

‘SHIFTING GROUNDS’

Sure Start Whitley in Transition

A Progress Report

**Simon Bradford
Valerie Hey
Fin Cullen**

**Centre for Critical Evaluation
Department of Education
Brunel University
300 St Margarets Road
Twickenham
Middlesex
TW1 1PT
UK**

This Report is based on data collection completed in the period of summer/autumn 2004 through interviews with Sure Start Whitley Partnership Board Members, Community Development Workers, and individuals and organisations not currently involved with Sure Start Whitley provision.

The themes under examination were governance, diversity, and the impact of community voices on the services.

The structure of the Report is as follows

- Introduction
- Methodology
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- Governance
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Introduction

“A tremendous amount of work is now needed at local and national level. We have a daunting task to deliver 2,500 children’s centres alongside radical changes to nursery education and childcare. But making it happen is all-important. Families will welcome a strategy, but they will welcome real services in their neighbourhoods even more.” (Naomi Eisenstadt, ZeroNineteen, p.27, 2004)

This quote illustrates the contradictory (and often external) pressures being brought to bear on Sure Start Whitley (SSW) during the summer of 2004. The research themes we were initially requested to focus on - the impact on policy and practice of involving local people, and diversity issues - shifted under our feet as the Local Authority in Reading was required implement the Government’s Children’s Centre agenda.

This placed a specific onus on SSW, and the Partnership Board’s role and significance substantially altered.

The relevant point in Eisenstadt’s quote concerns the somewhat hurried nature of the process implied, and the confident statement that families want services, more than strategies – how would we know that? Does experience show that any kind of service, as long as it exists, is perceived to be better than none? Is an immediate outcome rather than a reflective plan really the sort of aim enshrined in the Sure Start principles of collaboration, consultation and partnership work?¹ Can those process goals be achieved quickly or under pressure? If the strategising progression is short-circuited, where do local voices get heard?

The polarities which emerged when the ground shifted took some surprising forms. The spirit and ethos of SSW, which focuses pragmatically on achievement, service, making a measurable difference, were surprisingly demonstrated in the Director being perceived as a block to action, while he emphasised planning, reflection, consultation and collaboration as necessary underpinnings in the moves towards change. The strategic thinkers on the Partnership Board found themselves pushing the Children’s Centre through – no matter how vaguely delineated – in the interests of getting something done to move the Reading services for children forward. In order to access the funding stream and meet government demands action had to be taken. Consideration of what form this action should take was construed as resistance to the timing pressure and to partnership. Not only did positions become

¹ *Sure Start Principles*

5. *Respectful and transparent: Services should be customer driven, whether or not the service is free.*

6. *Community driven and professionally coordinated: All professionals with an interest in children and families should be sharing expertise and listening to local people on service priorities. This should be done through consultation and by day to day listening to parents.*

(<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/thesurestartprinciples2/>)

increasingly polarised (and apparently personalised), but they reversed the usual roles that Partnership Board Members play.

Parents (or other users) are historically the voices demanding provision, pushing to get things done in the face of strategic top-down delays and procedures, and the SSW Director has been widely described as an active achiever. At the SSW Partnership Board Meeting on 23 August 2004 the representatives of statutory services were, in the main, pushing for change in a general context of ‘...a lot of unknowns’ while parent voices were cautious, pointing out the need for meetings, consultation, ‘getting it right’ and the Director counselled waiting another year to ensure the plans, partnerships and procedures were put in place.

With respect to the research themes, the issues of governance, representation and the renegotiation of Sure Start Whitley’s and the Partnership Board’s role and status were fore-grounded to an extent that dislocated the original research plan. What had been a linked progression of evaluative narratives was interrupted by the schism of an organisation under great pressure, at a moment of substantial change. What had been an orderly progression towards ‘mainstreaming’ over several years, with predictable requirements for external feedback, was apparently railroaded as the Children’s Centre agenda became the catalyst for immediate and urgent transformation. Even though the background discussions and general agreements in principle had been negotiated the year before, the differences in the ‘pacing’ of these developments became highly significant and problematised.

As the Policy and Governance interviews progressed, it became clear that we were reviewing history – senior representatives were already formulating their withdrawal, looking back on the Partnership Board as a stage in a process that had already begun to move on.

Because the Sure Start Whitley space and role had become so contested during this period of the research, the focus altered considerably; the Partnership Board became the site and the source of substantial polarisation, viewed both as necessary vehicle for change and obstacle to growth.

Although the development was rich and complex, the study and description of how this particular body changed is not necessarily informative in planning for the future, except insofar as it renders issues of governance and partnership explicit.

