this current evaluation, we have also wanted to provide the basis of a more philosophical discussion about the identity of Sure Start within Thornhill and the relationship between how it is perceived and the contact with 'hard to reach' families.

We know that the aim of all Sure Start programmes is to make a difference to the lives of families with children under the age of 4. The national evaluation is providing a comprehensive overview of the services offered; the impacts of these; and the financial costs and value added benefits of all the diverse initiatives. The aim of this report is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the local initiatives undertaken, and to provide an additional route for dialogue between local families and Sure Start. This report is based both on new data collected during this evaluation period but there is also a synoptic strand to the evaluation where previous findings are reassessed in terms of the ongoing situation at Sure Start Thornhill. Evidence collected from a variety of methods of data collection, including a user satisfaction survey and extensive interviewing with service users confirms that those families who access the services provided by Sure Start Thornhill are generally very satisfied with the new opportunities for family support and individual development that have been created in their locality. Much of this report is focused on considering those schemes, ways of working and relationships between Sure Start and local parents which demonstrate the success of Sure Start Thornhill. However, in drawing this stage of the initial evaluation to a close, we felt it would be important to widen the perspective of our focus, to assess the extent to which Sure Start Thornhill has been successful in becoming part of the cultural experience of young families in the area. Attitudes to the presence and role of Sure Start in the local area have been an important aspect of our investigation, as they highlight both the current levels of satisfaction with the services provided, and can also indicate how well established the initiative is, and therefore how likely the various services are to become part of the mainstream provision. In addition, whilst it is indisputable that there have been clear benefits for many of those who have accessed the services, this report reflects on the extent to which 'hard to reach' families are engaging with

Sure Start, and what changes, if any, may result in drawing in more of those families with complex needs.

In addition to the material above, this report also considers some broader issues within the Sure Start agenda, particularly the ways in which the policy area of Sure Start has made a significant impact on what we understand to be service provision. This report argues that Sure Start offers exciting possibilities to remould service delivery and form new partnerships and collaborations, and the extent to which Sure Start Thornhill is performing this role is reported on. We find that there are examples of exciting innovative service delivery, and at its best Sure Start Thornhill is able to use its position within the community to really make a difference to service users. We also argue, however, that there is more scope to be radical and to rethink the boundaries of service provision but there are specific barriers currently in place which prevent this happening to a great extent. Issues of collecting evidence and what constitutes evidence of successful intervention are also discussed in this report. This issue is relevant across all Sure Start programmes as they seek to find concrete and measurable indicators of making a difference in the lives of children and their families.

The report also considers the notion of Sure Start as a learning entity and considers the way the staff are able to rethink their roles and redefine their professional identities; in particular their capacity to become evaluative and self-reflective. Once again there is strong evidence that this is happening to a certain extent, but there are still some barriers to the formation of a widespread learning community within the staff at Thornhill and this report makes some practical suggestions about the way forward with this. Partnership and community involvement in the programme and its management and strategic direction is also a key theme of the report. We report here on what steps have been taken to improve the links between Sure Start and the community; in addition some practical recommendations for further work in this area are made. Related to this point, but again widening the agenda, is the issue of how to conceptualise the issue of partnership and community involvement. It is often taken as a given that partnership and involving the community in the running of a Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) is a desirable strategy, although data collected in the field suggests that the views of a significant proportion of users and potential users is contradictory. Many users want to access a service which is provided for them, but do not see a role for themselves in managing or getting involved with the programme in any other sense than as clients. A cost benefit analysis was conducted in the second phase of the evaluation, and this exercise has been repeated in this phase. Record keeping of activity within the programme has improved dramatically since the last report and Sure Start Thornhill is now monitoring visits and interventions on a much more robust and rigorous footing.

To conclude; this report looks back over a successful first phase of activity at Sure Start Thornhill and seeks to celebrate the achievements of the programme. This is balanced with a discussion of the evolving policy context of Sure Start and the ways in which Thornhill should be planning the next stages of its activity.

Introduction

This document is the evaluation report for Sure Start Thornhill. It is based on empirical work conducted at the programme during 2003/2004 and is the third and final report of the first phase of the programme. It follows two earlier reports which covered the first year or so of the programme, and the subsequent years of development. During these reports, the evaluation team from Huddersfield University established an evaluation methodology which looked at the programme through the use of themes. These themes were conceived to bring conceptual clarity to the complex policy contexts and practical settings of Sure Start and give a sense of what the important issues were as the programme firstly become operational, and then moved into a phase of developing services for the under 5s and their families in Thornhill. Many of the themes of the earlier evaluation reports, such as communication and inclusion are still extremely pertinent to the work of the programme. Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs as they are called by the National Evaluation of Sure Start) are charged with improving the life-chances of children by working with families and local communities to deliver services in new and innovative ways. They are targeted at the 20% of most deprived communities in the country and therefore are always working in an arena of social exclusion, poverty and complex patterns of deprivation. Reversing these patterns and delivering real change at the level of the individual child remains as challenging and difficult now as it did when Sure Start was created in 1998 and for this reason many of the areas where Sure Start Thornhill needs to make an impact have remained the same. Communication with individual members of the community and getting the Sure Start message out to as many families as possible is still crucial to the ongoing success of the programme for instance.

However this report, rather than returning to the previous themes and measuring progress in a linear way, is being structured differently to take account of the policy shifts and new ways of thinking which are being fostered by the wider Sure Start agenda. For these reasons this report will

consider some of the theoretical issues and concepts associated with Sure Start and examine how Thornhill can improve its performance by adopting some radical new ways of thinking about what it does and why it does it. What we want to avoid in particular, is the notion that evaluation is all about making incremental changes to practice and tinkering with the delivery of services so they are delivered in increasingly rational and efficient ways. Although it is very useful to think sometimes in terms of efficiency and establishing the most productive way of working, it is sometimes necessary to think beyond current procedures and examine a programme from a wider angle of vision. This theoretical slant to this evaluation will be driven by a consideration of the published literature on Sure Start which is now increasingly rapidly as researcher and evaluators begin to examine how SSLPs are operating and provide interpretations of what this means. It will be driven also by a consideration of how the local community in Thornhill see Sure Start and their perceptions of the programme.

What Constitutes Evidence?

Sure Start programmes are part of a larger government inspired initiative where services have to demonstrate that they are evidence based and have clear sets of data about them being cost efficient and effective. It is therefore pertinent to consider the types of data which an SSLP could consider using when making the case for its effectiveness. When the government was performing the initial audit of areas to determine which places would be eligible for Sure Start programmes, key indicators of social disadvantage were used including: the unemployment rate; numbers of dependent children of income support beneficiaries; and the educational attainment in the area. These kind of quantifiable indicators are extremely useful in assessing the success of a Sure Start programme in terms of its volume and impact on a community. However when we consider Sure Start in terms of its contribution to the improvement of quality of life or the differences made to families in the area it is the case that these cannot be

measured by statistical means alone. In particular these issues sometimes require the gathering and analysis of data which is more about subjective perceptions of improved family experience in the local area and is therefore far less amenable to statistical analysis. It is also important to realise that these perceptions are far more long term than can be captured within the life span of a 3 year programme and move beyond the scope of measurements such as the attendance rate at local schools or other indicators of this nature. In writing this we seek to show that Sure Start is always under pressure to produce hard statistical data to quantify its performance across a range of measurable outcomes, but that an insistence on these measures alone will prevent equally important, but less quantifiable evidence about improvements to life chances for children being ignored.

