

Newbiggin Hall Local Programme

**Evaluation of Newbiggin Hall Sure Start Programme: Annual Interim
Report**

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The evaluation

Introduction

The evaluation of the Sure Start Newbiggin Hall Programme explores programme management, projects and services to determine their effectiveness in delivering services to the young families of Newbiggin Hall. The evaluation provides a range of evaluation methods to enable comparison between services and projects and offers strategic guidance for the development and sustainability of the programme.

Evaluation team

The evaluation was undertaken by staff at the CPP, Northumbria University from February 2004 to March 2005. The research team were involved in a range of research activities during this period and worked closely with the Partnership to draw on their expertise and advice in relation to key dimensions of the research and to ensure local ownership of the study.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

Aims

The main aims of the evaluation were to:

Facilitate and/enhance a process of review and reflection, learning and improvement across the Programme.

To locate the findings within the context of the overall aims of the Sure Start.

Objectives

In order to meet these aims the evaluation set a series of objectives:

To assess the operation, impact and effectiveness of Partnership working.

To examine cost effectiveness

To assess the success of specific projects in terms of delivering intended benefits to children and their families.

Evaluation methods

The evaluation employed a range of techniques. These included:

- An analysis of key strategic documents, such as the delivery plan, monitoring documentation, six monthly risk assessment summaries and project appraisal documents.
- In – depth interviews with the Programme Manager, Members of the Partnership Board, team coordinators and team members, and managers of projects that are linked to the programme.
- Interviews with parents and carers, including parent/ carer representatives who already contribute to decision making in the programme through the parents and carers group and/ or by membership of the partnership board.
- Participation and observation in project group meetings, and Partnership development events.
- Participatory appraisal sessions with groups of parents who use particular services, belong to hard to reach groups (e.g. fathers) or have particular needs that the programme should meet (e.g. parents of children with

special needs). This has included participatory appraisal out in the community.

- Observation of actual service delivery to groups of parents and children with prior permission of participants.

Summary of key findings to date

Evaluation of Partnership Working

It is recognised that the quality and cost effectiveness of services can be improved significantly when organisations work together. For Sure Start Newbiggin Hall the scale and activity of partnership working is widespread and making the Partnership work effectively is therefore one of the most important challenges facing those involved. Utilising the skills and roles of board members, developing effective planning, implementation and monitoring processes, and joint working can have significant influence on the overall success of the programme.

Achievements

The Partnership is generally seen to have achieved a great deal in terms of setting up new services for young children and families, and in terms of building up links throughout the community, particularly in the early stages.

For many partners, the greatest achievement of the Partnership was getting the Sure Start unit up and running in the Newbiggin Hall shopping centre, and this was seen as having made the programme visible and accessible to the community. The Partnership is generally thought to have coped well with change – particularly changes in guidance around the location of Children's Centres.

Issues about the Board's structure

The list of Board members is perceived to be extremely inclusive of groups and organisations in the area. However partners are unclear as to how many people on this list are actually participating and if so how they are participating and who they are sending to meetings. The agenda at Partnership Board meetings is perceived to be too heavy to allow proper discussion of the issues, and most partners think that changes in the structure of the Partnership Board are needed to deal with this.

Many of the partners who attend meetings regularly felt that individual members of the project team were being given too little opportunity to feed back to the Board on how their services were developing. Moreover, concern was expressed by several people that the Board still does not have a permanent Chair. This was thought to be preventing the Board members from settling down into the business of taking the programme forward.

A few people felt that the Board was not showing itself to be fully accountable for the activities of the programme. For example some people felt that there was no obvious structure for agreeing the spending strategy, and others were concerned that issues around staff development and training were never reviewed by the Board. This relates back to comments about the atmosphere in Board meetings, and the lack of space for discussion and questioning of decisions being put to the Board.

Other issues

Partners were also asked whether they were satisfied with paperwork that they were receiving from the programme. Generally speaking the content and style of the

paperwork was highly valued as being comprehensive and accessible, although some people thought that there needed to be more linkage between statements of objectives and precise details about how the objectives were to be achieved. Quite a few people were highly impressed with the paperwork with one partner rating it “*one of the strengths of the programme*”. However there were many comments about the unwieldy nature of the paperwork and the difficulty of separating repetition from summaries of what had happened at meetings and new items needing consideration.

