

**KINGSTON UPON HULL
SURE START MARFLEET**

3rd YEAR ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

May 2004 - Reviewed Jan 2005

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1. Introduction

Sure Start Marfleet has undertaken a wide range of activities in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the services provided to meet the needs of local children and their families. It is a requirement that the Sure Start Unit is kept informed of evaluation activity by means of an evaluation report. This report, which will be submitted to the Sure Start unit, reviews evaluation work undertaken to date, examining the potential impact towards shaping the future of local service delivery. Potential lessons emerging from the evaluation work are also clearly highlighted. The report looks at how the evaluation evidence collected by Sure Start Marfleet can provide a framework for creating a case for the sustainability and mainstreaming of services. Each piece of evaluation work undertaken by the local programme is described and critically assessed. The report also identifies the local programme's main achievements and challenges and assesses the extent to which these are reflected in the portfolio of evaluation material. To conclude, the report makes a number of recommendations that will help to support the local programme in developing their evaluation strategy and maximising the potential benefits of evaluation activity.

2. Status of the Report

This report was submitted to the Sure Start Unit in May 2004 in order to provide an overview of the evaluation activity undertaken by Sure Start Marfleet. The aim of the report is to provide an indication of the success of the programme by critically considering the evidence presented through evaluation work. The undertaking of this type of study and the drawing together of evaluation evidence provides initial information to support the direction in which the local programme should move. However, the Sure Start Unit and External Evaluators recognise the need to build up further evidence to ensure there is sufficient reasoning to more clearly identify programme direction. The report therefore serves as a summary of evaluation work rather than a document that will be instrumental in modifying service delivery. As the local programme develops in-depth and focused work, such as the evaluation of the Family Support, Employment and Health (cost effectiveness) models, there will be more substantial evidence relating to the progress of the local programme. From this evidence, it will then be possible to produce a report that draws out the implications of evaluation work for the local programme. From here, the report will be made more substantial thus satisfying the need for reflective practice whilst also acting as a document that can be used more widely, for example to influence other service providers and the wider agenda.

3. An overview of the Evaluation Strategy

In line with guidance from the Sure Start Unit, Sure Start Marfleet has produced an annual evaluation strategy. The strategy identifies a number of outputs and outcomes as well as providing a more detailed breakdown of the task, the staff responsible, the timescale, and the resources required. During March 2004, the local programme noted the progress made and highlighted reasons that may have affected progress.

The strategy can be broadly summarised into the following list of activities and responses regarding progress:

1. Ensuring appropriate systems for monitoring and recording data – original database is due to be replaced with a more effective operating system.
2. Reporting on progress towards milestones, targets and objectives – this is achieved through a 6 monthly progress document.
3. Review Partnership mechanisms – only the Partnership mechanisms for Training and Development have been reviewed through liP.
4. Achieve Investors in People Award – A protocol will be in place regarding appraisal and communication, to meet all the standards.
5. Annual Training Plan – PA training in place, more trainers are required in the city.
6. Ensure Community Development – A strategy is being reviewed and developed.
7. Stakeholder briefings – This is effected through the manager's report
8. Develop a Sure Start framework, with partners, to measure performance across projects – External evaluator to be appointed and input from Sure start Unit to be secured.
9. Explore cost effectiveness – Systems and data collection are underway with external evaluators.
10. Investigate feasibility of longitudinal case studies – External evaluators appointed as part of the study to evaluate the family support model.

11. Baseline satisfaction survey – Report completed by external evaluators.
12. A study on employability (arising from national evaluation) – local lessons to drawn out.
13. Disseminating good practice from health schemes – A brief has been developed and evaluation in progress.
14. Evaluating family support model – External evaluators appointed to conduct work and evaluation in progress.
15. Implementation of mainstreaming and sustainability strategy – A business plan has been drawn up to support the development and sustainability of the cyber café.

In addition, each service and activity must be regularly reviewed using the service and activity review form. Information such as the following is recorded on the form:

- Evidence of consultation and parental feedback
- How the service is meeting and recording its aims and objectives
- Issues of partnership working
- Evidence of sustainability
- Areas for learning and improvement

The form is discussed with senior staff and can be used to contribute to the evaluation process.

The local programme also undertakes SWOT analysis to identify the main strengths and limitations of services and to assist in developing services. This is initially completed by the programme manager and sent to the team co-ordinator, partner agencies and key staff for approval. The local programme is currently investigating how to involve parents and the management board in this process.