As part of this year's evaluation activity, a user satisfaction survey was conducted and this has provided some solid evidence of how Sure Start is being perceived by people in the local area. The User Satisfaction Survey is reported on in a different document, but here we need to sound a note of caution based on some research which suggests that users are not always completely accurate when they complete surveys. Wensing (1996) did research on how people reported on satisfaction with health and social services and found that two thirds of people registered satisfaction with services, irrespective of what had actually happened to them. More generally, satisfaction rates can often reflect people's expectations of the service, so high satisfaction rates can indicate high achievement of service quality, but equally a high rate may well be attached to a much lower quality of service but one in which there has been a small but recognisable improvement. It is also true that different social groups report different levels of satisfaction with services and the fact that the user satisfaction survey incentivised the questionnaire with free fruit and vegetables may well have led to a skewing of the sample as those already responsive to Sure Start messages about healthy eating and diets were more likely to complete the survey.

Objectives of Sure Start

During this final year of the first phase of evaluation activity, the objectives of Sure Start Thornhill have remained the same. They are central to the programme's operation and aim to:

Work with young adults, local parents and existing agencies to develop early intervention strategies which strengthen parents' and carers' bonds with their children; to help reduce family breakdown; prevent social exclusion and build community capacity.

Raise awareness, knowledge and understanding about healthy living and provide the advice, support and services which families need to become and stay as healthy as possible.

Raise awareness, knowledge and understanding about young children's development, and provide support and services which help communities to meet children's emotional, intellectual, physical and social needs so that they can benefit from the opportunities afforded by statutory education when that time comes.

Provide information, advice, support and practical help to bridge the gap between universal and specialised services so that families and children with special needs are not further disadvantaged or excluded from community activity and opportunities.

As mentioned earlier, there is currently an increase in the amount of scholarly publishing about Sure Start programmes and the time lag between the inception of a policy and academic's propensity to catch up with this policy is now over. Some studies are theoretical in nature (see for instance Demaine 2003), and relate Sure Start to conceptual frameworks from sociology and educational studies, but the majority (Attree 2004; Weinberger and Stafford 2004; Meadows and Garber 2004; Morrow and Malin 2004) are more focused on practice and draw on empirical studies from Sure Start programmes to draw lessons about the emergence of good

practice and innovative delivery. The recent publication dates of this sample of articles demonstrates that writing about Sure Start is a new phenomenon and as we completed the empirical work for this evaluation, a decision was made to undertake a structured review of the literature to see how it could inform the work of Sure Start Thornhill.

The research methods for this evaluation report have remained largely the same as previous years. Emphasis has been placed on interviewing parents and families, both those using Sure Start and those who are not, in order to generate a qualitative dataset about local people's views about the service. In addition this report can also draw on quantitative research in the form of a User Satisfaction Survey which was conducted during the first half of 2004 and which elicited the views of 88 local families with school age children. The User Satisfaction Survey has provided statistical evidence of the impact which Sure Start Thornhill is making and the ways in which it is improving the health and learning opportunities for under 5s.

In the second evaluation report, a cost benefit analysis (CBA) was conducted to examine how Sure Start income was being allocated against specific activities and how this aggregated against the specific objectives of the programme. All SSLPs are required to conduct cost benefit analyses in some form, although the guidance from the National Evaluation for Sure Start has varied and is not always clear as to the exact nature of this strand of evaluation activity. The formulas and methodology used in the previous report proved to be of some efficacy in giving an overview of spending against particular targets and the process was therefore repeated for this report. It was found that there had been very little variation in budgeting or spending patterns between this year and the previous year and the associated costs of running Sure Start Thornhill had also changed very little. The cost benefit analysis did reveal improvements in the way in which Sure Start Thornhill is monitoring activity and attendance and this could provide a sound footing for further work in the future.

Section 1: Sure Start: An organisational perspective

This section combines a review of the emerging literature on Sure Start and empirical evidence gathered during the evaluation of Sure Start Thornhill. The aim is to examine Sure Start from an organisational perspective and outline those features of the programme which are innovative and which are contributing to real change within the delivery of services. A subsequent aim is to reflect on the current limitations of the organisation of Sure Start Thornhill and make suggestions for ways in which organisational factors could be altered to further the aims of Sure Start. In this section we will discuss Sure Start Thornhill as it is connected to the wider Sure Start agenda. As a trailblazer programme set up very soon after Sure Start's inception in 1998, Thornhill Sure Start has existed through the whole range of policy developments and is now looking to move ahead with the next phase of implementation by planning for the establishment of a Children's Centre. Sure Start policy has not remained static since the inception of the policy in the late 1990s, and the extent to which the Sure Start unit's thinking about key policy issues has changed will be reflected in this section. In particular we will be examining in what follows, the nature of Sure Start as an organisation and the ways in which it is perceived by both staff and service users. The aim here is to locate the work and development of Sure Start Thornhill within the evolving policy agenda and implementation framework created by Sure Start policies and funding mechanisms and measure the possibilities which the Thornhill programme has to learn from other Sure Start programmes.

Sure Start as a policy initiative was driven by a set of indicators in success in early intervention. These factors are elucidated by Eisenstadt (2000) who lists the factors which contribute to the success of early intervention programmes targeted at raising the life chances of young children born into poverty. Interventions which were most likely to be successful:

- Worked with parents as well as children
- Were culturally appropriate

- Were multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary
- Were community based
- Were non-stigmatising
(Eisenstadt 2000: 3)

These five bullet points appear uncontroversial and straightforward, but this appearance belies the considerable challenges involved in creating an intervention programme which can deliver these factors. Many of the factors are often the opposite of what could be found in many mainstream organisations. Services based on health models often tended to treat children in isolation from their family contexts and could be insensitive to cultural needs and differences; work in the community was often rare and all too often there was a strong stigma attached to seeking, or being forced to seek, help with parenting issues. It is a fact that for many families to admit to needing help or advice with parenting is to admit some kind of failure or shortcoming and thus programmes like Sure Start must always work with these negative social connotations and be active in trying to overcome the perceptions of parents. SSLPs are faced with the difficult task of remoulding existing services into a new package and evolving new ways of working which deliver these factors. At this stage in the discussion it is useful to consider the extent to which the evidence about the operation of Sure Start Thornhill is demonstrating that these initial principles of successful intervention are being met. We can conclude that Sure Start Thornhill is working well with parents as well as children, the services delivered at the centre are meeting the needs of parents and there is a strong sense that the family as a unit is welcome at the centres. The issue of cultural appropriacy is an interesting one. Thornhill is a remarkably homogeneous community with an almost 100% white population. It is unusual in this respect when compared with neighbouring communities like Saville Town and Thornhill Lees. The issue of being culturally appropriate in Thornhill is therefore not often seen as being important, the workers at Sure Start are almost all white and serve a 100% white community, so cultural differences are rarely on view. Irrespective of the ethnic demographic constituency, Sure Start Thornhill should seek to develop opportunities to celebrate diversity, bearing in mind that all

children accessing Sure Start services are likely to attend local schools which are multi-ethnic in nature.

Services at Sure Start Thornhill are multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary, the centres are able to make a combination of services based on health, social care and wider parenting issues, and for those able to attend the centres there is a wide range of services on offer.

