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## Introduction

Two services were 'spotlighted' by the Sure Start Sheerness partnership for individual evaluation, as part of the wider Sure Start evaluation. These services are parental training services and PALS (Play and Learn Scheme).

This report focuses on the service evaluation of the range of training that is made available to parents in the Sheerness area by the Sure Start Sheerness programme.

The purposes of the evaluation are assessing the parental training as it relates to:

- Service quality
- Cost effectiveness
- How well the provision works within the context of the wider partnership, and
- Whether the training supports the achievement of Sure Start objectives and key principles.

The spotlight report concludes that the training courses offered by Sure Start Sheerness are of a very high quality, with parent satisfaction of courses very high. In addition, the report notes that the First Aid and Childcare courses were developed as a result of parental demand underlining the extent to which this aspect of service provision is driven by parents rather than professionals.

A key issue for the programme is about training linking into a wider co-ordinated approach to addressing training and employment. Moreover, identifying and agreeing what the planned 'outcomes' for training are is very important to establishing criteria for their assessment.

## Methodology

The evaluation of the parental training incorporated methodologies to assess parental training in relation to a number of factors. These are:

- 1) Degree of integration into the wider Sure Start partnership; including the extent to which they support the achievement of Sure Start objectives and key principles
- 2) Efficacy of partnership working with external agencies
- 3) Success in involving clients in design and delivery of services.
- 4) Overall quality of services looking in particular at levels of satisfaction with services, in relation to various criteria about what constitutes a 'quality' service and the degree to which local families feel that a difference is being made in their own health and well being.
- 5) Cost indicators for services

In terms of exploring the issues around point 1-4, we undertook background and desk-top research, qualitative and quantitative analysis of data and interviews with the training providers.

A variety of evaluation methodologies have been employed and include:

- **One to one interviews** (through September) with Sure Start staff members and agencies involved in the delivery of training to parents. Each interview lasted in the region of half an hour.
- **A community survey** of local parents that captured the views of 110 parents of young children living in the Sheerness area about training services.
- **Provider questionnaire.** An evaluation questionnaire was completed by 11 Sure Start service providers asking them to assess the service being provided by a number of Sure Start services, including parental training services.
- **Unit cost** information is identified, where possible, on the basis of understanding the budgets allocated to the training activity and the degree of participation in these courses.

## An overall picture

Sure Start Sheerness offers various training courses to parents of very young children in the area, provided both in-house and in conjunction with external providers.

### Breast-feeding support workers

The breast-feeding course aims at training parents to promote breast-feeding and to support and give advice to mothers breast-feeding their children.

To date, one course has been run. The training has been attended by four parents and a number of health professionals.

The course comprises eight 2 hour sessions and participants receive an accredited qualification on completing the course. On completion of the course, parents are encouraged to act as voluntary breast-feeding support workers to other mothers.

The course is co-ordinated by Madeline Wilkins (Sure Start Health Visitor) and is delivered by an external agent, Deborah Robertson, a qualified lactation consultant.

The course was originally developed for Sure Start Chatham and has been adapted by Deborah to meet the needs of Sure Start Sheerness

### Childcare course

The childcare course was developed as a response to demand amongst parents for a course around parenting issues that would benefit both themselves and their children.

The course covers a broad range of themes including physical development, motor skills, emotional development, play, language and communication and career opportunities for parents.

The course was initially run in conjunction with Adult Education, Sittingbourne and facilitated by an external tutor. However, the course has subsequently been taken in-house and is delivered by Madeline Wilkins (Sure Start Health Visitor) and Cheryl Yardley (Sure Start Social Worker).

The second, in-house course, was run over a 6 week period, with each session lasting 2 hours.

Over the course of the training, parents compile a folder that they are encouraged to keep as a reference source and to share this information with other parents in the Sheerness area.

### First Aid for parents

As with the childcare course, the first aid course was delivered in response to parental demand. The course is co-ordinated in-house by Nicki Higgins (Community Midwife) and is delivered by an external party, Alison Williams (based at Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital).

To date the first aid course has been run 4 times with an average attendance of 10 parents per group.