4. The Portfolio of Evidence

The local programme was requested by external evaluators to collect all material relating to evaluation and present a portfolio of work. This chapter explores each aspect of the portfolio giving consideration to questions such as the following:

- What is being evaluated?
- How does this fit with the overall evaluation strategy?
- What methods of evaluation have been used?
- How successful is the work in terms of evaluation?
- Is the evaluation sufficiently evidence-based?
- Could anything have been done differently?
- What has been learnt from the evaluation?
- To what extent has the project/activity achieved its targets?
- What challenges and issues have been highlighted?
- How has the evaluation work shaped the service?
- What else needs to be done?

Each piece of work within the portfolio will be examined individually. These are:

4.1 - Community Satisfaction Survey

The satisfaction survey was conducted to determine the extent of the quality of services as perceived by local families. The survey is a requirement of the Sure Start Unit and is an integral part of the overall evaluation strategy for Sure Start Marfleet. The survey was conducted by independent evaluators with the support of local schools. Through the survey, it was revealed there are:

- High levels of dissatisfaction with outdoor play facilities/services
- Mixed levels of satisfaction with indoor play facilities/services
- High levels of dissatisfaction with childcare facilities/services
- High levels of satisfaction with library facilities/services

There were also high numbers of respondents who did not complete survey questions making it difficult to draw conclusion as to true satisfaction levels, particularly regarding several services such as midwifery or baby clinics.

The independent evaluators made a number of recommendations, namely:

- Review accessibility of information in the community and collectively present details of all the children's activities and groups happening in the area
- Continue to contribute to the city-wide play strategy
- Support the need for parents to be informed as to the progress with the development of local parks
- Consider various recommendations regarding the design of future satisfaction surveys

The satisfaction survey provides a good starting point from which to address local issues. In terms of evaluation, it would be worthwhile re-visiting the document and exploring the impact that it has had on service development. It would be helpful to determine if the recommendations of the report have prompted any particular activities and actions. Given that the survey is to be repeated, the local programme will then have a clear understanding of some of the factors contributing to changes in satisfaction levels. It is also important to consider that as the satisfaction survey is a major part of the evaluation strategy that it should be viewed as an on-going learning and development process rather than merely a research task that is conducted every three years.

4.2 - Speech and Language Therapy

The portfolio contained the annual report from the Speech and Language Therapy service. This is one example of an Annual Report, as each service produces a report following a similar structure, which feeds into Annual Service Level Agreement meetings. This is used to assess how services continue within the programme.

The first service discussed in the report is *Baby Talk*, a service aimed at promoting good communication between parents and babies. The service is well attended and there is regular input into the group from other professionals such as the nutrition assistants. The group is looking at how they can ensure regular input from the health visitor, as this has been identified as being particularly useful for parents. The baby support worker is also instrumental in attracting new parents to the group and identifying parents who may need support in the group.

Internal evaluation of the service shows that parents feel their children really enjoy the sessions and that they often repeat the activities at home.

The second service, *Toddler Talk*, is for children between 8 and 18 month old and provides a play based interactive session. The internal evaluation shows that the group has the same regular attendance as *Baby Talk*, with 23 families having attended three or more times, although 21 families only attended once, which is more than double the number of families only attending once at the *Baby Talk* session. The report shows that the sessions are really enjoyed by children, particularly the singing.

Details of the Baby Visit service are also presented in the report. The service aims to give parents advice and support and to inform them about Sure Start. Just over half the planned visits were successful and reasons for a non successful visit are noted. This aspect of the service is due to be evaluated shortly.

Parents attended workshops to make *Talk Talk and Nursery Rhyme Bags*. 28 bags were made to be used with any child whose language is mildly delayed. The report notes that evaluation is ongoing via the completion of evaluation forms.

The report also details the numbers of referrals to the speech and language therapy service and the input by the service in nursery schools. The speech and language service are also administering the Sure Start Language Measure by conducting a home visit test for children in the area. Administration of the test has not been without difficulty, particularly in terms of ensuring access to families and ensuring that all speech and language therapy staff complete the relevant training. The service is trying to create links with the health visiting service to be able to administer the test more efficiently.

Seven staff have successfully completed the Hanen training, and have noted on evaluation forms that it is helpful.