There was a concern that some items of information needed to be communicated straight after the meeting, rather than waiting for the minutes to be written up. For example those who have missed a meeting need to be told (or reminded) well in advance when the next meeting is going to be. A few partners were highly concerned about certain instances of failure in communications when the details of an event or activity had changed, and one person suggested that an “across the board policy” be drawn up with regard to who needs to be informed of such changes, and the timeframe for informing them.

On the subject of parental participation, most partners were impressed by the ability of the parents who did regularly attend partnership meetings to speak up about the way that they wanted services to be developed, and there was a recognition that a lot of work had been done to encourage parental involvement. However some people were concerned about the levels of support that parents were getting outside of the Board meetings. Many more people were unclear about the processes by which parental involvement was being developed. It was notable that interviewees who had not attended meetings for some time had a more positive view of the programme’s efforts to support parental participation, and the involvement of the community generally.

Conclusion

In terms of past achievements and future direction, the majority of partners viewed the Sure Start Newbiggin Hall programme in a very positive light. The main areas that were identified for improvement were the arrangements for Partnership Board meetings, clarity over how organisations should be represented in Partnership Board meetings and support for parental participation. There were also some suggestions for improvement around paperwork, accountability and communication. Partners who had not attended meetings for some time were markedly less critical, which suggests that structures for partnership working and community involvement that worked well in the early days are now in need of review.

Update since the partnership evaluation

The findings of the above evaluation were presented at the Partnership Review Day in May 2004, and then fed into subsequent discussion. As a consequence, the partnership was able to respond to the findings and recommendations very quickly, and the following changes have occurred:

- More subgroups have been established and being established. These are being attended by a range of partners and are succeeding in resolving a great deal of

business outside of the monthly Board meetings. As a consequence the board meetings are noticeably shorter and lighter.

- The structure and responsibilities of the partnership board being looked at by a working group
- Staff are presenting Worker's Reports to the partnership board, which are followed by a discussion of that member of staff's area of work.
- From December, there will be a new subgroup to discuss the service development implications the new Children's Centre.
- The outreach team is being expanded to increase parent and carer participation. The parents group has been disbanded, but parents are taking on new and different roles – in particular they are taking turns to organise and run their own time out sessions.

Year 2 Cost Effectiveness Review

Sure Start services provide a wide range of activities in the Newbiggin Hall area and the importance of the role Sure Start plays in children's services in the region is widely recognised. An evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of Sure Start services provides general information to agencies and the partnership board about the effectiveness of the planning and commissioning process, service provision and monitoring arrangements. The use of case studies also highlights more discreet issues, which emerge from cost-effectiveness evaluation.

Programme planning

The initial plan for the development of the programme occurred when the interim partnership introduced its delivery plan in 2002, before the programme manager came into post. Since then more detailed action plans have been drawn up by both the health team and the play and early learning team. The programme staff as a whole also submit an M6 form on which they state their quarterly performance plan for meeting specific national and local targets that have been set under Sure Start objectives 1-4.

Measuring outcomes

The programme staff perceive there to be a problem measuring outcomes due the lack of population level data, for example on levels of breastfeeding and smoking. This makes it difficult to measure the effect of Sure Start on either the population as a whole, or to see how families who have used Sure Start compare to those who have not. The situation is expected to improve over the next year as regards data on smoking because Health Visitors are starting to return forms for each new birth, which include information on whether the mother smoked while pregnant. The programme team will also look at ways to use the data from other early years services (e.g. libraries and nurseries).

Ensuring additionality

The delivery plan was based on gaps in service provision identified by the interim partnership, and programme aims to provide and commission services on the basis of the plan.

Project appraisal

Proposals for new projects and services that are to be provided partly or wholly under the Sure Start Newbiggin Hall budget are given to the Partnership Board for comments. Once decisions have been made an appraisal document is drawn up for the Board's approval. Parents can participate in this process as members of the board itself or by attending one of the recently formed subgroups (for example the new subgroup that is being set up around childcare). Capital planning is overseen by a subgroup involving local parents and carers, and this has been the case since February 2004.

