

**SURE START SUNDERLAND  
FORD**

**THE VIEWS OF CURRENT USERS ON WHAT SURE START FORD  
MEANS TO THEM  
AND THEIR EXPERIENCES SO FAR**

**LOCAL EVALUATION REPORT**

**AUGUST 2004**

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**LOCAL EVALUATION OF SURE START FORD  
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**I. BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION**

**1. Aim of the Evaluation:**

To assess how well Sure Start is responding to what parents and the local community in the Ford area want for children under four and their families.

**2. Method**

The evaluation steering group, comprising the local evaluation team and the four programme managers involved, decided that interviews would be undertaken with Sure Start parents' groups, non-Sure Start community groups and other local forums as considered appropriate by the local programme. This was to gain a 'snapshot' of views of what Sure Start meant to them and what their experiences had been so far.

An interview schedule was devised by the local evaluators and the programme managers. It was decided this would be carried out by staff within the programme as this would help to introduce the idea of evaluation to both staff and parent/carers.

Two interviews were carried out with individual parents and there were three group interviews. The size of one group was not reported, but it is estimated that a total of approximately twenty parents/carers were consulted. Their anonymous responses were forwarded to the University evaluation team for analysis.

**II. INTRODUCTION TO SURE START AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The overall aim for Sure Start local programmes is:

'To work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children'.

There are four main objectives:

Objective one: Improving social and emotional development  
*In particular by supporting the development of good relationships between parents and children, enabling early identification of difficulties, helping families to function effectively and promoting social and emotional well-being.*

Objective two: Improving Health

*In particular, by supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth.*

Objective three: Improving children's ability to learn

*In particular, by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promote early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with special needs.*

Objective four: Strengthening families and communities

*In particular, by involving families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty.*

### **III. MAIN FINDINGS**

#### **1. What Sure Start is about for people in the Ford area**

These current users saw Sure Start Ford as being for both parents/carers and their children and for the community.

For parents, they see it as about learning good parenting skills, providing opportunities for interacting with other parents, helping boost their self-awareness and confidence, training for qualifications (with childcare support), encouragement for parents and grandparents to get back to work and advice on employment.

For children, they see it as about children getting a better start in life, whatever their background, interacting with their peers thus widening opportunities for socialisation outside the home and providing a better start to their education.

They also see Sure Start as about building a sense of community and bringing the community together, and having a say about what they want in the area.

These areas of importance to parents/carers can also be seen to relate to the Sure Start objectives of improving social and emotional development, improving children's ability to learn and strengthening families and communities.

#### **2. What Users Hope Sure Start will achieve for children under 4 and their families in the Ford area**

Respondents' vision for Sure Start related to:

- Better facilities in the community, e.g.

‘A building on your doorstep where you can get support and advice for a wide range of issues e.g. health, childcare, employment advice’.

‘Somewhere where everyone is welcome and can be involved to build a community spirit’.

- Building social networks, e.g.

‘Personally, to be put in touch with like-minded people and meet other parents’ (working parent).

Parents/carers talked about increasing support networks, and the importance of social contact, confidence and having fun.

- Children’s learning, e.g. early identification and support of particular educational needs in the preschool stage, easier transfer from home to nursery/school, bonding with and relating to other children, and improving the ability to learn (including handling toys correctly).

### **3. Knowledge and Experience of Services**

Parents noted that Sure Start staff made them feel welcome. These parents/carers were familiar with the ACE shop and the availability of courses and groups to promote learning and provide social opportunities. However, one respondent noted that Sure Start had not lived up to their expectations so far (but did not give a reason for this answer). Another commented that whilst the Programme was up and running and established, it still had a long way to go (but did not expand on this comment).

### **4. Benefits to Users**

Positive elements identified so far related to:

- Facilities, e.g.

‘the location is ideal on doorstep’.

- Building social networks, e.g. enjoyment of meeting other people and in some cases using this as a stepping stone to joining other activities
- Children’s learning, e.g. mixing with others, improved behaviour
- Parenting, e.g. the way parents react to their children
- Personal development, e.g. training courses develop new skills and help towards employment, varied timetable of activities maintains interest, and working with staff in groups has boosted self-confidence and self-esteem.

These comments show some evidence that the work undertaken is moving towards parents’ vision for the programme.

## **5. Areas for Improvement**

Whilst some respondents indicated that their experience had been entirely positive, there were some individual comments about areas for improvement. These related to:

- Premises and Facilities

Four parents highlighted that the entrance to the building is very unwelcoming and they have experienced long waits at reception due to a shortage of staff in this area and their need to attend to other matters i.e. answering the phone. In addition the entrance was often blocked by buggies, which could perhaps be folded down. It was awkward to bring double buggies through the internal door. One individual expressed a concern about safety issues in the building; another highlighted that there were no breastfeeding facilities.

- Information

One parent felt that they were not informed when things were happening and they therefore missed out on activities, and that not enough people were coming due to insufficient advertising.

- Participation

It was felt that volunteers participating in the programme were sometimes left out of organised events. It was noted by one parent that some courses have been folding due to low attendance, and by another that it was difficult to attend everything due to overlap. Due to age restrictions some children were missing out on activities, e.g. 4-year olds attending school

## **6. Suggestions for the Future**

These have been categorised into some of the key areas for Sure Start local programmes:

Support for families and parents:

- more courses for adults (e.g. confidence-building, aiming for a job, qualifications/certificates, hobbies, family related, making books for children e.g. alphabet books, Makaton sign language)
- overnight babysitting
- office staff or nominated parent to show people around or personally take them to rooms, especially for new parents

Support for good quality play, learning and childcare opportunities for children:

- More playgroups for two-year olds (i.e. where children can be left)
- An outdoor play area
- Soft play for children's parties

- A 'good learners' group

Availability and Accessibility:

- activities for older children and more activities for the school holidays; trips in the summer; activities to include a wider range of ages (i.e. not just under-4s)
- more afternoon groups
- activities repeated at different times including weekend and evening sessions (aware of staffing issues)
- trolley lockers for buggies and possessions

Parental Involvement:

- The respondents would like more parents to come and to be involved – courses and subgroups need more parents
- There is a need for men to be involved, perhaps through courses aimed at men, e.g. car maintenance

#### **IV. SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS**

Interviews were carried out by Sure Start staff with approximately twenty parents/carers in group and individual settings. The purpose was to gain a snapshot view of what Sure Start meant to them and of their experiences so far.

##### **Key findings:**

- Parents recognise Sure Start as being for parents/carers, their children and the community.
- Parents recognise Sure Start as providing emotional and social support; early learning for children and providing training and qualifications for adults.
- There was no specific mention of the health element of Sure Start.
- Parents' vision for what Sure Start would achieve related to better facilities in the community and building community spirit; building social networks, and children's learning (e.g. relating to other children, early identification and support of special needs, easier transition from home to nursery)
- So far Sure Start was seen to be in a good location, to be helping build social networks, to be helping children's learning (socialisation) and to be helping personal development (e.g. through training courses)
- Parents' comments show evidence that the work undertaken so far relates to some aspects of these parents' vision for the programme
- There were some areas for improvement, e.g. it was reported that the building was unwelcoming and there could be long waits at reception; there are no breastfeeding facilities; there was a lack of information on occasions.
- Suggestions for the future related to support for families and parents (courses, overnight babysitting, person to show round building and take to rooms), play and learning opportunities (playgroups, good learners' group, outdoor play area, soft play for parties), availability and accessibility (activities for older children, holiday activities, greater range of times), and parental involvement (more parents to be involved, activities aimed at men to encourage their involvement).

#### **Ford**

#### **Round 5**

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