

Sure Start Nuneaton

***Evaluation of the Early Years work
and Child Care Service***

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

Sure Start Nuneaton is a local programme aimed to support parents-to-be and parents and families with children under four. It shares with other Sure Start local programmes a goal of improving the life chances of children living in disadvantaged areas and preparing them to thrive and achieve when they reach school. Sure Start Nuneaton was established and began to deliver services in 2000/2001 as a Round 2 project. The programme has evolved and expanded and is now well established within the community it serves. From April 2006 funding for Sure Start Nuneaton will be managed by the Local Authority. Sure Start Nuneaton will become a Children's Centre offering full day care, health services and family support to an increased number of families over a wider geographical area.

The aim of Sure Start is:

"To increase the availability of childcare and 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, enabling their parents to work and contributing to the end to child poverty."

The objectives are:

1. ***"Improving the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare."***
2. ***"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."***
3. ***"Improving Health, in particular by supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth."***
4. ***"Improving the 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."***
5. ***"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."***

1.2 EVALUATION FOCUS: THE EARLY YEARS WORK AND CHILDCARE SERVICE

The early years work, centred mainly within the childcare service, is a core activity of Sure Start Nuneaton and is in a position to influence the achievement of all five objectives.

The early years work and childcare service was selected for this evaluation study because:

- It exhibits elements which are considered to be innovative. For example the development of “Sure Starters”, a series of sessions planned by a range of service providers and delivered as an integrated service to prepare parents and children about to enter Nursery education and planning for groups using the Birth to Three Matters framework.
- It is a core activity of the Sure Start service.

The early years work and childcare service is well established and successful, as defined by:

“previous evaluation...the Childcare team’s careful planning...support for parents and carers...and their enthusiasm and commitment... with every session on offer is oversubscribed.” (Prima Childcare Team of the Year application 2005).

In 2004, the service won a national award at the Sure Start Partners in Excellence Awards in the “Enabling Children’s Learning” category for the way it prepares children for nursery education.

“The service was commended for running a multi-disciplinary project called Sure Starters that helps parents and children about to commence nursery education.” (Small Talk, Warwickshire County Council February 2005).

1.3 LINKS WITH OTHER RESEARCH PROJECTS

In 2003/2004, the Youth Affairs Unit at De Montfort University, Leicester, undertook an evaluation project focusing on the group delivery of services at Sure Start Nuneaton. The evaluation report, June 2004, concluded that:

“Especially significant for both parents/carers and staff was the presence of childcare. Childcare was raised by all sources as central: practitioners felt that both its existence and its quality made their jobs easier and improved their work. Parents and carers often said that they had been searching for a children’s group or entertainment for their children when they found Sure Start, that they were pleased with the quality of the care and the set up and surroundings, that they were comfortable leaving their children alone in the crèche because the children seemed to enjoy it. It is the central nature of childcare that characterises the group approach at Sure Start”.

Youth Affairs Unit, De Montfort University, 2004

One aim for this evaluation is to obtain some objectivity surrounding the opinions and perceptions of both service providers and service users as quoted above, and establish the factors which contribute to the effectiveness of this area of service. For example:

- What do practitioners mean when they praise the quality of the early years and childcare service?
- Why are parents comfortable to leave their children in the crèche?
- Why do the children seem to enjoy the sessions (and what are they gaining from them)?

1.4 HOW THE EVALUATION WILL SUPPORT THE SURE START NUNEATON PROJECT

The evaluation will support the project in:

- Understanding how well the service is performing and contributing to the Every Child Matters outcomes.
- Keeping track of how the service is contributing towards meeting the objectives for Sure Start.

Informing the service regarding any changes or developments needed in order for the service to be more effective.

2. SCOPE OF THE EARLY YEARS WORK AND CHILDCARE SERVICE

2.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of the Early Years work and Childcare service are directly linked to the aims, objectives and targets for the whole Sure Start Nuneaton programme.

The service aims to offer children play opportunities that support their emotional, social, intellectual and physical development within a relaxed and welcoming environment and to support parents and model good practice.

2.2 STAFFING STRUCTURE

The early years work and childcare service is managed by the Early Years and Family Support Manager. The Deputy Director is line manager to the Childcare Supervisor, who is responsible for the day to day operation of the service. The Supervisor line manages the team of Early Years and Childcare workers, comprised of two permanent staff, plus two sessional workers, who are employed on a flexible basis, working term times only. In addition, other Sure Start staff, such as Family Support Workers, or clinicians may assist in or lead the delivery of groups, as appropriate. Nursery Nurses from the mainstream Health Visitor service support some sessions. Finally, trained volunteers often work in the sessions. These may be parents or other members of the local community.

2.3 SERVICES

The sessions offered fall into two categories – childcare and play provision:

- Childcare is offered as a crèche facility at the Riversley venue to parents or carers undertaking adult learning at Sure Start Nuneaton.
- Play provision is the term used to describe groups for parents and children together. The groups are age specific, covering children aged 8 months to 3+ years. Play provision is available at both Donnithorne and Riversley

Parents and carers have access to a very well stocked toy library, which is managed by the Childcare Supervisor.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to evaluate the short term impact of the early years work and childcare service funded by the Sure Start Nuneaton Partnership to provide evidence for the sustainability of the work when Sure Start funding ceases. *The term “impact” in this instance refers to the effect the Sure Start Nuneaton early year’s service has on those who receive the service.*

3.2 HYPOTHESES TO BE TESTED

The following hypotheses have been tested through the research:

The Sure Start Nuneaton early years work and childcare service is effective because:

- *The Sure Start aims and objectives are firmly embedded and are evident within the ethos, values and culture of the early years work and childcare service.*
- *The quality of resourcing – human, physical and environmental is of a very high quality and this affects both the quality of provision and responses of parents.*
- *The development and delivery of an integrated approach, using practitioners from different professional backgrounds (health, social services and education) and with differing expertise to offer, improves the quality and effectiveness of the services offered.*
- *The positive relationships with parents and carers and the influence of using a modelling approach to the teaching and development of parenting skills is an effective tool in embedding successful parenting.*

3.3 EVERY CHILD MATTERS OUTCOMES

Curriculum planning and delivery is currently centred on the Birth to Three Matters planning framework. Whilst this is successful and continually developing, the team has begun to consider how they are able to meet the outcomes of the Green Paper “Every Child Matters” framework. Although some initial in-house analysis has suggested there is a high degree of match between current provision and that required by the “Every Child Matters” framework, this is in a position for further exploration.

4. THE SURE START AREA

The Sure Start Delivery Plan tells us that:

- The Sure Start Nuneaton Local Programme covers three wards within the borough town of Nuneaton, Warwickshire. The town is situated close to the heart of the midlands motorway system (M6, Junction 3 and M69, Junction 1)
- The ethnic make up of the area is rich in diversity including white communities, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu faiths, a small Caribbean and Chinese community, and a traveller’s community (*1991 census*).
- The area has a higher than average incident of crime, with burglaries and auto crime as particular problems (*Community Beat Bobby quoted from the Delivery Plan*).

The Sure Start Area Profile tells us that:

- The area has a total population of around 9520.
- The area has an under-4 population of around 565.
- There are around 380 families with children under-4.
(*Warwickshire Health Authority, Dec1999*).