Matching projects to targets

The programme submits an M6 form on which they state their quarterly performance plan for meeting specific national and local targets that have been set under Sure Start objectives 1-4.

For example under objective one which is “improving social and emotional development” there is a national target to “reduce the proportion of children aged 0-3 in the 500 Sure Start areas who are re-registered with social services within the space of twelve months on the child protection register by 20 per cent by 2004”. The milestones which the programme plotted under objective one for the first quarter of 2004-05 were: “maintain an outreach service following referrals from Health Visitors and Social Services”, “provide toddler behaviour sessions”, and “all Sure Start staff to attend Bonding and Attachment training”. Meanwhile an additional target and milestone was decided locally under objective one for the first quarter of 2004-05, which was for all staff to attend training in Mental Health Awareness.

Identifying expected unit costs

The programme team calculate a figure for the expected total costs of each service and the number of sessions they are expecting to provide, in their proposals to the partnership for the funding of new services, projects and activities. The proposals also include a breakdown of total cost into staff costs, costs of equipment and so on. People applying for small project grants are also required to provide a break down of costs and an estimate of the number of people who they expect will benefit from the proposed project.

Indirect costs, such as the cost of the programme manager's input into the activity, are not generally included in planning documents. However unit costs based on actual attendance and expenditure for the first quarter of 2004/5 - with and without behind the scenes costs - have been calculated for some services for the purposes of this evaluation with the help of programme staff (see appendix 1).

Encouraging cost effectiveness

Generally speaking the programme seeks to provide the most appropriate services possible, in order to meet the objectives and targets set out in the delivery plan (or in more specific cases because of the expressed needs of local people.) Therefore it is

rare for local projects to bid for large amounts of funding from Sure Start Newbiggin Hall. The partnership can nevertheless encourage cost effectiveness through contact with representatives of other organisations via partnership arrangements, and the process of commissioning services directly.

Selection of projects

The Small Grants Group has been set up to assess applications for funding small projects, for which £5000 per year is available in total. The Group is led by programme staff and includes local parents and members of partner organisations.

More generally services have been commissioned in accordance with identified local needs and Sure Start objectives. There have been several documented instances of providers being rejected because they were proposing too high a charge for a service that was not considered by the partnership to be offering value for money.

Non standard output measures

Born to Read is evaluated on a City Wide level. Other programme activities are evaluated by a member of staff at the end of each series of sessions. A variety of methods have been used to collect the views of parents using the service. However some bought-in services have not been formerly evaluated from within the programme - this includes Tumble Tots and crèches.

Monitoring data

The monitoring data that is collected on a daily basis is simply a record of who attends each session of an activity (i.e. which children and which parents). The programme is then able to link each person with their personal details to produce a breakdown of attendance by age group, ethnicity and so on.

Standardised monitoring

Details from each project are linked to parents and families. Therefore when parents sign in to say they have attended an activity or session or used a service, the system is automatically ready to produce comparable data *about* the people who have attended the various services. The data system is thought to be "quite robust".

Quality of returns

All projects, activities and services that are provided by Sure Start Newbiggin Hall complete the activities register, and there are no missing or incomplete returns. In fact everyone is said to be signing in "religiously". Generally speaking the exact nature of what needs to be provided for the money that is being paid out (e.g. X amount per child-session or per session with a group of parents) is specified in the project appraisal forms, and there have been no problems so far with organisations delivering services as agreed.

Cost Effectiveness case study 1: Bringing Tumble Tots to Newbiggin Hall

Provider

Tumble Tots Newcastle are the sole providers of the Tumble Tots activity programme in Newcastle. The programme was established in 1979 by the former Olympic gymnastics coach, Bill Cosgrave to “develop children's physical skills of agility, balance, co-ordination and climbing, through the use of brightly coloured Tumble Tots equipment¹. The programme is structured to develop children's positive personality traits including confidence and self-esteem” (from the Tumble Tots UK website).