The issue of a service being community based is another interesting point to consider. It appears as a universal truth that a service should have strong links to its community and be embedded within local life and feel “owned” by the local community. This has been the rhetoric surrounding SSLPs since their inception and it is rare to find a voice to dissent from this orthodoxy. When examined in more detail however, the issue of community involvement is more problematic. In particular the question arises as to the balance of power between the professionals who are responsible for the service delivery and PSA targets, and those members of the community who wish to become involved with the programme and influence its direction. This interface between professional interests and community ownership is not easily resolved and many of the tensions which are generic to this issue are present within Sure Start Thornhill. This does not mean that the community and the management of Sure Start Thornhill are in conflict or even disagreement; it means that there are always compromises which need to be made between two interests which can sometimes be in conflict. A pertinent example of this is the quiz which used to be hosted at Sure Start. This social event proved to be very popular with the local community and feedback from the User Satisfaction Survey demonstrated that the quiz quickly became a focus for social cohesion within the community and allowed people to visit the Sure Start centres for an enjoyable and worthwhile purpose. However the quiz was stopped for a while, ostensibly because its operation did not contribute directly to Sure Start activity and was therefore perceived by staff to be an optional extra and not a core part of their business. The user satisfaction survey contained many calls for the quiz to be reinstated and if Sure Start

Thornhill is serious about community involvement and showing that the programme belongs to local people, then there must be a more sustained attempt to listen to the needs of local people and meet these. It may well be that services and facilities created may well appear to professionals as tangential to Sure Start targets, but there is clear evidence from the evaluation that the first important step in any work with parents and families is to get them to come to the centres. If they don't come, you cannot work with them, so any initiatives which bring people to the centres must be nurtured carefully and not terminated because staff do not believe the activity is meeting targets.

When we considered what Sure Start Thornhill was doing particularly well and the observable strengths of the programme, the following emerged as the most valued aspects:

Universality of Services

Both centres have a wide range of services including health, community and educational provision and public information services. This is a strong feature of Sure Start Thornhill and ensures that for those who are willing to attend the centres there is help and advice available.

Extension of home-visiting

Sure Start has been extremely effective in extending the range of home visiting across a wider range of services. Evidence from parents shows that home visiting is one of the most valued aspects of Sure Start and is very likely to be the single most important factor in their satisfaction with the service. Home visiting works because it demonstrates a commitment to individualised service provision and is also effective in linking with hard to reach families who are very unlikely to make the initial approach to Sure Start through one of the centres. Visiting at home and building trust and confidence can do a great deal to enable hard to reach families to access Sure Start.

Range of activities

Sure Start Thornhill runs a range of activities and programmes for parents and children. Some are explicitly health focused, but these are balanced with other activities which develop other aspects of parenting. Groups such as the baking group add a further dimension to the programme and there are also some very worthwhile activities which are focused on the development of parents' employability and life skills. This range of provision ensures that Sure Start Thornhill is more than just a health centre for children and families and can offer activities which go beyond this agenda.

Lead agency

At this stage it is worth noting the contribution made by the lead agency of Sure Start Thornhill, namely Kirklees Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. Because the lead agency has a focus on social service issues, it offers a range of expertise which goes beyond a purely health based focus. This expertise is manifested in a variety of ways and contributes to the quality of the provision offered by Sure Start Thornhill. In particular the expertise and knowledge of the partnership board and management committee is able to influence the strategic direction of the programme. Having a lead agency which is able to encompass a whole range of service provision gives Thornhill Sure Start a strength which should be exploited further in the future, particularly the overview available to such a body and its contribution to commissioning services from both health and welfare settings as opposed to health settings alone.

Multi-agency working

One of the fundamental aspects of Sure Start which makes it unique from other agencies is the development of the multi-professional to service

provision. At its best this can clearly be a way of creating joined up service provision in enabling a range of different expertise to be easily available to families without duplication of information giving. With the forthcoming development of Children's Centres, such multi-agency working will hopefully offer much more cohesive support and protection networks for vulnerable families. Recent studies of Sure Start have confirmed the view that multi-agency working is important to the success of programmes:

It is the quality of the collaboration with the other agencies which determines the success of Sure Start local programmes in tackling the issue of employability, and especially the links and networks that programme managers and staff bring with them to the programme. Collaboration between operational staff is often effective even where links are poor at a strategic level. (Meadows and Garber 2004: 1)

Meadows and Garber note that collaboration can occur at operational level even when strategic links are poor, but this does not mean that the management of SSLPs should not strive to create conditions which are conducive to work of this type.

What emerged during the years since Sure Start first began operating is the complexity of the role which Sure Start programmes can play in local service provision and linked to these new kinds of understanding of service provision which Sure Start has created. For many, both users of Sure Start, and those who work within the system, Sure Start is first and foremost a physical embodiment of service provision operating at an institutional level and where the primary meaning of the service is located in the visible presence of Sure Start services within a community. Thus the image of Sure Start is that of a building or centre where parents bring children in order to receive services. In the case of Sure Start Thornhill, the entire philosophy of service provision was grounded firmly in the establishment of two centres to act as the focus of service delivery within the community. The physical presence of the buildings may make it hard for people involved with Sure Start in Thornhill to think of the service in any way

other than as an entity delivered from within these buildings. But in order to fully appreciate how Sure Start can change approaches to service delivery and reach a wider range of families, it is sometimes necessary to think about Sure Start as a theoretical construction or a system of thinking and ideas. Sure Start can play a major role in reshaping services to meet the evolving and often complex needs of parents and children but our experience of evaluating Sure Start Thornhill is that this can only be fully realised when the mind sets which are created through the institutionalisation of services in a building are challenged. In particular in Thornhill there is much evidence from the evaluation activity that the existence of the buildings has done much to prevent the development of innovative ways of delivering services and reaching the local community.

The existence of the centres can lead to an approach to service delivery in which users have to physically visit the building as a prerequisite to receiving help and advice. We found an attitude amongst many Sure Start staff that if parents were to be worthy of being helped then they should find the time and resources to visit the building with their children. This attitude of “they first have to help themselves, before we can help them” is reinforced on two different fronts. The first is the unspoken desire to make sure the facilities at the two centres are used and that there are sufficient parent visits to the centres to justify their existence. The second is a general idea of the necessity for self help and responsibility for parenting which may well be imported into professional thinking from the realm of the personal. It is clear that some staff, although reluctant to admit this explicitly, do believe that parents should make the effort to attend the centres to access services, and if they do not, then they are not deserving of them and should be ignored. It is of course the case that Sure Start Thornhill has done much to reach out to people in their homes and this work should continue. What we are describing here is more about the general view of Sure Start from staff and as we came to the end of the final year of evaluation activity we saw much evidence that this view was becoming further entrenched rather than being challenged.

So why is it important to think beyond the physical location of the centres? Simply put, there is ample evidence that there are still families in Thornhill who are not accessing Sure Start services and do not believe that Sure Start has anything to offer them. During this year of evaluation we concentrated much of our fieldwork on understanding those families who are “hard to reach” and refining what we know about their profile and perceptions of Sure Start. By understanding more fully the reasons why people are reluctant or unable to access Sure Start services it will be possible for the programme to tailor future activity to specifically address the needs of these groups,

Sure Start programmes, because of their close grounding in a specific community are able to tailor services to local people and their needs, and this remains one of the key organisational factors which can contribute to success. Within any community, and Sure Start is no exception, some families will be “hard to reach”, and will not willingly avail themselves of Sure Start services, however appealing and logical this may seem to those outside the family. Since Sure Start programmes have been operating, we have begun to find out more about the “hard to reach” groups and Eisenstadt (2002) using data from the national evaluation, can write:

The key message for statutory services so far from Sure Start is that failure to take up services by people living in poverty is often a result of practical circumstances, not lack of concern for their children. Much greater effort needs to be made to ensure that providers contact hard to reach groups and find out what are the barriers to take up of services. The most important lesson from Sure Start so far, is the need to talk to local people about their needs, and respond in ways that are visible. (Eisenstadt 2002: 4)

The previous evaluation reports spent a great deal of time discussing the issue of hard to reach families within Thornhill and the complex reasons which underlie their reluctance to engage with the programme. Work in this final year with a selection of families who are not using Sure Start, has generated more insights about this.