In reviewing the material with regard to the perceived success and impact of local involvement in terms of policy and practice, it is necessary, though, to situate it within that moment of struggle – although varied in their approaches to the work, all Partnership Board Members do clearly work towards better services for children and families, and it can be seen that this common commitment to a contested process underpinned their strongly divergent points of view. The individual reports are situated within a wider agenda – different for each of them – of trying to do what is from each of their points of view transparently the best thing, for the wider good of local children. That these different angles of perception laid the groundwork for conflict and becoming ‘stuck’, rather than enriching the partnership task, is worth considering, particularly as the Partnership Board has now built more positively on these shaky foundations.

It is a potential consequence of any clash in perceptions that positions become polarised, and sometimes personalised. Various figures are perceived emblematically as supportive, problematic, or delinquent, depending on where each observer is situated with regard to the change. As agreements are reached and differences negotiated, these dramatic constructions fall away, and are replaced with more subtle and workable understandings. And as with many such episodes in organisations, this was a transitory process, now pragmatically viewed as resolved, a useful learning experience, or ignored. The Partnership Board will, inevitably face further 'disruption' and change, specifically because the current landscape of social policy in this field is subject to rapid shifts and modification.

Our view as evaluators is that the specific circumstances faced recently in SSW have been, to some considerable extent, inevitable. We are not surprised at the degree to which the recent period has been experienced by some in terms of conflict and divergence. One of the consequences of the whole 'partnership' approach to policy, provision and decision making is precisely that older 'bureaucratic' and *mediating* mechanisms and structures are no longer present to the extent they were in the past. This means that conflict (and conflict is a normal and inevitable element in this) is often much more immediate, visible and 'lived' by stakeholders than it might otherwise be. It is worth remembering that one of the functions of bureaucracy has always been to dissipate the 'irrationality' of conflict and supplant it with (allegedly) more rational processes of decision making and distributing goods or services. Partnership, perhaps paradoxically, whilst maximising the possibility of collaboration, *also* holds the potential for enormous competition, as individual organisations, agencies and agents find themselves having to defend particular practices, loyalties and traditions. Control seems elusive and authority that might have been experienced in an unproblematic way in one organisational space can seem challenged in new and more collective settings. Add to this, the 'politics of the budget', external audit and a general culture of 'performativity' and the subsequent 'politics of partnership' become complex. In the current more 'open' spaces of partnership, these forces pervade and animate decision making. Partnership Boards in a range of settings have had to learn to acknowledge and deal with this. SSW is no different in this respect.

Within this somewhat complex environment, we believe that the SSW Director role should be seen as very important and, in particular, as having the potential to achieve 'boundary-spanning'. Partnerships, as we suggest, comprise complex networks of agencies and agents. Work – both formal and informal - to 'bridge' some of the boundaries, gaps and misunderstandings that (naturally) arise from time-to-time is crucial to the effectiveness of this work. We go on to say more about this role later in the Report.

Methodology

Examples of the requests and pro-formas outlining the interview questions are attached as Appendix 1. As before, we have utilised semi-structured formats, which allow us to cover the target topics, but ensure that each participant's unique response to the material and their particular areas of interest or expertise can be respected.

With the SSW Partnership Board interviews and the Community Development Worker interviews and meetings, confidentiality has been protected as with the parents in the last report, by quoting anonymously, grouping various participant's thoughts on the same theme together, and removing identifying references to organisation or status. Again, a semi-structured interview was used to allow both consistency of theme, and a range of individual response or focus.

The researchers attended and observed the Partnership Board Meetings where the move to Children's Centre provision was debated.

The areas addressed by interviews, meetings and observations are:

- Partnership Board Members and CDWs on governance, and community impact.
- Community BME representatives on diversity issues.
- Greenfields and Green Frog user observations.

We are following the example of the Sure Start Inclusion and Diversity research reports in using the term Black and Minority Ethnic

In the context of these projects, the term 'black and minority ethnic' (BME) families was used as it has become commonly used to describe people experiencing racial discrimination because of their skin colour, their ethnicity, their culture or for other connected reasons. Within the term 'BME', the DfES brief for the pilot projects also included the 'new communities' of 'asylum seekers, refugees and Travellers and Gypsies'. We are tentative about adopting what might appear to a mechanistic means of defining quite diverse people by a form of words or letters, but in the interests of brevity within this report we shall use 'BME' as a short hand to avoid cumbersome usage.

From Sure Start: For Everyone - Promoting Inclusion, Embracing Diversity, Challenging Inequality Inclusion Pilot Projects Summary Report DfES Publications May 2004 (p.5)

Diversity: BME organisations, GPs, and non-users of SSW

Community organisations proved hard to contact and engage with in this research. However, they were helpful at interview. The responses from some who were contacted are still not returned, and the GPs consulted have also not yet returned their contributions.

