



“More than just a building”

**Evaluation of
Sure Start Holloway
crèche facilities**

September 2005

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NCB promotes the voices, interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives.

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Executive Summary

In 2005 Sure Start Holloway commissioned the National Children's Bureau to evaluate the extent to which its crèche provision, delivered via Holloway parents Centre (HPC) and Andover Brightstart Centre (ABC), contributed to its overall aims and objectives.

A variety of methods were employed to gather data from as many sources as possible and maximise the reliability of the findings. These included a survey of families using the crèches, analysis of Sure Start Holloway's monitoring records, extraction of information from the family support respite records, interviews with key personnel and interviews with twelve parents and carers who had used the crèche.

HPC and ABC are both independent agencies with their own management structure. Both received initial capital funding to substantially redevelop premises into suitable childcare facilities, as well as ongoing revenue funding to cover running costs and have to date been predominantly financially dependent on Sure Start. Service level agreements with Sure Start Holloway stipulate the provision of crèche and some other facilities. HPC is expected to provide an average of 50 to 55 crèche places per week for Sure Start Holloway and ABC between 77 and 92 places per week.

Crèche places are free. They are designated for use by Sure Start Holloway families in certain circumstances, such as attending Sure Start meetings, classes or activities, or having time-out from childcare and for families assessed as needing respite by the family support team. Referrals to the respite crèche are allocated for six-week periods, but these are renewable on review.

For the year 2004/5 the database records show that a total of 165 children used either or both crèches 2169 times. However there is known to be a degree of under-recording of use.

The database records show that the ethnic diversity of the children using the crèche is consistent with and representative of the ethnic composition of the local population of children.

On average children visited the crèche six to seven times over the twelve month period. The database shows that over half the children used the crèche five times or less and a small number used it more often. Relatively high rates of use were made by those accessing the respite crèche, which is consistent with the aims of the family support service and Sure Start Holloway.

The findings show that the crèches were used for a range of reasons, all consistent with Sure Start Holloway's aims. In order of frequency of use these were found to be: to enable parents and carers to attend Sure Start meetings, classes and activities, have time-out, and pursue a respite referral.

Records for referrals to the respite crèche show that it was predominantly used to help families cope with mental and physical health problems such as post-

natal depression and deal with stressful circumstances such as homelessness, overcrowding, isolation and poverty.

Interviewees reported that the crèche helped them cope with health problems, attend appointments, classes, or workshops, get a break from childcare, have some 'adult' time and to catch up on household chores.

Parents and carers reported that for them the most important aspects of a crèche were for their children to be happy, have fun and get good quality experiences, in a safe environment with experienced, trustworthy and responsible staff. Regardless of their need for childcare they would not otherwise leave their children in a crèche.

Very high levels of satisfaction were found with both crèches, although some people preferred one or the other for different reasons. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents were particularly happy with staff skills, interaction with and care shown to their children; the convenient location and accessibility; the purpose designed and equipped premises; and the type and range of activities and equipment available. Staff were praised for creating a calm, happy atmosphere, putting new children at ease and pursuing a wide variety of stimulating activities, which could not otherwise be accessed or done at home. Effectively the only note of dissatisfaction was the length and number of sessions available and some difficulty in booking places.

Whilst it was not possible within the scope of a short-term evaluation such as this to measure actual outcomes for adults or children, a number of benefits from using the crèche were reported. Parents and carers said that the crèche had increased their access to classes, Sure Start meetings and other activities, which in turn they felt brought further longer-term benefits. They also felt that the crèche had helped them socialise more, feel less isolated, deal with ill-health, have the chance to address other caring and household responsibilities and have a break from children.

Workers echoed these and also observed that parents and carers had gained skills and confidence from attending workshops and classes, were more able to separate from their children, had the opportunity to address the causes of stress in their lives and received an introduction to Sure Start services and activities.