Recently the National Evaluation of Sure Start team (based at Birkbeck College London), have been clarifying their views on the policy focus of Sure Start and what features are particularly pertinent in this context:

Sure Start local programmes are designed to be comprehensive, community-based projects adapted to local needs, and making maximal use of local expertise and enthusiasms. Such a focus on local autonomy may capitalise on shared concerns of people for their community (Ness Evaluation Team 2004: 2)

Clearly the issue of local autonomy within Sure Start programme is important, and this report will return to this issue a number of times to examine the possibilities to increase the level of involvement of local people with the running of the programme. However we also wish to sound some notes of caution in relation to this issue as there is clear evidence from Sure Start Thornhill that there are many Sure Start users, both actual and potential, who use or wish to use services, but who have very little interest in getting involved in running the programme. These people are content to access services and take advantage of what is on offer, but are reluctant to become further involved. The reasons for this are complex and varied: some parents feel that they have insufficient time to get involved in Sure Start, others see it as not their responsibility and believe the service should be managed by professionals; others lack confidence in their own ability to get involved. One of the key messages of this report is that the issue of community involvement in Sure Start is not straightforward and as it moves into its next phase of development, Sure Start Thornhill needs to revisit this issue and seek further clarity.

Challenges are posed by the public policy context within which the Sure Start initiative was conceptualised, and flexibility in methods is necessary to accommodate these challenges. Key elements in this context with a bearing on the implementation of the study include the emphasis on preventive rather than reactive work; the need for “joined-up working”; the engagement of a wide range of professional and non-professional community members; and, perhaps most importantly, the government’s “managerial ethos” with its central emphasis on targets and performance indicators (Ness Evaluation Team 2004: 3)

In order to research further into the features of families who are hard to reach, the evaluation used an extensive interviewing schedule. This involved recruiting and training a number of parent interviewers to go out into the local community and collect opinions about Sure Start. Interviewers were equipped with an interview schedule and a tape recorder and they sought out families and parents with children under 4 and asked them about Sure Start. Some interviews were with parents who were already using Sure Start, but a significant number were with parents who did not use Sure Start. By analysing the content of these tapes, it was possible to organise families who did not access Sure Start into three main types. These types of family and their reasons for not accessing Sure Start are listed below. The types were arrived at through a phenomenological analysis of the data. Phenomenology seeks to arrive at an understanding of individual experience and how people make sense of their experiences. It is a useful technique when analysing people's perceptions of an organisation like Sure Start. When drawing up the three main types of hard to reach families, we drew on White (1986) who has identified two kinds of "restraint" which prevent people from accessing services. The first kind of restraints is termed *restraints of redundancy* and refer to beliefs fear and habits of the individual and members of the family. The second type of restraints is termed *restraints of feedback* and refers to interactional patterns within and outside of the family. Both types of restraint have left their impression on the types of parents we have identified in what follows, and we can see that a complex set of interlocking beliefs and behaviours can keep families from accessing Sure Start services.

The three types of hard to reach families are as follows, in order to make our analysis accessible we have named them according to their main characteristics.

The wary parents

Those who are wary of Sure Start have not been given sufficient information to make a judgement about the services and arrive at an

independent decision to use them. The wary will frequently conflate Sure Start with an arm of the social services or medical provision and will consequently view Sure Start as an instrument of government surveillance and control. They will therefore avoid contact with Sure Start and unless activity is targeted at re-educating this group they will remain forever suspicious about Sure Start and its motives.

The unconcerned parents

The unconcerned are not suspicious or wary of Sure Start; they simply do not think that they are in need of the service or that it has anything to offer them. They tend to think of themselves as successful and competent parents and are usually very able to access other health care and educational services when needed. Their general view of Sure Start is that it offer services which either duplicate or reproduce what they can access already, or that it is a service which is only useful for incompetent or neglectful parents.

The working parents

The workers are prevented from accessing Sure Start primarily by logistics. They often work shift patterns which mean they cannot attend Sure Start centres during the day and therefore rely on childcare arrangements outside of Sure Start and when they have finished work, so have the Sure Start centres. These parents are usually curious about what Sure Start can offer and they are often resentful and disappointed that there are very few opportunities to use services outside of working hours. These parents were extremely vocal on the user satisfaction survey calling for more to be done to meet their needs, and the interviews with parents conducted by the interviewing team also revealed that there was a general opinion that more could be done to help working parents access services provided by Sure Start. Vimpani (2002) writing about Sure Start issues from an international perspective has the following to say about developed countries' service delivery systems for parents and children:

Our service systems often do not reflect the reality of contemporary life for our families with young children. Although child health clinics within pram-pushing distance of their home might have made sense for mothers who stayed at home to care for their young children full-time, they make less sense in an age where a significant proportion of mothers of preschool aged children are in the workforce full or part-time and are extensive users of child care. In such circumstances, the call for child care centres to provide a 'platform' for other service providers, such as child health services, makes considerable sense (Vimpani 2002: 281)

This neatly identifies an issue facing Sure Start Thornhill, namely the coordination of Sure Start services with child care provision for working parents. We know that many families in Thornhill are making extensive use of child care facilities, but these are not linked, either directly or indirectly. The universality of this issue is confirmed by the National Evaluation of Sure Start team:

Sure Start is perceived as being predominantly for non-employed parents and mothers, largely because of the 'office hours' that services are available. It is more difficult to engage with employed parents and fathers. (NESS 2004a)

On the issue of working parents and their access to Sure Start, there is much evidence to demonstrate that this group would appreciate the opportunity to receive home visits outside working hours. This group feels cut off from health visiting support and are placed at a disadvantage simply because they are already in employment and cannot receive visits at allocated times. If these parents want to attend a clinic, they have to take time off work and employment circumstances are such that they lose pay. This group of working parents therefore finds it hard to access Sure Start services, despite the fact that they may well be in need of services. Sure Start Thornhill needs to rethink some of its key ideas about provision and delivery to see if more could be done to meet the needs of working parents. One suggestion to improving this situation which has come from a number of parents has been the provision of either telephone advice line or drop in centre held regularly during a weekday evening.

The three types of “hard to reach” parent presented here give an overview of the main reasons why more families are not accessing services at Sure Start Thornhill. Overcoming the barriers to participation identified here is not easy and the programme has already taken some positive steps in this regard. The work of the two parental support coordinators remains crucial in spreading the Sure Start message to the wider community and the centres have been opening on Saturday mornings in order to offer working parents the opportunity to attend. In our previous evaluations we underlined the strategic importance of the parental support coordinators and the key message which their role gives to the local community. Recent research has confirmed our findings hold true in other settings and this link between a local community and a Sure Start, as operationalised by staff who understand local issues, is extremely important:

Therefore, what is distinctive about the community support project is that support workers are ‘normal people with normal problems’, who have a practical understanding of the demands of parenting in their local area. For example, Community Support Workers (CSWs) explained that they could find common ground to share parenting strategies with families allocated to them:

I think because we're parents as well, and we can relate to situations they've had, that perhaps we've had at one point, is an advantage. People, I think, would be more wary of a professional going in with a big fancy title, because I think most people are. (CSW, female, aged 29 years)

Therefore, a number of CSWs felt that their input was more readily accepted by ‘hard to reach’ families than intervention by a professional worker. (Attree 2004: 4)

Attree concludes that the work of the CSWs (a post analogous to the parental support coordinator role at Sure Start Thornhill) is important in providing access for local people and our evaluation activity this year confirms this view. Returning to the issue of out of working hours opening, we must note that this Saturday morning opening is limited in the services provided, for example Health Visitors are not available at these sessions, and a general lack of the services and professionals found at Sure Start during the week, means that these sessions are useful as social occasions

and to provide a children's club, but do not equate to a radical attempt to make Sure Start services available to working parents outside the confines of the working week. We can conclude by saying that the steps taken to widen possibilities for access are welcome, but more needs to be done if participation in Sure Start Thornhill is to rise.