In terms of evaluation, the report is very useful in giving a complete overview of the service. The questionnaires used as part of the evaluation are creative and very parent friendly. With regard to the future evaluation of the service, it may be worthwhile identifying particular issues and questions that when addressed may help to shape the service. For example, the evaluation could look at the numbers of families that move from the *Baby Talk* group to the *Toddler Talk* group and identify the reasons behind why some families choose not to do this. Another example could be to monitor and identify why a high number of families only attend one session. Internal evaluators must also ensure that the sample they are using is representative of all sessions, as some evaluation work is carried out on one day only and is therefore reliant on the views of the families in attendance. Internal evaluators may also wish to consider building on the evaluation work they have already done by presenting a stronger evidence base. It is clear that families are really enjoying the sessions and it would therefore be useful to expand on this by demonstrating the impact the sessions are having. This could be done by conducting and presenting some analysis of the speech

and language therapy plans. The plans explore objectives and outcomes for individuals, based on overall aims and as set against individual baseline data. The plan also records whether or not the parent/carer is satisfied with the outcome. Collective analysis and presentation of this data will demonstrate the impact of the service, thus strengthening the evidence that portrays the success of the service.

4.3 - Food and Health Survey

The food and health survey was conducted as a partnership between the department of Nutrition and Dietetics at Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust, Preston Road New Deal for Communities and Sure Start Marfleet. The report states that the aim of the project is to enable better eating habits, particularly for children, by improving access to information. Local people were therefore surveyed in order to gauge perceived needs regarding nutrition issues, thus enabling the project workers to shape the project.

The survey mapped the provision of local food outlets and noted that quality of fresh produce is often variable. Shopping facilities are also limited in the Preston Road area and access to larger shopping facilities is difficult for non-car owners. The report notes that questionnaires were distributed via the nutrition assistants at Sure Start Marfleet and at the Greatfield clinic. The response rate was quite low with only 38 people completing questionnaires.

Some of the results of the survey revealed the following:

- Nearly all the respondent's children liked fruit and vegetables and the majority did not have problems feeding their children.
- Over a third of parents were weaning their children before the recommended age of 4 months, which can lead to numerous health related problems.

- Only 36% of parents had weaned their children at the recommended age and nearly three quarters of the parents offered several alternative drinks which health experts would not recommend.
- Only 22% of parents had introduced their child to using a cup at the recommended age.
- The majority of respondents ate at least one cooked meal a day.
- 70% eat pre-prepared meals at least once a week
- 32% do not eat fruit and vegetables daily
- 30% would eat more fruit and vegetables if it were cheaper and 23% if there was better availability.
- 80% believe they are eating healthily, but if only 70% eat fruit and vegetables there must be some misunderstanding as to what exactly constitutes healthy eating.
- Over half the respondents feel the quality or variety of food sold locally is not good

The authors identify the work that needs to be done as a result of the survey, namely:

- Work with parents regarding weaning and drinking
- Addressing the poor availability of quality food locally
- Support people to change their eating habits by providing information
- Provide a crèche to support parents to go food shopping without having to take the children

The survey provides a well referenced and sound basis from which to build supports for local people to eat more healthily. The next stage is to focus on evaluating how the project implements the recommendation from the study. It is important that the project is carefully monitored so that the impact of resulting activities can be adequately measured. The project team may wish to consider using the project data as a baseline, and then conduct surveys periodically to establish the different factors and levels of change. It may also

be worthwhile considering revising the research methodology, in light of the fact that the response rate was fairly low. Perhaps the project could recruit a core group of participants, who are identified as having low levels of healthy eating, and conduct and monitor work with this group in order to effect change. Evaluation of work with parents attending cooking sessions is outlined below. The project workers should also consider piloting and reviewing questionnaires so that they can identify at an early stage why respondents are not completing certain questions and ensure that the questionnaires provides all the needed information.

4.4 - Cooking Sessions

The Nutrition Assistants provided an evaluation report detailing the work they have done around healthy eating and also to present the views given by participants. The report highlights the participants learning achievements as a result of attending the session, namely learning basic cooking skills, using a microwave, learning to cook on a budget and cooking for one. The majority of adults are cooking more at home following attendance at the sessions, although several of the participants living in sheltered accommodation are not cooking more at home, probably due to disability or the fact that they already cooked for themselves. Nearly three quarters of the people attending the sessions have made some changes to their diet as a result of the sessions and those that did not report changes are all in fact cooking the healthy recipes at home. The report notes that success in changing the diets of people living in sheltered accommodation was limited, but that this group benefited from other positive aspects, such as the opportunity to socialise.

