

Rotherham District Sure Start Maltby

Service for Parents of Children who need Additional Care Spotlight Evaluation

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Introduction

Sure Start Maltby is a third wave programme, and as such has been up and running for the last two years. Whilst Sure Start has an established presence in the Maltby community, the service is still evolving to meet new government strategies, in particular the development of Children's Centres. In light of this, Sure Start Maltby is currently waiting for the completion of their new Sure Start Centre in the summer 2005, which will impact significantly on service provision for all Sure Start services, through providing accessible venue space, co-locating services and increasing the project presence.

For 2003/4 Sure Start Maltby commissioned Cordis Bright Consulting to conduct its annual evaluation. The parameters of the evaluation included the assessment of three services funded by the programme. These 'spotlighted' services are:

- The support group for parents of children who need additional care
- The STEPs project (Support, Therapy, Education and Prevention mental health programme)
- The DeVeling Dads project

Whilst the nature and structure of the three projects is distinct, the evaluation for each of the three projects has shared objectives, and these have been examined across 6 key dimensions.

- Strategic Dimension:** The extent to which they support the achievement of Sure Start objectives and key principles
- Operational Dimension:** Efficacy of operational processes and procedures, including extent of partnership working with external agencies
- Implementation Dimension:** Overall quality of services; including the extent to which services meet user needs and expectations
- Unit-Cost analysis:** including bench-mark costs
- Future Strategy and Planning:** strategic analysis of exit strategies and opportunities for mainstreaming of projects
- Cost-benefit Analysis:** Overall conclusions, identification of best-practice, value-for-money by taking into account qualitative context and long-term outcomes

Sure Start Maltby Evaluation 2003/4
Parents of Children who need additional care Spotlight Service

This report focuses on the service evaluation of the Group for parents of children who need additional care and the hydrotherapy pool sessions, and was conducted between February and September 2004.

Methodology

To gain an understanding of the service on the six key dimensions, the evaluation necessitates a number of levels of analysis. These include background and desk-top research, qualitative and quantitative analysis of data. Interviews have been conducted at all levels of engagement; with service users and the service co-ordinator. This multi-level approach ensures feedback is obtained from people engaged at all levels of service provision and use. A variety of consultation methodologies have been employed.

- Interviews with Service Leader:** One hour semi-structured interview with the Family Care Worker.
- User views:** 131 parents were surveyed as part of the overall community survey (see Programme Evaluation Report 2003/4) 6 of the respondents to that survey had children who need additional care. Additionally parents attending the hydrotherapy sessions and the support group were engaged in short semi-structured interviews.
- Observation of Service and Intervention Techniques:** Both the Hydrotherapy and Support Group were observed in operation.
- Unit cost analysis:** This was undertaken by using the basic unit cost model which deduces what the average cost of a contact is by reference to the total Sure Start contribution, using data from 2003/4 and the total grant made available in 2003/04. Various benchmarking costs are provided to enable comparison of unit costs for the purposes of assessing cost effectiveness.

Service Profile

Sure Start Maltby funds a Family Care Worker for ½ day per week in the Maltby Sure Start area. The worker is there to provide a service for parents of children who need additional care for reasons of illness or disability. The service comprises two elements:

1. Support Group
2. Hydrotherapy Sessions

Support Group

Objectives

The over-arching objective of the support group is to provide additional support to families to ensure optimum child development, with four key sub-objectives;

1. To encourage children's and clients emotional and cognitive development.
2. To advise parents and carers on child development issues (e.g. breastfeeding)
3. To give practical advice and signposting to parents as needed
4. To provide practical support to parents and carers

Targets

There are no project specific targets for this service.

Format

The group runs for 1 ½ hours per week during term time in the premises of a local pre-school which operates at the local Christian Centre and comprises a number of elements to provide support to families in the Sure Start area with a strong preventative focus.

- Guest Speakers**, these are suggested by parents and give them an opportunity to gain information and advice about services for them and their children as well as provide a catalyst and forum for discussion among the parents.
- Developmental Play Sessions**, including soft play and sensory stimuli for the children attending the session.
- Individual one-to-one Support**, parents can ask the worker for help in completing Disability Living Allowance Claims and for other more specific advice or support with their child's additional care needs.