Constraints of multi-agency working

Whilst there is an implicit acceptance and support of the principle of multi-professional and multi-agency working it is apparent that structures exist which impede the development of such an approach. There remain clear cultural differences between various groups of professionals in particular along the lines of what can be considered a divide between those working within the health tradition and those from a community support background. This issue has been identified elsewhere:

Staff interviews gave indications that there may be a tension for Sure Start between the community development aspect and the therapeutic or clinical intervention side. This may relate to the holding of different professional values (see Wilmot, 1995). The New Labour agenda suggests that complex, deep-rooted problems require joined-up solutions and emphasizes a social model and a community-focused response (see DSS, 1999). The latter may be easier to 'map onto' if one's profession has a social or community-oriented focus rather than a more individualistic focus. (Morrow and Malin 2004: 173)

Bureaucratic accountability procedures remain quite distinct and often result in either duplication of services or lack of relevant information being appropriately shared. There is still no shared agreement about data protection issues and often this legislation by specific professionals groups in order to circumvent cooperation and collaboration with other groups. Issues of professional power are at work here and it is the case that data protection and the continued erection of barriers has resulted in the breakdown of relationships to some extent. The management of Sure Start needs to be proactive in tackling this issue and establishing shared

administrative procedures which transcend narrow occupational ways of working. Service level agreements need to reflect the explicit multi-agency approach of Sure Start rather than the sectional professional base of each particular group. Whilst it is clearly the case that legislation concerning data protection needs to be adhered to, we have noted from interviews with key members of staff that some interpretations of data protection are unduly strict and often erroneous and are being used as way of gate-keeping and of preventing valuable information sharing between professional groups.

Home visiting issues

As we identified earlier, home visiting is important to the mission of Sure Start and many local people see this as one of the major benefits of the programme. There are however, a number of complex issues raised by home-visiting, and drawing on data gathered from parent interviews, this section will discuss these in more detail.

Parents have identified that what they most want from home-visiting is a focus on family support. They do appreciate visits from health visitors, but they see this activity as mostly for the benefit of the children. They therefore want to see more visiting activity which is focused on family support issues and which meets the needs of the whole family and not just the children. Work with both parents and children was identified as a factor in success in the policy framework which led to Sure Start's inception and our work in this area suggests that more could be done to focus visiting activity on whole family issues.

Developing parents' employability and life skills

Sure Start Thornhill is already doing some useful work to help parents get back into employment. But our work with a wider group of parents than

those who attend the centres demonstrates that child care issues are paramount. It is part of the drive of Sure Start to reduce poverty and clearly developing parents so they can get into employment is one of the most effective ways of doing this. But at the moment Sure Start Thornhill does not give parents who find employment enough support with ongoing child care. At worst there can be a perception that training and development is offered through Sure Start, but once a parent finds employment there is little which Sure Start can do to help them with childcare. The development of the children's centre and associated wraparound provision during the next phase of activity will no doubt go a long way to solving this issue, but in the short term it should be a clear priority for the programme to review its child care provision strategies and see if more flexibility for working parents could be attained. A review of the literature surrounding employability within Sure Start programmes revealed the following evidence:

Providing childcare for parents attending education and training is an important contribution by local programmes towards improving employability. Where local programmes have an 'employment coordinator', relationships with specialist employment organisations have been developed and sustained, and individual parents have received enhanced individual support. (Meadows and Garber 2004: 2)

The role of employment coordinator is not one which is currently offered at Sure Start Thornhill (although there are regular visits from members of the job centre). It appears that the programme should review its policy in this area and conduct a feasibility study concerning an employment coordinator or similar role as having one individual charged with looking after the interests of working parents and those seeking work could prove extremely beneficial for the programme.

The Mainstreaming agenda

Over the past few years, policy frameworks have been moving towards a consideration of main streaming. The notion of main streaming is complex, but put simply, it refers to the movement of services developed via Sure

Start so they are taken over by other agencies and made part of their usual provision. Mainstreaming will ensure that innovative delivery and services which clearly meet the needs of local people are not lost or dismantled when Sure Start funding runs out. Effective mainstreaming activity requires SSLPs to develop networks with other agencies and to use their funding and organisational resources to develop Sure Start messages within existing services. In the case of Sure Start Thornhill, there has already been some successful activity linking with the Thornhill Lees community centre on specific projects. Organisations such as the Thornhill Lees community centre offer a far greater range of provision than Sure Start and a location outside of the immediate Sure Start area ensures that any activities also draw on a wider range of cultural and ethnic resources. Cooperation between Sure Start and centres like these is thus very important in diversifying the range of provision and bringing the Sure Start message to a wider group of families, as well as ensuring that strong links which can lead to mainstreaming are created. It is important that the initial success of partnerships such as this one is built upon in the next phase of activity and that Sure Start Thornhill becomes proactive in searching out more opportunities of this kind.

Postcode issues

This is an issue which is faced by all Sure Starts and is a result of their organisation along geographical lines and within strict groups of postcodes. Sure Start Thornhill has a clearly defined set of postcodes of families eligible for services and is unable to provide support outside of these boundaries. There are areas of considerable poverty which exist close to Sure Start Thornhill catchment area but not within it, and evidence from the evaluation shows that there can be considerable resentment of the “postcode” lottery which determines whether a family can access services. Resolving this issue is a matter for both national policy, but more could be done at the local level to think of creative solutions to the issue. It is clear that there is unused capacity within the two centres at Sure Start Thornhill, both in terms of space and staff time and expertise and as Sure Start enters its next phase we strongly recommend the continuation of the debate about

providing services across a wider geographical area. Work to investigate this possibility has already been conducted but should be continued so that the programme can consider ways of moving beyond its original catchment.

Section 2: Sure Start and inclusion

In previous years we have stressed the issues concerning inclusion and Sure Start. Clearly the issue of making Sure Start accessible to the widest number of families is of paramount importance, although the difficulties of reaching the 'hard to reach' is always a factor to take into consideration. In this section we will consider some specific issues about inclusion which have arisen from this year's evaluation activity and examine a particularly successful model of inclusive working which centres on the homeless unit and draw out lessons about how this could be used in a wider way.

As in our previous findings, the delivery of service provision to families living the homeless unit remains excellent. There is an understanding that families with complex needs or who are in crisis situation often need additional and specific support but may be unable to access the services through their own volition. Circumstances simply prevent them from doing this. Sure Start Thornhill has consistently recognised this and has been committed to maintaining a regular presence at the homeless unit, irrespective of numbers of families who are resident at any one time. This has generated a clear identity about Sure Start and both raised awareness about services available and been successful in engaging some families on a longer term basis. We identified earlier that there can be a perception amongst Sure Start staff that parents need to show willingness to attend centres before they can access services, and we outlined the limitations inherent in this mode of thinking. In the case of the homeless unit, this thinking has not been used and the efforts to reach out to a vulnerable group of people has resulted in some extremely worthwhile support work. There are many lessons which can be learned from this model of provision, most important is the fact that staff were prepared to visit the unit and make initial contact. They were also prepared to provide both transport and individual support to those families who wished to visit the centres. In short this is a model of outreach service provision which has often been mentioned by parents living in the wider locality as desirable but rarely made available to them.