At Greenfields Day Nursery researchers were shown how there had been substantial effort made to retain a BME child whose parents were uncertain, addressing their concerns by photographing activities, demonstrating and reassuring them about her engagement and experiences while there, and there is a stated awareness that this is an area to expand.

As with Sure Start nationally, Whitley fathers tend to be peripheral figures, an issue that has been addressed by employing a male CDW to particularly take on the effort to increase dads' involvement. This has led to the creation of an allotment scheme, barbershop days, gym access, and a series of contact calls to try to engage interest and attendance at activities or meetings. Involving fathers in activities socially constructed as 'women's business' within the highly gendered SSW space is a slow and time-consuming process, and to directly interview people whose defining characteristic is a low level of engagement is problematic, particularly when their stance accords with a gendered cultural norm.

Jamie, the specialist CDW, suggested several ways in which researchers might try to gather information, but the most likely to have a response – that of asking mothers to administer a questionnaire, with an incentive of some kind for return – is also most open to contamination, as it could not be guaranteed the fathers actually provided the answers.

It may be that a men-only group meeting might be the most effective way to build a clearer picture of the factors involved.

From interviews with BME members, the key factors raised in relation to SSW were:

- The need for an immediate demonstrated welcoming of difference – whether leaflets have a range of community language options, even 'welcome' or some greeting in a variety of languages, and are otherwise in English, etc. It was repeatedly pointed out that it is not having translators available, etc, that counts as much as letting people know their difference is recognised and valued.
- Links, leafleting, advertising in a range of BME community centres, and places of worship, where families from across Reading gather, some of whom would be from Whitley area.
- As Whitley area is perceived as 'rough' (i.e. racist) and particularly threatening for women, some time spent on forming links/groups living there who might then come in together would be useful. As women from some BME backgrounds are unlikely to go out alone, what about clearly inviting grannies/aunties also, widening activities, engaging the family network rather than the mother-child dyad?
- "If this is truly part of Sure Start Whitley's aim they need to come out and empower. Let us know we count."
- Signs and information in community languages on doors, and in halls so that the immediate impact is of welcome and helpfulness. "Because you have to know who is where, it isn't apparent to a

stranger where you go, and if you're nervous/unaccustomed to going to new places it can be intimidating just going in the door".

- Sure Start Whitley services are seen by some as enviable, and not particularly accessible or flexible unless you are a 'mainstream' local inhabitant.
- Refugee families or refugee children, children in temporary housing fleeing domestic violence – is there any flexibility regarding postcodes as they are not necessarily within the area but have great need, often unable to access many mainstream services due to housing status.
- Fears of discriminatory attitudes, lack of respect for differences in faith, family structure, child-rearing patterns could be tackled openly – can SSW demonstrate that staff know that different minorities experience disrespect and that SSW services are neither about criticism or 'assimilation', but are open to negotiation and collaboration?

In general, there are issues here that people from particular backgrounds understand as being to do with 'respect'. As Richard Sennett points out,² respect should be seen as an 'expressive performance', not something that just happens by chance or good fortune. The achievement of respect demands that we find the right approach, the right words and the right gestures. This has real implications for the way in which community services of all kinds operate.

The points that arise above, and the difficulties in ensuring a wide take-up across culture and diversity are not limited to SSW, but problematic for many Sure Start programmes. The Whitley responses mirror the central research findings on these shortfalls, as can be seen in the strategies suggested below:

- *using recognised community workers;*
- *developing 'Childcare Champions' in the local community;*
- *running information surgeries;*
- *using community radio advertising;*
- *using community press advertising;*
- *being aware of the power of the spoken word;*
- *promoting Childcare Fairs within community venues;*
- *using more targeted mailing;*
- *using local community and faith centres;*
- *using high profile and status venues for events to attract interest;*
- *ensuring catering at events is culturally appropriate;*
- *avoiding religious days and holidays for events;*
- *'word of mouth' to relatives and friends;*
- *use of interpreter to orally translate;*
- *literature in community languages;*
- *face to face interaction in community and faith venues, at local festivals and community events;*
- *developing promotional videos and audio CDs;*
- *billboard advertising;*

² Sennett, R., (2003), *Respect. The Formation of Character in an Age of Equality*, Allen Lane, p.207.

- training 'Information Ambassadors' to work in BME communities;
- targeting fathers and extended families with information;
- outreach/home visits.