Location

Galafield Youth Project. Sure Start Newbiggin Hall pays for a crèche within the building so that parents with children in more than one age group can attend.

Staff

Tumble Tots UK require that there have to be three staff per session and one staff member to every six children. There must be one trained and qualified leader at each session, and all of the staff will have received training from Tumble Tots UK. There are three sessions for different age groups each held at a different time on a Wednesday morning. Sure Start Newbiggin Hall provides a crèche so that parents with children in more than one age group can attend.

Date started

The first session at the Galafield in Newbiggin Hall was held in September 2003.

Achieving programme targets

There are three sessions in Newbiggin Hall aimed at different age groups, but also based on different levels of ability. Children “graduate” from a younger class to an older class when they have demonstrated a certain level of development and their families are given a certificate, which outlines what level of development the child will have achieved. The nursery nurse for play and early learning (who is part of the Sure Start team) comes into the sessions on a weekly basis, and is therefore in a position to observe the improvement in children and their parents who attend sessions regularly.

Measuring outcomes

Outcomes will be measured at the population level through the speech and language target, and any data that can be acquired about children’s social skills at the time that they start school/ nursery class.

Ensuring additionality

Sure Start Newbiggin Hall is providing sessions that would not otherwise be available within easy travelling distance for local parents. The programme did consider the option of bussing parents and children from Newbiggin Hall to what was then the nearest centre (Gosforth), but this was found to be impractical.

¹ The bright colours are useful in helping young children understand instructions (e.g. “can you jump over the red and blue bar?”)

Identifying expected unit costs

Both the amount that Tumble Tots Newcastle would make per child-session provided, and the one-off charge for registering each child were agreed prior to the service being brought in to Newbiggin Hall. There are no additional costs to the programme, as the venue has been made available free of charge. The only alternative that was considered prior to commission was that of bussing children and parents to Gosforth where sessions were already being held, but this was decided to be impractical, and would have meant that less Newbiggin Hall parents could benefit. There are no alternative providers of Tumble Tots in Newcastle.

Non standard output measures

The play and early years development worker (who is part of the Sure Start team) comes into the sessions on a weekly basis, and is therefore in a position to observe the improvement in children and their parents who attend sessions regularly. She also has the task of inviting parents along to decide whether they want to commit to attending the sessions with their children, so she has in-depth knowledge of parent's impressions of about the service.

Project delivery- positive factors

The Tumble Tots activity programme is well established and the leader has been running the sessions in the North East for over 15 years. The suitability of the venue, which is able to provide a changing area and crèche as well as a large hall, is also a positive factor, as is the fact that Sure Start subsidises places for people in the catchment area, and pays for the crèche.

Project delivery – negative factors

The main problem has been getting families to commit to attending sessions on a regular basis, which is necessary if they are to really experience the benefits. One staff member suggested that Sure Start could help by trying to persuade other organisations in the area to avoid holding events and activities on a Wednesday morning if at all possible. There were some initial problems with getting parents used to continuously supporting their children to do activities through out the 45minute session, but the parents who attend regularly, work this way as a matter of course.

Meeting targets

Targets have been met in terms of getting a good regular attendance although both Tumble Tots and Sure Start programme have made it a priority to try and cut down on the number of people who attend for a few sessions and then stop coming. For Tumble Tots to bring any significant benefits to the children, parents need to commit to attending for a period of the child's development (e.g. 6 months to two years). For this reason Sure Start made some contacts in the middle of last year with parents who had started bring their child to Tumble Tots and then dropped out, which resulted in some of those parents bringing their children back and starting to attend regularly.

Unit costs

The costs per child-session were agreed from the outset and there has been no change. There are no other costs to Sure Start because the hall at the Galafield is provided free of charge.

Staff perspectives

Staff are very enthusiastic about Tumble Tots and attend regular seminars to refresh their knowledge and ideas. They view the service as being unique within the area,

because they are the only sessions, which teach young children to carry out physical activities in a disciplined manner, while working in groups and obeying instructions. As one member of staff put it:

“It’s about confidence and discipline and learning respect for an activity. Going to soft play is like a free for all which does have its place but it teaches them completely different skills”.