The Nutrition Assistants also complete a form for each of the sessions where they record the following data:

- number of participants expected/ actually attending
- details of special needs and requirements

- the aim of the session
- the activities undertaken
- details of information given to participants
- cost of the session
- comments from parents
- what has worked well
- what needs to be done differently

Collection of this data is particularly effective and a periodic analysis of this data will be useful to the evaluation process, as it will identify information such as levels of attendance. The Nutritional Assistants provided support to other staff with their activities and groups, and this was nicely illustrated in the portfolio by the inclusion of several notes of thanks. In terms of future evaluation, it may be worthwhile revising the administration of the questionnaire in order to gain a full indication of the change. It may be helpful to establish what prior skill levels and understanding people have by administering a questionnaire at the start of the sessions. At the end of the sessions a final questionnaire could be completed, which will give a fuller picture of the impact of the sessions. In addition it would then be possible to identify the full situation from the data. For example in the evaluation report several statistics are given, such as 25% learnt how to prepare healthier meals and 30% have learnt to use a microwave. By establishing the situation with the remaining percentages, for example 70% already knew how to cook with a microwave; the evaluation could therefore show that the course was successful in ensuring that 100% of people who had not previously cooked with a microwave have now learnt.

4.5 Feedback from Parents on Services

– Men Behaving Dadly

10 completed questionnaires were provided from attendees of the Men Behaving Dadly group. Dads reported that they enjoyed meeting each other and seeing their children have the opportunity to play. They are able to get advice and find out what is going on in the local area. Dads and siblings requested more outings and activities such as picnics and play wrestling. One dad suggested there should be an outing exclusively for dads and another dad suggested that the group should get together with other similar groups. Generally, there wasn't anything that dads didn't like, although a few things were mentioned, such as standing about, things getting a bit messy, some swearing, playing pool, and the coffee is sometimes not made well.

From the evaluation forms it is possible to see that fathers and siblings really enjoy the group. It would therefore be worthwhile expanding this evaluation work and possibly producing a report that further illustrates what the group does and exactly how families, in particular fathers, have benefited. The group may also like to consider using some creative evaluation techniques, for example making a short video diary about Men Behaving Dadly.

- The Crèche

The portfolio contained fifteen feedback forms from parents whose children had attended a crèche. All the parents rated the standard of care provided as good or excellent and nearly all the parents were satisfied with all aspects of the crèche provision. The feedback form also assessed the level of parents knowledge with regard to the location of policies and procedures and the fact that the crèche is registered with Ofsted. The majority of parents are aware of the registration status, but do not know where the policies and procedures are.

In terms of evaluation, the forms are a useful way of securing views from parents. As the crèche is a fundamental provision, it may warrant a more comprehensive evaluation in order to answer those questions that will lead to improved service delivery. Feedback forms can not always portray the difference the crèche is making to parents and children's lives, nor can they address more complex issues such as the accessibility of the crèche to parents who are from traditionally 'hard to reach' groups.

- Various Feedback forms

The portfolio also included numerous samples of completed feedback forms from services and activities. The forms give some very positive comments from parents about the activities provided by the local programme. Unfortunately, in isolation these documents can only be treated as examples as it is impossible to determine other details that are needed in order to make effective assessment. It would certainly be well worthwhile presenting some analysis of the complete sets of these documents for future evaluation purposes.

4.6 - Marfleet Summer Holiday Play Programme, incorporating the Play Bus Consultation

The portfolio contained a creatively presented report, detailing the Summer Play Project, which was conducted in partnership with the Children's Fund. The report gives a comprehensive account of the activities that took place and states that the aim was to provide activities for at least 75 local children and parents. The programme actually far exceeded this by providing activities to over 380 children and their parents. The authors included a wide range of views that were representative of all the people attending, and they included some of the suggestions and recommendations parents had made.

