

Doncaster District

Sure Start Denaby Main & Conisborough

Evaluation of Partnership Working

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Evaluation of Partnership Working in Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start

Final report

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Background | 3 |
| 2. Introduction | 3 |
| 3. Methodology | 5 |
| 4. Findings | 6 |
| 4.1 Board members | 6 |
| 4.2 Staff | 8 |
| 4.3 External partners | 9 |
| 4.3.1 Health | 10 |
| 4.3.2 Education | 10 |
| 4.3.3 Social Services | 11 |
| 5. Analysis | 12 |
| 6. Action planning | 13 |
| 6.1 Board..... | 14 |
| 6.2 Staff working as partners | 17 |
| 6.3 External partners | 19 |
| 7. Underpinning skills and knowledge | 21 |
| 8. Conclusions | 22 |
| 9. References | 23 |
| 10. Appendix A | 24 |
| Partnership working brief..... | 24 |

Written by Shirley Lindley
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1. Background

This evaluation on partnership working forms part of the wider evaluation of Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start. The report is based on interviews conducted with Sure Start staff, board members, partners and others who have had some form of contact with Sure Start locally. Partnership working is seen as an essential component of the successful delivery of Sure Start objectives, and as such is highlighted for priority in the local evaluation guidance.

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) completed a synthesis of early findings from local programme evaluations in June 2004¹, bringing together all evaluation reports and summaries produced by Sure Start Local Programmes (27 in total). NESS found that partnership members recognised the benefits of multi-agency and team working, and the flexibility that Sure Start offered. The involvement of parents was identified as being a vital ingredient in creating a successful partnership. However, the extent to which these benefits were achieved was variable. There is, apparently, still some work to do on a national basis to change organisational cultures and language to provide the best opportunities for partnership working which improves the quality of life for those parents and children whom Sure Start serves.

Partnership working may be viewed not only as a way of working, but also as a constant developmental activity in which all partners' needs are taken into account and improved delivery of services, more closely aligned with local needs, is the focus.

2. Introduction

Partnerships come in all shapes, sizes and structures. There is no universal model for successful partnerships - it is a description of a way of working, not a definition. Different kinds of partnership will be effective under different conditions, according to local needs and circumstances. However, there are factors that are common to all successful partnerships. A framework has been developed for the evaluation of partnership working in Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start using good practice research and toolkits identified by the NHS², the Audit Commission³ and the Employers Organisation for Local Government⁴. These are grouped around 4 key areas:

- a. **Leadership and vision** – where partners shared a realistic vision for the partnership's work through the creation of common goals; develop a clear framework of responsibilities and accountability; and harness their energies to achieve more than they could on their own.
- b. **Organisation and involvement** – partners include key local players who are mutually accountable; share risks and rewards; behave in ways to support successful outcomes; develop effective communication systems; and develop trust between them.

- c. Managing performance** – partners develop strategies and clear, shared objectives to achieve the vision supported by the necessary policies, plans, practices, timetables and resources; manage change effectively; assess local needs; share data; and maintain a continuing dialogue.
- d. Learning and development** – partners continuously seek to improve what they do in partnership; add value by sharing learning opportunities or through secondments; take into account the work of the partnership within their mainstream activities; measure progress towards meeting objectives; assess the quality of the partnership process.

Partnership working is therefore a continuous process of action and review of performance. Strategy should be intelligent – informed by feedback from monitoring key performance indicators (process, outputs and outcomes). It needs to be dynamic, continually adapting to a changing environment. Partners need to make explicit what ‘success’ looks like for them individually, and clarify what a shared vision of success looks like.

As much previous research has shown, joint working is beset by many obstacles which can stem from changes in national policies or requirements, or locally through the inherent difficulties of putting together a range of agencies with differing cultures, purposes, structures and ways of doing things. For most partnerships building trust between partners is the most important ingredient in success. This can be particularly difficult if the problem that the partnership is addressing stems from a legacy of mistrust or conflict between different agencies.

Partnership working can be expensive, with hidden costs (e.g. managers’ time, meetings) as well as difficult. Consequently, it is to be expected that Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start would have experienced difficulties with partnership working, and this has been exacerbated by personnel changes. Many of the barriers highlighted in this report are not unique to this partnership; they are common among many different types of partnerships.