Service users perspectives

Parents were consulted about how they had found the sessions that they had attended. The response was overwhelmingly positive with only one parent able to name anything that they would change about the sessions. It was also clear that parents regarded the service as being completely different to anything else that exists in Newbiggin Hall.

The things that parents liked about the Tumble Tots sessions were:

A good environment

The child has to take orders from people other than his parents

Good equipment that they don’t have at home

The songs

The child can climb up and turn around on the equipment

Very different to playgroups where children are just left to get on with it

Good information in terms of books/ leaflets on parenting

Good information to help you decide to commit to sessions: “you know exactly what you’re coming to”

Crèche – means child doesn’t have to miss out because you’ve got more than one child in different age groups

It’s active “he’s a very active child”

Interact with other children

Watch other children doing activities

Different classes for different stages

In particular, the benefits that parents had noticed were:

Help for children that have problems with movement

Confidence, agility and bodily functions

Learn respect for other people

Learning to take turns with other children

Learning to associate with other kids

Get confidence before starting school – “he’s very shy”

General speeding up of development: “He’s come on in leaps and bound since gym babes (the youngest class). He’s learning.”

Made the child more sociable

Sense of routine – “he knows he’s doing Tumble Tots every Wednesday”

Different classes for different stages – Gym Babes got him crawling and sitting up

When asked about what they would change:

Most people said nothing – the timing and so on of the sessions was fine

One parent said that her child (aged 2) could do with a bit longer than 45 minutes to wear him out, as he is very energetic for his age!

Another parent said that Sure Start generally should provide more detailed information about its activities (referring to services other than Tumble Tots): “the leaflets only just touch on what’s happening”.

Conclusions and recommendations

Tumble Tots is a cost effective activity for improving children’s confidence, physical agility and listening skills, which is highly valued by parents and staff, and looked forward to by children. A full evaluation is currently being completed, which will include observations of children (and their parent’s perspectives) made in September 2004 and again in January 2005. The report will demonstrate what benefits can be noted objectively, over a relatively short period, and whether there are any unknown reasons for drop out. In the longer term the issue is not likely to be whether to continue with Tumble Tots, but whether the service provision could be expanded, and whether recruitment needs to be aimed at the families who might need the service more than others (i.e. children in families who are showing signs of speech and language problems).

Recommendations:

- Consider increasing the involvement of partner organisations and parents in recruitment, publicity and providing support that might encourage more parents to attend sessions regularly.
- Take on board lessons of best practise from Tumble Tots for other Sure Start activities, particularly with regards to making more detailed written information available for parents about new service and activities.
- See whether the board can make any suggestions about ways to monitor the impact of Tumble Tots (i.e. through data from other organisations).
- If considering the options for expanding provision to 3-4 year olds, bear in mind any factors that might make it easier or harder to get this age group to attend regularly.

Cost effectiveness case study 2: Crèche – a service under review

Provider

Crocodile at the Galafield and Cleo at the Brian Roycroft Centre. Cleo is a locally run business which was set up with the help of The Community Project.

Staff

The number of crèche workers that will be running a session depends on the number of children and their ages. The maximum number of children that the crèche can take is ten and this would usually require four workers. There needs to be at least two workers for the crèche to run at all.

Date started

The existence of both crèches predates the existence of the Sure Start Newbiggin Hall Programme.

Achieving programme targets

The crèches are booked as and when they are needed to support programme activity so they do not link to any specific programme targets.

Measuring outcomes

The outputs are simply that parent/ carers are able to attend sessions, meetings or activities, so there are no direct outcomes. The indirect outcomes are the outcomes of the activities or sessions. For example having a crèche at Tumble Tots enables parents to attend with children of different age groups, which in turn may lead to Speech and Language outcomes.

Ensuring additionality

There is a recognised lack of childcare provision in Newbiggin Hall, and especially sessional childcare provision. However there are other options for expanding childcare provision, in particular there is the option of booking sessions with childminders if they have the capacity to be flexible. On the other hand a childminder will not always be the best option. For example, for some activities there has to be a session with parents which involves all the children coming in later on (e.g. to eat the food that their mums have cooked in a cookery class.)

