

WOMEN TOGETHER - End of Year Report : 2004/05

The Women Together project started with a 'taster session' on 9th December, 2003 and progressed as an ongoing weekly programme from 13th January, 2004.

This report provides an overview of the project, its service delivery, impact on the community and its integration with other SureStart services. Based on qualitative and quantitative data and supporting documentation, the report outlines how 'Women Together' has developed as a community resource and contributes to SureStart objectives. Data for evaluating this project was gathered using two stage written feedback from the parent/client group, reflective assessment of the staff and interviews conducted with a representative sample of parents.

A useful feature of the programme is that it is subject to ongoing adjustment in response to the needs of the client group, which has a beneficial impact on day-to-day service delivery. The main focus of this evaluation will thus be its contribution to the future direction of the service.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT : 'Women Together' is an ante-natal and post-natal, women only, exercise and relaxation, full day programme, with lunch provided. The Well-Being Workshop took over provision of this service from a previous relaxation service run by another provider.

A new format was introduced, which has proved successful. The new format allows the client group to have a substantial segment of time away from their usual routine, in a supported learning and activity based environment, while still looking after themselves and their children. To add value and provide a rounded package of care for the women and children who attend, in addition to the main exercise and relaxation elements of the programme, worked into its format is an 'information session'. This covers a variety of healthy living practices including various aspects of nutrition, naturopathic first-aid, self-massage, baby massage, aromatherapy, posture, eye and foot health etc. The practices and activities are selected, based on the key SureStart objectives and local targets.

Children under 4 are welcome to attend with their parents and join in the sessions, stay along with their mums during exercise or play with other children or with toys in the supervised play area provided.

Women are officially referred to the programme by the Health and Outreach team, the SureStart Health visitor and Health visitors from local health centres, the Family Support and Early Years team and the Inclusion worker. Often the health/support worker will accompany the woman on her first visit to the group and advise the group facilitators of special needs or circumstances that may be relevant in individual cases. As the group has progressed, clients are referring other women to the group and offering them informal support to help them attend and integrate. There is a play area ably run by creche staff from the Early Years team that supports mothers and enables them to concentrate on exercise if their child is content playing.

The project gently promotes mum and baby interaction and can help identify issues with bonding and post-natal depression. Exercises and discussions are informed, well-facilitated and lively, building in cultural variation and actively encouraging participation from the different ethnic groups represented. It allows women across the cultural mix of the area, to engage in activity together and introduces children at a very early age to exercise and healthy eating, irrespective of the prevailing practice in their family group. The project is pro-actively inclusive and issues are addressed as they arise so that sessions can be satisfying and rewarding for all attendees.

SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW : Post-natal and ante-natal women arrive together and after individual assessment of each new mother at their first visit, the instructors manage the group, taking into account the women's mixed abilities and medical conditions. In addition to developing the fitness and well-being of the mums and babies, the mixed group allows mums to access a support network in pregnancy, into which they can easily re-integrate after giving birth (a difficult and isolating time for many women).

All staff involved in delivery of the programme, engage in regular reflective practice and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which keeps the sessions fresh, topical and interesting, the results of which are seen in the high attendance figures and positive feedback. The instructors along with SureStart staff and volunteers offer a programme which is well-run, friendly and a safe space for mums and children. The growth of the project and its development into other sub-areas along with the personal development of the mums who attend, highlights the value of the service and its sustainability.

Regular evaluation from the parent group informs service delivery which is driven by the needs of the client group as identified through fitness assessments alongside regular formal and informal feedback. In keeping with the desired outcomes of the project, it is apparent from observation of the group and the feedback received, that attending the sessions is an integral part of the well-being of the mothers and children.

EXERCISE

HEALTHY EATING

RELAXATION

*nutrition *self & baby massage *eye & foot health *posture *empowerment & confidence building

The end of year written feedback justified the new format of the programme and points towards an improvement in well-being and fitness for the majority of the parents and children. There is increased bonding within the group and a welcoming atmosphere for new mums. The inclusion of healthy living modules like nutrition and baby massage adds value and is additionally cost-effective as it does not involve increased organisation or additional use of SureStart resources, and is included in the resources and cost of the programme. For the women it ensures optimal use of their time and effort in attending.

The feedback identified outcomes that each parent considered important to them along with recommendations for improvement and the benefits and usefulness of different elements of the programme in achieving SureStart targets in a personal and meaningful way.