There was strong evidence that early years services in BME communities need 'connectors' (Gladwell, 2002) who can communicate directly, in community languages, with enthusiasm, empathy, and clarity. Connectors cross many different pools of influence and are equally at ease with decision makers such as local authority officers or in the myriad sub-cultures of local communities. They also need to be prepared to work in local venues, at times appropriate to community custom and in a culturally sensitive manner. It is clear with more targeted and thoughtful communication, participation can be significantly enhanced, indicating that poor communication has been a key factor in the exclusion identified.*

From Sure Start: For Everyone - Promoting Inclusion, Embracing Diversity, Challenging Inequality Inclusion Pilot Projects Summary Report DfES Publications May 2004 (p.7)

Given the difficulties in widely accessing relevant organisations, in order to build a richer picture of non-users' constructions of SSW, local parents with small children in tow were engaged in discussion in the library, at the local parade of shops, and at bus-stops and on the bus. Although this was an entirely informal and inconsistent procedure, the researcher always explained the reason for the interest, and checked informally on consent; 'Can I quote what you think?' or 'Can I put that to them in the report?'

In the shops on Northumberland Avenue, the researcher saw and talked with several mums with toddlers who seemed quite stressed, the children chaotic, being shouted at or slapped. Sisters who the researcher got into conversation with as she grabbed one child running out the door when asked if they knew of or used Sure Start Whitley said no, it had never been suggested that either go, and neither would anyway, "*it's all just keeping an eye on you isn't it?*" When the researcher described the programmes and activities the respondent said that sounded okay but still it was just so someone could check on the little ones, really, and besides there was someone who went there one of them had had a fight with.

It transpired they did know quite a lot about Sure Start Whitley and maybe even had attended, but there was someone who was now having a baby with the dad of one of the kids there with us in the shop who use Sure Start Whitley, and this was a block. They both said that somewhere free to leave the children would be the main benefit for them in any community service, just to have a break.

The researcher talked to a young and heavily pregnant Year 10 girl on the bus. She had heard of Sure Start Whitley and reported a very good relationship with her GP, surgery and Midwife; she thought that she might go along 'later', but wasn't sure she would have time as she would be completing school. She pointed out that anyway she goes around with her friends, why would she go anywhere without them? The girls with her said they thought they (the people who use Sure Start Whitley) might be "*a bit sad*" and seemed confident they had an alternative supportive network of peers

– perhaps it would seem like a bit of a rejection of her friends to attend, or perhaps they would like to be included?

The library, which is, apparently, only sporadically open has SSW and some CMHT leaflets, all in English. Some of the leaflets, videos and children's books are in community languages. The books generally are romances, plus lots of commendations of the 'British character' (soldiers and explorers), and guides to becoming a millionaire, self-realisation, etc. It seems quite friendly and well-used, and the researcher talked with a Muslim woman who had an auntie or mother with her, and a toddler and daughter looking through the children's picture-books. It was their first visit to this library, and had been suggested by the daughter's school. She was very attentive to her children and taken aback at the idea of going to anywhere like SSW, saying she wouldn't trust her children to strangers, and why would she not use a family member to help if she needed care for one or the other? She very politely took the researcher through some of the issues that would make it strange – cleanliness, food, things people might say.

She was asked how she would be reassured about any of these things, and was very uncertain of this. She thought if some of the staff were Muslim she would be more confident they weren't just saying the food was clean or whatever. She had heard of places where they say there is no pork because '*to them it doesn't matter*', and also tied this in with insults being spoken, bad things being said about your religion. She was asked if she thought she would be interested in activities or workshops like First Aid, and she said yes, some things would be good to know, but she could only go if it was solely women there, and did not usually spend time with people who drink or smoke so it would be... hand turning up and down... She was however clear that almost anything to do with educating her children would be manageable.

There seem to be some key issues that come out of this fieldwork.

- 'Popular' understandings of SSW are very important in determining how and whether people will access its services. These are inevitably shaped by other 'cultural' factors (and race or ethnicity are key elements here)
- This suggests that the 'public face' of SSW should be carefully constructed by SSW although whatever publicity or PR is undertaken will be mediated through other 'cultural' lenses
- To understand how people think about SSW, it is crucial that SSW staff, managers and Board members understand the cultural perspectives that exist in the area. The research clearly shows (from many angles) that Whitley is highly differentiated, with class and race being often subtly nuanced and intersecting to shape discourses of participation and use
- Whitley is predominantly white, avoided to some extent by BME individuals, and again, mirrors the experience of other Sure Start programmes in serving and representing the 'majority culture'
- There are important distinctions to be made between 'child-care' and wider policy objectives. There is an important national debate on this, and clearly the move to Children's centres is important

here. This fieldwork, although limited, suggests the significance that 'education' might have in this.