The September 2004 M3 data for Sure Start Nuneaton tells us that:

- 445 families are registered
- There are 538 children under-4 registered

1991 census information tells us that:

- 81% of the population are White British.
- 16% of the population are Indian British.
- All other ethnic groups living in the area represent less than 1% each.

There are at least three distinct neighbourhoods within the Sure Start area: a traveller's site on the edge of the area with a very small population, and two much larger areas separated by main roads: the Hill Top area, known as Donnithorne and the Chilvers Coton/Abbey/town centre area, known as Riversley.

Donnithorne

This area is largely comprised of an estate of council built housing. It also includes a number of flats specifically for young one parent families, let as short term housing. The population in this area is predominantly White British. The area is situated about 15 minutes bus ride away from the town centre and is separated from the town centre by roads, a railway and a park. The area is lacking in basic amenities and has no General Practice surgery, chemist or shops beyond a small corner shop/newsagent. One primary school serves this area. Sure Start has a converted shop in this area from where services are offered. However, some services such as adult education and Sure Starters (groups for pre-nursery children) are only offered from the Riversley facility.

Riversley

This area contains the main Sure Start Nuneaton facility at Riversley Park, which is located right on the edge of the Sure Start area. The area is bounded by the ring road of the town, and includes doctor's surgeries, schools and a range of shops which become part of the town centre amenities. The housing is mainly terraced and is owner occupied or privately rented. The population here is more diverse, with a large British Asian population. The town mosque is within the area, and many Muslim families choose to live here to be close to the Mosque. A Sikh centre is also located within the area. This area is generally considered to be more prosperous than the Donnithorne area. However, this is a relative term, and needs to be considered as such. "According to the Sure Start National Evaluation Summary, Characteristics of Sure Start local programme areas, Rounds 1 – 4, "Low income, unemployment and child poverty are all more than double the national averages." *Evaluation of Group Delivery of Services, Youth Affairs Office, De Montfort University, 2004 quoting Barnes et al June 2003, <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/0-4BD92B.pdf>*"

5. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

This has been a small scale impact study of the work of the Sure Start Nuneaton early years and childcare service. It has essentially used a qualitative design because it has largely focused on the perceptions and opinions of professionals and parents. However, some quantitative data has been available for analysis, particularly through the Sure Start Language Measure.

The study has monitored and evaluated coverage of four of the “Every Child Matters” outcomes:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy & Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution

These outcomes were selected as they most closely fit with the focus for the early years work. The inspection criteria from these outcomes have been used to define impact and effectiveness and to tease out responses to the hypotheses being tested. The fifth outcome, “Achieve Economic Well-Being”, falls largely outside the remit of early years work. However, where appropriate, reference has been made to aspects of this outcome and included in both the research and findings.

A mosaic approach has been adopted, as a variety of data sources were sought in order to achieve a holistic overview.

The following research methods have been employed:

- **Analysis** of Sure Start Nuneaton documentation and statistics
- **Using findings from research conducted by The Youth Affairs Office, De Montfort University, June 2004 “Evaluation of Group Delivery of Services”**
- **Interviews** with managerial staff
- **Interviews** with receiving Nurseries
- **Observation** of childcare sessions
- **Interviews** with clinicians other Sure Start service providers
- **Focus group discussion** with early years staff – scaffolded by a questionnaire
- **Focus group and individual discussions** with parents

5.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The children involved were too young to give consent, therefore parents were fully informed and gave consent on their behalf.
2. Issues surrounding parents included informing parents about:
 - What evaluation work was being undertaken.
 - Why the evaluation had been commissioned.
 - How they were invited to be involved.
 - What the involvement entailed.
 - How the children were involved.
 - How confidentiality was to be maintained.
 - How the evaluation findings were to be used.
 - How parents would be informed of the evaluation outcomes.

Parents were made aware that they could choose not to take part at all in the evaluation or that they could withdraw at any time without fear of repercussions.

3. It was anticipated that staff would take part in this study as part of the on-going evaluation of Sure Start work. However, ethical practice included staff being fully informed as to:

- The reasons for and nature of the evaluative work.
- How they would be expected to participate.
- How the findings would be reported to them.
- How the findings would be used.

4. Validity of the study has been ensured by:

- Verifying opinions and perceptions with tangible evidence where possible.
- Seeking evidence from a range of sources, thus triangulating the information given. This has been particularly important when opinions and perceptions could not be verified by tangible evidence.
- Ensuring questions were not leading and making no assumptions prior to the collection of research data.

5. In order to address the ethical considerations the following procedures were followed:

- Prior to the data collection activities, an information sheet was provided for parents to briefly explain the nature of the study and how they could choose to be involved.
- Parents were given the opportunity to discuss the evaluation prior to the work commencing.
- Written consent was sought from all parents who chose to be involved.
- Language interpretation and support was present at all discussions and interviews with relevant parents.
- Care was taken in focus group discussions with parents to ensure all parents are able to give their opinions freely, and that the opinions of any one parent did not dominate the discussion.
- Care was taken to ensure cultural, racial or gender bias was not generated by being sensitive to the members and balance of the focus group of parents.
- Crèche facilities were provided by the Sure Start early years service to ensure all parents are able to take part in the focus group discussions if they chose to do so.

5.2 EVIDENCE COLLECTION THROUGH INTERVIEWS WITH EARLY YEARS MANAGER AND SUPERVISOR AND EXAMINING DOCUMENTATION

A range of relevant documentation was used, both for background information, as part of the framework for the evaluation strategy and as evidence to support information gathered from other sources. The documentation included:

- The Sure Start Nuneaton Delivery Plan
- The De Montfort University evaluation of Group Delivery of Services, June 2004
- The Ofsted framework for inspection
- Policies relevant to the early years and childcare service
- The Birth to Three Matters planning framework
- The early years and childcare planning based on the Birth to Three Matters framework, plus session evaluations
- The Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals
- Information for parents, e.g. parents tips sheets, guidance cards for toys and games borrowed from the toy library, information handouts for crèche sessions to explain the focus for learning

A number of meetings were held with either the Manager or the Supervisor to discuss evidence to support coverage of four of the Every Child Matters inspection criteria. Once potential coverage was established, it was then possible to verify this information, either from observation, from interviews with clinicians and other Sure Start service providers or from interviews with service users – parents or carers.

In addition, the Manager and Supervisor were interviewed separately to discuss their respective views on strengths and constraints within the service, and how next steps for developments are decided and by whom. Their responses could then be compared for similarities and differences.

5.3 INTERVIEWS WITH RECEIVING NURSERIES

Visits were made to a sample of receiving nurseries. Sure Start Nuneaton children move on to attend one of five nurseries, with three as the main receivers. Four nurseries were visited - the three main nurseries and one of the two others. In one nursery, the Headteacher was interviewed, This interview was very detailed and lasted for over two hours, with other relevant members of staff joining the discussion as appropriate. In the other three nurseries the interview was with either the nursery teacher (in two instances) or with the Foundation Stage Co-ordinator (in one instance). These discussions lasted for up to one hour.

Discussions with nursery staff focused on:

- The readiness of Sure Start children for nursery in terms of confidence and independence, ability to play and relationships with children and staff. If appropriate comparisons may have been made generally against non Sure Start children (anonymously).
- Whether there was evidence that the Sure Start children maintain any progress made prior to nursery.
- Whether Sure Start parents were able to become partners in their child's education.
- Whether the nursery had a positive and effective relationship with the Sure Start facility.