This report aims to examine how partnership has been operating within Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start, the positive factors and also the barriers that are preventing more effective partnership delivery. Section 3 outlines the methodology used, while Section 4 describes the findings which resulted from speaking with staff, service users, and partners who have had different degrees of involvement with Sure Start. An commentary of the findings is given in Section 5.

The good practice factors discussed above are used as a benchmark, applying the findings from the research into how partnership works within Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start to produce an action plan for further improvements (Section 6). This action plan is divided into three sections: actions that could improve the effectiveness of the board; actions to improve staff working in partnership with each other; and actions to improve partnership with external partners. These actions will obviously be the

responsibility of all those involved, but especially board members and the managers within Sure Start, who are charged with putting the necessary structures in place to make a lasting, positive difference to existing ways of working for the benefit of local families.

Underpinning any actions people take are a set of skills, knowledge and attributes. Section 7 takes three skills or knowledge sets under each of the four good practice strands to make explicit the types of behaviours that may be demonstrated against each. Whilst these may seem obvious to some, they are useful for us to check how effectively these skills and knowledge sets are being utilised. Comparing behaviours against those listed may be used as a measure to determine the extent to which the behaviours are being demonstrated, and whether the right people are being involved at the right time.

3. Methodology

The aims and objectives of this evaluation are presented in Appendix A. The research was conducted over a period of 6 months from August 2004 to February 2005. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 7 nursery staff, 7 family support or co-located staff, 9 board members and one adviser, the current and past programme managers, 2 head teachers and a Social Services manager – a total of 29 interviews. Board members were from a range of representative agencies, including the Primary Care Trust, Child Health, Education Action Zone, Job Centre Plus, DMBC, and community and parent representatives.

The process of taking part in the interviews and considering their answers appeared to facilitate board members' reflections on the purpose of their role. A workshop for Board members held shortly after the interviews enabled further discussion of this and several sub-groups were agreed in order that improvements could be made. Data was examined to identify good practice and barriers to partnership working. From this, recommendations for future working were developed in an action planning document.

By taking action to improve performance, there are expectations that partnerships will:

- Align the services provided with the needs of the users
- Make better use of resources
- Stimulate more creative approaches to problems
- Positively influence the behaviour of others (partners or third parties) in ways that none of the partners acting alone could achieve.

4. Findings

This section examines the views of three groups of people – board members, staff and external partners. The views expressed are those of individuals' perceptions of their experience of working with or for Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start. Comments have been mapped alongside each of the four strands of good practice identified in the introduction, with positives and existing or past barriers identified. Past barriers have been recorded in order to set the historical context of why a particular situation is operating in the present. This understanding can help us to improve relationships and partnership working in the future, by learning from past mistakes.

4.1 Board members

Board members were interviewed during September and October 2004. It is important to understand that this is a snapshot of the situation as it stood at that time. Many of the barriers raised began to be addressed in the first board workshop in October and it is encouraging to see progress being made so quickly.

4.1.1. Leadership and vision

Positives – Guidance from more experienced members has been given to less experienced members about the role of being a board member. Generally, members felt they were encouraged to participate in debates.

Barriers – There was no clear agreement of a shared vision of what Sure Start should be doing. There was some mismatch of expectations of what data was being collected and the impact measures being used, and what was feasible.

4.1.2. Organisation and involvement

Positives

- Feedback from the community was perceived as being mainly constructive.
- There was a consensus that no-one dominates the board meetings, and everyone was given the opportunity to contribute their opinion.
- Meeting times were generally acceptable to most partners; the jargon was 'manageable', although it took a while for some parent representatives to get used to it initially.
- The statutory representatives were perceived to be approachable.

Barriers

- Although members felt able to express opinions, they did not always feel listened to or that their views were taken into account.
- Some parents felt that Sure Start was not doing enough and the loss of a 'drop in' facility was unfortunate.