As Sure Start research nationally suggests

A complementary issue... is the preference BME communities expressed for education rather than care. Education was seen as a key bridge for access to achievement in the wider community. Childcare tended to be regarded more as an issue for families and the ethnic community. Where local authorities successfully promote the educational benefits of early learning rather than simply the caring for children to enable parents to access work or study, communities appeared more receptive. Overwhelmingly, however, the principal barrier for families of all ethnic groups was the high cost of childcare. This differentially impacted on those in BME communities who tended relatively to be poorer. (p.8) The evidence makes it clear that reducing exclusion is a task that requires resources. It is not a role that can be added on to other responsibilities, nor can it be addressed with easy solutions. It is a complex, time consuming and resource heavy task which, to be effective, needs supporting at all levels and with the commitment that other areas of work enjoy. (ibid p.15)

Greenfields and Green Frog: issues of emotional well-being

Greenfields parents were leafleted for consultation as part of the fieldwork, and the sole respondent was interviewed. The manager of Greenfields had predicted this would be problematic, as the parents who use this full-time provision are usually working people, and not necessarily engaged in SSW activities or able to timetable extra contacts. This is indicative of the varying constituencies using SSW services.

The couple the researcher spoke with at Greenfields thought the service offered was flexible, accessible, and welcoming, and made it clear that they were confident that if they had opinions or queries they would be listened to in a satisfactory way: their belief was that the service would enable them to have 'voice'. Interestingly, they were not aware that Greenfields was a SSW provision, but said they thought it unlikely they would access any other SSW activities.

This general 'framework of access and use' was so different from earlier contacts with Green Frog that it was thought important for the research to consider the differences between those who access Greenfields and Green Frog, spending regular time observing the pick-ups at both. Collection time is a point when the quality of relationships between parents and children is very apparent, and how children and carers meet and greet each other can be enormously illuminating.

Generally at Green Frog some children may be apprehensive, quiet or wary as going-home time approaches, scanning to see who will be collecting them, and not necessarily appearing confident about the contact. There might be no greeting from the adult, or a 'What have you done with your coat?' no hug or inquiry about the child's day. This shows a marked contrast with Greenfields.

Children at Greenfields tended to be collected by parents, particularly fathers, and siblings together (this will also be a function of the timing), and to be cuddled, talked

to, and questioned about their experiences. More children seem to leave Greenfields singing or chatting, or in someone's arms, than at Green Frog.

The parents who access Green Frog generally appear more tense, more anxious and less engaged in the parent-child interaction. This is of course true of every parent on some day or another, but overall it seems that some of the users of Green Frog may be among those local people who most struggle with juggling their lives and problems, and whose relationships with their children may be problematic.

There will be a financial difference - as parents at the August Partnership Board meeting pointed out - between those who can afford full-time day-care and those who may not be able to, and poverty plays a strong role in undermining emotional resourcefulness, but our view is that there are vulnerable and potentially 'at-risk' families who find in Green Frog an acceptable link with a service for their children.

- It would be worth directing resources towards clarifying this level of need, and engagement of the hard-to-reach, and ensuring that a case is made for the continued funding of Green Frog. This would be in line with central Government policy and NHS guidelines which currently stress accessible early intervention and support which many CAMHS struggle to provide. These could be designed around reviewing the level of vulnerability and evaluating the impact of Green Frog not just in terms of increasing emotional literacy and strengthening resilience in the children, but developing carer links with, or take-up of, other services. This work would be consistent with Theme 3 in the original proposals made for continuing evaluation of SSW.

Governance

From observing the Partnership Board Meetings and communications, and interviewing board members, particularly at a time of such change, particular issues are highlighted and these are referred to in this section.

Sure Start Local Partnerships are founded on the keystone of parent/community involvement; engagement of parents and ensuring local representation are perhaps the most significant governance task in local Sure Starts. Because this has been a baseline requirement, the role of Sure Start Whitley Partnership Board has been to demonstrate a model of governance that is frequently new to the statutory (and other) agencies in attendance.

But there are practicalities – known to all of us – which make it difficult to evaluate, or even recognise, how these representations work.

An immediate factor is the imbalance of levels of local and national knowledge and strategic overview. In particular, 'parents' are not a cohesive group or constituency with an office or e-mail system, and who can thus hand on or share information or opinions from one meeting to the next. It is not possible to speak of 'the community' (in Whitley or elsewhere) as if it were unified and homogenous. Diversity, difference

and complexity are the characteristics of any community, not least in Whitley. For this reason it is important to reflect on *who* is identified as representative or *whom*, and *what* exactly they are able to 'bring to the table'. Disparities of power (for example, between local people and senior managers in local authority departments) also mean that the more powerful may need to reflect on their practices and procedures if they are serious about involving other stakeholders in the work. This is an issue that needs consideration in SSW as it has real implications for any notion of 'partnership'.