Outcomes identified in the quarterly feedback (16 replies in the last quarter) :

GENERAL OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED BY PARENTS :

Parent child interaction, bonding
Support for mums/mums to be
Social time for parents and children
Positive contribution to children's social development
Healthy living practices for all the family
Fitness
General well-being
New Skills & Information
Relaxing space

The main instructors (Anthea Row and Julie Hemmings) have noted that the fitness level of the group as a whole has risen, the women are more self-aware and able to make more discerning judgements about health choices for themselves and their families. The growing ease and empowerment of parents, children and staff involved in the programme is apparent and is reflected in the co-operative and increasingly pro-active attitude of many parents.

Reflective changes:

The service is constantly adapting to meet the growing needs of the client group. Feedback from users and staff is constantly sought in group and individual discussions. Challenges are met and innovative ideas explored. With input from both clients and the delivery team, new developments are introduced.

SOME EXAMPLES

- FRUIT, instead of junk food was actively promoted - fruit is now supplied and prepared for the children. Mums are encouraged not to bring in unhealthy snacks. Most children now make straight for the table with fruit/carrot sticks/fruit juice when hungry.
- Eating at tables was suggested and agreed upon by parents and staff.
- Women are given hand-outs and make notes as they progress in their knowledge and feel more able to continue practice at home, with their families
- Baby massage- to improve health, help with bonding and contribute to SureStart targets with regard to post-natal depression. Individual sessions initially, led to an extended course on demand.
- As the group develops and grows in number, within the session, parents are being encouraged to lead smaller, supervised sessions with other parents of similar fitness to allow the instructors to concentrate on new attendees.
- Parents with relevant skills are being encouraged to demonstrate their skills to the group (the view is that as their confidence grows they can be encouraged to obtain requisite AE qualifications to facilitate work/careers in the future)

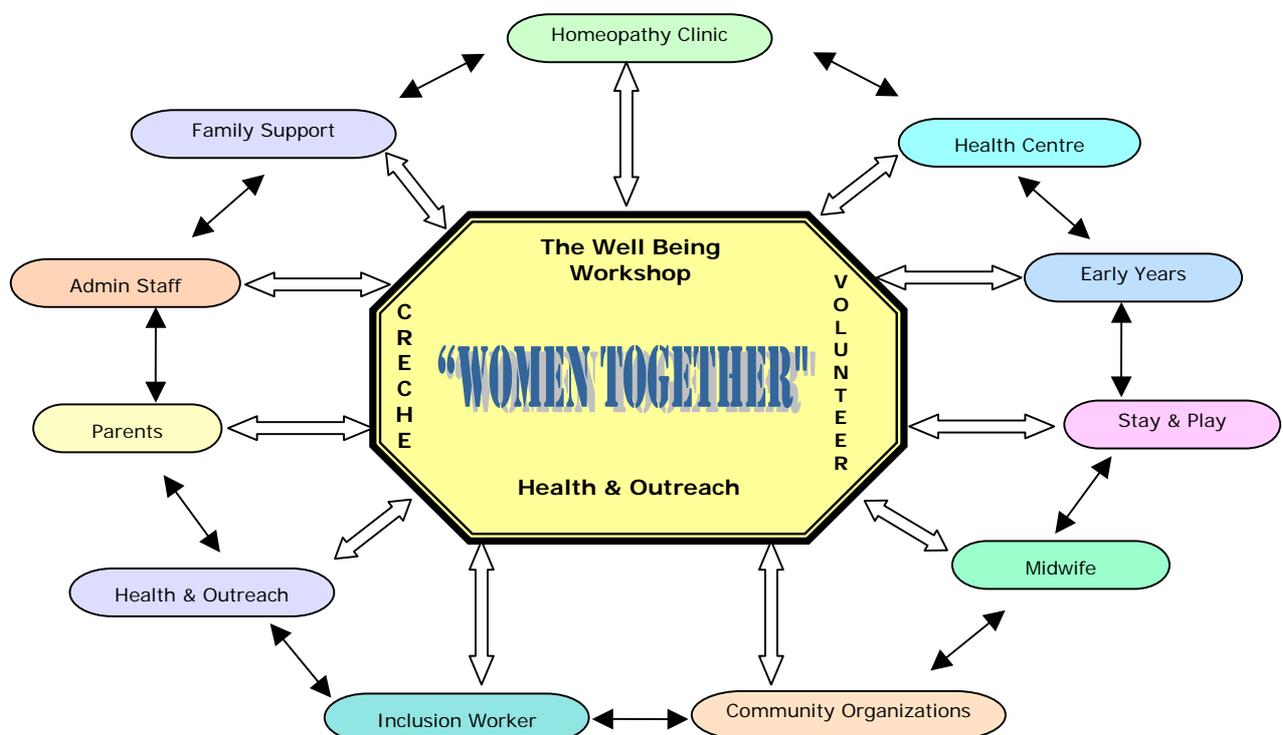
Partnership & Team Working :

An important aspect of the 'Women Together' programme is its value as a focal point for inclusion of women from families who have recently registered with SS BH.