Hydrotherapy

Objectives

The over-arching objective of the sessions is to improve the health of children and to ensure optimum child development.

Targets

There are no project specific targets for this service.

Format

The session runs for 1 hour per week during term time in the premises of a local special school which caters for children with severe disabilities.

Staff

The Service comprises 1 Family Care Worker for ½ day per week At the support group there is also a childcare worker who helps to encourage the children's play alongside the parents at the group. At the Hydrotherapy sessions there is a physiotherapy assistant provided by the school and a Sure Start volunteer. The service is managed by the ? within existing hours.

User Profile

The Family Support Worker is in touch with 11 families who between them have 13 children with additional care need ranging from fairly minimal to extremely complex.

Costs

The total cost of the Family Support Worker for the ½ day per week she spends on this service is £2012 for 2003/4 being 1/10 of her total salary.

Strategic Dimension

The strategic dimension of the evaluation provides an analysis of the extent to which the project objectives and outcomes work towards achieving Sure Start objectives and key principles. The services objectives are strongly aligned with all four Sure Start objectives, and the impacts of the service stretch across all four objectives.

The key objective impacted upon by the support group is *Objective One: Improving social and emotional development*. This reflects the core objective of providing support services to parents and children, and is inherent through the support group particularly in the one-to-one work provided by the Family Support Worker.

Further to this, an important objective of the group is to ensure children are at their optimal stage of development to access school and develop their learning. The group gives children an excellent learning through play experience which is specially designed to take account of their additional care needs. This preparatory work aims to ensure *Objective 3: Improving learning* is achieved across the whole Sure Start community.

The Hydrotherapy sessions have a significant health focus under *Objective Two: Improving health*. The sessions provide parents with the opportunity to support their children's specific and general health needs due to the intrinsically therapeutic nature of swimming in the hydrotherapy pool.

Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities is systemic to the objectives of the group and the hydrotherapy sessions. It is impacted through the contribution to other Sure Start objectives, but more specifically through groups role in bringing together families who can then go on to develop mutual support systems.

Whilst not a direct measure of impact on objectives, service users stated a demonstrable impact upon their child(ren) and their own health and well-being.

For both parents and children, the greatest impact of services was to increase their confidence. Providing social support and reducing stress are also key outcomes of the group.

Operational Dimension

This dimension examines the efficacy of operational processes and procedures, including extent of partnership working with external agencies.

Organisational structure and management

The Family Support Worker who has ½ day per week allocated to work with parents of children who need additional care is line-managed by the ?. Line management is provided ?, and on an ad-hoc basis as necessary.

Integration with other service providers

There is a limited degree of integration between the generic family support work and that which is offered additionally to parents of children who need additional care because it is done by an individual who is part of the Family Support Worker team. Co-location with the rest of the Sure Start team allows for some degree of informal communication, although this does not necessarily ensure effective information sharing and linked service development.

Beyond the limited integration with the Sure Start team, there is similarly limited integration with other service providers. The Family Support Worker does work directly with Sure Start in supporting events and providing signposting to other services (e.g. STEPs). However the wider service provision and interaction is limited as there is no formal method in place to know which workers are working with which families.

It has been even harder to link effectively with the Health Visiting Service which is providing a universal home-visiting service to all families in the area as their information sharing protocols do not allow them to pass on the names of families with children who need additional care for the Family Support Worker to contact and offer services to. The Health Visitors do pass on promotional literature but this has not proved a very effective way of engaging with families who are more likely to engage after direct contact with Sure Start rather than through literature.

Communication with other service providers

Awareness

The limited amount of referrals, indicates there may be a lack of awareness of the service provided by Family Support Worker across other services including those within Sure Start. If this is the case, this

lack of community awareness may also explain the lower levels of attendance at the group.

Training

All Family Support Workers have undertaken a significant amount of formal training to support their roles, including;

?