Some imbalance is unavoidable, particularly in that some Partnership Board Members may be occasional attendees who do not have paid time which they can devote to keeping up with processes, some are involved in one particular organisation, informed from only that particular angle, some are involved in several organisations and therefore aware of wider local issues, interplay of needs and priorities, some are involved at strategic borough or national level, and therefore informed of larger priorities, likelihoods and constraints.

One of the unusual aspects of this Partnership Board has been that most statutory organisations are represented at a relatively senior level. It therefore models a balance of governance in that local individuals and organisations share table space with strategic and operational planners. There is direct communication – and debate – unmediated by levels of administration. This has drawbacks, in that from one angle the local and individual can be discounted as under-informed, parochial, and driven by un-contextualized personal need. On the other hand those in strategic positions can be discounted as under-informed, disconnected from local realities, and driven by status and budgets. But it is also an arena where both bottom-up and top-down agents can demonstrate direct engagement with the project, and inform each other's stances. This raises the issue of 'respect' again.

The most problematic role in that setting may be that of mediator in the process of partnership working. The task of the Director of SSW is crucial here. It is to engage and encourage parents in the SSW Partnership Board, to try to balance the gaps of consistency and knowledge by giving an overview and history, and also act as resource and advisor (almost as interpreter), in the broader temporal process of development. In our view, this places the director in the often complex role of both advocate and informed 'neutral' – the Director is required to have a keen sense of both the local and the larger pictures, and to contribute to making up the shortfall in parental time and knowledge, he has to inform them of the relevant background and issues for each meeting.

Information to parent Partnership Board members invariably runs via the Director – and whether that is viewed as an empowering or a screening role may mean that parental representation can be seen as 'contaminated' or controlled by SSW, thus invalidating what is also seen as SSW's greatest strength and contribution, in terms of governance.

Finally, we point to the potential for 'informal networking' (the day-to-day 'wheeling and dealing' that routinely characterises organisational life) to occur outside of the 'formal' partnership time that is available. The existence of a 'partnership board' does not mean that such practices are eliminated (indeed, and at worst, it may

encourage them). We are acutely aware that stakeholders in the various agencies have strong capacity in this respect and these practices can be enormously excluding of those who are not part of any 'charmed circle' that exists. Parents and members of 'the community' are most likely to be those who are excluded in that way.

There are a number of points that might usefully be made here:

- We think that SSW Partnership board should continue to work hard to generate trust and respect amongst stakeholders and that strategies and mechanisms are needed to ensure that this happens: training, 'away-days' and reviews are potentially important aspects of this.
- Less prescriptive format to Partnership Board meetings – invited contributions, less presentations by Sure Start Whitley, agenda items for debate.
- Regular programme of sub-committees, with Partnership Board Members invited to relevant ones, especially parent meetings.
- Parents at every meeting, ideally with continuity, and some money and effort put into that, enabling and empowering them so they have a consistent critical opinionated role.
- Enable Partnership Board to discuss areas of disagreement or difference or difficulty e.g. re some parents disliking Thamesbridge site.
- Openness.
- To be able to query or inquire without being reacted to as if threatening or critical.

It came across strongly from interviews and discussions that the Partnership Board is not necessarily seen as a resource by Community Development Workers generally, and the sense of polarised, sometimes oppositional positions quite significantly permeated a range of practitioners' views at all levels. The perception of being under threat, embattled, or undervalued however seemed, paradoxically, to run in tandem with a confident awareness of achievement, and an effective internal support network which recognises work well done.

How this translates to future partnership undertakings will be interesting, especially as the central Sure Start guidelines seem to describe the Sure Start model and ethos rolling out (see below), and it remains to be seen how the somewhat hurried and top-down process of getting the Children's Centre in place affects future developments.

Your expectations of health colleagues

In seeking to work in partnership with health colleagues you can be clear that you are not looking for great changes in structure or practice but an adaptation of approach that will promote integration, prevent duplication and ensure a more consistent approach for families, particularly those with complex needs.

For example, your expectations will be that health colleagues will:

- *commit to seamless working, with good mechanisms for working together and sharing information between service providers*
- *signpost families to relevant local services*
- *identify childcare and early education provision to local families and work together with providers of the early year's provision for the benefit of families.*
- *base health service provision within a children's centre*
- *co locate services for families and children in health settings*
- *participate in activities such as group work, with other local providers*
- *provide specialist input to ensure a preventative approach as well as enabling the early identification of any problems*
- *participate in shared training opportunities*
- *provide training around health related subjects and child development for early years and childcare staff*
- *create a shared approach to workforce issues e.g. flexible work arrangements, office space that enhances good communication and team working, examination of each service provider's role to reduce duplication and enhance efficiency.*

(Children's Centres Implementation Update No 5, Caroline Healy, Health Adviser, Sure Start Unit, July 2004).