Identifying expected unit costs

The charges are fixed by the provider and only vary according to the number of children who the crèche is being booked for. It is cheaper per child to book the crèche for a larger number of children, because of the way that the crèche has to be staffed.

Meeting targets

There are no targets as such that relate to crèche provision (the target relates to the availability and accessibility of all childcare), but the use of sessional childcare in support of organised activities is necessary to help achieve all programme targets.

Unit costs

The charges per child booked into a crèche have been as expected, but the costs per child who actually take up a crèche place have been higher than expected, due to people deciding not to attend at the last minute or being unable to attend.

A comparison with Sure Start Wallsend shows that the direct unit costs should be much lower for in-house provision. We should note that this could partly be due to “economies of scale”, as there are around 530 child sessions offered per quarter through Sure Start Wallsend, compared to 157 through Sure Start Newbiggin Hall.

Remedial action

The programme is starting to use childminders instead of creche when it is appropriate and viable to do so. There has also been an effort by both staff and other parents, to cut down on the number of creche places that are booked before they are reasonably certain, that the parent is going to be attending the activity.

Staff perspectives

Members of staff are aware that creche provision is currently costing more than was anticipated. They are also worried about the behind the scenes costs of arranging creche provision, in terms of staff time. However they are fairly satisfied with other aspects of creche provision, for example they are pleased that the creche providers can

be flexible about the timing (as long as it is within normal working hours) and number of places to be booked.

Service users perspectives

A short consultation exercise using participatory appraisal with various groups of parents, showed that some parents rated the creche provision at the Roycroft as one of the positive aspects of services for pre-school children in Newbiggin Hall. The exercise also highlighted that parents felt that there was lack of choice in the area with regards to pre-school services in general.

In addition, some parents have pointed out that they would prefer to use the same crèche provider for all the activities that they attend. This would mean using Clio at the Roycroft in support of activities at the Galafield for some parents, and vice versa for other parents. This option has been discussed, but the programme said no, because the cost of booking two creches in support of one activity is thought to be too prohibitive. However it is intended that creche be provided in-house when the programme gets its new and larger building, and this should mean more consistency as well as lower unit costs (see appendix 1).

Evaluation of Cookery Course for Young Parents

Project Planning

- The Sure Start Newbiggin Hall Health Development Worker arranged and helped facilitate the project in response to the needs expressed by parents who the team come into contact with.
- The course was developed as part of a package of health promotion activity, developed for various groups of clients on the basis of: a) the expressed needs of clients, b) Sure Start objectives, c) existing evidence and d) the concerns of professionals in the area (e.g. concerns about obesity in school children). The pre-meeting also provided ample evidence that the parents needed information about healthy food, for example parents said that they found it hard to work out how fattening food was by looking at nutrition labels. Moreover everybody had examples of their own bad eating habits (e.g. too many takeaways)!
- The course itself was carried out by the Community Nutrician Worker with the help of a Sure Start worker (the Health Development Worker) in the Galafield building. The Galafield provided kitchen and café facilities free of charge as a partnership arrangement, so the costs were fairly low.
- The course was designed to a) encourage the sociable aspects of cooking and healthy eating, and b) enable parents to adapt recipes that they already cook and enjoy, in order to make the food healthier.

Target Community

- The course was available to young mothers who had expressed an interest in learning more about health eating on a budget.
- The course was invitation only but the mothers came from all over of the Newbiggin Hall Sure Start catchment area.