Commitment of SureStart Staff particularly the Health & Outreach team who offer support during the sessions and introduce a steady stream of new clients to the project and the Early Years team who provide creche support, is integral to the success of the programme. (Theresa Douse, Sam Bennett, Zainab Ismael). The volunteer support is committed and effective (Angela McNicholas). Kathryn Day and Alison Moore offer informed and effective management, which is flexible and encourages innovation.

Some external partnerships are also being fostered. A programme has been developed between the Well-Being Workshop and English Heritage with the support and co-operation of SureStart, which will offer the group a series of excursions with healthy living, the outdoors, history and the importance of the contribution of various groups to English culture, as its themes. CAMOPS, a local media organisation, funded by a SureStart small grant is working on producing a culturally-g geared, relaxation video, using the 'Women Together' programme and *The Well-Being Workshop* as a resource.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING



Involvement and development of the Parent group and volunteers : Importantly, parents are actively engaging with the programme, suggesting areas of development, taking positive steps to support each other and the staff.

- 2 parents volunteered to demonstrate their skills in baby massage to a mums and babies group at Edward Road.
- Parents bring in information and aids to share with the group. Parents introduce pregnant friends to the sessions.
- A Parent with ESOL qualifications has offered informal help to those parents who are trying to learn/improve english (in addition to any other formal study they are undertaking)
- Parents are networking to offer themselves as pregnancy buddies, birthing partners to each other.
- 2 parents contribute to providing healthy picnic food, 'free-from' cakes and cookies for group events

The volunteer (Angela McNicholas) has proved to be an asset to the team and has been offered support into a career in community work.

Monitoring: Monitoring information is collected at every session. All clients sign in, new clients are registered with the programme and SureStart registration checked. Monitoring information is collated and merged with programme data, to provide information on take-up and usage and tells us who uses the service.

Take-up & Usage: Women are introduced to the programme by

- H & O staff,
- Social Services,
- Family support
- Early years team
- Parent to parent referral
- Health Centre referrals
- Hostels.

NOTE: The group embraces a variety of personal objectives and circumstances and is changeable.

- 1) Some women attend regularly but others attend sessions towards the end of pregnancy, when signed off work until they return to work. Thus, in addition to the general growth in attendance, the programme can accommodate a steady flow of new clients.
- 2) Most women who are not working or studying, attend well after giving birth, through breast-feeding and after and some see it as mid-week support, while studying or working part-time.

There are 3 clear categories of clients :

- ANTE-NATAL
- RECENTLY POST-NATAL (MAY OR MAY NOT BE BREAST-FEEDING)
- WOMEN WITH A CHILD UNDER 4 THOUGH NOT EARLY POST-NATAL OR BREAST-FEEDING.

These categories may include, sub-headings like single parents, working parents, parents on benefit, families with a disabled parent/child, hard-to-reach groups etc,

OVERALL FAMILY TAKE-UP January - December 2004	Number
No. of families that have used the service in the year	68 (124 women + children)
Highest number (women + children) that has attended in any one week	33
Lowest number (women + children) that has attended in any one week	13

USAGE AVERAGES		Number
Average running pool of families who actively use the service at any given time		24 + average of 38 children
Average no of clients per week	START	13 (women + children)
	FIRST QUARTER	21 (women + children)
	LAST QUARTER	26 (women + children)

FEEDBACK & EVALUATION:

Structured and unstructured feedback is continually sought from the client group
 Informal - Regularly, through individual and group discussion, including parents and staff. This informs content and session planning.
 Formal - through written feedback.

In order to better inform the process of reflective evaluation, triangulation of data is done through interviews with parents and staff, which has the added benefit of providing subjective, contextual detail to inform the discussion and recommendations.

End of Year feedback : For methodology, Stage 1 analysis and questionnaires see Appendices 1, 2,3.