In terms of evaluation, the authors have presented a very successful piece of work. They have identified ten positive points about the programme. These include:

- a good example of partnership working
- well attended
- positive feedback
- developing local infrastructure and gathered local views
- gained plenty of resources and ideas to be used in the future
- parents involved
- teenagers have gained experience by acting as helpers

The authors also examine three learning points:

- there is still unmet need in terms of holiday play and leisure
- It is too big a task for one organisation to take on the monitoring, evaluation and financial activities – a co-ordinator should be appointed to steer partner agencies.
- Early planning and communication is required as is informing and involving more parents

From this, the authors note the action that is due to be taken by the partnership:

- A newsletter (an example is included in the portfolio)
- Monthly meetings
- A presentation to local parents

The report also examines the consultation regarding the Play Bus sessions and states what parents liked and didn't like about it. Although the consultation process and methods are not fully described in the report, it is clear that the sessions were very much liked by the parents. Several parents also made suggestions for improvements and change and these are noted in the report. Seven parents have volunteered to be helpers and the report recommends that these parents should be offered training opportunities with a crèche facility to enable them to perform this role. In the event that the report may be distributed to a wider audience, the evaluators would recommend that the names and

telephone numbers of the volunteers are taken out of the report. The only other recommendation the evaluators would like to make would be to include a brief section on how the Summer Play Programme fits with the overall targets and objectives of the Sure Start local programme and the contribution the play programme has made in achieving these.

Overall this report is a good example of a simple and effective evaluation as it identifies points for future learning and action. In addition, there is plenty of photographic evidence, and the report is written and presented in a way that makes it accessible for a wide audience to read.

4.7 - Additional Sources

The portfolio also contained additional pieces of work that are not strictly evaluation, but can be used to support or evidence the evaluation process. These are:

- **Sure Start Marfleet Exit Strategy Report**

Sure Start Marfleet commissioned independent evaluators to explore the issue of mainstreaming services. The report details responses from partner agencies with regard to the sustainability of services. This document is instrumental in focusing the local programme on the need for effective evaluation. Where services are well evidenced, proving the extent of the impact they are making, there will be a strong case for mainstreaming and sustainability of the service. Applications for funding can be supported by evaluation work that proves the service is worth the continuation of funding. Sure Start Marfleet has used the Exit Strategy Document as a basis for inviting external evaluators to tender for the evaluation of the Family Support Services. The report has also given rise to sustainability and mainstreaming strategy which, although no work has commenced as yet, will become incorporated into the evaluation strategy.

- **The Play and Learn Team Annual Report, for the management board**
And
- **Community Development and Family Support Team Annual Report, for the management board**

Each team is required to complete an annual report for the management board. These two reports are an example of these and describe the activities provided for by two teams. The reports contain numerous statistics regarding the use of various sessions. Future plans and challenges are also identified and some examples of feedback forms are included. The information provided in these reports could be used in an evaluation, whereby deeper analysis and further evidence would be required in order to assess the impact of the services and the progress made towards achieving set targets.

- **Details of Evaluation Training Courses and Evaluation Meetings**

This demonstrates the commitment that Sure Start Marfleet has towards evaluating the effectiveness of its services and shows exactly what staff have learnt regarding evaluation. The file contains numerous resources that will be helpful in gearing staff towards undertaking effective in-house evaluation.

With regard to evaluation meetings, the portfolio contains evidence of Sure Start Marfleet's involvement with the Information and Monitoring Group. The group assists local Sure Start programmes to collectively keep abreast of developments relating to the monitoring and evaluation of Sure Start programmes in Hull. Developments through this group include the decision to jointly evaluate health services provided by Sure Start.

- **A Project Evaluation Folder - detailing the methods used by partners and projects to collect feedback from parents**

This is a useful folder for people wishing to develop questionnaires and feedback forms. It is also useful in contributing to understanding how partners approach evaluation and gives examples of some of the tools they may use. Joint-evaluation is a cost effective and productive way to evidence services. Where partners work together they can help each other in collecting the evidence required to secure the sustainability of joint projects.

5. Strengths and Challenges Identified by Staff – The relation to evaluation

The evaluators requested that staff spend some time identifying what they thought were the main strengths and challenges of the local programme. The aim is then to assess the extent to which the main issues are reflected in the current and planned evaluation activity. The following table highlight the findings of this exercise.