Project Activities

- The project started with a meeting between those parents who had been invited and expressed an interest, the Sure Start worker and the Community Nutrition Worker (CNW). The CNW had already decided on the structure of the course; namely that she would give a talk at the beginning of each session and then she would instruct them so that they could cook as a group. However the parents were given a say in the content of the talks (for example they were asked whether making sense of label was something that they found an issue – and they said it was) and more importantly in what sort of things they would like to cook. Many of the things that they said they liked were apparently unhealthy (e.g. pizza and chocolate cake), but the dietician wanted to show people that almost any recipe could be adapted and made healthy (e.g. bread pizza with a healthy topping and chocolate cake made with cocoa powder and no icing). This is an example of one session of the course:
Week 4: Talk on Five a Day and discussion, followed by the group cooking chicken stir fry and low sugar chocolate cake. Everyone sat down afterwards and ate the stir-fry, including the children in high chairs, while the tutor finished off cooking the cake. Finally the group ate the cake with some tinned fruit, and then they cleaned up and washed up.
- The course structure was based on a tried and tested method for community cooking classes. However the way that the project started, with a pre-course meeting so that parents could not only name, but also explain why, certain aspects of healthy eating were an issue for them, was arguably quite innovative.
- The way that the Health Development Worker joined in the sessions, i.e. partly as participant and partly as facilitator was also an innovative feature. Another nice little touch was that things were arranged so that the children would come out of the crèche and sit in high chairs with their parents, so everybody could taste what the group had cooked.

Partnership Working

- This was a small project, which was well within the scope of “normal” activity for the Newbiggin Hall Sure Start Health Team. A report by the Sure Start worker, outlining how it went, will be included in her next presentation to the partnership board.
- Since the course was intended to be invitation only there was no need to involve the partnership board prior to the course. However if the programme decides to run another course in the future, on the basis of a more open invitation, then certain partners could be in a position to help with recruitment.
- Before the Partnership Review Day it was apparent to both staff and board members that there was too little time set aside during board meetings to hear from members of the Sure Start team, and offer them help and guidance as appropriate. However the new structure of board meetings that has been in place since the Review Day should allow the partnership to offer more support to individual staff members and their activities, particularly through the various new sub-groups. It is yet to be seen whether this will have any impact in the case of cookery classes for parents.

Objectives/ Outcomes

- The project was carried out in conjunction with objective two (Improving Health), local target two (Diet).
- The aim was that, by the end of the course, the parents would have improved knowledge and ability, to buy affordable healthy ingredients and cook healthy meals for themselves their families.
- The Sure Start worker monitored attendance but it is very difficult to quantify outputs and outcomes, without going to the extent of giving parents a written test to see what they have learnt, which would have been over the top and unnecessary. However it has been possible to assess qualitatively, what parents feel they have learnt, how much they feel they will be able to use the knowledge and whether they have been happy with course (see below).
- Parents felt from the beginning that the course was a good idea, because eating was something they all enjoyed and healthy eating was something they could all learn more about, especially in terms of cooking a wider variety of meals for young children. When they were interviewed at the end they said that the best things about the course had been eating the food afterwards, learning how to eat healthily and trying new things. The parents also said that they had felt “very” comfortable doing the course and would definitely like to do another course learning more recipes. What is more they would be happy to try other health promotion courses in the future (e.g. fitness). The only change that the group as a whole wanted was for the sessions to last a bit longer – they felt that there was a lot of sitting around after they had finished eating. Only two people wanted other changes: one mum would have preferred afternoon sessions and another would have preferred a few “fattier” recipes (e.g. she would have enjoyed making a more traditional chocolate cake).

Achievements, Benefits and Beneficiaries

- Over the six weeks that the project has been running it has made an immediate difference, by providing an opportunity that parents otherwise would not have had, to get together and cook new recipes, then eat the food with their children. The children were clearly taking an interest in the new foods that were put in front of them and the mums were themselves giving everything a try even if it was something that they thought they wouldn't like. The parents say that their habits have not changed much as yet, but everybody clearly felt that they had learnt new ways of eating healthily. We should bear in mind that most of the mums already do cook some healthy meals, so learning new recipes should be a way of enhancing what they already do, and enabling them to eat healthily more often. We should also bear in mind that people had problems attending, so none of the mums actually managed to attend the entire 6-week course. This might explain why the impact on habits hasn't been felt as yet.
- The project was intended to meet the expressed needs of a particular group of parents. However there is a possibility that a wider group could have benefited as the parents who were invited repeatedly said that they knew of other people who would have been interested. On the other hand there was a limit to the number who could be invited, so this probably comes down to the need for a waiting list system and whether you can get a firm commitment from some people so that free spaces could be opened up to others. What is more the

health team were keen to try the course out a group of people who were already used to attending activities together.