Children were reported to have benefited greatly from using the crèches. Parents and carers felt that their children's social skills and behaviour had improved, that they got a lot of enjoyment and fun, were more stimulated, had more exposure to different toys, equipment and activities, were more confident in spending time away from parents, showed improved language skills and were learning more. Staff echoed those observations and reported that children also showed increased independence and self-esteem, learned from each other, and demonstrated greater understanding of personal and social boundaries.

The main barriers found were the length and number of sessions available and the systems used for booking and allocating places. However the crèches and Sure Start were already attempting to address these issues. Both crèches were concerned about their future funding and viability when Sure Start resourcing reduced.

1. Introduction

In Spring 2005 the National Children's Bureau was commissioned by Sure Start Holloway to evaluate various aspects of its crèche provision. Childcare had been highlighted as a major need by the original consultation conducted with local families when Sure Start Holloway was first established. As a result Sure Start Holloway financed the development of new crèche facilities at Holloway Parents Centre and Andover Brightstart Centre over 2002-3 and has since continued to fund crèche provision at these two sites. Over 2006 - 2007 Sure Start Holloway will develop into a Children's Centre. The planning for this has already begun and includes childcare provision at the proposed Mitford Children's Centre.

Aims of this evaluation

The evaluation aims to evaluate the extent to which Sure Start Holloway's support for crèche provision contributes to its overall aims and objectives.

Objectives

Specifically, the evaluation will:

1. Examine and describe the crèche provision, organisation and management
2. Analyse the characteristics of those who use the crèche and any patterns of use
3. Explore the main reasons why people use the crèche facilities, their views on the provision and what outcomes they and their children have experienced
4. Evaluate the extent to which Sure Start Holloway's aims and objectives and the needs of families are met and access to other services enhanced by the crèche provision
5. Examine the extent to which the crèche provision enhances family support
6. Establish the unit cost of crèche provision
7. Provide pertinent information for the development of Children Centres locally

2. Methods

A variety of methods were used in order to gather data from a range of sources. These were:

- a) Face to face semi-structured interviews with the two crèche co-ordinators;
- b) A survey of crèche users, over a three-week period, using a self-completion questionnaire;
- c) Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with twelve crèche users, seven of whom had used the respite crèche. Six of these twelve had also completed questionnaires;
- d) Analysis of Sure Start Holloway's database on crèche use;
- e) Analysis of various Sure Start Holloway documents relating to crèche provision;
- f) Analysis of information provided by the family support team leader, extracted from individual case-records, on the referrals made to the respite crèche and outcomes noted.

Further details on methods

b) Survey of families using crèches

A self-completion questionnaire was run at each crèche over 3 weeks in May and early June, 2005. Parents and carers using the crèches were encouraged by the crèche workers and Sure Start staff to complete the questionnaire.

A total of 38 questionnaires were completed, of which:

- 23 questionnaires were completed by ABC users. Sure Start Holloway's database records for 2004/5 show that the ABC crèche sees an average of 40 families each month. Therefore the 23 returned questionnaires over three weeks represents 58% of monthly users.
- Fifteen questionnaires were completed by HPC users. The database records for 2004/ 5 show that HPC sees an average of 50 families per month. Thus the response rate represents 30% of monthly users. However HPC felt that fewer than normal numbers of families used the crèche over the weeks when the survey was applied.

Profile of questionnaire respondents

Number of children

33 of the 38 respondents gave details of the number of children they had in the crèche that day, of whom:

- Most (29 or 88%) had one child in the crèche
- Four said they had 2 children in the crèche (total 37 children)

The largest age group of children was those aged between two and three years old.

Table 1: Ages of children in crèche on day of questionnaire

Age	Under one year	Between 1 & 2 yrs	Between 2 & 3 yrs	Between 3 & 4 yrs	Between 4 & 5 years
Number (<i>n</i> = 34 children)	3(9%)	7(21%)	18(53%)	4(12%)	2(6%)

c) Face-to-face interviews with crèche users

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person with twelve parents. Six of these had volunteered after completing the questionnaire. Some families who had been referred for respite crèche were approached by the Family Support Team Leader and out of these another six agreed to participate. Out of the twelve interviewees, seven were using or had previously used the crèche on a respite basis. Eleven interviewees were women and the other interview was conducted with both the mother and father.

f) Analysis of use of respite crèche

Use of the crèche for respite purposes was examined in two ways. The Family Support Team Leader provided an anonymous breakdown of the records of referrals to the respite crèche for the seven-month period, September 2004 to March 2005. This included why families had been referred, how often they had used it and the recorded outcomes for the adults and children.