The main purpose of these discussions was to confirm the success of the early years work and childcare service with both children and parents. (Success being broadly defined as children being prepared to enter the Foundation Stage of formal education and make progress through the Stepping Stones of the Early Learning Goals and parents being confident to work alongside nurseries to support their child's development).

5.4 NON-PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION OF GROUPS

An example of each type of early years session offered was observed, including both crèche and play provision. In total nine sessions were observed, seven at Riversley and two at Donnithorne. The reason for this imbalance is because more sessions are offered at Riversley, and all crèche sessions took place at Riversley.

The purpose of these observations was:

- to gain an overview of the early years work and childcare services offered to parents and children
- to introduce myself to the parents and carers who attended
- to be able to observe both the format and content of the sessions
- to observe the dynamics and quality of the relationships of those individuals and groups involved. This included early years staff, clinicians and other service providers involved in the session, parents and children
- to gain evidence against the Every Child Matters inspection criteria
- to gain evidence to test the hypotheses that the quality of resources (human, physical and environmental), the commitment to the aims and values of Sure Start, the development and delivery of an integrated approach and the quality of relationships between staff and with parents and carers are important factors in the effectiveness of the early years work and childcare services.

5.5 INTERVIEWS WITH CLINICIANS AND OTHER SURE START SERVICE PROVIDERS

Individual interviews were held with three clinicians: a Health Visitor, a Speech and Language Therapist and a Clinical Psychologist. Interviews were held with three other Sure Start service providers: two Family Support Workers and the Parent Involvement worker. Individual interviews were chosen over a focus group discussion to ensure individual responses could be compared for similarities and differences. In addition, comments were taken at a group meeting of mainstream Health Visitors.

Discussion focused on:

- the contribution early years staff make within the integrated service and their opinion on their effectiveness.
- contributions the clinician or service provider has made to the early years work and childcare service and their opinion on their effectiveness.

Opportunities were identified to observe the integrated service in practice, for example through “Chatterbox”, an adult training course with follow up sessions in the crèche and through Sure Starters.

5.6 QUESTIONNAIRE AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE STAFF

Information from early years and childcare staff was obtained via a focus group interview, scaffolded by a questionnaire. Staff completed questionnaires individually, then brought the information to the group for discussion. The discussion lasted for over an hour and involved three members of the early years and childcare team. The fourth member of the team was not able to be present due to work commitments at another facility. However, she was given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire.

This group discussion took place towards the end of the study, and was useful to verify some evidence already collected from other sources as well as to seek fresh evidence from the staff involved. The discussion mainly centred on staff opinions as to the aims and purposes of the service, how they were supported, both from managerial staff and by clinicians and other Sure Start staff and what they perceived to be the strengths of the service and constraints and issues for further development.

5.7 INTERVIEWS WITH SERVICE USERS: FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

Interviews with parents and carers were offered at both venues – Riversley and Donnithorne, with independent language interpretation available where appropriate. Information from parents and carers was gathered from both focus group discussions and interviews with individual parents. This was to maximise the number and range of parents views sought and obtained. The interviews were semi structured and participants were able to give open responses, rather than choosing from a list of options. This semi structured format was to allow and encourage deeper discussion to be promoted where applicable. No information was gathered using questionnaires, as some parents may not have been comfortable giving written responses because of language or other barriers.

Group discussions lasted from 30 to 45 minutes at both venues. Interviews with individual parents/carers lasted between 15 and 20 minutes at Riversley, but tended to be briefer at Donnithorne, lasting between 5 and 10 minutes. One factor could have been that there was a higher percentage of new users at Donnithorne who had yet to form opinions on some issues.

Discussions focused on:

- *Basic contextual data: number and ages of children, services accessed, length of time living in area, length of time using Sure Start*
- *What parents/carers liked about the service*
- *What they didn't like or would like to see improved or changed*
- *What, if anything, they felt their children gained through the service*
- *What, if anything, they as parents and carers gained through the service*

Statistical Breakdown of parents' sample

The breakdown of the sample of parents and carers taking part in individual or group discussions is as follows:

Total No of parents/carers interviewed		38
No of parents interviewed individually (4 Donnithorne/6 Riversley parents)		10
No of parents interviewed in groups (Six group of between 3 and 6 parents: 1 Donnithorne group, 4 Riversley groups, one mixed group)		28
	Riversley	Donnithorne
Parents	26 (all mums)	10 (9 mums, 1 dad)
Carers	2 (grandparents)	0
British Asian	23	0
British White	5	10
New users (up to 6 months)	3	5
Established users (over 6 months)	25	5
New to area (less than 1 year)	1	4
Established in area(1 – 15 years)	16	5
Whole life in area	10	1

Services used by interviewed parents:

Play Provision for parents and children together

Stepping Out for children aged 8 – 18 months at Riversley	2
Stepping Up for children aged 18 – 24 months at Riversley	11
Stay and Play for children aged 2 – 3 years at Riversley	13
Surestarters for pre-nursery children at Riversley for both areas	3
Stepping Together for children aged 8 – 24 months at Donnithorne	4
Stay and Play for children aged 2 – 3 years at Donnithorne	3

Childcare:

Crèche

10

*(6 parents/carers from Riversley,
4 from Donnithorne)*

N.B.

Some parents use both play provision and childcare.

Crèche and Surestarters is offered to families living in both areas but takes place at Riversley.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

When considering the effectiveness of the early years work and childcare service, all the following strands of data are relevant. Some relate to use of services (M3 data, waiting lists and toy library use). The Sure Start Language Measure results indicate the long term impact of the whole Sure Start Nuneaton programme on children's language development. These results cannot all be attributed to the early years and childcare service, but, as a core service and with the highest number of contacts per month, the service is very likely to have played an important role.

6.1.1 CONTACTS

A total of 98 children attended at least one group during the month of June. The childcare and early years service has the largest number of contacts of all the services offered at Sure Start Nuneaton, and the number of contacts has risen significantly over the six months shown.

Statistics for six months from December 2004 to May 2005 shows the total number of contacts for the early years and childcare service. The contacts include both parents and children who have accessed services:

Dec 04	Jan 05	Feb 05	Mar 05	April 05	May 05
153	248	247	265	239	380

6.1.2 WAITING LISTS

The evaluation of group services undertaken by De Montfort University in June 2004 concluded that *"service users and staff found waiting lists difficult, and both said they had grappled with them and were trying to come up with solutions"*. This current evaluation of the early years work and childcare service indicates that waiting lists are still an issue, but may be less significant than a year ago. All early years and childcare sessions are still fully subscribed at Riversley, but there are no waiting lists for Donnithorne. In May 2005 a total of seventeen children were awaiting a place in one of the play provision groups at Riversley. In the interviews with parents, five out of 38 interviewed expressed concern about waiting lists, especially if they knew that parents had not attended groups where they had been allocated a place.

The issue of non attendance is significant when considering waiting lists. In every group observed a number of parents failed to attend, even though places always have to be booked. The number ranged from one or two to up to half the expected group. Sometimes, but not always, apologies had been received. During the month of June a total of twenty one children failed to attend on any occasion groups where they had been allocated a place. The highest number of non attenders was for Surestarters (seven), thought to be as a result of children attending provision elsewhere, in particular a recently established neighbourhood nursery.