The timing of the courses have been chosen in order to allow as many parents as possible to attend:

- ❑ 2 weekday courses
- ❑ 1 evening course
- ❑ 1 Saturday afternoon course (aimed at fathers)

Crèche facilities were provided with the weekday courses but not the evening and weekend courses.

Each course runs for 5 weeks, with each session lasting one hour. The Saturday course was adapted and consisted of two three hour sessions on successive weekends.

The curriculum for the course has been developed by Alison Williams and covers a range of issues relating to paediatric first aid. Subsequent courses have been adapted following parental feedback. For instance, one course covered issues to do with asthma at the request of a mother attending. Since the curriculum has been developed specifically for the Sure Start programme, it is not, at this stage, an accredited course and there is no formal qualification at the end. Parents are, however, given a complimentary first aid kit for completing the course.

### How to talk course

“How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk” (How to talk) is a formal course that encourages communication between parents and their children where parents learn to come to an agreement with their children in order to resolve issues more effectively. The course is delivered by Madeline Wilkins and Cheryl Yardley.

The course delivery involves group sessions that are limited to around six parents per session, with the limitation due to crèche space rather than the requirements of the course. Parents are expected to attend six formal sessions, and subsequently meet at a monthly support group that enables them to monitor their progress.

To date the course has been run twice with three parents completing the first course and five parents completing the second course.

Given that a number of parents have completed the “How to talk course”, there are plans to run the follow-up course, “Siblings without rivalry”.

### Driving lessons

Sure Start Driving lessons are provided by a locally based qualified driving instructor. A number of criteria are used to determine which parents are able to access the course:

- ❑ Parents must live in the Sheerness area
- ❑ Parents must come from a household with no income (i.e. neither partner working)
- ❑ Parents must be registered with Sure Start Sheerness

Successful applicants are allocated an initial block of ten lessons. By the end of these ten lessons, parents are expected to have attempted the theory test. If they take the test, they are allocated a further ten lessons (regardless of whether they pass or fail); if they do not attempt the theory test no further lessons are provided.

The lessons are provided at a subsidised rate with parents required to pay £5.50 per lesson. Parents are expected to make their own childcare arrangements whilst taking lessons.

Up to seven Sure Start parents are able to take driving lessons in any one period, with new parents introduced as parents pass their test or decide to move on.

## Service Evaluation

### Cost of Services

Unit cost information about training where possible has been identified through relating the expenditure of the programme to the level of contacts it has. These establish baselines for measuring improvements into the future. See Tables 1 through to 5 for details of costings.

One general comment relates to the unit costs analysis for all courses presented below. The Programme has been highly successful in negotiating "in kind" resources from other partners, and so from the Programmes point of view the cost relative to the numbers of people attending courses appears highly cost effective. In addition where some costs are borne directly by the Programme unit costs compare favourably, at least at face value. In future years however, partner contributions may be more difficult to sustain, and this will put a greater emphasis on ensuring that there are low drop out rates on training courses. This also raises the prospect of "part charges" for participants (where this is practical and meets equity tests), but has the secondary gain of increasing throughput of participants.

Table 1: Breakdown of childcare course costs – external provision

Breakdown of Cost	Cost and Notes
<b>Service</b>	Childcare Course - KAES
Total Cost of Service <sup>1</sup> (£)	NA
No. of people benefiting from course	8
Source of funding for course (Sure Start, other agency)	Supplied by KAES
Sure Start Contribution to total cost (£) (e.g. admin support)	0
Contribution from other agencies/partners e.g. training facilities, course instructors	NA
Notes e.g. number of clients completing course, did any substitutions take place of attendees on course	NK
<b>Basic Unit Cost (£)</b>	Per course: NA Per client: NA Per course session: NA

Table 2: Breakdown of childcare course costs – in-house provision

Breakdown of Cost	Cost and Notes
<b>Service</b>	Childcare Course – In House
Total Cost of Service <sup>1</sup> (£)	0
No. of people benefiting from course	16
Source of funding for course (Sure Start, other agency)	NA
Sure Start Contribution to total cost (£) (e.g. admin support)	Personnel Time
Contribution from other agencies/partners e.g. training facilities, course instructors	NA
Notes e.g. number of clients completing course, did any substitutions take place of attendees on course	
<b>Basic Unit Cost (£)</b>	Per course: NA Per client: NA Per course session: NA