In addition over half the interviewees were purposively selected from respite crèche users. This focus on the respite crèche was designed to gather extra information on the use made of the crèche for respite, the outcomes noted by workers and experienced by families and the extent to which the respite crèche enhanced family support work.

3. Background and description of crèche provision

In Spring 2003 the Parenting Education and Support Forum conducted a survey across families in the then recently formed Sure Start Holloway area (report PESF July 2003). The findings showed that there was very limited childcare and no crèche provision in the area and that local families desired subsidised childcare. As a result two crèche facilities were developed from scratch: one at Holloway Parents Centre, in Mayton Street and another at what is now named the Andover Brightstart Centre, on the Andover estate.

The Holloway Parent Centre (HPC) developed out of the earlier Parents' Workshop, which had provided parenting courses and family support in the area. Capital funding totalling £74,299 from Sure Start Holloway enabled a substantial redesign and rebuilding of premises to accommodate a crèche, outdoor play area, meeting rooms and office facilities. The HPC crèche at Mayton Street opened in 2002. It is one of the services run by the Holloway Neighbourhood Group, a well established local community organisation, and is managed by them.

Since 2002 the HPC has provided a crèche, meeting room and other facilities for Sure Start Holloway under Service Level Agreements (SLA), which to date have been renewed annually. Over 2004/5 Sure Start Holloway provided £49,980 for these services and according to the most recent SLA, covering the period April 2005 to March 2006, £46,600 would be provided. According to HPC estimates, the bulk of this grant goes towards the crèche provision, namely: £43,305 for 2004/5 and £39,360 for 2005/6. The remainder goes towards parenting courses and room hire for Sure Start meetings.

HPC also gets some funding from, and provides some childcare courses for, the Children's Fund and Islington Early Years.

The creation of the Andover crèche also required substantial redevelopment and refurbishment of premises adjacent to the Tollington Community Centre in the Andover Estate. Again Sure Start provided capital funding totalling £41,593 for this work in 2003. Since then the Andover crèche has provided crèche facilities, stay and play sessions and some other services for Sure Start, mostly under SLAs. It has undergone various changes of name, management and governance, including being run directly by Sure Start Holloway for a limited period. Since November 2004 it has been named the Andover Brightstart Centre (ABC) and has had its own independent management. The SLAs with Sure Start Holloway provided for £29,212 funding for the period November 2004 to March 2005 and £45,581 for the year April 2005 to March 2006. Funding mainly covers the crèche (£18,131 for Nov 2004 – April 2005 and £42,271 for 2005/6) and also four stay and play sessions per week and a small amount of outreach services.

Sure Start specifications for the crèches

Sure Start was established to improve the health and well-being of families and children under school age. Local Sure Start programmes are expected to improve services for families and spread good practice learned from local programmes to everyone involved in providing services for young children. In particular local programmes are expected to improve children's life chances by developing services including:

- Support for families and parents
- Outreach and home visiting
- Primary and community health care
- Play, learning and childcare

Crèche provision is listed under Objective 3 of Sure Start Holloway's Service Plan:

"Improving children's ability to learn: in particular by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promote early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with special needs"

The SLAs between each crèche and Sure Start Holloway set out a number of general aims and objectives which apply to all Sure Start programmes and services, together with more specific aims, objectives, targets and outcomes related solely to the crèches. Progress is monitored on a quarterly basis through review meetings.

The aims and objectives of all Sure Start programmes are:

- i) To promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children, particularly those who are disadvantaged
- ii) To improve the social and emotional development of young children
- iii) To improve the health of young children
- iv) To improve children's ability to learn
- v) To strengthen families and communities.