Through interviews with the Early Years Manager and Supervisor, it is clear that concerns surrounding both waiting lists and non attendance have been noted and that measures are either in place or under consideration to address the issues where appropriate.

6.1.3 TOY LIBRARY

The toy library is situated at the Riversley centre. It has a small but adequate room allocated solely for its own use. It is very well stocked with toys and activities, including multicultural resources, for children aged 0 – 4 years, plus a parents' resource section. The toys and equipment are fully catalogued and each toy comes with ideas for parents to support learning. There is an established system for borrowing and the facility is open throughout each day. The library is organised and maintained by the Childcare Supervisor, but is staffed by the "Duty Officer", which can be any member of the full Sure Start team. The Library was observed to be promoted on some occasions at the end of play provision groups, but not consistently. The facility is probably underused at present.

There is no toy library located at the Donnithorne facility. Parents from the Donnithorne area are able to use the toy library at Riversley or a well stocked toy library situated in the local Primary School. However, from the interview with the nursery teacher at that school, it appears that it is very rarely accessed.

The number of people using the Riversley toy library from April to June 2005 was as follows:

April: 12 users, making one visit each.

May: 7 users, with six users making one visit each and one user making seven visits.

June: 17 users, with fourteen users making one visit each and three users making three visits each.

6.1.4 SURE START LANGUAGE MEASURE

"The Sure Start Language Measure is a tool designed specifically to help Sure Start Local Programmes measure changes in the language skills of 2 year olds in their communities in order to help assess how far they are progressing towards meeting the targets and objectives in this area. The Sure Start Language Measure is a simple parental report tool that can be performed by a wide range of Sure Start team members. The information is collected via an interview between the Sure Start Worker and the parent."

www.surestart.gov.uk

The Sure Start Language Measure data for Sure Start Nuneaton is as follows:

Referral Rates (Children aged 0 – 3 years)

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
No of children from Sure Start area referred to Speech and Language Therapy	22	23	42
Percentage of the above children registered with Sure Start Nuneaton	77% (17)	22% (5)	19% (8)

Although the number of referrals for Speech and Language Therapy from the Sure Start area has almost doubled over the last three years, the percentage of those children referred who are registered with Sure Start has fallen from 77% to 19%. Therefore, it can be concluded that far fewer of the children registered with Sure Start Nuneaton exhibit speech and language concerns.

Sure Start Language Measure Results

Category	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
P	19.44%	6.98%	5.41%
Q	11.11%	9.30%	16.22%
R	16.67%	0.00%	2.70%
S	52.78%	83.72%	75.68%
No of subjects	36	43	37
Total number of children with a high word count	23 64%	40 93%	34 92%

Key: P Low word count & parent had a language concern
 Q High word count & parent had a language concern
 R Low word count & parent had no language concerns
 S High word count & parent had no language concerns

Observations from these statistics include:

- The number of children with a high word count has risen over three years by 28% and this increase has been maintained for the last two years.
- The number of children with a low word count, but whose parents do not have a concern (group R) has fallen by 14%, and is now at an extremely low level.

Any conclusions drawn from these statistics would reflect on the full Sure Start Nuneaton programme, of which the early years and childcare service is a core activity. Other external factors may also have influenced the changes and improvements.

6.2 OBSERVATION OF GROUPS

From the observation of groups, both with childcare in the crèche or the range of play provision sessions offered, it has been possible to obtain first hand evidence as follows:

Relationships with parents, carers and children

In all groups parents and children were greeted with enthusiasm and interest. As families arrived, staff took time to speak to each one individually, even if they arrived later than the majority. Parents were greeted in mother tongue language if appropriate. Parents consistently showed open, relaxed responses to staff and to other parents and children.

In childcare situations, parents were encouraged to take time to settle their children before going to their adult learning group. The Family Support Worker came to greet the parents in childcare, and reiterated that they should take time to settle the children. Adult learning groups commence fifteen minutes after the childcare group to facilitate this. Children were almost always happy to separate from their parent or carer, and adults left without showing anxiety. They appeared very confident to leave the children, who were sometimes very young – less than a year old.

In play provision situations, parents often arrived informally over a 15 to 20 minute period. They were confident on arrival, and went straight to activities, playing and interacting with the children. At Donnithorne some parents took initiative, by arriving a little early to help to prepare activities, preparing and distributing drinks and initiating tidy up time. They also often enjoy taking responsibility for displays. All these instances of independence and empowerment were skilfully and sensitively facilitated and encouraged by the staff.

Learning opportunities

Every session showed evidence of careful planning and preparation. The sessions were clearly structured, all following a similar routine. The sessions began with play, both indoors and outdoors, weather permitting. Drinks and snacks followed, the session concluding with group activities, usually involving stories and songs.

The sessions were very well resourced at both venues. Toys were of very good quality in terms of age, condition, and kite mark standard. Resources chosen for different groups were age appropriate, and care was taken to ensure a safe number of toys and/or activities were available, in order not to compromise health and safety issues. The outdoor play area was checked daily before children arrive.

The focus for learning (taken from the Birth to Three Matters Framework) was always shared with parents either verbally, sometimes to the whole group at snack time, sometimes to smaller groups or individuals during the play session or via a handout at the end of a crèche group.

Progression in skills was evident through the age specific groups. This was achieved via the toys made available and the activities provided and was especially evident in the Sure Starters groups, where activities were planned using the Early Learning Goals. Here, group activities were especially noticeable as requiring more advanced skills. For example, making Angel Delight required careful observation and descriptive language skills and interactions with a challenging book needed concentration and good observation skills.

Staff could be seen consistently to work as a team, even though staff members could vary from group to group. There was little need for verbal communication between staff during the session, as routines appeared to be well established.

Staff showed great skill in their interactions with children, and their enthusiasm was an encouragement to parents.

Very sound procedures were observed for health, safety and security, such as locked doors, hand and table washing routines and continuous vigilance over children at play.

Healthy eating was promoted at snack time with bread sticks or a range of interesting fruit on offer. Children almost always tried the fruit, even though parents were heard to comment that some fruits were outside the children's experience at home.

Coverage of the Every Child Matters inspection criteria

Observation, interviews and documentation all give evidence to show coverage of the Every Child matters inspection criteria. A full summary is shown in table form in Appendix 6. Observations of sessions were particularly useful to evidence the majority of the criteria for Enjoy and Achieve, promoting healthy lifestyles and supporting children's mental health (Be Healthy), providing a safe environment (Stay Safe) and helping children to develop socially and emotionally (Make a Positive Contribution).

6.3 INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF

6.3.1 EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE STAFF

The focus group interview with early years and childcare staff formed an important part of the evidence collection. The staff were eager to discuss their work and gave full and frank answers and opinions. They listened carefully to each others points of view and were both respectful and encouraging towards each other. No one was dominant in voicing opinions, and there was a real sense of partnership and mutual support among the team.

Staff had already completed details of qualifications and experience, so we were able to concentrate on service aims and delivery during the group discussion.

Qualifications, experience and on-going training opportunities

All staff members hold (or were working towards obtaining) suitable childcare qualifications eg. NNEB, NVQ 3 or City & Guilds Learning Support, together with a range of previous work experiences in the childcare field. The two main childcare workers have been in post for one to two years, and the casual childcare workers for three years.

Both the core childcare workers are from the local communities – one from the Donnithorne and one from the Riversley area.