In addition the Family Support Worker for this group has had ?.

The childcare worker who supports children's play in the support group is ?

Implementation Dimension

This dimension of the evaluation assesses the overall quality of services; including the extent to which services meet user needs and expectations

Profile of service-use

The average attendance at the group is by 4 families each week with 4 parents and 5 children attending. Most families come every week.

Occasionally new families attend but often it is for a specific piece of advice or one-to-one work which once completed means that they no longer attend.

The average attendance at the Hydrotherapy session is 8 families which is the capacity of the pool (Families book in advance). Not all of those families using the Hydrotherapy pool had a child with an additional care need.

The service also caters for children up to the age of 8 rather than 4 as is the case with most Sure Start services.

Quality of service provision

Overall, the service provided was perceived by service users, and service providers, to be of a high quality.

Frequency

The majority of parents were very satisfied with the frequency of receiving the service, however several commented that they would like there to be more trips and events organised.

Capacity

The consensus between service users and staff was that the group could be better attended as there is room for up to 10 parents and children.

The hydrotherapy pool was operating at capacity and because of this from April 2004 an extra session has been offered.

Communication with Users

Communication with service-users is a two-way pathway, enabling information to flow between service-users and service-providers in order to improve the service for all parties, and can facilitate a more needs-led output.

Advertising/Awareness

Of the 6 parents interviewed as part of the community survey whose children need additional care only 3 had used the service and of these 2 had been invited by a friend who already used the service. The other had been referred by a member of the Sure Start team. It would therefore seem that there is much to be done in raising awareness of the service both among parents and professionals.

Unit-Cost analysis

The unit-cost analysis is based on average or approximate data due to the high degree of flexibility of working practice across this service. The unit-cost analysis does not include on-costs, such as administration expenditure, capital costs etc. or any allowance for the childcare support.

The worker who is allocated ½ day per week to disability services costs £20,129p.a. of which 1/10 can be seen as direct cost for this service i.e. £2,129.

The worker supports 14 families per week making the unit cost of support to each family assuming the service runs for 36 weeks per year £4.22.

The cost of each group is £29.57

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis has been conducted to:-

- Occupational Therapist group provision

- Health Visitor Clinics

(*Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2003 D.o.H.*)

Table 1: Comparative costs of group service provision for Family Support Workers

Service provided	Groups for parents of children who need additional care	Occupational Therapist run group	HV contact in clinic
Group – average cost	£29.57	£47.00	£53.00

Future Strategy and Planning

The main drawback of the service seems to be that it could be far more effective if accurate information was shared by health as to families who have children who need additional care in the area. They would then be able to suggest which of those families might benefit from hydrotherapy and which would benefit from the group. All families could then be contacted and real demand for the groups could be accurately assessed.

If the intention is to provide all families of children who need additional care with a service then the first thing that the programme needs to know is how many children that encompasses, their ages and the range of additional needs they have.

It may be that there are not really enough parents who want, need or can access the service offered by the support group which explains the low take-up of sessions. Hydrotherapy sessions seem well supported and, indeed have been increased to cope with demand but it may be that the wrong families are using the service and/or there is substantially greater demand.

Once the start-point data is in place it will be necessary to make contact with all families and find out their wants. If there are not enough parents who want the group to make it worthwhile it may be necessary to investigate the possibility of joining forces with one or both of the other Sure Start Local Programmes to provide a group in which case transport needs would have to be investigated. Otherwise home visiting to offer support may be more effective or extending the age range catered for to include parents of school-age children in which case the group might need to be re-scheduled.

The Board need to make it a priority to get their health partners to share this data.

Cost Benefit Analysis

Given how much this service achieves in terms of outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and families in the area it would seem to be well justified in terms of the cost versus the benefit.

However, given the recommendations for the future it could be that even greater benefit could be derived from this small input if the tools for planning were in place.

Even if no progress is made in terms of the data it would seem that there is a very fundamental thing which could take place to make what is happening currently more effective:

- Real awareness raising of the group and hydrotherapy sessions both within the Sure Start team, with outside professionals and community workers and also with the public.