Cost Effectiveness

- Due to the partnership arrangement between Sure Start Newbiggin Hall and the Galafield, which allows the former to use the premises of the latter free of charge, the course was bound to offer value for money. The Health Development worker's time should also be factored in if the programme wishes to calculate unit cost.
- The costs of the course were roughly comparable to cooking and health eating courses that have been held in other communities. The cost per parent may have been higher than had been expected, because attendance wasn't as high as had been planned for, but the workers were able to adapt to this to a certain extent, by halving the quantities of ingredients.
- The number of hours that the Health Development Worker put in to organise the course were justified considering that the sessions were intended to be a "kick start" to the process of providing many more health promotion courses to parents. These "behind the scenes" costs should be lower for any sessions that are held in the future.

Lessons

The two most important lessons from this course are:

- Pre-meetings work well in terms of encouraging people to decide if they really want to do a particular course and ensuring that the course meets their needs.
- In addition to the pre-meeting, it could be useful to carry out some kind of consultation with would-be participants at an earlier opportunity (i.e. before the venue is booked), around what kind of timing arrangements would work best. Carrying out time planning exercises with parents would also help them make an informed decision about the commitment to attend for the full six weeks.

Conclusions and recommendations

This has been a fairly successful project, and the only drawback is that it has involved too few people, and that people have not been able to attend regularly. I would therefore recommend that for future projects of this nature:

- The health team should consider a strategy to boost numbers, such as inviting a wider number of people initially, and then whittling the numbers down to those who can make a firm commitment (i.e. over-recruiting), or else operating a "waiting list" system.
- As part of the above process the health team could consider undertaking some kind of time planning activity with parents, before they decide on dates and times for the course.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendations arising from the partnership evaluation

Recommendations for the Board

- Use the next Partnership day to take forward proposals for establishing subgroups to carry out discussions on most areas of business and feedback to the Partnership Board as a whole. (Done)
- Make the appointment of a permanent Chair a priority, possibly to be looked at by a sub-group. (Done – new chair appointed)
- Develop opportunities for individual members of staff to feedback about the development of their services in a way that will maximise information sharing and support from relevant partners. (Done)
- Reorganise the paper work from each meeting so that it is easier to move from a summary of what has happened to the items of information related to each point. Consider arranging the documents by theme so that the items relating to each theme can be easily distinguished. (Done).

Recommendations for the programme

- Consider contacting partners individually to discuss how they can help provide services for parents, such as training and employment advice, and to make sure that they are clear on the role that they are being asked to play in the decision making process. This is especially relevant when an organisation is new to the Partnership.
- Where organisations have failed to send a representative to any Board meetings, the contact should be followed up to see if the organisation needs more information about what is required from them as a prospective partner.
- Look into ways of prioritising communication – for example so that the relevant parties are informed more quickly if events or meetings have been cancelled. (Done)

Recommendations arising from the Cost Effectiveness Review

- Consider increasing the involvement of partner organisations and parents in recruitment, publicity and providing support that might encourage more parents to attend activities regularly to get the maximum benefit for themselves and children.
- Take on board lessons of best practise from Tumble Tots for other Sure Start activities, particularly with regards to making more detailed written information available for parents about new service and activities.
- See whether the board can make any suggestions about ways to monitor the impact of services and activities (i.e. through data from other organisations).
- When appropriate, continue using childminders in support of Sure Start activities, to save money on creche.
- Carry out further consultation with parents with a view to promoting the fact that crèche will be provided in-house in the new build, and finding out exactly how people would like to see those facilities utilised.

Recommendations arising from the Cookery Course Evaluation

- The health team should consider a strategy to boost numbers, such as inviting a wider number of people initially, and then whittling the numbers down to those who can make a firm commitment (i.e. over-recruiting), or else operating a “waiting list” system.
- As part of the above process the health team could consider undertaking some kind of time planning activity with parents, before they decide on dates and times for the course.