All staff have undertaken an impressive range of on-going training opportunities and continue to improve and update their skills and knowledge. In addition to externally provided training the staff benefit from in-house training delivered by clinicians via monthly clinical development group meetings. Staff appreciated the opportunities for professional development, but sometimes worried about this taking them away from the groups. They take their role very seriously, and are thoroughly professional about their responsibilities.

Staff have access to regular, individual supervision meetings with the Childcare Supervisor and formal annual appraisal arrangements. In addition, monthly group supervision meetings take place, again facilitated by the Childcare Supervisor.

Aims and Priorities of the early years work

There was strong agreement between the staff that their aims and priorities fell into two areas:

- To provide quality care for children by ensuring the children were safe, and happy and were able to learn through play, so preparing them for nursery. Developing the children's confidence and independence was considered to be very important.
- Modelling positive parenting and interactions with the children, with the aim of parents and carers continuing this approach at home. Encouraging healthy lifestyles was also considered to be a priority.

Staff suggested that they have a different focus in childcare or play provision. The priority in childcare was to ensure the children were happy and confident without their parent or carer, whilst in play provision, the emphasis was more towards encouraging positive play and good interactions between parents and children.

One member of the team felt that enabling and encouraging parents and children to work together as a team at Donnithorne was important, as this community is less established and stable in terms of people moving in and out of the area. It was interesting to note that the staff saw the Riversley area as a more stable population, echoing the statistical breakdown of the sample of parents interviewed.

Positive and challenging aspects of their roles

The staff all took great satisfaction from seeing the children enjoy themselves and have fun as they learnt and developed. They liked working with a range of families and valued the support of clinicians and the wider Sure Start team.

Opinions on challenges centred around not being able to settle a child in childcare sessions and the difficulties imposed by trying to address the diverse needs of the families they work with. One concern was voiced about ensuring parents are comfortable with the cultural mix within some groups. Only on one or two occasions had parents found this to be a problem, but this comment shows how seriously staff take the task of meeting the needs and expectations of the wide range of families who access the service.

Effectiveness of the service

All staff felt that good teamwork was the most important factor for them to be able to provide an effective service. This very much included the whole range of personnel available for support, from the Supervisor and Manager to the clinicians and Family Support Workers. The integrated service was seen to be very significant with the provision of education, health and family support.

The team all felt they were affirmed in their roles through a range of feedback mechanisms that include: verbal feedback from parents and the reactions of the children in sessions; written feedback from parents comments cards and from other members of the Sure Start team at team meetings; from the constructive discussions in supervision and appraisals: and from support and praise within the early years and childcare team. It was noted that the Supervisor thanked the staff every day for their work.

Working with children

The staff were confident about the arrangements for planning, and were supported by the framework provided from Birth to Three Matters and input from the Childcare Supervisor. They were supported in the delivery of sessions by a range of staff – clinicians, Family Support Workers and Nursery Nurses from Health. They also felt that they supported each other, by having good routines and playing to each others strengths.

Working with parents and carers

The discussion concentrated on how the staff had established and maintained relationships with parents and carers. There was agreement that being consistent, welcoming and giving time and interest were vital. It was important to staff that parents felt they could trust them, and this was achieved by making sure any concern was acted on quickly, and any comments taken seriously. Parents needed to know that the staff would do as they said they would, for example by informing parents if the child wouldn't settle or seeking advise on the parents behalf. Staff aimed for equality and respect between themselves and parents, achieved, in addition to the attitudes and actions above, by practical considerations, such as a comparable dress code to

parents, and first names between parents and staff. All these measures were observed during sessions, and many were commented on by parents themselves.

Liaison with receiving nurseries

Staff were able to give some examples of links with nurseries, but these were generally one-off visits or phone calls, for example to liaise over dates for nursery staff to visit, or to attend a school fete with a Family Support Worker.

In general, and confirmed through discussion with nurseries and other Sure Start staff, liaison with nurseries was mainly through Family Support Workers, and not directly with early years and childcare staff.

6.3.2 SERVICE MANAGER AND CHILDCARE SUPERVISOR

Through interview with the Deputy Director, who manages the early years work and childcare service, the mutually supportive roles within the integrated service Sure Start team were confirmed. It was the Manager's view that the areas of strength in the team lay with the staff, with their suitable qualifications, range of skills and specific abilities, for example, language support. Relationships, both with parents and with other professionals in the wider team, and a belief in true partnership were considered to be important factors in the effectiveness of the service. The early years work and childcare service was viewed as being integral to the whole Sure Start Nuneaton service provision. As a core service it has a high profile within the programme.

With the establishment of the Children's centre in 2006, the service may be approaching a period of change, and embracing this challenge would be the next major area for development.

In terms of constraints, fitting into the wider programme and issues surrounding both capacity and non attendance were thought to be significant.

The Childcare Supervisor is responsible for the day to day management of the early years work. Her role and responsibilities are wide ranging and cover supervision of staff, developing planning, liaison work, organisation of groups and staffing rotas, and responsibility for the toy library. This range of tasks mean that she is almost entirely office based.

In discussion with the Supervisor, many of the opinions of the Manager were echoed. In terms of next steps, the Supervisor was considering many aspects of service delivery as opportunities for improvement. For example, enhancing planning, offering play in the home for hard to reach families, extending the services offered at the Donnithorne facility, re-organising Sure Starters groups and promoting the toy library were all possibilities along with as the challenges of moving towards the development of the children's centre. Constraints surrounding capacity (both in terms of space and staff) and non attendance were repeated.

6.3.3 CLINICIANS

Responses from the interviews with clinicians were analysed and compared for similarities and differences.

How the early years work and childcare service supports the work of clinicians

All three clinicians were very appreciative of the early years work and childcare service, and were able to give many examples of how the service supported and helped to deliver their own objectives and priorities. To summarise:

- By delivering health promotions within sessions, such as child safety, sun awareness and dental health. Here, the Health Visitor liaised with the team and planning was adjusted to include some activities based on the promotion, with promotional material distributed to parents who had attended. This had proved to be such a successful approach, that the Sure Start Health Visitor had shared this with mainstream Health Visitors, resulting in a similar approach being adopted across North Warwickshire.
- By delivering consistent, up to date information to parents, and signposting them on to suitable referral pathways.
- By delivering effective sessions, where good models of speech and language, positive behaviour management or responding to children are promoted.
- By providing good quality childcare so that parents can attend adult learning related to health, speech and language or positive parenting.

How the clinicians supports the early years and childcare work

The relationship between services was seen to be both mutually beneficial and mutually supportive. The clinicians supported the early years work through:

- Input into planning and resources such as the parent tips sheets covering a range of issues such as language development, weaning, sleep problems, immunisation.
- Contributions to in-house professional development opportunities through monthly clinical development sessions.
- Acting as a consultant for difficult situations, and being available for staff to signpost parents towards when appropriate.
- Working alongside early years staff within sessions, such as Sure Starters or Chatterbox.

Clinicians views on the effectiveness of the service

There was a consensus of opinion that the quality of the staff in the early years team was the single most important factor. This was articulated in the following ways:

- They are reflective practitioners - always striving to improve and to see the “bigger picture”.
- The sessions are well planned and well prepared with purposeful, relevant activities.
- They form good relationships with parents, based on trust and respect.
- They are enthusiastic and the children like them!
- They are well managed by the Manager and Supervisor, who have clear vision and keep their eye on the ball.
- They are part of a multi-agency team.