- Due to the necessary security arrangements on reception, members felt it was not easy to ‘just pop in’ and visit the nursery, and the majority of the staff didn’t really know board members. This contributed to a feeling of a lack of involvement and commitment. Those that did have more contact with staff felt that was the main way they picked up information about what was really happening.
- Information sharing was a problem especially between Sure Start and statutory services
- Some members felt that decision-making was open and transparent, whilst others felt that decisions had already been made beforehand, and the Board had no real decision-making power. Some felt the reasoning behind decisions were not always clearly explained, even to the Board members, much less to staff, parents, and the wider community.
- Information about important decisions or changes was sometimes tabled at a meeting, when advance notice would have been more useful. Not all members were aware of events, even those where help was requested and could have been given.

4.1.3. Managing performance

Positives: The board has overseen the successful delivery of high quality nursery provision and a range of activities which meet the identified needs of local families.

Barriers:

- Some members were unsure about the value of providing ‘soft skills’ training or arranging day trips, and whether those families that were most in need were the ones accessing the services.
- There was little clarity on structures and feedback mechanisms e.g. who vice-chairs are, the number and nature of sub-groups etc.

4.1.4. Learning and development

Positives: Members acknowledged that there was now more integration of services than previously, and that many professionals had changed the way they now did things, they were more inclusive than previously (although it is difficult to attribute this just to Sure Start).

Barriers:

- For the parent representatives, being a board member was a new experience, and there was little or no training or induction.
- There was a perception among some that the Accountable Body, DMBC, are not fully engaged. However, other than for finance, no representative was invited to all board meetings.
- There were some questions raised about the representative nature of the community and parent representatives.

4.2 Staff

14 staff and the previous programme manager were interviewed between August and November 2004. Staff have been included in this evaluation of partnership as they are internal partners, working to a greater or lesser degree with external partners to deliver the Sure Start programme.

4.2.1 Leadership and vision

Positives

- Staff feel valued and that they work well together as a team. There is a consensus that the service adds to that which would normally be delivered within the community
- There appears to be some signposting between both within the teams and with external agencies e.g. health visitors, training providers, schools. Staff work alongside other services to reach the community e.g. at baby clinics, in order to publicise the activities on offer and get to know and build up relationships with parents.

Barriers

- No staff except the managers knew what the vision/mission was.
- Working with other agencies can sometimes take a long time to set up, which can be frustrating and lead to delays.
- Some Family Support team members felt there is 'too much emphasis on what happens in the nursery' and not enough focus on work within the community

4.2.2. Organisation and involvement

Positives

- Statutory Services are now more integrated with Sure Start, e.g. work with health visitors in clinics is seen as a package of services. It is easier to identify and signpost services for families with particular problems.
- There is a consensus that there are good relationships with parents, who are kept well informed of their child's progress.

Barriers

- There was much uncertainty about the proposed new extension to the nursery and also uncertainty about the new building and what services are going to be available there – staff were unsure what their role would be.
- The two teams being on separate sites hinders communication.
- More publicity would be useful, both to inform and also to celebrate success
- There was a perception that parents view the two teams as two separate projects
- The relationship with Social Services was unclear, staff felt they were not given background information which could help them to deal better

with the children's needs, to set targets or to alert social workers to potential problems.

- It was unclear how decisions are made, and who makes them.

4.2.3. Managing performance

Positives

- Staff felt their roles and responsibilities were clear
- The teams appear to be established within the community, where they seem to be well known among the client groups with which they work.
- Within the team it is acknowledged that people have different strengths and work well together, helping each other out as necessary.
- The management style with the Family Support team encourages staff to experiment, take on responsibilities and work together.

Barriers

- Limited celebration of success or positive feedback "we're just expected to do a good job and only talk about any problems"
- Staff generally feel that the community is kept informed but there was still a gap with the 'hard to reach' parents, both identifying and getting them involved e.g. families in transit, who may move in and out of the area within a short space of time
- The short term nature of some contracts means that staff are lost and work that is being built up is either stopped or reduced, which is seen to be damaging to the community.

4.2.4 Learning and development

Positives

- Staff feel they are encouraged to develop their skills.
- In the Family Support team there is a general feeling that training needs are met.

Barriers

- Access to training is limited for nursery staff by work rotas.
- Little or no contact between the two teams and uncertainty about what they each do. Nursery staff were unsure about how they would find time to have more contact.