Strengths	Reflection and Comments
Good Joint Working And team work	There are examples of evaluation work that reflect the success of joint-working. E.g. – Summer Play .The local programme will be involved in joint evaluation work of health services.
Self-referrals and increasing attendance	This is reflected in monitoring data which can be easily incorporated into evaluation work
Family Work and the Family Support Model	Due to be evaluated by external evaluators There has been some investigation as to the feasibility of longitudinal case studies – pending outcome
Activities/Trips	Feedback forms are used which can be incorporated into more comprehensive evaluation work
Nutrition Services	Work has been carried out providing a good baseline for evaluation
Fathers involved	Feedback from Men Behaving Dadly
Crèche	Feedback is collected
New ways of working	This is reflected by the range of evaluation work. Some evaluation work may suggest change is needed and thus facilitate new ways of working.
Parents into employment	This is due to be explored. The local programme are contributing to a national study
Midwifery service	To be evaluated as part of the health / family support evaluation

Some of the strengths that are monitored but may not be fully highlighted by the evaluation process are:

- The range and impact of Sure Start courses
- The impact of the Safety Scheme
- The impact of outreach services
- Parental involvement at an operational level
- The quality of local childcare training
- How the local programme has contributed to the reduction of children on the Child Protection Register

Staff identified the following challenges that impact on the local programme:

- Staffing Levels
- Time constraints
- Communication barriers
- Lack of involvement, increase participation (parents, dads in particular, and community)
- Reduced activities in holidays and no crèche
- Hard to reach families
- Changing attitudes and disseminating the Sure Start ethos

Many of the above are not reflected in the evaluation work. This is probably because a lot of the points are seen as inevitable complications which Sure Start is used to working around. However, it would be useful if these points were given attention during the evaluation, as the process may encourage the emergence of workable solutions. The very mention of the challenges will also help people to see the whole picture. For example an activity may be successful, but poorly attended because of the lack of availability of the crèche. The important thing to remember is that the local programme can learn a lot by identifying the challenges and examining the way in which it was dealt with.

6. Suggestions for Adopting an Effective Approach to In-House Evaluation of Services and Activities

Although there has been significant work undertaken to monitor the services and activities provided by Sure Start Marfleet, there remains a need for the Sure Start Local Programme to fully evaluate provision by undertaking a more thorough analysis of this work. When producing a portfolio of evidence for evaluation purposes it may prove to be more effective to adopt a format, similar to the one outlined below:

1. Providing context

Understanding the background is a vital part of the evaluation of services and activities. It is important to know what the service and activity is trying to achieve. If the evaluation loses sight of this it will not be possible to determine whether or not a service or activity is operating effectively. In a small scale in-house evaluation, a paragraph detailing the aims and objectives of the service or activity along with a description of what actually goes on should provide sufficient context.

For Example:

During an evaluation of a toddler group, the evaluator would provide the context by giving consideration to the following:

- What is the activity club actually about?
- What does it involve?
- Who does it involve?
- When and where does it take place and for how long?
- How does it fit with the larger programme of activity?
- What is it trying to achieve?
- Does it aim towards specified targets?
- Costings?(where applicable)

2. Collecting and presenting Information

Collecting information is a central part of the evaluation process and requires much planning. Evaluators must determine what it is they want to know and what are the best methods of getting that information. Typical questions may include:

- Is the activity being well attended and if not, why not?
- What do parents hope to achieve by attending the sessions?
- What is going well?
- What is not going so well?
- What impact are the sessions having on families?
- Is everyone enjoying it?
- Is anything unexpected happening?
- How can things be improved?

This evidence can be collected using a variety of methods and different sources.

Examples are:

- Collecting registers to verify attendance
- Photographs (with consent) to give a full illustration of the sessions
- Interviewing the activity leader to gain their perspective
- Parents and Carers keeping reflective diaries
- Holding a group discussion with parents and carers
- Creatively working with children to identify their likes and dislikes
- Producing a brief questionnaire to secure feedback from families
- Examining records that may be kept to show the progress children have made

The thought process behind the collection of information and the methods you used must be recorded. When producing an evaluation report, it is a requirement to describe the methodology you employed. A brief paragraph describing this will be sufficient in a small scale in-house evaluation. In more detailed research it is usual to provide a rationale for your investigations and choice of methodology.