6.3.4 OTHER SURE START STAFF

Responses from the interviews with two Family Support Workers and the Parent Involvement Officer were analysed and compared for similarities and differences.

How the Family Support Workers support the work of the early years and childcare service

One Family Support Worker had had a major input into the planning using the Birth to Three Matters Framework. She had used her education background to work with the Childcare Supervisor on this well developed and successful area of work.

All three staff support the service in the delivery of sessions: one bilingual Family Support Worker through language support at “Chatterbox” sessions and one through delivering Sure Starters sessions. The Parent Involvement Officer, also with an education background, was able to help in play provision when needed. This widening of the range of staff supporting sessions can be seen to be an enrichment to the service. These staff all brought different skills and emphases to the sessions, as evidenced through observation. For example, in play provision it appeared that, while the early years and childcare staff were primarily able to support the children in their learning, the Family Support Workers were able to have a slightly higher focus on the needs of the parents.

All staff said they supported the work of the early years and childcare service by encouraging parents to take up the service.

How the early years and childcare service supports Family Support Workers and the Parent Involvement Worker

Both Family Support Workers saw the availability of childcare and play provision as a major part of a package of support for families. The Manager of both services also stressed that this was an important aspect of the Family Support Service.

Both Family Support Workers acknowledged the availability of crèche facilities as vital for parents undertaking adult learning. They reported that parents often commented on how they felt confident to leave their children in the crèche. This had been observed in crèche provision and was later confirmed by parents themselves during interviews and group discussions.

One Family Support Worker felt that the open plan, single office set up for all Sure Start staff meant that it was conducive to the mutually supportive ethos of Sure Start and that professional information could be shared easily.

The Parent Involvement Officer felt that the availability of play provision was the primary focus for parents who were considering beginning to access Sure Start services and that once the link had been established, parents tended to move on to take up courses. However, the Family Support Worker who was also the Adult Learning Co-ordinator was of the opinion that for many parents the first point of contact was through attending courses (and using the crèche), later moving onto access play provision.

Opinions and evidence on the quality of the early years and childcare service

The staff all held the service in high regard. The reasons given for the quality of the service were:

- The consistency of core staff helped to make parents feel confident and secure in leaving their children in the crèche. The Adult Learning Co-ordinator knew that parents were reluctant to take up training elsewhere, even if crèche facilities were available.
- The quality of resources was seen to be significant as was the clean, safe environment and its position within the local neighbourhoods.
- Parents have commented that they like to be able to see what the children are learning.
- Parents have never been heard to make negative comments about early years and childcare staff.

6.4 SERVICE USERS – SAMPLE OF PARENTS AND CARERS

The responses from the sample of 38 parents or carers were analysed by counting and tallying answers from each participant, and then grouping and ordering into the most common points of view. Comments relating to a very small number of parents are also included.

There were no noticeable differences in responses between parents interviewed as individuals and those who took part in focus group discussions.

Similarly, there were no major differences in responses from Riversley or Donnithorne parents, other than the responses tended to be fuller from Riversley parents. The sample analysis (page 15) shows that there was a much higher percentage of new users interviewed from the Donnithorne area, compared to the Riversley area. Also, there was a much lower percentage of parents living in the Donnithorne area for an established length of time (over one year). These factors may have been important in the amount of information Donnithorne parents were able to share compared to Riversley parents.

There were no noticeable differences in responses from British White or British Asian parents or carers.

Why parents first began to use the Sure Start childcare or play provision

1. To give the children a change and to play with different toys
2. To enable the children to mix with other children
3. To get out of the house for a break and to have some adult conversation
4. To help the children to learn and develop

In addition, there was one response for each of the following, but each from a different parent:

To have a safe place to play; because it was a free service; as a move on from anti and post natal services at Sure Start; from a recommendation by another agency.

Whether parents or carers had made friends through Sure Start childcare or play provision

Virtually every parent responded positively to this question. The only exception was in the case of three new users, who had attended groups for only a few weeks. Even then, one new user said she had made one new friend, and another said she had made friends with one of the staff.

What parents or carers liked best about childcare or play provision

The following three areas were about equal in the number of responses given, and summarise the opinions of the vast majority of parents:

1. Friendly, welcoming, caring staff who are good with the children and who they feel they can trust.
2. Facilities: lovely toys, different and much more than those at home, safe, clean environment.
3. Learning: different each week, the focus is explained and helps parents understand how the children are learning, language development, confidence, preparation for Nursery, socialising with other children.

In addition, a small number of parents (five or less) expressed the following comments:

Help with problems, facilitating adult learning.

What were the aspects of the early years work and childcare service the parents or carers didn't like or thought could be improved

There were far fewer responses to this question compared to the positive responses above. Parents were often reluctant to share ideas and had to think for longer before answering. This may have been because they wanted to show support for and loyalty to the service, or because in general they were so satisfied with the service. Therefore the following summary needs to be considered within this context:

1. Would like to be able to attend more sessions per week and for play provision to be available during the holidays.
2. Would like to be able to bring siblings, or to have crèche facilities for siblings.
3. A small number of parents (five) expressed frustration with waiting lists, especially if they knew that other parents had not attended.
4. One parent only stated that she had felt excluded due to language/ cultural differences within a group. However, several parents specifically stated that they appreciated the ability to make friends across different cultures.
5. Five parents (within one group discussion) would like to see more physical activities within sessions to promote children's physical health.

In addition, there were a few practical suggestions that generally related to only one or two parents (*Suggestions for Surestarters, natural juice for drinks, didn't like messy activities for young toddlers, open to parents from a wider area, English classes on site*)

What parents and carers felt their children gained, if anything, through attending childcare or play provision

There was a wide consensus of agreement to this question, with the first three responses being by far the most common. Almost every parent mentioned the development of social skills, confidence and learning in some form as summarised below:

1. Social skills - mixing with other children, learning to share.
2. Confidence and beginning to gain independence from parent or carer.
3. Helping development, including speech.

Ten parents or carers noted developing healthy eating habits, with five or less responses for the final two areas.

4. Healthy eating and hygiene habits.
5. Enjoyment and fun.
6. Preparation for Nursery.

What parents or carers thought they had gained, if anything, through attending childcare or play provision

Parents in general had to think for a little longer before answering this question, but again there was a wide consensus of agreement as summarised below. The first response was by far the most common, but making friends was also seen as particularly important.

1. Confidence in parenting/ support with parenting issues.
2. Making and seeing friends.
3. Ideas for activities to do at home.
4. Pleasure in seeing the children learn and have fun, and quality time to spend with the children.
5. Opportunity to undertake adult learning.

6.5 RECEIVING NURSERIES

6.5.1 Links and liaison with Sure Start Nuneaton

Liaison with nurseries is mainly through Family Support Workers, with each worker allocated to a specific nursery setting. Early Years staff liaise in the summer term prior to transfer to nursery, but this is a specific annual link rather than regular liaison.

The Family Support Workers liaise and develop links in a variety of ways. For example, by displaying Sure Start information, through training opportunities provided by the Speech and Language Therapist, through a Sure Start Parents Together group sited in one school and through the Family Support Worker attending nursery events. In addition one headteacher has been part of the Sure Start management group.