Table 3: Breakdown of first aid course costs

Breakdown of Cost	Cost and Notes
<b>Service</b>	First Aid Course
Total Cost of Service <sup>1</sup> (£)	£450.14
No. of people benefiting from course	17
Source of funding for course (Sure Start, other agency)	Sure Start
Sure Start Contribution to total cost (£) (e.g. admin support)	£450.14
Contribution from other agencies/partners e.g. training facilities, course instructors	Personnel Time (Minor Injuries Unit)
Notes e.g. number of clients completing course, did any substitutions take place of attendees on course	£429.40 of cost on x50 1 <sup>st</sup> Aid packs
<b>Basic Unit Cost (£)</b>	Per course: £450.14 Per client: £9.80 Per course session: £75.02

Table 4: Breakdown of driving lessons costs

Breakdown of Cost	Cost and Notes
<b>Service</b>	Driving Lessons
Total Cost of Service <sup>1</sup> (£)	£752
No. of people benefiting from course	4
Source of funding for course (Sure Start, other agency)	Sure Start
Sure Start Contribution to total cost (£) (e.g. admin support)	£527
Contribution from other agencies/partners e.g. training facilities, course instructors	£225 – Parental contribution
Notes e.g. number of clients completing course, did any substitutions take place of attendees on course	
<b>Basic Unit Cost (£)</b>	Per course: £188 Per client: £188 Per course session: NK

Table 5: Breakdown of breastfeeding support worker course costs

Breakdown of Cost	Cost and Notes
<b>Service</b>	Breastfeeding
Total Cost of Service <sup>1</sup> (£)	£410.50
No. of people benefiting from course	6
Source of funding for course (Sure Start, other agency)	Sure Start
Sure Start Contribution to total cost (£) (e.g. admin support)	£410.50 + personnel time
Contribution from other agencies/partners e.g. training facilities, course instructors	NA
Notes e.g. number of clients completing course, did any substitutions take place of attendees on course	
<b>Basic Unit Cost (£)</b>	Per course: £410.50 Per client: £68.41 Per course session: NK

## Integration into Sure Start Partnership

### Strategically

In terms of ensuring that all training provided by Sure Start Sheerness address the strategic goals of the programme, the programme ensures that:

- Its *Capacity Building Strategy June 2003* sets out specific targets and actions, agreed with local parents, about encouraging employment, training and volunteering experiences for local families.
- Training reflects the specific needs of parents, with training provided reflecting express needs of parents and parents also actively agreeing course objectives and/or reshaping course delivery to best meet their needs.
- Training meets specific programme objectives, with, for examples, the first aid course addressing targets concerning reducing the incidence of children presenting at accident and emergency departments, the breast-feeding course addressing targets concerning increasing breast-feeding rates and the driving instruction focused on trying to reduce barriers to parents' taking up employment.

In terms of addressing this latter point, Sure Start Sheerness, as a fourth wave programme, is still at a relatively early stage in its programme development. Not surprisingly, specific strategic and operational linkages to the wider training, education and employment agenda are also at an early stage.

### Observations and opportunities

1. As noted in the main programme evaluation report (page 37), the significant number of parents that are prepared to consider volunteering within the programme is highly encouraging about the levels of social capital within Sheerness and are especially encouraging about the likely realisation of the aspirations of *Capacity Building Strategy 2003*.
2. As noted in the main programme evaluation report (page 37), the development and implementation of such strategies will do well to explicitly with sustainability objectives for the programme, and could include:

- Identifying areas within programme delivery that local parents, with support and training, could take ownership of. This has been the case at Sure Start St Matthews, for example, with toy libraries, and the case at Sure Start Aylesbury Plus, for example, with training of courses.
  - Establishing pathways into further education and employment. For example, at Sure Start North Canning Town, the local employment service and the Sure Start North Canning Town community development manager (who has volunteer co-ordination as part of her function) are co-located and volunteers are able to seek out specific personal advice about employment and training.
  - Linkages with other agencies, such as Connexions and Job Centre Plus, to offer assistance to local parents. For example, at Sure Start Gladstone, these services provide personal advice sessions to local parents within local community facilities.
3. In addition, the programme could also consider having representatives from organisations such as Connexions, Job Centre Plus and adult education services represented on the Management Board or through specific sub-groups to help further the interface between the programme's training provision and pathways into further training and employment. This occurs, for example, at Sure Start Highview.

