

# Sure Start Wycombe – Evaluation of Round 6 Programme

---

Parental Involvement: A Final Report for Sure Start Wycombe

September 2005



**GHK**

30 St Paul's Square

Birmingham

B3 1QZ

Tel: 0121 233 8900

Fax: 0121 233 0308

[www.ghkint.com](http://www.ghkint.com)

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Introduction	3
1.2	Objectives and principles of the Sure Start programme	3
1.3	What do we mean by parental involvement?	3
1.4	Why should parents be involved?	4
1.5	Parental Involvement in Sure Start High Wycombe	4
1.5.1	Initial Consultation	4
1.5.2	Being Aware of the Sure Start Wycombe Local Programme (SSWLP)	4
1.5.3	The Parents’ Forum and Management Board	5
1.5.4	Involving Parents who do not attend the Parents’ Forum / Management Board	8
1.5.5	Sure Start Services and Activities	9
1.5.6	Hard to Reach Groups	13
1.6	Findings	13
1.6.1	New Parents v Existing Parents	14
1.6.2	Training	14
1.6.3	Hard to Reach Groups	14
1.6.4	Services	14
1.6.5	Sure Start Wycombe Delivery Plan	15
1.6.6	Parental Involvement Strategy	15

# 1 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

## 1.1 Introduction

This report on parental involvement is designed to provide early findings as they relate to key issues such as:

- The effectiveness of the Sure Start Wycombe parental involvement strategy in relation to developing ongoing parental involvement in the programme;
- Parents views about how far they are involved in the programme;
- Communication with parents at management board level; and
- Representation of parents at all levels of the programme and within decision making processes of the programme.

Key achievements and priorities outlined in this report arise, and therefore should be viewed, within the context of 2003/04. This year was primarily a year about establishing the programme and partnership infrastructure, building links with local families and agencies, and taking the first steps in delivery.

Two focus groups were held with parents, and in total the views of 20 parents were canvassed. The first focus group was held with parents involved with the Parents' Forum, and the second with parents attending one of the local services – Bumps to 1.

## 1.2 Objectives and principles of the Sure Start programme

Parental involvement is considered a critical ingredient in the success of the Sure Start programme. Parents are not simply 'consumers' of services but are, critically, key drivers of policy and improvements in services, their involvement ensures that programme delivery is user-led and sustainable in the longer term. As the Sure Start Unit guidance describes:

*'The aim of Sure Start is to work with parents-to-be, parents and children, to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those that are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children'.<sup>1</sup>*

## 1.3 What do we mean by parental involvement?

The term 'parental involvement' refers to the multiplicity of ways in which parents should be involved in the management and implementation of the programme, which goes much wider than simple consultation.

---

<sup>1</sup> A Guide for Sixth Wave Programmes, Sure Start Unit, Spring 2002

The term 'parent' includes all those having parental responsibilities or undertaking the direct care of children within the family. It therefore includes mothers and fathers, grandparents, guardians and other carers.

#### **1.4 Why should parents be involved?**

Sure Start is seen as a partnership approach in which local people, especially parents, are one of the key partners. All Sure Start programmes are required to involve local parents. The services that are provided should be a direct response to the needs of local parents and be constantly measured to show that they are working in this respect.

Sure Start national guidance suggests that consultation with parents will serve several purposes:

- To raise awareness of Sure Start and the need for participation in it among parents of young children;
- To understand what it is like to live in a Sure Start neighbourhood;
- To collect information about existing experience of services, to discover where these are appropriate/adequate and where changes are needed or new services required;
- To develop a base of interest in Sure Start from which parents can be recruited to help in the planning and implementation of the programme; and
- To monitor programme development as experienced by parents.

Projects are more likely to be successful if they promote the involvement of local people in their planning and implementation:<sup>2</sup>

*“The aim should be to develop programmes where local people, parents and others, become active participants rather than passive recipients of services.”*

Consultation should not be seen as a one-off exercise to generate a wish list, rather it is a continuous process, to support decision-making and shape the future development of the programme.