Three of the four nursery staff interviewed had visited the Sure Start facilities, but not when groups were taking place. All said they would welcome the opportunity for further visits or closer links. All nurseries are invited annually to attend a Surestarters group (pre nursery play provision). Some nursery settings did take up this invitation, but not all.

All the nursery staff interviewed had an understanding of the aims of Sure Start, particularly when links were more developed, for example through the full time nursery placements.

6.5.2 Full time Nursery Places

Sure Start has funded 16 full time places in two of the receiving nurseries from 2000 to 2004. Staff in those schools considered these full time placements to have been of great benefit to the children in terms of their overall development and readiness for school. The evaluation of the impact of these full time nursery places fall outside the remit of this project, but these comments are worthy of note, and could be considered for further exploration.

6.5.3 Identification of children and validity of information

On entry into nursery, none of the four nursery settings visited formally identified children who had accessed Sure Start services. Sharing this information was considered to be the prerogative of the parents themselves, and therefore, some parents may have chosen to do so while others may not. Similarly, Sure Start Nuneaton do not present names or records to receiving nurseries. The children who have attended Surestarters, the pre-nursery play provision group, do produce a folder of their work, and parents are encouraged to share the contents with the receiving nursery, but this is entirely the choice of parents.

All four nurseries visited could see the benefit of formally identifying the Sure Start children, in terms of evaluating their on-going progress, and implied that they could do so in the future.

Two nurseries were able to identify children using informal methods. For example, if the parents chose to share the information, if the children themselves mentioned activities they had done at Sure Start or if other parents shared information that they had attended with another family. However, these informal methods could easily have missed out some families, and, therefore, any of the following information shared by the nurseries has greatly reduced validity.

6.5.4 Impact of Sure Start

The above comments on identification and the effect on validity needs to be considered, but the following information is still worthy of note within that context.

One of the two main receiving nurseries commented very favourably regarding the impact of Sure Start on the families within the area. In this instance, the Headteacher was interviewed. She had been in post for over ten years and was therefore in a sound position to voice her opinions on changes from pre to post Sure Start services. Sixteen full time nursery places were funded through Sure Start. Around 60% of the intake of 46 were known to have accessed Sure Start services. Those children appeared to be entering nursery at a higher level and to be more prepared for learning. They made good progress in nursery, as evidenced through assessment undertaken in October and June. The children are used to a learning environment, are aware of routines and can engage in play. Factors other than Sure Start input could be influential, and it is impossible to separate out the impact of the early years and childcare service from other Sure Start services such as Family Support.

The same nursery headteacher commented on changes within the attitudes of parents since the introduction of Sure Start services: the parents were considered to be more confident and assertive as partners in their children's education, for example, by engaging with the nursery staff, voicing opinions or concerns and showing more confidence with parenting issues.

In the second nursery five children who had accessed Sure Start services could be identified. Those children were considered to be on a par with children who had attended full time day care in terms of confidence and independence, and in advance of children from home or childminded backgrounds. This was evidenced from assessment of the stepping stones from the Early Learning Goals of the National Curriculum Foundation Stage. However, there could have been other unidentified children within the setting who exhibited different characteristics. Full time nursery places were also funded by Sure Start in this setting.

The other two settings were not able to give any opinions or comments on the impact of Sure Start on the readiness of children to engage in nursery education.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 SUMMARY

All the above findings have contributed towards the following conclusions. Evidence has been sought from both service providers and service users, from focused observations and from written documentation. In analysing the findings, it has been possible to find common threads across the range of sources of evidence, and to find similar opinions and perceptions from a range of service providers and service users.

The early years work and childcare service is effective in its aim of impacting on the lives of parents and children who access services. In summary:

- It provides a well managed and well resourced service that is highly valued by both parents and staff both within Sure Start, in receiving nurseries and in the mainstream Health Visitor service.
- It provides quality care and early years education for children within a safe, secure and happy environment so that children can have fun as they learn through play.
- It supports parents and carers by modelling positive parenting, by offering non judgemental support and advice when sought and by signposting parents to other services when appropriate.
- Early years staff work in partnership with parents, exhibiting both respect and equality within the partnership.
- The service helps to prepare children for nursery through a suitable curriculum based on the Birth to Three Matters framework and the Early Learning Goals of the National Curriculum Foundation Stage. Activities are thoroughly planned and prepared and are well delivered.
- Staff are suitably qualified and benefit from a comprehensive range of on-going professional development opportunities.
- The service both supports and is supported by the contributions of clinicians and Sure Start staff to form an integrated delivery of services.
- The early years work uses resources from mainstream services wherever possible, and contributes to mainstream provision, particularly in the health sector.
- Parents are beginning to take ownership of and make contributions to the service. For example, at the Donnithorne facility parents create displays and select activities themselves. Staff skilfully facilitate and encourage this involvement.
- The early years work covers the majority of the inspection criteria from the Every Child Matters framework (see paragraph 7.3 below)

7.1 HYPOTHESES

From the data collected and the findings identified, there is clear evidence to support all the hypotheses tested.

- ***The Sure Start aims and objectives are firmly embedded and are evident within the ethos, values and culture of the early years work and childcare service.***

Partnership with parents, respect and equality are all amply demonstrated within the service. Parents trust the early years staff, not only to care for their children in childcare sessions, but also to follow through on any queries or concerns. The staff offer time and attention to each family, showing care and concern and responding to them as individuals.

- ***The quality of resourcing – human, physical and environmental is of a very high and this affects both the quality of provision and responses of parents.***

The early years work is very well resourced in terms of toys, equipment and facilities. The environment is safe and secure and good use is made of the space available at both the Donnithorne and Riversley sites. However, to some extent, the space available limits the range of activities that can be provided and opportunities for further development. Parents appreciate the quality of the resources but in general this is only one reason why parents use the service.

The service is working to capacity, particularly at the Riversley site, and it is difficult to see how the service here could be extended within the space available. The Donnithorne facility is only timetabled for some sessions during the week and it is here that there is capacity for extending services, subject to identified needs and availability of staff.

The single most important feature contributing to the effectiveness of the service lies with the early years and childcare staff. From observations and interviews with service providers and service users it is clear that the staff themselves are the service's greatest asset. Strong and effective leadership and management, clear vision, on-going professional development, a commitment to the families they work with and the desire to continue to develop and improve the service are all significant factors.

- ***The development and delivery of an integrated approach, using practitioners from different professional backgrounds (health, social services and education) and with differing expertise to offer, improves the quality and effectiveness of the services offered.***

The integrated service provision is extremely significant, contributing towards the effectiveness of the early years work. The quality of provision in groups is enhanced through input from clinicians and staff with a range of expertise. Clinicians influence the professional development of early years staff, both directly through training in the clinical development group sessions, and indirectly by being available for support and advice. The open plan, single office arrangement helps to facilitate this. Early years staff are all positive about the benefits of integrated service provision and are eager to take advantage of the additional expertise available.

The early years and childcare service is greatly valued by clinicians, other Sure Start service providers and the mainstream Health Visitor service. The early years work makes a valuable contribution to the priorities of other service providers.

