

**SURE START SUNDERLAND
MONUMENT**

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

LOCAL EVALUATION REPORT

AUGUST 2004

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Monument Round 5

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**LOCAL EVALUATION OF SURE START MONUMENT
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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 Monument 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 view 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.

Interviews were carried out with four groups of between two and eleven parents/carers. The total number of participants was twenty-nine. 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 Monument area

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

For parents, they see it as about access to services and an 'information point' that has provided information that parents previously would not have known about. It is also about having a place to meet new families/parents and sharing experiences/difficulties. It provides an opportunity to meet new friends, offers new groups, education and support.

For children, they see it as about offering health checks for 0-4 year olds, helping children develop, offering trips and activities and ensuring safety of toys and equipment.

They also see Sure Start as about community involvement and getting involved in what is happening.

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 health, 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 Monument area

Respondents' vision for Sure Start largely related to children's play and learning:

- Better quality playgroups offering 'opportunities for children to do things that they may not normally do e.g. art/craft/messy play' and 'activities for active toddlers' with an emphasis on groups continuing not stopping after a short spell.
- Providing more nursery places, and 'better child development and stimulation' and 'social skills for children'.
- Providing more to do in the school holidays, more activities for older children and safer outdoor play equipment.

In addition, it related to social networks and mutual support:

- ‘Meeting other people with young babies’ and ‘supporting parents and each other’.

3. Knowledge and Experience of Services

These parents/carers were familiar with a range of Sure Start services and activities. These included: -

- Groups e.g. Baby massage, Stay & Play Babes, Parents Group
- Services e.g. Drop-in at St Aidan’s, Bookstart, book loan, Toy Library, Safety Loan Scheme, community transport, nursery at Shiney Row School.
- Activities e.g. trips, book festival project
- Funding e.g. toddler group funding, toy provision.
- Access points e.g. Shiney Row Shop provides a convenient place to buy baby milk.
- Opportunities for adults e.g. volunteering

4. Benefits to Users

Positive elements identified so far related to:

- Building social networks, e.g. providing opportunities to meet new people
- Children’s learning, e.g. opportunities to see ‘what other babies can do, know how they develop and progress’.
- Personal development, e.g. there are courses provided with crèche facilities, e.g. keep fit. Support is offered by staff and other participants and it is well-organised.
- Information e.g. ‘when you join a group you find out about what else is on offer’
- The staff are informal and not intimidating and there are ‘friendly staff at the Shop’.

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:

- Information

One parent reported that they did not see activities advertised. Another stated that there were too many leaflets and too much information at once.

- Participation

It was reported that some groups and courses were not very busy.

- Availability

It was noted that some activities only run weekly, sessions are not often long enough, and some activities stop in the school holidays.

- Accessibility

‘My friend lives in Fencehouses and can’t access activities, sun/safety scheme’.

6. Suggestions for the Future

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

Support for families and parents:

- Parent groups for children’s behaviour/tantrums
- Support for new parents, e.g. how to bath babies
- Incentives for Sure Start members, e.g. discounts on production of card.

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

- More groups for 0-1 year olds, e.g. to follow baby massage. Toddler groups were felt to be a bit noisy for this age.
- Stay and Play Babes to go on after one year of age / a separate group for 12-18 months
- Swimming baths sessions

Parental Involvement:

- A parent group and/or something for dads

It was also noted that Sure Start should continue what it was already doing and not drop any services – ‘you may not use them, but it’s good to know they are there if needed’.

IV. Summary and Key Findings

Interviews were carried out by Sure Start staff with 29 parents/carers in group situations. 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; health provision; early learning for children and providing learning and volunteering opportunities for adults.
- Parents’ vision for what Sure Start would achieve related largely to children’s play and learning, e.g. improved playgroups and a range of activities, with a long-term

view of sustainability, improved quality e.g. 'better child development and stimulation', an increase in provision of services e.g. more nursery places, outdoor play areas. It also related to social networks and mutual support for parents.

- So far Sure Start was seen to be providing new groups, activities and services; funding and support; access points allowing easier access to provisions such as baby milk; opportunities for adults e.g. courses, volunteering.
- Benefits identified so far related to building social networks (e.g. opportunities to meet new people), children's learning (e.g. babies' development), personal development (e.g. courses), information and approachable staff.
- There were some areas for improvement, e.g. more information; increased participation in activities; availability of courses/groups and improved access to services.
- Suggestions for the future related to support for families and parents (incentive schemes, parent groups), play and learning opportunities (separate groups for different aged children, a continuation of services in the school holidays, swimming sessions), and parental involvement (more for dads).