Future Evaluation

The evaluation team will continue its work in the following areas:

- an investigation of refugee/asylum seekers in Whitley and their actual/potential access to SSW
- consideration will be given to existing quantitative indicators and the extent that these are helpful in evaluating SSW
- a focused evaluation of pre-school services will commence in January
- an evaluation of existing commissioned services, originally planned, will begin now.

Appendices

Pro Formas:

- Request letter to Greenfields Parents
- Questions for GPs
- Sure Start Whitley Evaluation 2004 – Outline Interview Questions
- Questions for Non-Users

Matters Arising from earlier Research

User concerns – Check-list re how these have been addressed

Sure Start Whitley Partnership Board Code of Practice.

Request letter to Greenfields Parents

Dear Parent or Carer

As you may know, all of the SureStart Whitley services are evaluated as part of helping us to make sure that the project is meeting people's needs. Joady Brennan, a child health professional, researching from Brunel University, will be talking with local people and organisations during May and June to collect information for the next report.

If you would like to help by contributing, Joady can meet with you or telephone you at home, at a time that suits you, to discuss how you feel SureStart is doing, and what plans you think might be useful for the future. The questions are about how much say you feel you have in planning, any changes you have seen happen, and what you think about the services. This is a confidential contact, and does not involve personal information about you or your family. Joady will be happy to answer any other questions you may have about this report.

All we want to know is your opinions. Taking part means that SureStart can be sure that future plans involve what you and your children think. If you want to help please fill out and return the slip below.

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To Michelle Wigmore

I would like to take part in the SureStart Whitley evaluation: please ask Joady Brennan of Brunel University to contact me. I understand that my name will not be used and personal information to do with me or my family will be treated confidentially.

NAME.....DATE.....

...

SIGNATURE.....

...

CONTACT NUMBER.....

Questions for General Practitioners

We are carrying out an independent evaluation of SureStart Whitley, and have reached a point where we would like to consult with local GPs on how they perceive the services are doing.

As you know, SureStart is a centrally funded 0-4 provision for those areas across Britain deemed particularly disadvantaged, providing a range of resources to enrich and improve the quality of life for young children and their carers.

One of the cornerstones of the SureStart concept is parent participation and community representation, so it is crucial that local voices are heard and represented in the planning and evaluation of services. As the multidisciplinary programme has now been running successfully for a year we are particularly interested to discover what areas of shortfall might be beginning to emerge, and to address the question of those who don't access this service.

Therefore can we ask you, thinking particularly in terms of those families with children of 4 and under, to let us know what your sense is of how SureStart Whitley is doing? These answers are of course confidential, and will be presented as a generic response, to ensure that no individual can be identified.

The themes are:

- **Access and diversity:** Do you know of children who might benefit from SureStart contact but whose parents or carers seem unlikely to access? Please list what you see as the potential reasons for this and any ways you think Sure Start Whitley might be more welcoming or accessible
- **Representation:** Do you feel that there are community organisations or representatives who do not currently have a say in how Sure Start Whitley services are planned or provided? Do you have any suggestions as to how this might be changed?

Are there any services you think might be appropriate or helpful to any particular group or type of family, child or parent that are not currently provided?
Do you have any other feedback on Sure Start Whitley generally?

Thanks for your time. If you would like to see the completed evaluation please let us know at joady.brennan@brunel.ac.uk.

Sure Start Whitley Evaluation 2004 – Outline Interview Questions

Which voices have a say?
Which voices get listened to?
Which voices make changes?
Which voices get left out?

Extent of wide representation

Effect of wide representation

Involvement – impact on Sure Start Whitley, flexibility of Sure Start Whitley
Impact on policy, impact on practice.

How do planners/providers/users define ‘impact’?

What has to happen for you to think that community voices have an impact on the Sure Start Whitley service? (What do you notice, what do you look for, what are the signs for you...)

Concrete examples of impact, of responsiveness of Sure Start Whitley?

Board

- How are aims/goals defined and worked out? How is that debate negotiated/led/managed?
- How many hats do you wear while sitting on this Board? Do they clash, have different priorities or agendas? How do you negotiate that, personally? Do you think that clash is also there for other Board members? How do you think they manage it?
- What interests do you think other Board Members represent?
- Do you see the process of representation working well? Egs. of how, or if not, how not.
- Do you think other Board members see this process as working well?
- Which voices do you think have most say, in terms of what actually happens or changes in Sure Start Whitley provision?