### **1.5 Parental Involvement in Sure Start High Wycombe**

#### **1.5.1 Initial Consultation**

In the pre-submission phase, when the Delivery Plan was being developed, a number of parents were consulted about services they would like to see provided for their young families. A community consultation process was undertaken with the local community. Parents and community representatives were consulted using local Health Visitors, Home Start staff, Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) and play workers, which informed the development of the Sure Start Wycombe Local Programme (SSWLP) offer.

#### **1.5.2 Being Aware of the Sure Start Wycombe Local Programme (SSWLP)**

---

<sup>2</sup> A Guide to planning and Running your Programme, Sure Start Unit, Summer 2002

There is good awareness among parents regarding the services available through the SSWLP, and parents remain extremely positive about the usefulness and quality of these. Further details are provided in section 1.5.5 below. Parents remain less clear, however, regarding the purpose and main goals of Sure Start. Just under 50 per cent of parents consulted, for example, were aware that Sure Start is a national programme aimed at improving services and support for families and young children. Of the remaining parents consulted, responses regarding the purpose of Sure Start Wycombe included: providing assistance to families who are on low incomes; helping parents to meet other parents; developing provision for under children under the age of four within the community; and encouraging the community to use the services available.

Parents are told about Sure Start through a number of channels. These include:

- Advertisements in places of worship, GP surgeries and the local library;
- Health Visitors;
- Home visits made by members of the Sure Start Wycombe team;
- Phone calls made by members of the Sure Start team, informing families of the services available to them;
- Nursery Nurses;
- PAFT Workers/ Visitors;
- Word of mouth – through friends and neighbours already participating in Sure Start Wycombe activities;
- Attending other activities – for example Storytime and Tea ‘n’ Toast; and
- Registrations or referrals from local professionals.

### **1.5.3 The Parents’ Forum and Management Board**

A key challenge for Sure Start Wycombe has been to ensure strong representation and the participation of parents at Management Board level. This is particularly important given the focus of Sure Start and current Government thinking, which both highlight the importance of services that are user-led and driven. Sure Start Wycombe is committed to delivering a local programme that is user-led and this is demonstrated in the early success in involving parents in the decision-making systems of SSWLP.

The Parents’ Forum is working well in terms of engaging parents. There are currently between seven and ten members, which meet monthly to discuss issues around Sure Start Wycombe’s activities and services. This is then fed into Management Board decision-making processes. The Forum is informal and a crèche is available.

In terms of participation, while the monthly Forum meetings attract between seven and ten local parents, consistency of attendance remains a key priority for the Sure Start Team. Four parents regularly attend the Parents’ Forum, two of which also attend the Management Board. In addition, one of these parents also acts as the Deputy Chair for the Management Board, which is a significant achievement.

The Parents' Forum meets on a monthly basis and dates are provisionally booked in advance as a means of enabling as many parents to attend as possible. Agendas and notes are sent to those parents who are members of the Forum prior to these meetings taking place. This process not only provides valuable preparation information for parents but also acts as 'a reminder of the date for this meeting'.<sup>3</sup> A significant number of parents reported that on a number of occasions this information arrived less than a week before the Forum taking place. This was considered to be too short notice in terms of preparing for this, and which parents felt may be responsible for poor attendance in some cases at Forum meetings.

#### **Case Study**

The agenda for each Parents' Forum meeting and the minutes from the last Forum meeting are sent to [parents] who attend prior to each meeting date. This information is really helpful in reminding people about the issues talked about and is important preparation reading. These notes also act as an informal reminder for parents about meetings that have been organised. Sometimes this information is sent to parents with only a few days notice before meetings taking place, which can lead to some parents thinking that the meeting has been cancelled or not attending as they do not know what will be discussed.

Sure Start Parent

Of the parents who currently attend the Parents' Forum, all regard this as an extremely positive resource for information sharing and for parents to express their views and opinions regarding the SSWLP. Parents stated that they feel comfortable discussing issues within the Parents' Forum environment and feel that their views are listened to by programme staff.