## Operational partnerships

### Involving parents in training design

Both Childcare courses have involved parents in the identification of training outcomes and both been evaluated, the first using a standardised process of monitoring as used at Adult Education Sittingbourne, and the second (in-house) course through exit interviews with all participating parents. The Childcare course was the subject of an academic evaluation by Madeline Wilkins as part of a Masters degree in Community Development.

Parents attending the "How to talk" course remain in contact with Sure Start staff via regular support groups. Parents on the course are given details of further Sure Start activities they can participate in and staff running the course informally monitor the progress of parents from this

course on to other Sure Start activities. Monitoring of the course is also done by exit interview that takes the form of an informal chat.

Monitoring of performance is not undertaken with regard to Driving lessons since the success of the course depends on the outcome of their performance at both the driving theory test and the driving test proper. Information regarding each client is fed back to the programme, with the progress of each parent discussed.

The Breast-feeding support training, given the relatively formal structure of the course, incorporates a formal monitoring system. An evaluation form is provided to all those who complete the course and covers a range of areas and asks for suggestions for future courses. The course received a positive assessment from participants, one of whom noted:

- *The course is easy to access and gives you more confidence to help mothers breast-feed.*

The First Aid course was designed specifically in response to parents' needs and parents also receive feedback forms to complete at the end of the course to determine satisfaction and to identify additional needs. The results of the evaluation have led to changes in the course, demonstrating that parents have been integral in shaping the course around their own needs.

## Observations and opportunities

1. Training providers are to be commended on the extent to which the training involves parents in the training design and that feedback mechanisms enable ongoing assessment of the needs of parents and the extent to which the training is appropriately responding to these needs.

## Working within the partnership

### In house provision

All those involved in training delivery felt that their work was supported by the rest of the Sure Start team who were active both in encouraging and supporting those staff engaged in providing training.

Staff engaged in the "How to talk course" evidenced this support through having Sure Start staff run a brief version of the course in-house as a means of encouraging awareness about the training.

Staff involved in the Childcare course indicated that they felt supported by the rest of the programme, and in particular by John Fowler, Programme Director, and Gill Ransley, Operations Manager, who discuss ideas about the course and provide assistance. It was felt that senior management had helped the course to thrive by giving staff on the course “free reign” to develop their ideas. This scope to work in a creative manner was appreciated and was felt to have contributed towards the success that had been achieved.

Other members of staff “pitch in” their ideas regarding the course and offer advice where appropriate. Those involved in training, were especially encouraged by the extent to which other members of staff were becoming involved in session delivery, so that the childcare course for example involves a session on healthy eating. Staff agreed that leveraging the opportunities offered by having parents attend training courses to offer a wider range of information and advice was an extremely efficient and effective means of raising awareness amongst local families.

It was noted by staff engaged in the Breast-feeding support training that the programme has been interested in breast-feeding as an issue since its inception and so have been very positive about the training course provided to parents.

Staff delivering training courses also raised the following additional points with regard to working in Sure Start Sheerness

Table 6: Strengths and areas for improvement

Area	Comments
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Team work</b> – everyone works well together and pulls together to achieve goals.</li> <li>▪ <b>Multi-disciplinary working</b> – a range of talents and expertise exists from which to draw upon that improves the quality and range of service that can be offered to parents.</li> <li>▪ <b>Creativity</b> – Sure Start offers the chance to engage in innovative work. Staff can explore new ways of working and can approach issues from a new way. Staff are given more freedom in working and are supported in doing so by senior management.</li> <li>▪ <b>Lack of bureaucracy</b> – frees up staff to get on with work.</li> </ul>

Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Ambiguity</b> – thinking can sometimes be woolly. Ideas are put forward but not always acted upon due to lack of clear lead and time constraints.</li></ul>
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## External provision

Lyn Devlin at Adult Education Sittingbourne stated that she felt the relationship with Sure Start whilst they delivered the Childcare course was very positive and supportive. She indicated that things worked well from their perspective and there were no problems either in setting up the course or in subsequently rolling it out. A problem had arisen initially with regard to the provision of crèche facilities for the course which was the responsibility of Sure Start Sheerness, but this was quickly resolved and no further problems arose for the duration of the course.