- ***The positive relationships with parents and carers and the influence of using a modelling approach to the teaching and development of parenting skills is an effective tool in embedding successful parenting.***

Positive relationships were apparent in all sessions observed, and were echoed time and time again in interviews with parents and carers. There is an ethos of respect and equality throughout the service. Staff are non judgemental, genuinely friendly and show real concern for the families they work with. The outcome is a partnership of trust. Early years staff model positive parenting through play and they are successful in engaging parents and children together within sessions.

7.3 EVERY CHILD MATTERS INSPECTION CRITERIA

Through examining planning and through focused observations, the evidence suggests that the early years and childcare service addresses the majority of the inspection criteria for four of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. In particular it exhibits comprehensive coverage of the criteria for “Enjoy and Achieve”, promoting healthy lifestyles and supporting children’s mental health (Be Healthy), providing a safe environment (Stay Safe) and helping children to develop socially and emotionally (Make a Positive Contribution). In addition, by providing childcare, it enables parents to undertake adult learning, which may contribute to their ability to seek work (Achieve Economic Well-being). The tables in Appendix 6 detail examples of how the service addresses and meets the inspection criteria.

7.4 THE SURE START OBJECTIVES AND MAINSTREAMING

As a core activity of Sure Start Nuneaton, the early years and childcare service is one of the central means of meeting the Sure Start objectives. In addition to the ways in which, through its own activities, the objectives are addressed, it also supports other Sure Start services with their own agendas, as they aim to meet the objectives. There is also evidence that, through work with Health Visitors, it contributes to mainstream health provision.

Improving the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare.

This service offers childcare to support adult learning within the Sure Start service. It is not in the position, nor is it the aim, to provide full day care enabling parents to seek and maintain paid employment. This will be achieved when Sure Start Nuneaton achieves Children’s Centre status in 2006.

“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.”

Within groups, the early years staff promote positive parenting through modelling interactions with children at play, managing children’s behaviour, accepting children’s contributions, for example, through art work or attempts to learn new skills. They relentlessly model praise and encouragement, which values children and helps to develop confidence and self esteem. They are encouraging but not patronising to parents, and this approach helps parents to gain confidence in their parenting skills. Working in partnership with clinicians, in particular the Clinical Psychologist, strengthens this area of work. Links with other Sure Start services, for example Family Support, enables those families to receive appropriate support.

“Improving Health, in particular by supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth.”

The service works co-operatively with health professionals, both within Sure Start and within mainstream services. It is successful in promoting healthy lifestyles to parents and modelling ways in which those lifestyles can be achieved. It delivers health promotions both through the curriculum and through the good relationships with parents. It supports mainstream health provision by offering childcare for Health Visitor adult learning groups, by facilitating two year health checks and by sharing current health information, for example regarding immunisation, breastfeeding or eating/sleeping issues. The staff are knowledgeable and confident and are able to signpost parents to additional support services if appropriate.

“Improving the 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.”

The service is extremely successful in achieving this objective. The findings provide an abundance of evidence to support this, particularly through observations and examination of planning and through the findings of the Sure Start Language Measure. The provision of learning opportunities is rigorously planned, but delivered in ways that promote enjoyment and fun. The children (and parents) enjoy coming to groups! The integrated service approach ensures that children who may have special needs can be identified and signposted onto other services efficiently.

“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.”

Parents and carers, almost without exception, state that they have met new friends through attending groups. A few parents specifically said that they appreciate the opportunity to make new relationships across cultures in the

well established Riversley community. Here, the service offers a supportive environment for parents who may be isolated in their homes. At Donnithorne, early years staff work creatively to attempt to strengthen the community through group activities and through encouraging parents to become active partners within Sure Start groups. This, in a small way, attempts to strengthen this more fluid and sometimes volatile community.

7.5 INHIBITING FACTORS/CONSTRAINTS

Capacity and Attendance

The service appears to be working to full capacity, particularly at the Riversley site. Here there are waiting lists for all groups and the space available limits the number of children who can be safely accommodated. At the Donnithorne site, there is capacity to develop the service, subject to identified need and staffing levels.

Good use is made of space at both sites. The recently developed outdoor area at Riversley will enable the outdoor curriculum to be developed here. Outdoor space at Donnithorne is very limited, although best use has been made of this small space.

The Early Years Manager and Childcare Supervisor have identified several areas for future development of services, but space and staffing levels may limit future developments.

Non attendance appears to be an issue in many groups. Managers are aware of this, and are continually seeking ways to address the issue, without alienating families.

The early years staff, both managerial and childcare workers, work extremely hard to deliver the high level of service and appear to be working to full capacity. At present this may limit further development of services.

The toy library, sited at the Riversley facility is very well resourced and organised. The tips cards that accompany each toy give parents and carers ideas to promote learning. The toy library is sometimes promoted within groups, but not consistently. The statistics for usage indicate that the library is underused at present. The toy library sited at All Saints Primary School and available to families in the Donnithorne area is apparently used only rarely.

Links with Nurseries

Links with nurseries have been developed from the onset of services at Sure Start Nuneaton through consultation and liaison from managerial staff and throughout the early years service. The links are currently maintained mainly through Family Support Workers. Some of these links appear to be strong and well established resulting in positive partnerships. Other nurseries have looser ties, and here the partnerships appear to be less fruitful. In all cases the sharing of professional information regarding individual children does not take place consistently. As a result, nurseries are not able to clearly identify all families who have accessed Sure Start services. Consequently, it is not

currently possible to track the progress of individual children in order to evaluate the long term impact of Sure Start on children's progress or to ensure a smooth transition to nursery for all children.

The early years and childcare service has made great efforts to develop this transition process through Surestarters groups, providing a curriculum based on the Early Learning Goals of the Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum, and involving parents so that they understand how their children will learn in nursery settings. In previous years these groups have proved very successful, as determined through attendance rates, feedback from parents and from some nurseries. This year attendance rates have been lower, thought to be as a result of children accessing groups at a recently established neighbourhood nursery. However, plans are already in hand to re-consider how best to deliver Surestarters, for example by offering groups throughout the year and not just in the summer term.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Further Development of Links with Nurseries

Further development and strengthening existing links with nurseries in order to facilitate the sharing of professional information, tracking pupils to assess progress and seeking ways to support each others aims and objectives is the primary recommendation of this evaluation study.

In addition, the following recommendations are suggested:

8.2 Development of Services Within the Resources Available

Due to limits on space and staffing available, it may be useful to consider creative ways to develop the services offered. This will be particularly significant with the development of Children's Centre status in 2006, when the service will cover a larger area and population. Space for additional groups may be available within local schools, and this could be one way to strengthen the links with nurseries. Alternatively, space could be available in other local community venues.

There is clearly a limit on the extending or developing services within current staffing levels. It may be possible to consider ways of using other Sure Start staff within groups, as already successfully occurs when Family Support staff and clinicians work within groups, or to build on the existing practice of working in partnership with mainstream service providers such as Nursery Nurses from the health sector.

The toy library may be used by a higher number parents and carers if it could be promoted more consistently within groups, and if parents could be encouraged to use the library available at All Saints school.

8.3 The Role of the Childcare Supervisor

The Supervisor currently has a wide range of responsibilities, which mean she is almost totally office based. This may be limiting the extent to which she is able to introduce and maintain some of the innovations under consideration. Now that the service is well established and operating efficiently and effectively, it may be useful to re-consider the job description of the Childcare Supervisor. As an outcome, her role could concentrate to a greater extent on monitoring or development work within groups or some outreach work, for example, with receiving nurseries.

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