***'I feel that I can talk about anything that is of concern to me during these [Parents' Forum] meetings and feel that I am being listened to and that my views are important'***

**Sure Start Parent**

The Parents' Forum is felt to be important for delivering parent-led changes to SSWLP delivery, and has resulted in some meaningful changes to programme structures and delivery. For example, Management Board meetings are now held in the morning to encourage more parents to attend. This was a consequence of feedback from parents, through the Parents' Forum, that attendance at afternoon meetings was extremely difficult as many young children are only in nursery provision in the mornings. Feedback through the Parents' Forum has also established important changes to programme service delivery.

---

<sup>3</sup> Sure Start Parent

### Case Study

One of the issues highlighted by parents at the Forum meetings was the inability of some children to attend morning services as they attend nursery. As a result, the Sure Start team have developed more afternoon sessions, which means that children who attend nurseries in the morning can continue to participate and benefit from these activities.

Sure Start Parent

The Parents' Forum feeds into the Management Board through programme staff presenting the issues that have emerged from these meetings. However, parents remain unclear about how both the Forum and parents themselves affect the overall decision-making in Sure Start Wycombe. Parents considered that this was an area that could be made clearer and is important in terms of 'selling the benefits' to parents in terms of increasing the number of parents who attend and become involved with the Parents' Forum and Management Board.

***'I know that what is discussed at the Parents' Forum is passed to the Management Board, and that the [Sure Start] staff really value the views and concerns of parents, but I'm not really sure what happens during Management Board meetings and what happens afterwards.'***

**Sure Start Parent**

It should be noted that, the two parents who regularly attend the Management Board, recognised that they are able to vote at Board meetings enabling them to represent the views of parents and affect decision-making through this.

In terms of parent's attendance at the Parents' Forum, and participation at Management Board level, a number of key barriers were identified. These include:

- A belief among parents that they do not have anything of value to say;
- Parents being unclear about what is expected of them in terms of their contribution;
- Lack of clarity regarding what happens with the information discussed at the Parents' Forum and Management Board meetings and identified points for action;
- Lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the Parents' Forum and the Management Board, and the process that underpins these structures; and
- Feelings of anxiety and intimidation in terms of attending and expressing views in front of professionals.

It is the latter point, which is of particular significance. All of the parents consulted as part of this research highlighted self-confidence as a significant barrier in terms of involving parents in the decision-making structures of Sure Start Wycombe.

***'I was really worried about being involved with the Parents' Forum and especially attending Management Board meetings. It is extremely***

***frightening talking in front of all those professional people.'***

### ***Sure Start Parent***

Parents were extremely positive, however, about the support they had received from the Sure Start team and the Chair of the Management Board. The informal and 'bite-sized' approach to delivering support was felt to have been particularly successful, by slowly introducing parents to these processes and steadily allaying any fears and anxieties regarding participation. This 'bite-size' support includes:

1. Encouraging parents to attend the Parents' Forum and Management Board with no obligation to participate.
2. Having sat in on a couple of Parents' Forum/MB meetings, explaining to parents the protocols/processes that underpin MB activity and why these are important for service delivery.
3. Encouraging parents to begin to voice their views and discussing points of interest/where lack clarity.
4. Giving parents the opportunity to Chair meetings: undertaking 'rehearsals' and practice sessions to familiarise and build the capacity of parents for this.

Other critical factors for successfully engaging and involving parents in the delivery of the Sure Start programme in Wycombe were identified to be:

- Encouraging regular attendance at the Parents' Forum;
- Sending agendas and preparation material well in advance of Forum meetings;
- Having greater transparency in terms of how the Parents' Forum feeds into Management Board decision-making; and
- Having clearer information relating to Management Board 'action points', particularly those that relate to feedback from the Parents' Forum.