4.3 External partners

External partners were interviewed between November 2004 to February 2005. They included one health visitor working with the Family Support team, 2 head teachers and a Social Services Manager. Each had had different experiences and different degrees of involvement – two had had quite a close involvement, and for the other two there had been little involvement, although both professed they had attempted on numerous occasions to have requested more information, dialogue and participation.

4.3.1 Health

The health perspective is represented on the board by staff from Doncaster West PCT and the Child Health department.

Positives

- The Health Visitor was clear about how her role fitted in with Sure Start and she felt like a part of the team.
- Communication had improved since being co-located with the Family Support team.
- It was perceived that a better service was being offered to parents by working closely with Family Support team members, especially for the harder to reach parents, with whom a relationship could be built up over time.
- Resources were being used more effectively, with HV concentrating on the more difficult cases while nursery nurses were able to provide the more standard services.

No barriers were perceived.

4.3.2 Education

It is important to describe the historical background of Sure Start's involvement with local schools. When Sure Start first began there was initial enthusiasm from the schools to work in partnership. A teacher was seconded to work within Sure Start and a shared vision and action plan for school involvement was developed, along with the delivery of workshops for staff training etc. Four nursery workers employed by Sure Start (funded via Children's Fund) were placed in schools. However, the funding was not continued and these workers could not carry on working in school.

Representation on the board is via the local Education Action Zone manager and a Foundation Stage consultant.

Past Barriers

- Funding for resources promised to each school did not always materialise or was less than anticipated.
- Records from the Sure Start nursery were not passed on to the schools, and even in cases where there were clear problems with a child, information was sparse.
- There were questions about the educational value of some activities.
- Accompanying this was a break-down in communications between Sure Start and the schools, with meetings being cancelled at very short notice, and difficulties in establishing contact by phone with the previous programme manager.
- This led to the schools being very disillusioned with Sure Start.
"It was an example of how you think you are working in partnership but you're not really."

These events have culminated in a legacy of distrust which will take time and effort to repair.

Positives

- The appointment of the new programme manager has brought renewed hope from the schools that better relations can be established.
- A lending service offering resources to schools has been resumed.
- The positive aspects of schools' previous involvement with Sure Start is seen as being a model of good practice and to have been a good start for extended school services.
- Schools are very clear about the need for better communication and liaison, and that Sure Start needs to be unambiguous about what it can provide and not to make promises that will not be fulfilled.
- Schools would like to be involved in planning by being given the opportunity to comment and make suggestions on Sure Start action plans.

4.3.3 Social Services

Representation on the board is via a Senior Finance Officer from the Directorate of Social Services (who during 2004 was on long-term sick leave). There has been very little contact between Sure Start and Social Services, especially early on. Social Services felt there was resistance to working with them, and especially around Sure Start making places available in the nursery, as there was an anxiety about the nursery being inundated with Social Services users' children. It was perceived that the nursery reception area was a barrier for Social Services clients and they were not given a warm welcome. There is a perception that the nursery only caters for people who are already socially competent and confident.

Barriers

- There are tensions around what constitutes an appropriate referral to Social Services and what the thresholds for referrals are and when an initial assessment should be forwarded.
- Lack of funding for places for Social Services referred children to the nursery.

Positives

- During the last year there has been more contact with the Family Support team and staff have attended the others' team meetings.
- Some of the health visitors working with Sure Start have helped to build bridges between the two services.
- There is now an agreement that there needs to be a greater understanding of each others' roles.

5. Analysis

While there have been many difficulties in the past, Sure Start is now well positioned to build on the successes achieved and to re-establish good working relationships with external partners. There are many positive factors which will help to facilitate this, and successful partnership working is a central element which runs through all service delivery.

Staff are dedicated and work well within their teams, working together to improve the service being delivered. Partnership working at practitioner level may be seen as a real strength of Sure Start programmes, and the co-location of health visitors within the Family Support team is a good example of how value can be greatly added through joint planning and working.

The importance of involving parents and the wider community and supporting their involvement cannot be over-stressed in order to ensure that the services being delivered are the ones they want and need. It is encouraging to see that new parent representatives have recently been recruited to the board, and they should be given on-going support and encouragement. The use of jargon should continue to be minimised, and consideration should be given to developing a Parent Development plan.