Not only can this example of outreach be crucial in reaching more vulnerable families, but it can also serve as a useful way of generating awareness about Sure Start in general. There remains a consistent lack of knowledge about Sure Start and many of the services it offers from within the local community.

We have identified a particular group of parents who have children around the age of three years. This age group of children are not of school age nor are they babies and evidence suggests that families of this kind may well not be aware of what Sure Start can offer them. They are effectively located within a communication gap between the promotion of services by health professionals such as midwives and the information which is available through the two primary schools in the area. Our research suggests that these families will access information about local services from within their existing social networks, these may be the local shops, pubs, clubs and other places. More effective communication about Sure Start targeted at this group is needed and this requires interventions beyond the schools and the Sure Start centres. This could include more active engagement with community settings such as the running of joint activities. A very successful example of this has been the event to celebrate International Women's Day at Thornhill Lees Community Centre which demonstrated how Sure Start could work with other organisations to the mutual benefit of both. There needs to be much more creative involvement with established social networks in the area. The use of other settings to host Sure Start activities is also likely to involve more than just mothers. There is a perception that Sure Start is focused primarily on meeting the needs of children first, then mothers, and then finally families. Lloyd O'Brien and Lewis (2003) confirms the view that Sure Start programmes can be perceived as predominantly child and mother centred

The interview data suggest that fathers in Sure Start local programme areas may be committed to being fathers play a key role in the lives of their children yet tend not to engage with Sure Start programmes. A number of barriers to fathers' involvement in Sure Start were identified:

- predominantly female environment/lack of male presence;
- Sure Start opening hours and fathers' employment hours;
- traditional, gendered attitude towards childcare and male-female roles: 'mother knows best';
- female-centred orientation of services;
- lack of knowledge about Sure Start
(Lloyd, O'Brien and Lewis 2003: 18)

Many women reported this perception during interview and it appears to have a strong hold within the community. This kind of perception has a tendency to reinforce gender stereotypes and moving some activities outside the Sure Start centres can demonstrate that this perception is not correct.

Publicity

The issue of publicity has remained key during all three evaluation reports. Put in simple terms, any Sure Start is only as good as the information which it can get out into the community it serves. A programme can offer the very best in high quality services, but if local people are not aware of what is on offer, very little will be achieved. It remains the case that significant numbers of local residents are completely unaware of what Sure Start Thornhill is and what it offers. We have already considered in relation to the hard to reach family types particular the unconcerned who may know only a small amount about Sure Start but their knowledge is very limited and leads to a premature conclusion that they will not benefit from accessing services.

Section 3: Sure Start as a learning organisation

One of the most exciting and potentially radical features of Sure Start is the bringing together of professionals from a number of different fields and from a range of traditions. It is possible within a Sure Start to have a mix of workers from health care backgrounds, working alongside people with more of a focus on play and child development. This mixing of disciplines and the possibilities for multi-agency working offer the possibility for new ways of working with families to be developed. However this can only happen if the Sure Start programme develops a learning culture and actively encourages staff to take part in learning and development activity. A considerable amount of time was spent during this year of evaluation considering the extent to which Sure Start Thornhill was a learning organisation and thinking about what barriers exist in this respect. Hamel and Prahalad (1994) offer a useful list of four main features of a learning organisation. They argue that learning organisations possess the following characteristics:

- **Learning Culture** - an organizational climate that nurtures learning. There is a strong similarity with those characteristics associated with innovation.
 - **Processes** - processes that encourage interaction across boundaries. These are infrastructure, development and management processes
 - **Tools and Techniques** - methods that aid individual and group learning, such as creativity and problem solving techniques.
 - **Skills and Motivation** - to learn and adapt.
- (Hamel and Prahalad 1994: 32)

Our work with staff at Sure Start Thornhill suggests that some of the criteria for a learning organisation are being met for some of the time, but the picture is patchy and far more could be done to foster a culture of learning within the organisation. We have found that individual professionals frequently learn a great deal from carrying out their roles and are able to use this information to improve their own performance. But the opportunities for different professional groups to come together and share

expertise and knowledge which crosses disciplinary boundaries are rare and are not actively promoted by management.

In particular staff should be encouraged to belong to a learning culture where evaluation and creative sharing of good practice is a routine part of their activities. That is not happening at the moment because staff are still to a certain extent still inhabiting their original professional identities and are not working outside their particular areas. It is important to stress that a learning organisation is one in which opportunities for learning are distributed across the social network and not merely part of formal activities. There is therefore a need for informal learning routines based on more meaningful meetings between professional groups. It is also the case that staff need to be encouraged to think about creative ways of evaluating their work and there needs to be a movement beyond the use of questionnaires and surveys as the sole way of measuring the success of an activity. During this year of evaluation activity we undertook a video evaluation of the baking group. This group meets regularly and involves older children in practical activities to develop healthy eating and associated messages. The baking group itself is extremely successful and is a key example of the ways in which the community can become involved in Sure Start activity. The video of the evaluation activity demonstrated that evidence of success can go beyond the formal approaches of the questionnaire and can involve the community in an evaluation of the success of initiatives. There exists a whole range of creative possibilities for allowing users to evaluate Sure Start activity and more work should be undertaken to develop these.

Kenny (2002) writes of the possibilities of multi-agency working and the way in which collaboration across different disciplines can lead to new and flexible modes of service delivery which are more able to meet the needs of clients than the older forms of “uni-professional” working. There are also opportunities for research and evaluation experts and Sure Start workers to collaborate on evaluative activities. Weinberger and Stafford (2004) collaborated on a project to investigate the learning possibilities of “story

stacks” and jointly produced an evaluation document which captures the dialogue between a practitioner with an in-depth knowledge of Sure Start practices and a researcher who is able to provide a systematic focus for that knowledge. Such collaborations are extremely useful in widening the impact of Sure Start evaluative activity, but our work at Thornhill during the final year could have been more extensive and worthwhile if there had been more of a collective sense amongst Sure Start workers about the awareness about the need to evaluate their work and how this can be incorporated into their day-to-day work roles.

Our recommendations in respect of increasing the capacity of staff to conduct their own evaluative activity centre on the need for increased amounts of training and for the management of the programme to give this aspect of professional work a much higher profile:

Training is one of the key ways to draw staff from different backgrounds together to work in a complementary and multi-disciplinary way. Programmes that took a systematic and proactive approach to training appeared to be more successful at ensuring staff had the appropriate skills than those who took a more ad-hoc approach. (NESS 2004: 4)

There should also be a consideration of sharing information between the various roles within Sure Start and some collective sense of sharing evidence across discipline in order to increase the impact of organisational learning. Many commentators are now stressing the need for “joined up working”, and there are clearly improvements which can be made at Thornhill in this respect:

Challenges are posed by the public policy context within which the Sure Start initiative was conceptualised, and flexibility in methods is necessary to accommodate these challenges. Key elements in this context with a bearing on the implementation of the study include the emphasis on preventive rather than reactive work; the need for “joined-up working”; the engagement of a wide range of professional and non-professional community members; and, perhaps most importantly, the government’s “managerial ethos” with its central emphasis on targets and performance indicators (Ness Evaluation Team 2004: 3)

In addition to an increased stress upon staff learning about other roles and disciplines with Sure Start, we have identified a clear need for a greater commitment to staff development to give individuals and groups the opportunities to learn about developments at other Sure Start programmes. It was clear that some staff at the programme are becoming rather insular in their outlook and a commitment to encouraging them to attend development events and conferences where they share professional practice and expertise would be extremely beneficial. Staff who have benefited from these opportunities would have a better perspective on their work within the programme and would have some room to stand back and evaluate their practice and think of new and creative ways to improve service delivery.