The main focus of 'Women Together' is ante-natal and post-natal women. Activities are chosen to deliver these objectives in practical ways that are most relevant to this particular cohort group for e.g. exercise, relaxation etc (see Table below)

Specific Activities offered :

Exercise
Nutrition information & healthy eating
New skills - baby massage, foot massage, pregnancy self-massage
Breathing techniques
Posture, eye & foot health
Relaxation; stress management
Self-empowerment and confidence building techniques

- **Client-centred feedback was sought on how the programme met each of the 4 key SureStart objectives in terms of the outcomes (page 3 & Appendix 3) that the women had previously identified as most relevant to them. (Appendix 3)**
- **As it is anticipated that there will be an impact on children and the rest of the family, the format (Appendix 3) was used to gain some insight into the impact on the wider family/group as well.**

RESULTS SUMMARY: The graphs on page 9 depict the results from the data below.

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES :

Stage 2

Questionnaires = 17

Responses = 14 i.e. **82.3% of parents responded to the Key objectives questionnaire**

1. IMPROVING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

YOU	0.	1.	2.(1)	3.(1)	4.(4)	5.(8)	
YOUR CHILD (under 4)	0.	1.	2.(2)	3.(1)	4.(1)	5.(5)	n/a 5
YOUR FAMILY	0.(1)	1.	2.(1)	3.(2)	4.(5)	5.(1)	n/a 4

2. IMPROVING HEALTH

YOU	0.	1.	2. (1)	3.	4.(5)	5.(8)	
YOUR CHILD (under 4)	0.	1. (1)	2.	3.(3)	4.(2)	5.(4)	na (4)
YOUR FAMILY	0. (1)	1.	2.	3.(3)	4.(3)	5.(3)	na (4)

3. IMPROVING CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO LEARN

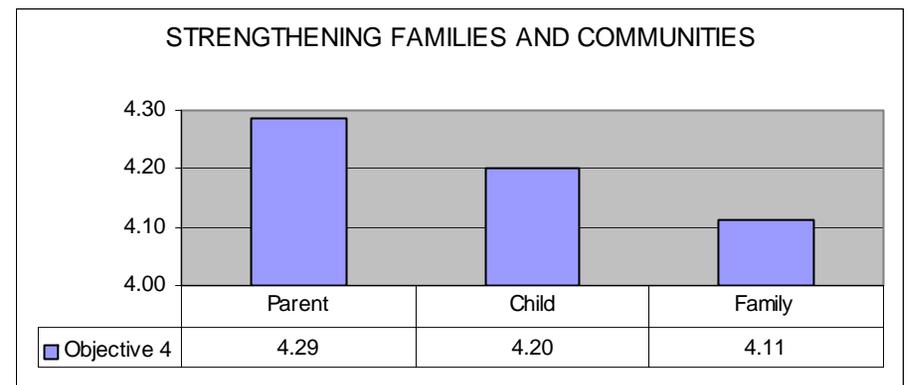
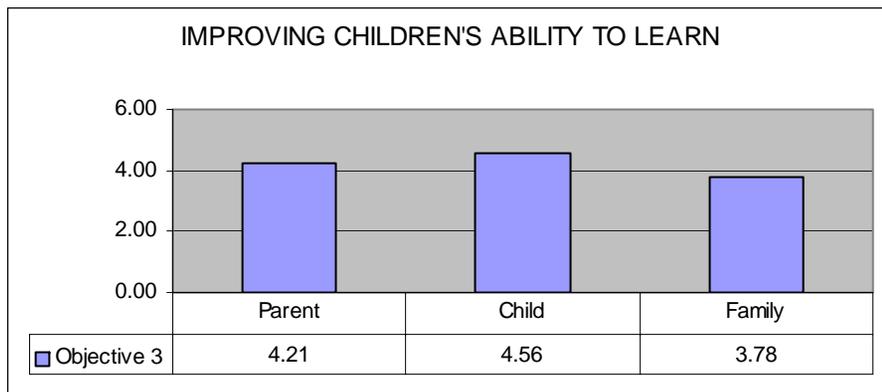
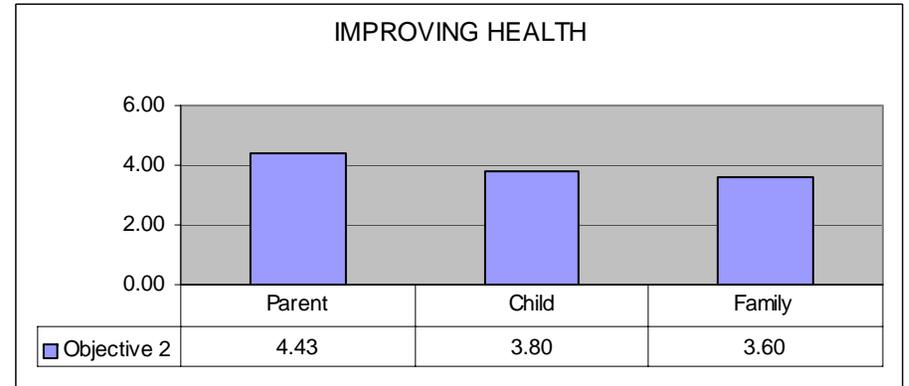
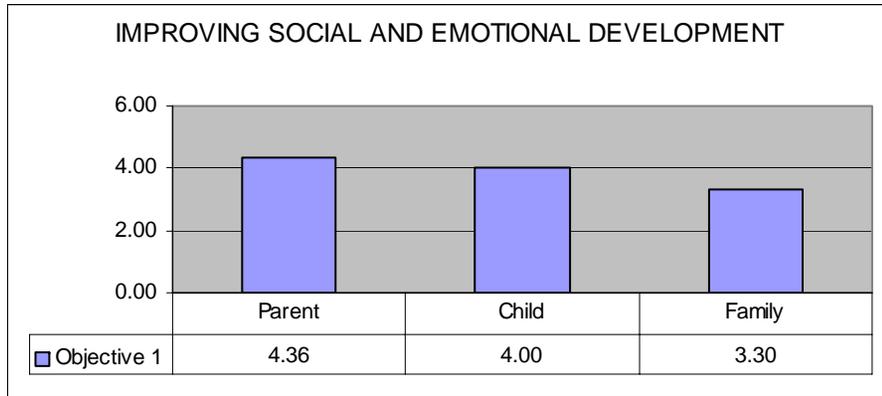
YOU	0.	1.	2.	3.(2)	4.(7)	5.(2)	na 3
YOUR CHILD (under 4)	0.	1.	2.	3.(1)	4.(2)	5.(6)	na 5
YOUR FAMILY	0.(1)	1.	2.	3.	4.(6)	5.(2)	na 5

4. STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

YOU	0.	1.	2.(1)	3.(1)	4.(5)	5.(7)	
YOUR CHILD (under 4)	0.	1.	2.(1)	3.(1)	4.(3)	5.(5)	na 4
YOUR FAMILY	0.	1.(1)	2.	3.	4.(4)	5.(4)	na 5

THE GRAPHS SHOW HOW PARENTS RATED THE BENEFIT OF THE WOMEN TOGETHER PROGRAMME

On a scale of 0 - 5 with '0' as least benefit and '5' as greatest benefit, the scores show the impact on Parents, their child/ren and its indirect impact on their family with regard to each of the 4 Key SureStart Objectives.



DISCUSSION : From the feedback, it is clear that the major benefit is to the women who attend the programme. This is understandable as they are the main focus of the programme and activities are targeted at them and only in that context, at the children who accompany some parents. The impact on the family is less direct. The majority of parents find the programme useful and are emphatic that it contributes to their well-being as a whole. However the facilitators consider that in the future, fitness could be assessed more systematically, both for individuals and for the client group as a whole.

ACTION

- Explore the use of a standard evaluation tool (well-being, change in quality of life scale) to establish improvement in well-being and quantify impact.

Flexibility in the delivery of the programme is essential as the group is subject to change on an ongoing basis. As the programme is kept flexible and activities are offered in rotation through the year depending on need, not all women who completed the questionnaires have experienced all the activities offered at different times. Some ante-natal women have not had the opportunity to assess the impact on children and family, hence these sections were marked 'n/a'(not applicable). Mother/child based activities like baby massage, are less relevant to them.

ACTION

- It is necessary to run joint as well as parallel activities to engage different sections of the group.
- An activity list to be circulated every 6 weeks to ascertain interest

The information sections can be further developed to encourage use of new skills within the family setting.

ACTION

- Home-based activities which engage older children and other members of the family could be developed. *It would be useful to observe the response to the English Heritage photo journals.

As the programme gets busier (almost double) and is at capacity it is necessary to evolve strategies to cope with the increased numbers.