#### ***1.5.4 Involving Parents who do not attend the Parents' Forum / Management Board***

As the section above has already demonstrated, parents who are involved with the Parents' Forum are extremely positive about its function in terms of both the personal benefits of participating in meetings, and its role in terms of communicating the views and concerns of parents to Sure Start Wycombe management and staff. However, knowledge of the Parents' Forum, and the opportunities for parents to voice their views directly at Management Board level, remain limited and confined to those parents who are already engaged to some extent with these mechanisms.

Of the parents consulted, and who were not already involved with the Parents' Forum / Management Board, 90 per cent reported being unaware of the existence of a Parents' Forum. Those parents who were aware that the SSWLP had established a Forum for parents reported:

- Being unclear about what the purpose of the Parents' Forum is;

- How to become involved with the Parents' Forum;
- Why it is important for parents to be involved with the Parents' Forum;
- Being unclear about the benefits for parents and the SSWLP from being involved with the Parents' Forum; and
- What the role of the Management Board is and its relationship to the Parents' Forum.

***'I have heard about a Parents' Forum that some parents involved with Sure Start attend. I don't really know much about what this [Forum] is for or why some local parents attend and others don't.'***

**Sure Start Parent**

### **1.5.5 Sure Start Services and Activities**

Parents were extremely positive about the services currently offered through Sure Start Wycombe. Parents may take part in a variety of services including (see Table 1 for full list):

- Toddler groups and playgroups;
- Health services;
- Early years provision;
- Events and excursions organised by the Sure Start Team; and
- Training courses.

The excursions to Moonbase and Activity World were mentioned most frequently when parents were asked which services they felt were most useful. Reasons for this included 'the opportunity to go out as a family'<sup>4</sup> and to participate in activities that would normally be inaccessible due to the financial costs.

***'The activities like Moonbase and day trips to places like museums and Legoland are really excellent as they give families the opportunity to experience things that they wouldn't normally be able to afford, it broadens children's experience and gives them a chance to mix with other children'***

**Sure Start Parent**

Bumps to 1<sup>5</sup> and Jo Jingles were also considered to be important services. Parents particularly value the presence of a midwife and a health visitor at the Bumps to 1 group. Parents explained that in the absence of this service they would need to travel significant distances to see a health professional as there are no GP surgeries within the Sure Start Wycombe area. In addition, significant value was also placed on the 'holistic' support that is available through this Sure Start group – parents being able to see to their child/children's health needs, and their own, while mixing with other local

---

<sup>4</sup> Sure Start Parent

<sup>5</sup> Recently extended to include parents with children aged up to 2 years and re-named Bumps to 2

parents whom they can share concerns with, receive advice and support from, and benefit from 'adult conversation'.

Parents were unable to give any names of services that they did not benefit from. Some parents did indicate, however, that they would like to see the Bookstart Bags service expanded to provide more focused Numeracy and Literacy pre-school support for children.

Table 1 below provides a list of the current services and activities offered through Sure Start Wycombe and local parent's views about these.

<b>Table 1 – Sure Start Services and Parent’s Views</b>		
<b>Name of Service</b>	<b>Description of Support</b>	<b>Parents’ Feelings about the Service</b>
Jo Jingles	A fun music and movement experience	This service was regarded as the most useful and beneficial service provided by Sure Start Wycombe.
Tea ‘n’ Toast	A parent and toddler group run by parents for parents, providing a network of support and as a means of encouraging parents to participate in other activities	A regularly attended service by parents and children. Parents felt comfortable talking and socialising with other parents in this environment. It has also been a useful method of referring families to Sure Start Wycombe activities.
Story Time	Provided one afternoon per week at Castlefield library for parents and children	A service that parents enjoy attending and do so on a regular basis. This service has also been a useful mechanism for several parents to register with Sure Start Wycombe.
Boomerang Toy Library	A toy and equipment library available to service providers, parents and carers and offers a means for therapeutic, educational and stimulating play for children up to five years of age	A regularly attended service by parents and children. It has also been a useful method of referring families to other Sure Start Wycombe activities.
Bumps to 2	A service provided for expecting parents or those with very young babies offering information on feeding and general health issues in a relaxed atmosphere.	A service that parents found extremely useful - providing invaluable health care in an informal and relaxed environment. Gives parents the opportunity to mix with other parents.
Bookstart Bags for Children aged 18 months	A book pack which has been developed to support numeracy and literacy skills of young children.	Parents consider this service extremely useful – providing pre-school early years support. Some parents stated that they would like to see more English and Maths pre-school support for children.
Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)	Early years education and childcare service – supporting early child development.	A service sited by parents as a means of registering with Sure Start Wycombe. Parents consider this service extremely useful – providing pre-school early years support.
Moonbase Activities	Physical activities for young children delivered through the local sports centre.	A service valued by both parents and children as it enabled children to enjoy the soft play facilities on a more regular basis as a result of the reduced costs provided by Sure Start Wycombe.