Additional targets and outcomes

In addition to meeting Sure Start objectives i) ii) iv) and v) (above) both crèches are expected to provide:

- Access to accessible quality childcare and Stay and Play sessions to support children's learning and social emotional development
- Parenting information and support to families
- Childcare to support parents [to] access training and employment and to support capacity building & parents involvement in the programme, parents' forum and management board
- Access through childcare to other service provision.

Outcomes specified for each crèche in the SLAs were as follows:

- Parents having access to flexible and accessible childcare
- Children having experience of high quality learning and play opportunities

- Increasing numbers of parents accessing training and development opportunities through accessing a crèche
- Parents having access to parenting information support and advice

The following additional outcomes were specified for the ABC crèche:

- Increased uptake of other Sure Start activities and services
- Parental involvement in management of the Andover Brightstart Centre
- Establishment of a Parents' Forum for the ABC centre
- Prioritisation of families on the Andover Estate
- Working in close collaboration with Tollington Community Association to develop parenting and family support services to be delivered in and from the centre, and in collaboration with other local services.

In interviews the crèche coordinators detailed the following tangible outcomes and benefits they desired for parents, carers and children from using the crèche:

For adults:

- Enhanced skills from attending workshops or classes
- Time to themselves
- The opportunity to deal with issues and problems
- Confidence that their children are in a safe environment
- An introduction to Sure Start activities and services

For children:

- Increased confidence, self-esteem and independence
- Time away from and ability to detach from parents and carers
- Having fun
- Improved social skills and development of friendships
- Increased intellectual, language, social, and personal development
- Preparation for nursery and/ or school

Services provided by HPC and ABC for Sure Start Holloway

HPC: Over 2004/5 HPC was expected to provide six to nine sessions and an average of 50.5 crèche places per week, in term times. For the year 2005/6 an average of 55 crèche places per week were stipulated. In addition HPC is contracted to supply some outreach work; a weekly stay and play session; 29 parenting workshops per annum; and meeting room facilities.

At the time of writing HPC could cater for up to twelve children per crèche session, aged between six months and five years, and was open most mornings (for 2.5 hours) and afternoons (for 3 hours) each week during term time. Besides this, HPC also provided a few crèche places per week for City and Islington College and other agencies in the area. HPC crèche has been registered with Ofsted since 2003 and gained an Ofsted certificate that year. In November 2004 HPC was inspected by Ofsted and received a very favourable report, including:

“The centre offers a warm, stimulating and very welcoming environment for children and their parents. Staff work well together as a team and benefit from strong leadership ... The Centre plans daily activities well. They ensure that children are involved in a range of exciting and stimulating activities. Good planning ensures that all areas available to children are used creatively. The staff have a sound knowledge of child development and the needs of young children. This is demonstrated in the staff’s understanding and ability to meet the needs of children who do not attend on a regular basis.”
(From www.ofsted.gov.uk; date of inspection 18/11/2004)

At the time of this evaluation HPC was applying to register more rooms in order to extend its provision and cater for more children.

ABC: At the time of this evaluation, an average of 90 places per week and eighteen places per session were allocated to and paid for by Sure Start Holloway, under their SLA. Twenty of these places per week were reserved for Sure Start Holloway parents attending City and Islington College courses. ABC catered for children aged from six months to five years with a capacity for 22 children per session. Under its SLA with Sure Start Holloway, ABC also runs four drop-in stay and play sessions per week for local families and from September 2005 planned to provide outreach to help engage newly registered families in the Sure Start programme.

The crèche was open every weekday morning, during term-time, 38 weeks per annum. At the time of this evaluation crèche sessions could only last one hour 55 minutes. ABC was in the process of getting full Ofsted registration as a crèche and until such Ofsted registration is complete could not provide care for children for two hours or longer. If successful it was planned that sessions would run for longer and that afternoon sessions might also be provided.

Ofsted took over the regulation of childcare regulations for childcare settings from local authorities in 2001. Registration rules stipulate the number of children who can be looked after at any one time, relative to the number of staff, the ages of the children and the size of the room. Thus any increase in the number of babies under the age of one, or children with special needs, reduces the overall number of children who can be accommodated.