A manifestation of this positive relationship that developed between Sure Start Sheerness and Adult Education Sittingbourne can be seen in the fact that Lyn indicated that she was interested in working with Sure Start Sheerness again and was particularly keen to work with the programme in the delivery of a literacy and numeracy course for parents in Sheerness.

Alison Williams, the First Aid course trainer also noted the degree of support offered by Sure Start Sheerness. She noted the assistance and input of John Fowler in particular, identifying from parents specific issues they sought help with in terms of paediatric first aid. John gave a list of parents' comments to Alison to form the basis of the first course. Alison, further, noted that John attended the father's training on one of the Saturdays, a gesture that was very well received by Alison herself and by those father's attending.

In more practical terms, Alison indicated that the programme provides her with the administrative support that she needs to ensure the smooth running of the programme.

Deborah Robertson, the lactation consultant for the breast-feeding support training felt that she had received good support from Sure Start Sheerness, in particular from Madeline Wilkins and John Fowler. She admired the "can do" attitude of these members of staff who have enabled her to get on and run the course and to get things done.

Gary Williamson, the driving instructor, also identified excellent support from the programme, with the programme taking responsibility for the administration of the scheme, identifying those parents that participate and offering considerable subsidy to encourage parental participation. Parents pay £5.50 per lesson, with Sure Start Sheerness paying £9 per lesson. While £14.50 is a discounted rate for driving instruction, vis-à-vis the standard £17 per hour, Gary feels able to offer this discount, as a consequence of the bulk purchasing by Sure Start Sheerness and the extent to which this has also enabled him to attract new private clients.

## Referrals

The Childcare course receives in-house referrals for parents who may potentially benefit from participating on the course. Staff indicated that they attempt to contact and engage parents who do not utilise other Sure Start services or attend groups. It was emphasised, however, that it is essentially open to all parents. When referrals are made, informal contacts are made with the parent and the possibility of them attending are discussed.

Given the specialised nature of the training on the breast-feeding peer support programme, potential candidates were identified by Madeline Wilkins and were approached directly and asked whether they would be interested in participating. The proactive approach was made necessary given the low profile of breast-feeding in the area meaning that few mothers are likely to come forward to offer themselves as volunteers.

Staff involved on the breast-feeding course felt it was not a course to which normal referral procedures should apply, and likewise, onward referrals were also not felt to be entirely relevant to the training, although parents are encouraged to participate in other Sure Start activities.

Some attendees on the First Aid course were parents who have been referred on by other Sure Start team members, but it was felt that most attendees were contacted via the home visits of Nicki Higgins. As such referrals play relatively little part in the First Aid course.

The driving instruction, involves parents self-referring through the programme, who are assessed on the basis of the criteria, set out at page 6.

## Observations and opportunities

1. The programme should feel very proud of the extent to which training providers feel so supported by the programme in creatively meeting the needs of local families.
2. The extent to which these training programmes can link to the wider employment and training agenda within Sheerness is worth the programme exploring, in the ways envisaged at the observation and opportunities sections at page 11.
3. Much of the processes of referrals to courses rely on relationships. Enhancing this methodology to increase the access of all parents that are likely to benefit from participation in the training is likely to encourage additional participation.

