Bournemouth Local Programme

SURE CAN EVALUATION 2003–5
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Summary

The report
This report describes the findings from the evaluation of the Sure Can personal development workshop at Sure Start, Local Programme, Bournemouth. It maps the services contribution towards Sure Start objectives and describes how short term benefits experienced by those attending will beneficially impact on long term Sure Start goals. The report is part of the overall research and evaluation strategy of the Sure Start programme that aims to examine the effects of Sure Start programmes on children families and communities.

Sources of information
The information gathered for this study was obtained from the following sources:

- Post-workshop feedback from parents attending
- Feedback from a community focus group
- Results from questionnaires completed by Sure Start staff

Summary of findings

- 94% of those attending rated overall recommendation of workshop at highest level (scale 5)
- 81% said the workshop would be extremely helpful in assisting them to feel better about themselves
- 75% said it would be extremely helpful in enabling them to be more open to new ideas and change

Changes to those attending included:

- more confident, positive, speaking out instead of being quiet, more assertive
- allow yourself to dream of how you want your life to be and know you can reach it
- finding out your goals - taking steps to reach them

Feedback on personal and parenting benefits included:

- Making parents feel good makes children feel good - less likely to play up
- Now spend one-to-one time with child
- Confidence to make changes in relationships and discuss results
Link to national objectives

Objective 1: Improving social and emotional development - enhanced self esteem in parents positively contributes to improvement in the personal, social and emotional development of children aged 0-5.

Objective 2: Improving health - higher levels of motivation to quit and support for relapse within the Centre enhances ability to stop smoking

Objective 3: Improving learning - evidence that setting life and family goals has contributed to parents taking up education opportunities as well as setting aside designated time to spend with their children

Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities - improved self esteem and motivation provides a powerful platform to seek out employment opportunities and feel confident about own ability to do the job

Lessons learned

- Training staff and support workers creates strong support network within the Local Programme Centre
- Short term 'high' from boost to self esteem needs to be sustained though ongoing support
- Including other agencies and community organisations contributes to community capacity building
- The programme is flexible and adaptable and trainers have been able to tailor the focus of workshops to meet the needs of specific groups
- It is preferable if the partners of those attending the workshop are involved so that they gain an insight into the changes their partner may be making.
**Introduction**

This report describes the findings from the evaluation of the Sure Can workshop at Sure Start, Local Programme, Bournemouth. It maps the services contribution towards Sure Start objectives and describes how short term benefits experienced by those attending will beneficially impact on long term Sure Start goals. The report is part of the overall research and evaluation strategy of the Sure Start programme that aims to examine the effects of Sure Start programmes on children families and communities.

Attending a Sure Can workshop is designed to support parents who want to get more out of life and feel more positive about themselves and parenting. Development in these areas has a positive impact on Sure Start national targets especially:

- Improving social and emotional development
- Strengthening families and communities
- The 'Every Child Matters' outcomes framework

Everyone involved with Sure Can is committed to the continuous evaluation of the workshop as a means of further enhancing the programme and also ensuring that those attending gain maximum benefit.

The Sure Can workshop focuses on achieving these objectives in addition to supporting the improvement of learning and children’s health through raising self esteem and encouraging goal setting to enhance life skills and self and personal development.

**Background**

The social and emotional benefits of self development training activities are well documented however there is limited research available on the advantages such programmes give to those attending and their families within a Sure Start environment.

The Sure Can programme was created to provide a safe learning environment where parents/carers could share life experiences in
confident and gain knowledge and understanding of the strategies and tools needed to make and sustain positive changes in their lives.

Young parents frequently find their time fully occupied by family and social issues and time for personal reflection and development can be at a premium. This opportunity, when available is valued.

Parents are also especially concerned about the provision of crèche facilities both to enable attendance at training events and ensure peace of mind and ability to concentrate during sessions. Knowing their children are being looked after significantly enhances the learning experience as well as acting as strong motivator to attend.

Networking and establishing a bond of shared experience through attendance at training events has significant psychological and social benefits which have been widely recognised in the evaluation of outcomes from other Sure Start projects. The value is further enhanced through discussion of personal issues in a ‘safe’ environment as those attending see that some of the problems they face are also shared with others.

**Workshop content**

1. **Objectives**

Sure Can is an interactive self development programme written specifically to meet the needs of Sure Start clients.

The programme focuses on three key areas of learning:

   1. reflection of past negative experiences
   2. identification of areas for change
   3. forward planning.

The programme is structured to provide accessible learning by using a variety of methods to develop and meet varied learning styles of those attending.