Safety Packs	These are available to all new parents. Provide advice and guidance regarding general health and safety in and around the home.	Useful introduction to first time parents regarding safety in and around the home.
Aerobics Class	Encourages parents to exercise as well as providing a means for them to make new friends.	Highly valued service by Mums in particular – giving them the opportunity to socialise with other parents, a way for them to keep fit and provide a break for them.
Driving Theory Test	To help with parents mobility. Supporting parents to prepare for their driving theory test.	Mobility is a particular issue for some parents and this was considered valuable for those looking to learn to drive.
First Aid Classes	Parents are provided with essential skills and knowledge regarding first aid for situations, such as a child choking, swallowing poison or suffering burns.	These classes are considered to be extremely important, particularly, for first time parents.
Badminton for Sure Start Dads	Provides a means for fathers in the Sure Start Wycombe area to socialise and encourage them to stay healthy.	No data from parents regarding this service.
Day Trips and Outings	Pre-arranged days trips and outings for parents and their children to fun and educational places such as Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, Museums, Activity Centre and Legoland.	Parents spoke very highly of the trips and outings provided by Sure Start Wycombe. They felt that the activities provided an opportunity for them to go out as a family, socialise with other families and participate in activities that they normally wouldn't be able to due to costs.
Parenting Course <b>(beginning March 05)</b>	Techniques regarding how to manage children's behaviour and parenting tips for first time parents.	Service delivery in early stages – too early to consult parents for their feedback.
Depression Group <b>(due to start April 05)</b>	Targeted local support for ante-natal and post-natal depressed mothers.	Service delivery in early stages – too early to consult parents for their feedback.
Oakleys Pre-school <b>(due to start April 05)</b>	Providing pre-school places for Sure Start families.	Service delivery in early stages – too early to consult parents for their feedback.

### **1.5.6 Hard to Reach Groups**

Sure Start Wycombe has made a great deal of progress in reaching all members of the local community. Groups that can be defined as hard to reach in the Sure Start Wycombe catchment area include: black and ethnic minority (BME) groups, in particular those who do not speak English as a first language; families and children with special needs and disabilities; and families who are reluctant to access statutory mainstream services.

The Sure Start Wycombe Team have shown great commitment to developing mechanisms that ensure the participation and access of all members of the local community in SSWLP services and delivery. These activities include:

- Provision of transport for those who cannot drive and/or have difficulties in accessing public transport;
- Delivering services from local, easily accessible venues;
- Employing some staff from the local community with additional languages – which has been important for involving parents for whom English is not their first language; and
- Using an Asian Support Worker, who attends some activities provided by Sure Start, and who supports parents with little or no English.

Language barriers however remain a barrier to extending involvement and participation.

Engaging the voluntary and community sector in a systematic, meaningful way is critical to extending the involvement and participation of local families and children in the Sure Start area. Community organizations provide critical links with local people and have an important role in terms of accessing identified 'hard to reach' sections of the community. This is particularly important in Wycombe given the Sure Start catchment area includes a non-white population in the region of 80 per cent.

Sure Start partners, for example, community organizations such as Jannina Rehmania and the Green Street Community Trust are engaged in a significant amount of work with the local Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in the Sure Start Wycombe area. It is therefore essential that Sure Start Wycombe utilize these partnership links to reach this section of the local community more effectively.

