

SOUTHAMPTON SURE START PROGRAMMES

SERVICE USER SATISFACTION EVALUATION

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
JANUARY 2005**

Prepared by Hempsall Consultancies

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
1 Introduction	3
2 Service User Satisfaction Evaluation	5
3 Recommendations by Area	8
4 Consultation with Professionals – Key Findings	11
5 Methodology	12

I Introduction

The Southampton Sure Start Programmes (Central, Millbrook, Redbridge and Maybush-MRM, Swaythling, Weston) commissioned Hempsall Consultancies to undertake an evaluation of Sure Start services linked to the Sure Start Unit target:

“75% of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support”

The evaluation focussed in four areas within Southampton; the three Sure Start local programme areas (Central, Weston and Millbrook, Redbridge and Maybush [MRM]) and Swaythling, where services are in the process of being mainstreamed.

The evaluation had the following specific aims:

- to establish the extent to which families are accessing Sure Start services;
- to explore how services are accessed (levels of information, introduction points);
- to establish perceived levels of satisfaction with services accessed;
- to explore perceived barriers to access;
- to explore additional service needs.

The evaluation was undertaken alongside an evaluation of breastfeeding within the Southampton Sure Start Children’s Centre programmes; findings from the breastfeeding evaluation have been reported separately.

A full report of findings and key recommendations from each area has been prepared for each of the four areas. This report provides an overview of key findings and recommendations and findings from consultations examining the cross cutting themes required by the Sure Start Unit, specifically:

- partnership working;
- parental/community involvement;
- management.

2 Service User Satisfaction Evaluation

The evaluation of service user satisfaction linked to the target “75% of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support” found similarities and differences between the four areas. Each Sure Start Programme has been established for a different length of time, and in the case of Swaythling services are in the process of being mainstreamed. Each area faces particular challenges and these differences affect service users’ perceptions of accessing services.

In general, service users in Sure Start Programme areas are highly positive about the services offered and their experience of accessing those services. The evaluation found support for the Sure Start Programmes achieving the Sure Start Unit target, albeit that there are caveats within each area that require consideration:

- In Sure Start Central 73% of all respondents felt that services for families with young children had improved during the past four years, however this figure increases to 78% amongst respondents registered with Sure Start Central. Improvements were identified that could be made to further increase the reach and development of services for families with young children. The benefits derived from accessing services for families with young children identified by participants in Sure Start Central tend to be child-centred – for example by providing children with the opportunity to socialise and access a range of provision and activities that they might otherwise be unable to access;

- In Sure Start Weston 71% of all respondents felt that services for families with young children had improved during the past four years, however this figure increases to 80% amongst respondents registered with the Programme. Improvements were identified to increase the levels and usefulness of information, service user perception of input and a requirement for additional provision (much of which would require a reconfiguration of existing services rather than a development of new services). Service users report that accessing services helps to reduce feelings of isolation and access to reliable and helpful support;
- In Sure Start MRM 68% of all respondents felt that services for families with young children had improved during the past two years, however this figure increases to 81% when registration is taken into account. On that basis the evaluation finds support for Sure Start MRM achieving the Sure Start Unit target amongst registered users of Sure Start services but not necessarily amongst the wider population. Benefits of accessing provision and activities identified by participants include opportunities to socialise where children could also play safely, thereby reducing feelings of isolation; providing children with opportunities to play and interact with other children and accessing support and advice.

In Swaythling, Mansbridge and Hampton Park, where people are accessing services, or where they feel qualified in offering an opinion, services are generally reasonably well regarded. Responses to the questionnaire survey strongly suggest that one of the main issues affecting parents/carers views of services for families with young children is a lack of information. Where respondents lack information about services (regardless of whether the service might be appropriate to their needs in some cases) it appears that it is more

likely that the service would be negatively rated. A lack of information regarding services has affected the overall proportion of respondents who have noticed a difference in the provision on services for families with young children; 35% of those responding felt that they had noticed a difference generally in provision and activities available for families with young children living in Swaythling, Mansbridge and Hampton Park during the past two years.

It is also apparent from feedback comments and responses to questions that there are issues with outdoor play areas that create a barrier to those who might wish to use them. There are high levels of need for the provision of additional services, according to the questionnaire respondents; safe outdoor play is most commonly cited, with activities for the whole family and indoor play activities for children also being prioritised.

Respondents indicate that there is a need to involve parents/carers of young children more in the planning and development of provision; there is little indication of 'ownership' or commitment to initiatives, with one or two exceptions.

3 Recommendations by Area

This section outlines the recommendations provided in each individual evaluation report for the four programme areas.