The aim of the programme is to increase confidence, build self esteem, develop a better self image and set goals for life changes.
During the programme participants will receive support to develop resilience and help identify what may have been inhibiting them. By using cognitive restructuring processes they gain an understanding of how to move forward in their lives following their own chosen routes with increased confidence in their ability and recognition of strengths.

In the context of the local programme, objectives are targeted at providing a basis of support in the following areas:

- Encouraging interest and access to education, training and employment
- Enhancing parenting skills
- Developing and improving relationships

2. How the workshop is delivered

The workshop is delivered in 10 sessions, typically over 5 days, spread over a two week period. Each session is designed to be run in isolation of the others although the recurring themes and learning points are consistently reinforced. The purpose of this is to ensure that those attending are not left with unresolved issues at the end of a session which cannot be dealt with for a number of days.

Group sizes vary but the ideal number is 8. The workshop is co-facilitated by two Sure Start workers who also provide support for anyone requiring it during or in between sessions.

**Method of evaluation**

Between May 2003 and June 2005 some 36 parents have attended 6 Sure Can Workshops held in Bournemouth. Their views on the workshop outcomes have been provided through evaluation forms and other methods of feedback as follows:

1. Since May 2003, each attendee has been given a post-workshop evaluation form to complete which covers 5 areas namely:
   - Personal Learning and development
   - Satisfaction with material content
   - Quality of facilitator performance
   - Group dynamics and team working
2. In May 2004, as part of an overall review to gain parents feedback on Sure Start services, a community focus group consisting of people who attended the workshop was held and their views on value of attendance were obtained.

3. In December 2004, a questionnaire was completed by 13 Sure Start staff, asking for their views on the benefits they had seen in those attending.

4. With effect from October 2004, a series of 2 hour follow up sessions have been run for past attendees. These have focused on maintaining personal progress and identifying areas where further support is required.

**Content Analysis**

The analysis of content has been focused into three broad areas:

1. **What benefit did those attending gain from the workshop?**

   Those attending highlighted the benefits they gained which appeared to fall into three broad categories namely:

   i. Tools & techniques – acquiring the skills and knowledge to make life changes, learning how to put past, negative experiences behind them and set positive goals for the future
   ii. Personal learning points – showing people their own worth, helping them to move forward
   iii. Supporting personal change – improving own confidence to make decisions, thinking positively and helping family to do so as well, feeling better about self and helping to control responses to what others say to them

   94% of those attending rated their overall recommendation of the workshop at 5 on a scale of 0(low) to 5 (high), 81% of those attending said that the workshop would be extremely helpful in assisting them to feel better about themselves whilst 75% said that it would be extremely helpful in enabling them to be more open to new ideas and change.
2. **What sustainable changes have they been able to make in their lives as a result of attending and how have these been achieved?**

In May 2004, a community focus group meeting attended by those who had completed the workshop in 2003 was held. Their reflections on personal achievement and progress was reviewed in focus groups. The comments and words used are those of the group. Seven topics were discussed and a summary of the feedback and outcomes achieved are as follows:

i. **What had the parents hoped to gain from attending Sure Can**

   - Hope
   - Self esteem, confidence, self awareness
   - Ways to deal with relationships and situations
   - Feeling better about self - “couldn’t get any worse”

ii. **To what extent have the hoped for gains been achieved?**

   Those attending were positive about the benefits. The overall view was that the course was the beginning of a process not a quick fix. Parents described the course as very tough at the beginning with a day focused on the negative. This was then transferred to positive as the course progressed which made it essential to attend every session. The course was described as a unique opportunity which could not have been accessed anywhere else.

iii. **How had it changed those attending**

   A significant number of changes were identified. These included:

   - More confident, positive, speaking out instead of being quiet when upset or annoyed, more assertive - with positive results
   - Not being scared to discuss problems with partner
   - Finding out your goals - taking steps to reach them
   - Allow yourself to dream of how you want your life to be and know you can reach your target
   - I used to have weight of the world - now I feel lighter
iv. Had the changes been kept up?

The majority of parents attending the focus group said that they had been able to keep up the changes up so far, although some had only just finished the course. Some had continued to think positively and had notes pinned up to remind them of key learning points. One person who finished in January was finding positive thinking difficult. Most said they were keeping the changes up well. Some said they were keeping up “the ones that mattered to me”

v. What was the best thing about the course?

Quotes included:

- Children well looked after in crèche
- Time to think about yourself
- Style of teaching - fun and easy to understand
- Building up relationships and friendships
- Learning to give compliments as well as learning how to take them and not shrug them off
- Helping me understand myself
- Learning that positive self talk can lead to achieving - “I can and I will”

vi. What had been the worst thing about the course?