The establishment of a Community Development post to support the existing activities of Sure Start Wycombe, and particularly parental involvement activity, should prove a useful addition to the team and will support early capacity building work.

## **1.6 Findings**

There has been good early success in engaging and involving parents in the design and delivery of the SSWLP. In addition, a number of services have been developed and 'purchased' which are having a positive impact on the lives of children and families living in the Sure Start area. That programme management have been able to achieve

as much as they have within the establishment phase is a credit to all Sure Start Wycombe programme management and staff.

Evidence from this evaluation has shown that parental involvement is far from easy and its complexity should not be underestimated. Both Sure Start staff and parents are in agreement that parents are paramount to the development of the SSWLP. To support existing activity to involve parents in the design and delivery of Sure Start Wycombe this report recommends the following:

#### **1.6.1 *New Parents v Existing Parents***

- It is clear that, while a number of committed parents have been successfully engaged, there are a significant number of Sure Start parents who remain unaware of the Parents' Forum and opportunities to attend Management Board meetings. It is clear that a constant cycle of engagement and some alternative strategies for getting new parents to attend both the Parents' Forum and Management Board need to be developed.

#### **1.6.2 *Training***

- Sure Start Wycombe staff are aware of the need to invest time in helping parents to identify their strengths and 'voice'. The 'bite-size' support currently offered to parents is considered extremely valuable and this should be expanded along with other 'mentoring' approaches. This applies equally to new parents and to those who are currently involved. However, it is important that parents themselves are helped to identify their training needs rather than having training imposed on them. Professionals may also require relevant training in engaging and mentoring parents.
- Developing an induction process: (1) for parents that become members of the Parents' Forum to explain the purpose and value of this resource and the benefits for Sure Start parents; and (2) for parents who attend Management Board meetings – to develop understanding of the process and the implications for programme delivery.

#### **1.6.3 *Hard to Reach Groups***

- Engaging the voluntary and community sector in a systematic, meaningful way is critical to extending the involvement and participation of local families and children in the Sure Start area. Building on the early partnership links with local community organizations, such as Jannina Rehmania and the Green Street Community Trust, Sure Start Wycombe needs to utilize these links more effectively to engage a wider number of local parents with the SSWLP.

#### **1.6.4 *Services***

- Expanding the opportunities available to build on the number of parents involved in delivering aspects of the SSWLP programme, for example, it is currently a parent that delivers the Playworker Project.
- While parents remain extremely positive about the current services available through Sure Start Wycombe, parents identified an additional need to deliver more early years education support. Some parents indicated that they would like to see

the Bookstart Bags service expanded to provide more focused Numeracy and Literacy pre-school support for children.

#### **1.6.5 *Sure Start Wycombe Delivery Plan***

- A number of parents spoken to were not aware that Sure Start Wycombe is part of a national programme aimed at improving services and support for children and families. Developing parents' understanding of the Sure Start Wycombe Delivery Plan is important for developing the capacity of parents to make meaningful contributions regarding design and delivery of the SSWLP. Developing a more 'parent friendly' summary of the current Delivery Plan would add value.
- Providing a glossary of terms to parents to enable understanding of the jargon, which in a multi-agency partnership context, is even greater. It is important that the Sure Start Wycombe Partnership Board is committed to and drives this exercise – parents who attend Board meetings could be involved in a 'plain English' exercise, where they could also be asked to review the readability of reports for distribution.

#### **1.6.6 *Parental Involvement Strategy***

- Knowledge of the Parents' Forum remains limited and confined to those parents who are already engaged to some extent with this resource. Sure Start Wycombe could improve the level of participation by developing greater proactive strategies for parental involvement, for example, by targeting parents more directly and providing information about the benefits of becoming involved with the Parents' Forum and Management Board. This activity could include developing an Induction Pack for all new parents.
- The current strategy to increase parental involvement at Management Board level, through the Parents' Forum, remains limited to those that attend Forum meetings. Alternative strategies need to be developed to broaden participation at this level to a wider number of parents.