Could you draw me or talk me through a flowchart of how you think information from various people and organisations travels through SSW and through the decision-making, policy and practice?

How different or similar do you think that might be from how other Board Members/involved people see it?

Questionnaire

- How long have you been actively involved in Sure Start Whitley?
- What got you involved?
- How have you been involved over time? (tickboxes & room for list)
- How did changes in your involvement happen?

- Before you were actively involved with Sure Start Whitley what did you think about it?
- What were your original aims and hopes re your own involvement?
- What would you say were your priorities for Sure Start Whitley before you became involved?
- What would you say are your priorities now?
- What do you think of the idea of involving local people and organisations in the planning and policy processes of a service like Sure Start Whitley?
- What do you see as the potential benefits of involving local people and organisations in the planning and policy processes of a service like Sure Start Whitley? Any potential drawbacks?
- What changes have you noticed in Sure Start Whitley policy that you think are related to local/user representation?
- What changes have you noticed in Sure Start Whitley practice that you think are related to local/user representation?
- Do you think most local people see this as working well?
- Do you think most local organisations see this as working well?
- Do you think local people/organisations have any concerns? What do you think would they be?
- Can you think of anyone, or any group who might be left out or feel left out of involvement with Sure Start Whitley?

What would you point to and say 'That most clearly shows local involvement in SSW'?

What would you point to and say 'That most clearly shows flexibility in how Sure Start Whitley runs'?

What do you think..... (egs. Partnership Board, Check-it Out Group, CDWs, MDT, Dads would say had been the most satisfactory thing about how Sure Start Whitley has run? And least satisfactory?

Questions for Non-Users

- As someone who is not involved in Sure Start Whitley, what are your thoughts about it?
- Is it a service you'd like to be involved in?
- What changes or differences would you need to see or be sure of before you got involved?
- What would your guesses be about why other people might not use Sure Start Whitley services or might not want to be represented in the planning?
- Are there issues to do with culture, language, welcome, accessibility, gender, money, etc. that you think might keep some people from using Sure Start Whitley services or getting involved in Sure Start Whitley?

Matters Arising from Earlier Research in SSW
User concerns: Check-list on how these have been addressed.

Parent views

How do the views re geographical and age cut-offs get fed back to Government/planners/policy makers? How do the users know this is happening? *(These coincided with Children's Centre changes so are being addressed)*

Re staff introducing themselves, being welcoming to parents as much as to kids, greeting.

The loss (when child too old) of the Sure Start Whitley services and support and links – quite disturbing for some – how to support smoothing this? *(Children's Centre will alter this?)*

Assumption of lack of skills, provision of only basic courses, 'deficit' model of local people. *(ESOL...)*

Thamesbridge Site

Many parents dislike this site, report finding it threatening, inconvenient, difficult, etc. How does Sure Start Whitley show it hears those views and accounts for them? *(This site is only available for a limited time – other sites will be accessible as part of Children's Centre changes)*

Non-Users

Flexibility in publicity.

Forms and info in community languages – workers who speak community languages?

Agoraphobia sufferers.

Men and involvement. *(Jamie as Dad's worker)*

Wider dad's activities - not all sport. *(Allotment, barber, etc)*

Multiculturally accessible, welcoming, representative?



Code of Practice for Sure Start Board members

Sure Start Board members should put the best interests of Sure Start first when participating in Sure Start meetings.

Sure Start Board members should ensure that all members of the Board have a full opportunity to participate in meetings, including the opportunity to contribute to debate.

Sure Start Board members should contribute to the efficient conduct of business.

Sure Start Board meetings should make an effort to be familiar with the issues under discussion, and should prepare adequately for meetings.

Sure Start Board members should support the work and reputation of the project within meetings, within the community, and within their agencies (where appropriate)

Sure Start Board members should be aware that as individuals they do not have authority to make decisions relating to Sure Start; their power must be exercised collectively through a formally constituted decision making body such as the Board or a subgroup.

Sure Start Board members have responsibility to feed back to their nominating body or organisation.

References

Eisenstadt, Naomi (2004) Zero2Nineteen Sure Start Unit

Healy, Caroline Children's Centres Implementation Update No 5 Health Adviser Sure Start Unit circulated July 2004

Sure Start Inclusion Pilot Projects Summary Report Sure Start: For Everyone - Promoting Inclusion, Embracing Diversity, Challenging Inequality DfES Publications May 2004

Sure Start Principles

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/thesurestartprinciples2/>