## Client dimension

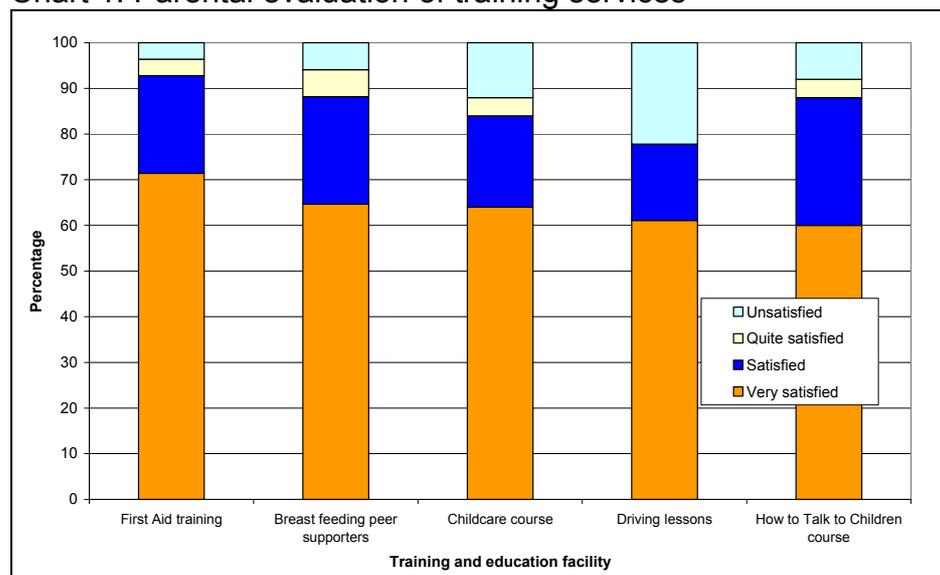
### Parental satisfaction with services

In the community survey of parents in the Sure Start Sheerness area, parents identified their satisfaction with training.

The results from the community survey are very positive with regard to training with a clear majority of parents engaged in training indicating that they Quite Satisfied to Very Satisfied with the courses provided.

The proportion of parents indicating that they were Very Satisfied with training was high with regard to each course with a range of 60% (“How to Talk to Children”) to a very impressive 71% (First Aid training). The results are given in full at Chart 1.

Chart 1: Parental evaluation of training services



A number of quotes in the questionnaire gave an indication of why parents appreciated the different training courses provided:

#### First Aid

- *First aid has been really useful – feel confident if I had to use it.*
- *I attended the first aid which I enjoyed.*

### Driving lessons

- *Driving lessons because if it wasn't for Sure Start I would not be able to afford the lessons or the tests.*
- *Driving lessons – this opportunity gave me the chance to pass my test, I would have been unable to do that otherwise.*

### Childcare course

- *The Childcare course – I felt welcome there and everyone was nice and the kids went to the crèche and loved it.*
- *Childcare very informative.*

When asked to indicate training or education services that needed improvement, 2 parents suggested the driving lessons and 1 respondent stated the First Aid course. The extremely low number of parents indicating that improvements were needed further emphasises the degree of satisfaction with the training services being provided.

Another, albeit crude, measure of quality is the extent of demand for training. These are:

- Staff engaged in the First Aid course indicated a list of 35 parents waiting to attend. The figure has been artificially heightened given that the planned September 2003 course was cancelled due to staff absence through ill-health, but would indicate that the next three future courses are already fully subscribed.
- The “How to talk course” has a waiting list of 15 parents, suggesting that the course is fully booked the next two or three times it will be run!
- Comments from the community survey indicate parents have applied for Driving lessons but have been unable to get places as the course is currently full.
- A number of parents have expressed an interest in the Childcare course although it was pointed out that there was no “waiting list” as such.

## Impact

A number of service providers were asked to assess the whether or not, in their professional opinion, they felt that the training courses being provided were beneficial to parents of very young children in Sheerness and the extent of any benefit they might offer. The results are given at Table 7.

Table 7: Service providers assessment of usefulness of training courses

Training course	Assessment			
	Very useful	Fairly useful	OK for a few	Not very useful
Breast-feeding peer supporters training	5	1	2	0
Driving instruction	4	0	3	1
First Aid	7	1	0	0
Initial childcare course (Sittingbourne)	3	0	3	1
Subsequent childcare course (in-house)	4	2	1	0
How to Talk course	6	1	0	0

As Table 7 demonstrates, the majority of service providers indicated that each training course (bar the initial Childcare course offered by Adult Education at Sittingbourne) were very useful, an extremely positive assessment of the courses provided by Sure Start. The First Aid and How To Talk course was particularly highly rated with all but one of the respondents indicating that they thought that it was Very Useful.

The specific impact of different courses have been identified with parents and trainers.