Representation from partner organisations is good, although attendance at board meetings can be patchy. Other Sure Starts have also found this to be the case¹. This may reflect the workload of those representatives, along with the requirement for attendance at a wide range of different partnerships. However, these different experiences, skills and knowledge can add greatly to the co-ordination and planning of Sure Start activities and ensure that they are placed in a wider context.

Now that Local Authorities have lead responsibility for planning and co-ordinating delivery of Sure Start, it is recommended they have more involvement at board level. The Nominated Strategic Officer for the Authority has responsibility to take on oversight of the LA's performance in respect of the Sure Start agenda, troubleshooting areas of difficulty, to have a strategic overview of other policy agendas, and to also be an advocate for early years and childcare provision. Their closer involvement would help facilitate partnership working still further.

Working with education and Social Services has obviously created tensions in the past. However, both indicate willingness for closer co-operation and communication and these opportunities should be embraced. There is much potential to improve and enhance service delivery by their closer involvement in Sure Start activities.

The main barriers which remain are around communication, both internally and externally. Therefore the work of the communications sub-group which has recently been set up will be of vital importance in contributing to the success of bringing all partners together to deliver the Sure Start objectives. Understanding partners' objectives and unique perspectives takes time and

effort, and should be an on-going process to ensure that new partner representatives are fully included.

6. Action planning

The next section makes recommendations for action for the board, staff and external partners, while section 7 outlines the skills and knowledge that underpin these actions. Action planning, like the findings, are set out alongside the four areas of partnership good practice working for the board, staff and external partners. Although there are many factors which may be associated with each of the four strands, only the ones where there is a perceived need for improved working have been discussed.

It is also acknowledged that for some of the factors, work has already been initiated and the first steps are being taken. As communication has already been identified as a major issue, it is as well to include all the identified factors here in order to present a fuller picture of the range of work that requires some attention. It will be for the board and staff to decide the priorities of the actions to be taken.

6.1 Board

6.1.1 Leadership and vision

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|--|--|
| No clear agreement of a shared vision | Partners share a common vision of the difference they want to make and the direction to take | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree common understanding of needs and opportunities, and the contribution that Sure Start can make • Identifying the role of individual representatives from partner organisations and the reason for their involvement. |
| There was some mismatch of expectations of what data was being collected and the impact measures being used, and what was feasible | Partner objectives are aligned in a common direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify mutual expectations and required standards • Share information regarding measurements and data collection being used for Sure Start • Identify data that partners would like to see that contribute to their objectives |
| | Partners facilitate partnership working and engender support within their own organisations or interest grouping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote wider understanding of the purpose and benefits of Sure Start • Improve communications • Review board composition to ensure all the relevant partners have representation at an appropriate level i.e. the Accountable Body and possibly team managers • Awareness rising session to identify the role of representatives from partner organisations and why they are involved. |

6.1.2 Organisation and involvement

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions whether decision-making was open and transparent. | Partners behave openly and deal with conflict and frustration promptly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce ground rules e.g. 'no surprises' • Explain the reasoning behind decisions • Advance copies of papers before Board meetings, where possible |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members did not always feel listened to or that their views were taken into account. | Partners have an equal say in decision making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help less well resourced partners build their capacity and confidence e.g. through mentoring, 'buddying' and/ or training • Review and monitor how partner members feed back into their own organisations. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members felt it was not easy to 'just pop in' and visit | Partners are mutually accountable for their contributions and share responsibility for success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish regular 'drop-in' sessions scheduled for different times and days and invite members in. Brief staff about this. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing between Sure Start and statutory agencies could be problematic • Not all members were aware of events, even those where help was requested and could have been given. | Communications are sufficient and effective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review methods of communication and develop a plan to improve (who, what, why, when, how), using the communications sub-group • Better use of ICT links • Building up relationships with external partners, especially those not on the Board |
| | Partners understand and respect differences amongst partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for practical involvement e.g. work shadowing • Create opportunities to get to know people as individuals e.g. 'away days' |