3. Using the information collected

This is fundamentally the most important part of the evaluation process as it is possible to draw valuable lessons from the information collected. The portfolio provided by Sure Start Marfleet contains a great deal of information; however there is a need for this information to be analysed in order to draw any conclusions that may be of benefit to the local programme. There were many examples of feedback forms and it is evident that the local programme is actively consulting with local families, what is not clear from the portfolio is what the programme has learnt as a result of consultation and how this has shaped individual services. The evaluators are aware that there may have been some oversight as to what to include in the portfolio, as certain paper work in the portfolio indicates that more evaluation work may have been undertaken than has been analysed or presented.

4. Dealing with the lessons learned

It is good practice in evaluation to not only identify potential lessons from the evaluation process but to also identify how these lessons can be translated into action. In a portfolio of evidence it would be useful to state the following:

- What has been learned as a result of the evaluation?
- What changes, if any, need to be made?
- How these changes will be made
- Any other information that will let people know the intentions for service development

The local programme is now currently developing a more structured process of reviewing services in order to identify and respond to potential lessons.

7. General Suggestions for Future Evaluation Work

Consortium Solutions has been involved in evaluating several Sure Start programmes across the city. The following are some general points, based on their experience that will enhance the quality of the evaluation work undertaken by local programmes.

Creativity and variety:

Questionnaires are often used in evaluation as they are a quick and easy tool for recording views and comments. However, people can become quite despondent when it comes to completing them due to the fact that they are faced with questionnaires and evaluation forms at every course and event. A little variety may encourage parents to take the time to think carefully about their answers. Suggestions include, closing a course with coffee and a discussion group where someone graphically records the comments made, or making a video diary of the event and asking for comments as the event is unfolding. This is being incorporated into the family support and employment evaluation.

Involving Parents:

Many of the parents using Sure Start services have skills in appraising activities gained through the completion of a ten week course in participatory appraisal. Other parents are attending courses in basic skills. It may be helpful to the evaluation process for parents to be instrumental in designing and carrying out evaluation work. This will assist parents to further develop their skills and bring variety and creativity to the process. In addition, other parents may find it easier to be more open with parent evaluators.

Ensuring reach:

It is valuable to the evaluation process to secure the views of a wide range of people. Usually children themselves are left out of evaluation as adults feel that they are too young to be able to give valid opinions. However, there are ways to communicate with children that can be evidenced as part of the evaluation. Examples of this including making a short video film or picture and photograph story board that records children's experiences and reactions to activities. Often this can be done with consent and as a project that involves the whole family. It is also worth ensuring that other family members are able to contribute, particularly fathers, as they are currently under-represented as a service user group.

Anonymous suggestion boxes:

Parents may wish to make comments about the services they are receiving without feeling that they may risk jeopardising the service. Suggestion boxes are located at each activity, and are used for anyone to drop ideas into at anytime.

Discussions with the programme manager revealed that this type of evaluation is not well used by staff or parents and that more can be done to encourage this. However, where the programme receives a complaint, the complaint is used as a basis for reshaping the service.

Relating back to Sure Start principles and targets:

It is important to examine the purpose behind the service or activity and ensure that this is reflected in evaluation material. Evaluation is more than simply asking people what they did and didn't enjoy. It is important to also measure the extent to which the service or activity helped to achieve a strategic objective, principle, or target. This is done through the 6 monthly review document.

Addressing the lessons learned:

Sure Start has made a firm commitment to evaluating the programme; as part of the portfolio, it may be helpful to indicate how this material will be used, in practical terms, to shape the service. An evaluation update could be produced to inform parents and professionals about the feedback that has been received and what action may be taken as a result. This will certainly help parents to avoid feelings of being saturated by continual evaluation.

Relating to the Evaluation Strategy

It is also important to relate learning back to the overall evaluation strategy. The local programme should consider a number of questions, for example:

- Is the strategy working?
- Are we using evaluation to ask the important questions?
- Are we getting the answers we need?
- Have we identified the challenges?
- What factors are making parts of the strategy difficult?
- How can we address these factors?
- How does all the evaluation work fit with the overall strategy?
- Is the strategy ensuring we achieve continued learning?
- Is the strategy helping us to build on our strengths with evaluation?
- Is our evaluation work fragmented or being carried out in isolation?
- Are we linking our work together to gain cross-project and cross-partner benefits under the guidance of an overall strategy?
- Are we reviewing the evaluation strategy and revising if necessary?
- Do we need a 'champion' to help drive our strategy?
- Are we making the most of the outcomes of the strategy?