3.1 Sure Start Central

- Improve the levels of information available.
- Support parents to be able to identify further benefits of accessing Sure Start services including parental benefits and outcomes.
- Provide clearer information and/or support staff to inform parents about who to talk to for information, support and advice.
- Consider ways to provide services for the whole family and at flexible times such as mornings, afternoons, evenings and weekends.
- Consider ways to meet the expressed demand for outdoor play, crèche provision and easier access to the dentist.

3.2 Sure Start Millbrook, Redbridge and Maybush- MRM

- Address the perceived lack of information or requests for more information for parents. This should include extending parents' ability to recognise Sure Start and related information.
- Support parents to be able to identify further benefits of accessing Sure Start services including parental benefits and outcomes.
- Raise awareness of registration for those parents unregistered and registered.

- Support front line staff and service providers to offer more opportunities for parents to express their views and have those views valued, listened to and accepted. Include more feedback for parents on their input when received.
- Consider ways of providing accessible whole family activities.
- Extend referrals to other services by providing clearer information and supporting staff to signpost, raise awareness and make links with services such as debt counselling, domestic violence, employment.
- Consider ways to meet the expressed demand for outdoor and indoor play, and flexible times (e.g. evenings, weekends).

3.3 Swaythling, Mansbridge and Hampton Park

- Increase levels of information about available services in the area.
- Provide an 'information directory' approach which demonstrates all services available, enabling parents to understand exactly what is available and what is not.
- Consider ways in which parents can be included in the planning and development of services to achieve a sense of ownership and involvement.
- Support front line staff and service providers to increase parents' feelings of inclusion and offer more opportunities for parents to express their views and have those views valued, listened to and accepted.
- Consider ways in which services can be provided for the whole family.
- Consider developing services which offer safe outdoor and indoor play for children.
- Identify ways in which parents can be supported with community safety issues.

3.4 Sure Start Weston

- Provide more information or detailed information to parents. Particularly seek to develop systems which extend the information available to those parents accessing one or two services to support them to raise awareness of other services and use services as appropriate to their needs.
- Support parents' ability to input into service planning and development and identify where this currently happens and provide feedback to place value on and recognise parental input.
- Provide support to empower parents to input into services and offer support for front line staff and service providers to offer more opportunities for parents to express their views and have those views valued, listened to and accepted.
- Provide clear information for parents on who to talk to for further services or specialist support including debt counselling, domestic violence, benefits, tax credits or other information and advice.
- Support younger parents to access services, especially for the first time and support staff to make provision for making younger parents feel more comfortable in services.
- Consider offering services for families with children of different ages to attend together or in parallel.
- Consider responding to expressed need for safe outdoor play activities, whole family activities, weekend or evening services and easier access to the dentist.

4 Consultation with Professionals – Key Findings

Southampton Sure Start is seen to have been decisive in influencing developments, working practices and outcomes. The reconfiguration of services is seen as integral to the Sure Start model of services in Southampton Sure Start area, enabling professionals to work more effectively together in targeting services to individual families and to disadvantaged communities.

Participants felt that Sure Start was working well to develop a strong model of community development that was delivering on many fronts. Perceived gaps and areas for development were acknowledged, for example, relationships with GPs and increasing reach. Participants felt that they were now able to work well together and to maximise resources through effective and imaginative approaches.

The overall experience of the participants in this group was that the Sure Start Programmes have had a positive impact on families with young children

There was evidence of reconfiguration of services beyond that which would have been achieved and of community development and involvement.

5 Methodology

A questionnaire was developed for each area and a copy was posted to all households with a child aged under five years old living within each area. Questionnaires were supported in the field by members of the wider Sure Start team and to further encourage participation each area offered recipients the opportunity to be involved in a prize draw.

Consultations were undertaken with parents/carers in the three Sure Start area; participants were recruited with the support and facilitation of Sure Start staff.

A number of professionals (individuals working within organisations that have an affect on, or are affected by Sure Start) were invited to attend a meeting to explore cross-cutting issues as required by the Sure Start Unit.

In total 545 completed questionnaires were returned, representing an estimated 20% (one in five) of all households, with a child under five years of age.

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Hemsall Consultancies Ltd., 71 Narrow Lane, Aylestone, Leicester LE2 8NA tel (0116) 233 7205.

Hemsall Consultancies would like to thank all those who helped to support and facilitate this research, and who gave valuable time to contribute their views and experiences, including managers and staff, parents/carers and volunteers.

For further information please refer to the full reports or executive summary reports for each of the Sure Start programmes: Central, Millbrook, Redbridge and Maybush- MRM, Swaythling, and Weston.