6.1.3 Managing performance

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about the value of providing some activities | Objectives, targets and milestones are set and owned by those responsible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve all members in strategy development and review • Promote framing of objectives by task groups or teams within the overall strategy context. |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambiguity about structures | The partnership structure fits its purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review partnership structure against criteria for partnership effectiveness and accountability • Develop terms of reference for sub-groups and reporting mechanisms back to full board |
| | Adequate resources are devoted to achieving partnership goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue joint bids, lobbying and approaches for sponsorship using the existing skills and expertise of members • Involve new partners • Identify better ways of using existing resources |

6.1.4 Learning and development

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no training or induction for new parent representatives | Partners seek to learn from each other and from experience elsewhere | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce training for new parent representatives to build their capacity and confidence. • Develop a Parent Development Plan |
| | Partners continuously seek improvements in activities and ways of working | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly identify areas for improvement through reviews of the vision, strategy and the activities that contribute to these. • Measure impact and progress of enhanced partnership working |

6.2 Staff working as partners

6.2.1 Leadership and vision

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|---|--|--|
| No staff except the managers knew what the vision/mission was. | Partners share a common vision of the difference they want to make and the direction to take | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular reviews of the mission, aims and objectives and how they relate to work plans/ areas |
| Working with other agencies can sometimes take a long time to set up, which can be frustrating and lead to delays. | Partner objectives are aligned in a common direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closer working with partners at all levels to ensure they are aware of common objectives and shared goals. |
| Some Family Support team members felt there is 'too much emphasis on what happens in the nursery' and not enough focus on work within the community | Partners facilitate partnership working and engender support within their own organisations or interest grouping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve communications between the two teams Investigate the possibility of cross-working between the two teams |

6.2.2 Organisation and involvement

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncertainty about building work and staff roles within them. Uncertainty about how decisions are made and who makes them Little or no contact between the two teams and uncertainty about what they do. Little publicity to inform the community Perception that parents view the two teams as two separate projects | Communications are sufficient and effective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review methods of communication and develop a plan to improve (who, what, why, when, how) Better use of ICT links Team briefings that include an update for all staff about all developments Cross- team communications regarding activities |
| | Partners understand and respect differences amongst partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff training on the roles and remit of the different external partners |

6.2.3 Managing performance

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|---|---|--|
| Limited celebration of success or positive feedback | Partners use appropriate methods for project management and co-ordination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular celebrations of success using appropriate methods e.g. newsletters, awards |
| Gap with the 'hard to reach' parents | Objectives, targets and milestones are set and owned by those responsible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review definitions of 'hard to reach', decide what resources should be allocated. |
| The short term nature of some staff contracts | Adequate resources are devoted to achieving partnership goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue joint bids, lobbying and approaches for sponsorship • Involve new partners |

6.2.4 Learning and development

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|---|---|
| Access to training is limited for nursery staff by work rotas. | Partners continuously seek improvements in activities and ways of working | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly identify areas for improvement through reviews of strategy and activities that contribute to these. Ensure all staff have the opportunity to take part in training opportunities. |

6.3 External partners

6.3.1 Leadership and vision

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|--|---|
| Mis-match of expectations of what Sure Start can offer | Partners share a common vision of the difference they want to make and the direction to take | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify expectations of each partner Define boundaries of involvement |
| Limited contact between Sure Start and external partners | Partners focus on partnership added value: how they can achieve more or better results through collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define success measures Clarify partnership added value |

6.3.2 Organisation and involvement

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|--|--|
| Inappropriate referrals | Partners understand and respect differences amongst partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for practical involvement e.g. joint working Create opportunities to get to know people as individuals e.g. 'away days' Training on criteria for referrals |
| Mis-understandings of what is on offer | Partners behave openly and deal with conflict and frustration promptly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the common agenda and the needs to be addressed Clarify expectations and required standards |
| Lack of communication | Communications are sufficient and effective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make use of ICT links Ensure prompt responses to partner enquiries Maintain dialogue over time with regular updates Ensure data requirements are met where possible, and in a timely manner |

6.3.3 Managing performance

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|--|--|
| Partners feeling excluded from Sure Start activities | Partner roles, responsibilities and contributions are clearly defined and accepted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree and work to principles/ protocols for collaboration • Invite comments and suggestions on the action plan. |
| | Objectives, targets and milestones are set and owned by those responsible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and agree a joint work plan within the overall strategy context. • Review reception arrangements to ensure they are welcoming to all visitors |