- Introduction - “but we know there is method to the madness”
- First session - need to know what the problem is to turn it round
- Talking about negative things
- Finishing things - knowing there is no definite follow up
- “it ended”

vii. Personal and parenting benefits identified by parents which evidence the value of the course

Parents feedback indicated that the style of thinking practiced on the course encouraged them to reflect on problems at home. This exercise enhanced the learning and enabled the following outcomes to be achieved:

- Making parents feel good makes children feel good - less likely to play up
More routine at home – loose boundaries before replaced by firm guidelines, more time, more control, child aware of routine and better behaved now

Better balance established in time given to different children

Now spend one-to-one time with child because became aware of needing to do this through the thinking on the course

Confidence to make changes in relationships and discuss problems

More open to change - “people are afraid to change - I have the steps to make a change to get where I want to be”

Friendlier community - if everyone did Sure Can everyone will feel better

Reduction in stress has greatly reduced my headaches

Being more in control of oneself keeps you more in control of people and situations around you so you would not need to tap into local services e.g. social workers, doctors with prescriptions e.g. anti-depressants

Positive thinking improves interview techniques - helps person to get a job and get off benefits

Ability and confidence to carry on education - future employment

Given up smoking for 15 days!

3. What impact on client actions and behaviours have staff evidenced since attending a workshop

A total of thirteen staff involved with the programme completed an evaluation form to gain their views on the progress they felt clients had made since attending the Sure Can workshop. They were asked to score responses in the range: 4 - strongly agree, 3 - agree, 2 - disagree, 1 - strongly disagree.

Seven categories were identified and a summary of responses is provided below:

1. Clients are more open to change - 92% scored 3 or 4. Comments included:
    “Nearly all felt they could make positive changes after the course
    “For some clients yes, they have taken on board the Sure can message. Others struggle to make the important changes”
    “Parents willing to listen to others and give them time to get their point across”
2. **Those attending feel more positive about themselves** - 92% scored 3 or 4. responses included:
   - "They are more confident and speak with confidence in a group setting"
   - "Many had never received a compliment before and this was very powerful"
   - "Certainly initially there is a great buzz and a few parents have gone on to set up groups, do volunteer training and set up for access courses"

3. **Clients feel their parenting skills have been enhanced** - 67% scored 3 and 4, the remainder did not respond either because they had not asked clients or else had personally seen no evidence:
   - "Generally there has been a shift, greater openness and willingness to discuss parenting issues"
   - "Parents exchange 'parenting skills' when together, giving each other confidence to deal with problems"
   - "People have given specific examples of having more confidence to enforce boundaries and able to find solutions when they have problems"

4. **Clients find it easier to solve problems** - 75% scored 3 and 4, 15% disagreed and the remainder did not comment. A range of opinions were expressed:
   - "A Mum was really pleased to be in control of her money and had managed to repay a debt and was feeling really positive about her finances"
   - "Maybe initially but not sure if it sustained"
   - "Perhaps because they can talk things over more easily, they find solutions"

5. **Clients find it easy to talk to others** - 85% scored in the range 3 and 4 the remainder either did not comment or, in one case, disagreed.
   - "Definitely form bonds with each other in the group"
   - "Overall yes, there seems to be an increase in confidence which enables this to happen"
“Relationships are built during the course making it easier for parents to talk and share”

6. Clients say they are happy with important relationships -38% disagreed, 23% scored in the range 3 and 4. The remainder did not comment. A range of views were expressed:

- “Has raised expectations for people and caused questioning of some relationships that they feel are not fulfilling”
- “Clients are more aware of the importance of relationships - and perhaps having looked at their life - now feel this relationship is not as good as it should be!”
- Still looking for ways to change/accept some relationships”

7. Clients develop and/or maintain a good circle of friends 77% scored 3 or 4, 15% disagreed. The remainder did not comment:

- “Despite the occasional “bust up” between friends, the Sure Can parents do seem to have developed into a strong and supportive group. The development of volunteers support group is evidence this of this group of parents carrying on the good work started by Sure Can”
- Not sure if friendships are maintained long term”
- “Aware that groups have kept in touch - very supportive of each other during and for a time after. Some have kept that concern/care”
The Cycle of Change

The cycle of change used to underpin this programme has been adapted from Prochaska & DiClementi (1986) model.

The model is used in an exercise to support learning on the process of making personal change. Two elements underpin the activity:

1. preparing myself to make changes in my life
2. preparing to break some of my habits

Those attending are taken through the four stages to understand how each element in the cycle is important to make and sustain personal growth and development.