Section 4: Sure Start within the community

In this section we will consider the meaning of Sure Start within the community and how it is perceived by local people. We have already alluded to issues with community involvement and some of the unreal expectations which can be created about community participation as result of policy frameworks. However despite these issues, it is clear that any SSLP should be seeking to maximise its profile within the community and promotion of positive partnership working. Community empowerment is seen as a key factor in neighbourhood regeneration but has a specific and intrinsic value for individuals as an activity in its own right. In order to be successful at this there needs to be far more attention paid to user friendly ways of working with local people.

There has been some extensive work on involving local parents in the operation of Sure Start. This work is positive and to be commended. We have conducted some work with parents who have volunteered their services to Sure Start in order to find out more about their experiences of partnership working. The impression gained from most parents is that Sure Start remains an organisation which is professionally focused and where expertise and knowledge linked to professional status is given a high status. Parents who wish to take part in meetings need to be extremely confident if they are to contribute, and generally the level of formality and procedural rigour can intimidate even the most resolute of local people. However, it is not true to say that local parents do not wish to contribute to decision making processes about activities at Sure Start it is simply the case that more informal and user friendly ways need to be developed to allow the voices of these parents to be heard. We can also note that where parents want to take part in meetings and accept roles within Sure Start, that their induction and training could be managed in a much more comprehensive and coherent manner. Parents need careful nurturing and support if they are to succeed in these roles and Sure Start Thornhill

management could do more to ensure that where volunteers come forward they are given appropriate training to fulfil their roles.

We can note at this point, that whenever the views of parents are elicited by the programme, this is done in the form of a questionnaire administered at the end of a course or activity. Many parents have posited the idea of a suggestion box or similar facility where they can contribute ideas freely about activities which can be run, rather than responding to a pro-forma which has been drawn up to meet a specific evaluation need. Linked to this is the issue of communicating to parents how their wishes are being considered and how they are being responded to. We note that at the moment Sure Start Thornhill is relatively poor at showing publicly that it has taken the views of parents into consideration. It is often the case that views have been considered, but unless it is demonstrated to parents that their ideas are valued, then the perception will continue that Sure Start is not that responsive to local needs.

Section 5: Cost Benefit Analysis

During the previous evaluation report, we undertook a cost benefit analysis of Sure Start Thornhill. The aim was to determine how the money in the programme was being spent and in particular gather evidence about the allocation of budgets to particular Sure Start priority areas. By performing some straightforward calculations using the budget for the current year and then using data about the number of visits to the Sure Start centre and the visits made by Sure Start staff to people's homes it was possible to arrive at some conclusions on the balance of spending within the programme and how this was contributing to the overall impact of the programme.

Explanation of Financial Model

The financial model used for the cost benefit analysis is based on the operating budget for the individual priority areas at Sure Start Thornhill for the financial year 2003/2004. The purpose of the Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) is to establish information on the financial costs of intervening in each of the priority areas. The CBA is not a formal financial audit and rather than providing detailed financial detail it concentrates on providing a guide to the cost of services to enable comparisons and analyses across the programme.

The calculations were performed in the following way:

- The budget for each of the priority areas was sought from the management of the programme.
- Analysis of the numbers of people accessing services in each of the areas was compiled from management information. Each worker at Sure Start is required to provide a monthly sheet detailing the totals of children and adults who have accessed facilities. The key to understanding this is the concept of the "visit". A visit is defined as an individual who either accesses services in one of the Sure Start

centres or who is visited in their home by a Sure Start worker. Each time an individual (child or parent) accesses a service it is considered a visit. Staff at the programme are required to differentiate between new clients and those who have accessed services previously and are returning. For the purposes of the CBA calculation this distinction between new and returning clients was subsumed and every visit was counted. The figures collected for this analysis began in September 2003 and ended in July 2004, representing almost one calendar year of activity at the programme. The figures for this calculation are listed in table 1.

- The cost of each visit in each of the priority areas was then calculated by dividing the annual budget for the areas by the number of visits made in one year.
- The next step required a calculation to incorporate the operating costs of the programme for the financial year 2003/2004. These costs include expenditure on administration and maintenance of buildings and equipment and the salaries of the management of the programme. Although the period on which the operating costs of the programme were calculated did not exactly match the months for which the number of visits was collected, the operating costs of the programme are largely fixed and therefore the calculation remains sound at the level of accuracy needed for the CBA analysis.
- The operating costs were then distributed across the total number of visits made to the centre. The total operating costs were divided by the total number of visits across all priority areas. This resulted in a figure of £64.63 which represents the additional cost of each visit required to sustain the programme.
- The final cost of the visits was calculated by taking the cost per visit for each of the priority areas and adding the £64.63 from the previous step. The results of this analysis are presented in table 2.

Table 1 – Calculation of annual visits

	Sep 03	Oct 03	Nov 03	Dec 03	Jan 04	Feb 04	Mar 04	Apr 04	May 04	Jun 04	Jul 04	TOTAL	Category
Antenatal drop in	5	5	2	18	8	12	14	10	9	14		97	H
antenatal visit		15	1	9	5	9	9	5	12	3		68	H
Baby Sure Start								9	5			14	H
Baking club	1	1	1	8	9	10	6	6	13	6		61	PL
Breast feeding					12	8	8	6	14	15	7	70	H
Busy babies	31	12	11	3								57	H
Carers support		1	1	1	1					2		6	H
Childminding support group									2			2	PL
Childminding support visit									4	4		8	PL
Coffee event		15	11	16				17		33		92	A
Mums and tots									3			3	H
Contact		19		6	9	24	15	19	14	41	20	38	O
Dads event											4	4	H
Dental health							4					4	H
Early Start					12	10	9		6	12	4	53	H
Family support contact		7	8		14	11	5		27	13	8	93	H
Creche course	7	8	7	7								29	H
HV drop in (OV)	16	52	69	56	66	67	70	64	87	61	64	672	H
HV drop in (TH)		13	23	17	41	34	40	24	25	37	33	287	H
Homestart support group			8	8	8	6	8					38	O
Improving maths course	6	6	6		3	3	3	3	4	2		36	A
Infant massage		9	9							9		27	PL
Infant massage (TH)	18	14						20	19			71	PL

Table 2 – Total cost per visit

<i>Priority Area</i>	<i>budget</i>	<i>total visits</i>	<i>cost per visit</i>	<i>overhead per visit</i>	<i>total cost per visit</i>
Outreach and home visiting	£13,242	81	163.48	£65	£228
Support for families and parents	£84,018	545	154.16	£65	£219
Play learning and childcare	£105,829	422	250.78	£65	£315
Primary and community health care	£76,998	1499	51.37	£65	£116
Special needs support	£31,527	489	64.47	£65	£129
Additional activities	£560	568	0.99	£65	£66
TOTALS	£312,174	3604			

Interpreting the results

The previous evaluation report stressed that the cost benefit analysis is not primarily focused on determining the cost efficiency of Sure Start in a simplistic manner which concentrates purely on costs alone. Sure Start is aiming to make a difference to families and children who are suffering from social exclusion and it is self evident that the cost of reaching these families may be higher than the cost of delivering main stream services. It is however possible to make calculations of the cost of each of the visits or interventions which Sure Start Thornhill makes. This information is useful for a number of reasons, especially when the process is being repeated year on year resulting in longitudinal data which can be used to evaluate the performance of the programme in relation to its spending and the priorities which are being pursued. However the change to the way in which visits are recorded by Sure Start between this year and last year has made direct comparisons across years difficult to perform.