### Childcare course

The Monitoring Forms from the Childcare course indicate that parents felt that the course had positively impacted upon their parenting skills and their knowledge of childrearing techniques. Hence when asked about the useful things that they had learnt, parents stated:

- *We learnt that children are learning from birth onwards. All the new skills. We take things for granted.*
- *We learnt about what stages the children are developing.*

When asked in “what ways the programme did the programme take off for you” one mother noted:

- *Knowing more about young children of my own or other people's children.*

The comments indicate that parents are deriving tangible benefits from the childcare course that are having immediate and practical implications of their ability to raise their own children, and their understanding of other children.

The staff identified that the success of the course is likely, in part, due to the fact that it has consciously not been marketed as a "parenting course". Staff identified that parenting courses have a pejorative connotation which may have the effect of stigmatising participants and discouraging parents to enrol.

### Driving lessons

The outcome of the Driving lessons are, in a sense, the most tangible and easily monitored of all the courses. Thus Gary Williamson noted that of 10 clients that have received driving lessons to date, two have taken their driving tests, one has passed and one failed but is scheduled to re-take again in the near future. An analysis of pass rates provides a measure of the training success, but as Gary pointed out, both he and the programme cannot guarantee that parents will pass since this is too dependant on parents getting through the final exam.

The instructor pointed to a range of other benefits that are not as immediately apparent and are not so easily monitored. He noted a development in the confidence of parents who have taken driving lessons. Moreover, the fact that parents are expected to pay some of the cost of the lessons, have to arrange their own childcare and are given additional work to do outside of the actual driving, was felt to be indicative that parents were engaging with the lessons.

Whether the driving instruction is, however, meeting the primary objective of encouraging increased employment through removing barriers to employment is at too early a stage to assess.

### Breast-feeding support

Both Madeline and Deborah felt that the breast-feeding peer supporters were having a positive impact on attitudes and the extent of breast-feeding in Sheerness, as well as having a positive learning experience for themselves. The knowledge of the mothers was said to have cascaded through the community by these mothers' contacts with other mothers, albeit that within the context of this evaluation, no specific evidence of this outcome has been identifiable.

It was felt that the success of the training had been mitigated to an extent by the fact that the four parents trained were no longer working as peer supporters and have variously left the area, taken up paid employment or did not have the time available to them to offer assistance.

### First Aid

Monitoring data from the First Aid course indicated that all the parents attending the course in May felt more confident about their ability to look after their children in the case of an accident. As one parent noted:

- *I have come away feeling much more confident.*
- *I basically know what to do – gave me confidence.*

In addition to being able to provide first aid, parents also felt more aware of when they should approach other services to help with accident prevention and paediatric care.

- *I am now clearer on where to go for help and when.*

When asked whether or not they would recommend the course to other parents, all those on the course indicated that they would whilst one parent stated:

- *I think it should be compulsory.*

### “How to talk”

The staff who run the course observed that parents have told them that it works well and has helped them to manage their children’s behaviour. They have also appreciated the mutual support between parents that occurs because of the course. The impact of the course was also felt to have manifested itself in relatively intangible ways such as through improvement self-esteem of parents and greater confidence in their own ability to look after their children.

### Observations and opportunities

1. The extent to which the training provided by Sure Start Sheerness is considered of high quality is a credit to the programme. This is also evident by the extent to which there are waiting lists for courses.

2. The degree to which there is such demand for these courses is instructive to adult education colleges, Job Centre Plus, Connexions and other related agencies about training that they could offer that will meet the needs of parents and, in turn, help with meeting their own organisational targets.
3. The planned 'outcomes' of the courses can be defined in various ways. However, the nature of this definition can dictate whether the training is deemed successful or not.

For example, objectives of driving instruction are to reduce barriers to employment so that parents take-up additional employment. If this is the primary objective, driving instruction could be deemed to fail. If the objectives are also about encouraging confidence that *over time* could lead to higher take-up of employment, the training could be deemed to be too early to decide. If the objective is simply about encouraging confidence, then the training is a success.

This is equally true to activities such as the breast-feeding training and the childcare courses.

4. Given 3, Sure Start Sheerness could consider exploring agreeing specific objectives with those involved in training that enable 'outcome' measurement and assessment. Ideally, this will need to connect with the *Capacity Building Strategy June 2003* and wider linkages with mainstream training and employment agencies.
5. To maximise the practical value of courses for parents, the programme could consider seeking accreditations for its courses.