1. **Thinking about change** - awareness of negative effects of habit, preparing the mind, ready and willing
2. **Determined to change** - action plan and support in place, new picture created, strategies to cope with 'urges' developed
3. **Action to change** - follow action plan, keep new picture in mind
4. **Relapse** - get back on track, use support network. REMEMBER 'I can do it' 'I am worthy'

Reinforcing the learning and sustaining the changes

Staff throughout the centre have developed a high level of awareness of the impact of the Sure Can Workshop on those attending. Through use of
formal and informal structures, support and signposting is provided which enables key messages to be delivered and reinforced in a seamless way.

These interventions are a powerful support mechanism and for those who may be experiencing difficulties or have relapsed to old behaviours, encouragement to get back on track is provided. Likewise, for those thinking about change or experiencing the impact after attendance, support is on hand from trained staff.

The combination of workshop attendance and post-workshop support provides a momentum which underpins not only the learning but also the culture and values within the centre.

**Capacity building**

The Sure Can model applied contains three key elements namely:

1. ongoing workshops and support programmes for clients and staff
2. train the trainer activity to transfer the skills and knowledge to a small number of staff
3. wider community involvement through training provided to local churches, support agencies and other voluntary organisations

This powerful development framework has consolidated the learning and values and contributed to real capacity building within the area.

Sure Can aims to help those attending set and achieve 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Trackable/Time-bound) goals in areas of their lives they wish to move forward.

Support to achieve these outcomes comes from a variety of sources namely:

- Trained Sure Start workers providing one to one support to deal with personal issues
- Sign posting to external agencies for specialist support
- Access to vocational or academic training programmes
- Access to employment opportunities

One of the strengths of the programme is the known mentor support arrangements. These are staff who are well recognised and established in
the centre. They are able to work with clients both inside and outside the formal structures.

Informal groups of those attending sharing experiences and supporting one another to achieve their goals are also a strong source of help and assistance.

A monthly follow up programme to support ongoing development has been launched for all those who have attended a workshop. Each session focuses on reinforcing the learning and helping those who are finding the going tough or have relapsed to a former state to get back on track.

There are plans to involve partners of those attending the workshop so that they gain an insight into the changes their partner may be making. This important development will enable greater shared understanding of personal changes and behaviours, bring partners closer together and reduce the likelihood of conflict.

Conclusions

The Sure Can programme is now in its third year and, thanks to the support and dedication of the management and staff of Sure Start, Local Programme, Bournemouth, has given clients a unique opportunity to make and sustain changes in areas of their lives they previously would have considered impossible.

A considerable amount of thought has been given by the team to the practical arrangements for running Sure Can and significant factors included:

- Running Sure Can at a time which fits in with childcare and school time
- Provision of crèche facility in which parents have confidence
- Staff trained in approach and able to reinforce the message with parents
- The establishment of ground rules was seen to be extremely important to keep safe and allow sharing of personal information. It is important to reiterate that those attending should only share what they want to.
- Prior knowledge of parents has been helpful in assessing suitability for attendance.
• The Sure can programme integrates well with other Sure Start programmes and the two elements compliment one another
• It is fun and nurturing. The care that is taken about the way the room is set up, folders, handouts, the sweets and other refreshments make people feel looked after, cared for and valued.

The programme is flexible and adaptable and trainers have been able to tailor the focus of workshops to meet the needs of specific groups. This has proved highly successful in helping those attending to deal with current issues which are impacting on them.

Analysing and acting on parent feedback and trainer post-workshop reviews has been a continuing process, enabling changes to format and content to be made where necessary.

As a result of the investment in training and support made however, a strong and enduring support mechanism is now in place which creates a positive atmosphere throughout the centre. Parents know they can talk to any member of staff about their experiences in the knowledge that they will be listened to, and that their feelings will be recognised and understood.

Alongside the internal support, external expertise in training and development for clients and staff alike has been available throughout the life of the programme. This has enabled the learning and skills to be embedded throughout the organisation and beyond into the community, using professional skills and expertise.

The combination of elements has enabled the Sure Can programme to continue and new staff to be trained whenever changes take place. As the number of clients attending the workshop grows, the Sure Can values and benefits will further embed themselves within the centre and enhance the ‘CAN DO’ attitude which characterises the Sure Start, Local Programme, Centre.
Special Thanks

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- All the staff of Sure Start - for embracing the ‘CAN DO’ culture

- All the clients who have attended the Sure Can workshop - for finding the courage to make changes in their lives and supporting one another

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