The previous evaluation calculated that a total of 5081 visits or interventions by Sure Start had been made. This year this has reduced to 3604. However there are some reasons for this dramatic reduction in the number of visits, in particular there has been a change of monitoring procedures. In previous years, child visits and parent visits were counted as separate entities, so a parent attending with a child would count as two visits. For this year, the family unit alone was counted, so a parent accompanying a child to Sure Start would only count as a single visit. Since the last evaluation, the budgetary structure of Sure Start Thornhill has remained very similar. The amounts being spent on each of the areas has remained the same and the operating costs (used here to calculate overheads) is also very similar to the 2002/2003 figures.

AS a result of the reduced number of visits and interventions, the overhead per visit has increased this year. It was previously £37 per visit, but this has now risen to £65.

Conclusions and Recommendations from the Cost Benefit Analysis

This is the second year in which a cost benefit analysis has been undertaken and once again we need to stress the point that this information is produced in order to give an overview of what the programme is spending money on, and link this to the overall goals of Sure Start. This is not a financial audit and does not claim the same accuracy or impact. The main conclusion we can reach from this year's activity is that things have remained largely unchanged from the previous year, spending has remained very similar and no dramatic changes to budgets or spending priorities has been made. The number of visits appears to have reduced, but this is mostly explained through the adoption of a different methodology for recording attendance activity at the programme. It is impossible, using the datasets for the two years, to reach a solid conclusion about whether the amount of activity at the programme has gone up or down during this year when compared to the previous year. We can conclude that the quality and scope of monitoring activity at Sure Start Thornhill has improved dramatically during this year and we are confident that the programme is now being more systematic and rigorous in its recording of visit and intervention activity.

The recommendation is as follows:

The increase in the quality of monitoring data is to be welcomed and Sure Start Thornhill has made some dramatic improvements in the way it records activity at the centres and in visiting parents and families in the community. There should be further work to build on this foundation, and the development of a more advanced monitoring system should be a priority. What is needed in particular is a system which identifies parents and children who are new to Sure Start and

tracks their attendance. The issue with the old system is that it makes no distinction between existing and new users, so any moves to further refine record keeping in this area would be welcome.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This is the final report of the three year evaluation of Sure Start Thornhill by the University of Huddersfield School of Education and Professional development. During the three evaluation reports we have focused on a number of conclusions and recommendations which relate to activities at Thornhill. During the early years of the programme we focused on the ways in which the programme communicated its message to users and the community and how multi-agency working and partnerships could be set up. Later evaluation activity focused on reaching those families which are “hard to reach” and the ways in which the programme could increase participation.

The conclusion of this evaluation is simple. Those users who attend Sure Start are very pleased with the services on offer and display high levels of satisfaction. This is a situation to be celebrated and the success of Sure Start Thornhill in building a coherent programme to meet the needs of some parents is considerable. This praise must be tempered though and in particular it must be noted that there are families within Thornhill who are not using Sure Start and are unlikely to do so if provision remains as it is now. Whilst there is an element of choice about whether families do access Sure Start services it appears that many vulnerable families are likely to experience some improvement to their quality of life by engaging with appropriate intervention.

The following recommendations are being made. These are all actions which are concrete and achievable by Sure Start Thornhill in the short to medium term and which we judge to have the potential to make a serious impact on the provision:

Publicity

There should be a sustained drive to mount Sure Start publicity at all possible public venues in the area. There should also be a drive to hold Sure Start events at these venues so publicity goes beyond that which can be achieved by notices alone. Sure Start needs to think outside of its “healthy lifestyle” values and consider publicity in settings such as pubs and clubs which appear to contradict these. In this way they can be sure that the message Sure Start is seeking to promote is being seen by as many possible members of the community.

Information sharing and data-protection

It was identified that information sharing amongst professional groups within Sure Start is being hampered by issues of data protection which are often cited as a reason for non-cooperation. Sure Start management should initiate a review of practices in this area, seeking if necessary, legal advice. Training and awareness raising of staff should then be conducted, so all Sure Start staff are aware of their legal obligations concerning confidential data, but are also aware of the need to share and collaborate with other workers and not gate-keep or hinder sharing of information.

Childcare

The issue of childcare remains a significant one for Sure Start Thornhill. Whilst the service provided is recognised as excellent, the limited availability of child care provision and its confinement to a narrow timetable based on courses and programmes at the centre, added to the need to book places in advance, mitigates against the wider development of individual parents. Whilst child care for occasional attendance at in-house courses can be accommodated, those parents seeking employment are forced to forego the excellent child centred facilities at Sure Start and find often less satisfactory alternatives which are able to accommodate their working day. This situation appears contradictory to the aims of Sure Start in its support for parents seeking employment.

Outreach

Services which are delivered via the two centres engender high levels of satisfaction but are obviously limited in influence to those families able to attend at these times. There are several identifiable groups within the locality who are unable or currently unaware of the relevance of services provided by Sure Start so evidence suggests that a much more proactive approach is necessary to attract these families. In the case of working families, more flexible provision of services, including the possible inclusion of telephone help lines and a regular evening drop in centre, and out of hours home visiting are required if Sure Start is to meet their needs. For those parents identified as “hard to reach” much more creative thinking is required irrespective of the efficacy of publicity it is unlikely that many of these parents will ever initiate contact with Sure Start. Therefore creative means need to be developed which will communicate the relevance of Sure Start. Such means could include: a practical presence in parts of the area which are most deprived possibly through the renting of a suitable unit from which to operate and provide a gateway to services. Whilst the notion of services being a “pram push” away is laudable, the stark reality of some parents’ perceptions of Sure Start means they are unlikely to make this journey. For parents experiencing multiple deprivation, finding the motivation to visit a Sure Start centre is often beyond consideration. Attention should be paid instead to offering practical and basic help and support (child care, domestic support), for an indefinite period as required by the needs of the family. Without such initial interventions, possible later engagement with a broader range of Sure Start services will not take place.

Articulation with existing service provision

There needs to be a much clearer position taken by Sure Start regarding the existing services in the community. So far much activity developed by Sure Start has been innovative and well supported by those accessing the service. But other networks already exist in the local area which could be encouraged

to develop their own provision under the guidance of Sure Start. This would ensure that the principles of Sure Start are operationalised through other established agencies.

Diversity

Even though we acknowledge that Thornhill is a homogeneous white community, there remains a need to promote ethnic diversity and celebrate cultures other than the majority ethnic group. Without this, Sure Start Thornhill will unwittingly reinforce the homogeneity of the area instead of seeking opportunities to build bridges with other cultures. It is particularly important to address this issue with young children.

Culture of evaluation

Concrete steps should be taken to improve the scope and quality of internal evaluative activity within Sure Start Thornhill. There are staff who are conducting useful evaluations of their work, but improvements could still be made so that all staff routinely collect evidence about the impact of their work, reflect on the meaning of this, and share insights and knowledge with other staff. There should be further training and development for staff to increase their knowledge of evaluation and enable them to be more creative in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their particular intervention.

Sure Start and the “stereotypical” family

Much of the focus of this evaluation has been directed towards the ways in which Sure Start can reach what are often termed as “hard to reach” families. Currently the services being provided by Sure Start whilst attracting high levels of satisfaction from those accessing these, appear to be targeted to what we can term a “stereotypical” family. The features of this stereotype include: a mother who is not in employment; has the emotional resources to seek out services and has the confidence to make the initial trip to a Sure Start centre. Whilst families of this type do exist and form a high proportion of currently engaging with Sure Start, if the programme is really to make a difference this

stereotype needs to be challenged. The fact that hard to reach families tend not to access Sure Start is a failure of that organisation rather than any a deficiency or lack of motivation of individual families. Families even those experiencing extreme levels of stress still want the best for their children and the fact that they are not choosing to use Sure Start services is evidence that there is still some way to go.

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