6.3.4 Learning and development

| Findings | Benchmark | Possible Actions |
|--|---|---|
| Failure to maintain good working relationships | Partners continuously seek improvements in activities and ways of working | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the areas that are critical for improvement |
| | Partners seek to learn from each other and from experience elsewhere | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to learn together through joint working or training |
| | Partners manage the changes needed for improvements to be made | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate and build upon previous successes • Identify 'early wins' that can quickly demonstrate progress • Invent new ways of doing things – be open to change |

7. Underpinning skills and knowledge

7.1 Leadership and vision

| Skills and knowledge | Behaviours |
|---|--|
| Consultation | Asking others for their views and involving them in decision-making |
| Identification of potential benefits, costs and risks for individual partners | Dialogue on how partnerships can achieve more, better and faster by working together |
| Vision and consensus building | Helping partners determine the difference they want to make and how to work towards it |

7.2 Organisation and involvement

| Skills and knowledge | Behaviours |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Building robust relationships | Encouraging genuine two way communication and improved mutual understanding |
| Managing expectations | Ensuring others do not anticipate things that cannot be delivered; being clear about setting boundaries |
| Managing communications | Listening actively, clarifying and checking own and others' understanding; keeping people informed |

7.3 Managing performance

| Skills and knowledge | Behaviours |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Team building | Applying partnership development principles to joint team working |
| Functions for successful performance | Identification of the roles and tasks which partners need to carry out to achieve objectives |
| Collaborative use of ICT | Applying ICT to enable partnership working and build common knowledge |

7.4 Learning and development

| Skills and knowledge | Behaviours |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Networking | Getting to know others and sharing information |
| Diagnosing performance issues | Identifying what gets in the way of greater success and scope for improvement |
| Facilitation techniques | Methods to enable group learning and decision-making |

The skills and knowledge matrix may be used to identify learning needs relating to partnership working and to take stock of existing skills. Pursing opportunities for partners to learn together can strengthen partnership trust and enhance relationships between partners.

8. Conclusions

Research has demonstrated that partnerships can be improved by implementing an action plan designed for this purpose. This report has attempted to identify the foundations upon which further progress can be built. As one of the pathfinder Sure Start programmes, there has already been a great deal of development and learning from past mistakes to provide services to families that are valued by the community. A positive Ofsted report has further illuminated this. However, as previously stated, success depends on continuous improvement and development, and this includes the way that partners work together to consolidate the success.

The report has laid out a programme for further development by making recommendations for actions and identifying appropriate supporting skills and knowledge sets. There is a great deal of literature based upon research into partnership working, and this report has attempted to be as concise as possible in identifying only those factors which are most applicable to this partnership, and has organised these into a simplified framework to enhance comprehensibility. It is for the partners themselves to agree upon and prioritise these actions to enhance the successful delivery of Sure Start services for local families.

9. References

1. Partnership working in Sure Start Local programmes. A synthesis of early findings from local programme evaluations (2004), Patrick Myers, Jacqueline Barnes and Isabelle Brodie, National Evaluation of Sure Start.
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3. A fruitful partnership (1998), Audit Commission
4. Smarter partnerships (2003), Local Government National Training Organisation and Educe Ltd. See www.lgpartnerships.com

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10. Appendix A

Partnership working brief

Proposed timescale July 2004 – March 2005

Aim

To look at internal and external partnership working within the Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start.

Objectives

To establish where partnerships works well internally and externally.

To establish barriers to partnership working internally that have been encountered and solutions developed.

Where barriers to partnership working internally continue, to work with partners in developing an action plan for future working.

To establish barriers to partnership working externally that have been encountered and solutions developed.

Where barriers to partnership working externally continue, to work with partners in developing an action plan for future working.

Methodology

To work with Sure Start staff in identifying key external partners.

To interview up to 5 Sure Start partners to establish difficulties encountered, lessons learned and solutions developed for external partnership working.

To interview up to 5 Sure Start staff to establish difficulties encountered, lessons learned and solutions developed for external partnership working.

Outputs

Report detailing the current situation in terms of partnership working.

Action plan for the development on internal and external partnership working.