ACTION

- Re-organisation of staff to facilitate the group more effectively.
- Encourage/develop facilitators from within the user group

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY & STAGE 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

In stage 1, 20 parents were handed questionnaires (Appendix 1, below) and asked for written feedback. This was randomly done by selecting 2 'normal', regular, sessions and distributing questionnaires to all attending parents. 16 replies were received. Feedback sought was unstructured and parents were asked to write their responses in any language they feel comfortable to express themselves in. Where appropriate volunteers helped parents fill in questionnaires (Appendix 1).

A reflective appraisal of the responses and the themes which emerged was conducted, the analysis is contained in Appendix 2.

In stage 2, via a further questionnaire (Appendix 3) completed by 14 out of 17 parents, these themes were then linked to the Key SureStart Objectives including the outcomes described above in page 3 and activities outlined on page 7.

Further, the themes were fed back individually to the 2 instructors and 6 parents to triangulate the information, provide contextual detail and inform the analysis, and recommendations which follow.

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE :

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>THE WELL-BEING WORKSHOP</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN TOGETHER PROJECT FEEDBACK SHEET :</p> <p><i>We would like to know how the Women Together programme has helped you. Please take a few minutes to share your views with us. When providing feedback, please make it personal – tell us how you and your children have personally benefited attending the programme and from interacting with other women and children.</i></p> <p><i>The elements of the programme that you have experienced so far are</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ <i>Exercise – warming up, stretching and breathing</i>❖ <i>Nutrition – information and lunch</i>❖ <i>Relaxation -</i>❖ <i>Affirmations and visualisation (using cards)</i>❖ <i>New skills-self-massage/baby massage etc</i>❖ <i>The Use of Essential oils along with the above</i> <p>1. Your overall impression of the day</p> <p>2. How does it help you/your family</p> <p>3. How does it help you away from the programme - in your day to day activities?</p>

APPENDIX 2

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES :

Stage 1

Questionnaires = 20

Responses = 16 i.e. 80% of parents responded to the questionnaire

General :

- All respondents found the sessions enjoyable, informative and useful
- 100% of respondents felt that attending the sessions is an important aspect of their well-being and support structure as parents
- 93.7% specifically mention the positive and supportive social aspect of the programme along with the ability to exchange information and make friends

Main elements of the programme :

- 87.5% feel that the sessions offer them the opportunity to exercise safely and effectively
out of which 72% feel that they are learning techniques for self-practice. 3 responses mention that their child is also learning exercises.
- 81.25% find it a good resource for nutrition and homoeopathy
- 93.7% of mums felt that it was beneficial to their child's social development, 87.5% felt that it gives them a place to go to, an incentive to get out with their child and a place to focus on themselves knowing that their child is also content
- 93.7% mums felt that they were learning new skills - with special mention of aromatherapy, baby massage, breathing techniques
100% felt that it contributes to healthy living practices for all the family
- 93.7% approved of the practical demonstration of healthy eating through the lunch provided
- 40% mentioned particular improvement in and support for specific medical problems,
results that have been achieved alongside treatment in the homoeopathy clinic where these outcomes have been specifically monitored.
- 87.5% felt energised by the relaxation session and 6 respondents mention the positive benefits of de-stressing and self-empowerment techniques.

APPENDIX 3

STAGE 2 QUESTIONNAIRE

HAVE WE MET OUR AIMS ?

REGULAR FEEDBACK FROM YOU HAS HELPED CREATE AN EXCITING PROGRAMME THAT REFLECTS YOUR NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

THE WOMEN TOGETHER PROGRAMME IS OFFERED WITH CERTAIN KEY SURESTART OBJECTIVES IN MIND. THESE ARE

1. IMPROVING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
2. IMPROVING HEALTH
3. IMPROVING CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO LEARN
4. STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

OUR ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THESE OBJECTIVES AS THEY APPLY TO THE ANTE-NATAL/POST-NATAL WOMEN (AND CHILDREN) WHO ATTEND OUR PROGRAMME.

With your help we would like to check how well we have met our aims.

FROM YOUR EARLIER FEEDBACK WE HAVE IDENTIFIED OUTCOMES THAT YOU CONSIDER IMPORTANT. ON EACH SHEET IS ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES ABOVE, ALONG WITH A SET OF ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAMME AND IMPORTANT OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED BY YOU.

PLEASE TICK a) THE OUTCOMES (as many as you like)
 b) ACTIVITIES (as many as you like)
THAT RELATE TO THE OBJECTIVE FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.