Who can use the crèche

Sure Start Holloway offers free crèche places to local families in the following circumstances:

- On referral for respite by a family support worker
- To attend Sure Start Holloway workshops, classes, meetings or other activities. These include management board and parents’ forum meetings.
- To have a break, or ‘time-out’, from childcare
- To attend City and Islington College English as an additional language classes – for ABC.

The leaflet advertising the respite crèche states that it is for “*parents with children under 5 who are registered with Sure Start Holloway and have challenges in caring for their children as a result of experiencing:*

- *A temporary injury or ill health*
- *Children or parents’ special needs*
- *Over-crowded living conditions*
- *Complications in pregnancy*
- *A surgical operation*
- *Domestic violence*
- *Depression”*

Respite crèche places are offered for blocks of six weeks, usually for two to three sessions per week. Need and priority is reviewed at the end of the six weeks. At both HPC and ABC three to four crèche places were earmarked for respite use at any one time, with one place kept unallocated in case of emergency need.

The Sure Start Holloway March 2005 leaflet promoting its events and activities advertises that crèche places are ‘*available*’ but usually must be booked for the Parents’ forum, International Coffee Mornings, massage, reflexology, keep fit sessions, Citizens Advice Bureau advice sessions and various workshops.

The Sure Start Holloway Parents’ Forum newsletter for Winter 2004/5 gives the following explanation about ‘time out’ places:

“There are limited ‘time out’ sessions available at both centres to give parents time for themselves. They can be booked in advance. Parents are also encouraged to contact the centre on a daily basis as spaces become available at the last minute due to cancellations. Both centres are fully accessible and welcome parents and children with special needs.”

Organisation

Each crèche was managed by a management board. ABC had attempted to recruit parents and carers who used the crèche onto its management board and to create its own Parents’ Forum. To date these efforts had proved unsuccessful, mainly because parents felt they did not have the spare time and capacity to give to this.

Each crèche employed a full-time crèche coordinator and sessional staff, sometimes recruited from parents. Many were said to have worked in the crèche on a long-term basis. Staff at HPC spoke a number of community languages. Both coordinators had childcare qualifications: the HPC coordinator had a BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Studies and the ABC coordinator had an NVQ Level 3 in Childcare and Early Years. Both coordinators also had substantial childcare experience with young children: one in an education setting and the other in another local nursery. The crèche coordinators were responsible for ensuring sufficient staffing levels at each session, organising rotas, supervising staff and planning the activities for children.

Both coordinators said that they had made substantial changes to how their crèches were organised and run since coming into post, approximately two

years previously. The activities were designed to follow the framework set out in 'Birth to Three Matters' and to promote and assist the children's care and development. When planning activities HPC followed a particular theme each month according to the ages of the children, but not 'rigidly'.

Both crèches set out a number of different play areas and activities each day for the children to try or experience. These included an art area, a 'home corner', a book corner, a baby area, a music area, a construction area, sand and water activities, outdoor equipment, physical activity, dressing up facilities, puzzles and a messy activity which was usually lead by a worker. Snacks including fruit and vegetables were provided at each session and children were encouraged to sit down to eat together. Songs and nursery rhymes were sung in a group at each session.

A 'key worker' system was employed at least when children were new to the crèche, but in the HPC children were subsequently allowed to go to whichever worker they preferred. Crèche workers provided some feedback to parents and carers at the end of each session, especially if any issues had arisen. More formal observations were made for children who attended the respite crèche, to provide feedback on outcomes to the family support workers.

Both crèches tried to recruit new parents through stay and play sessions. These also served to familiarise adults and children to the crèche surroundings and workers to make initial settling in to the crèche easier.

4. Use of the crèche

The following information on who used the crèche and why was collated from:

- The questionnaire returns (n=38);
- The interviews with families (n=12);
- The respite records for the period September 2004 to March 2005 (n=12);
- The Sure Start Holloway database. However there is a degree of undercounting where figures were not reported and of use by families not registered with Sure Start, or who live outside the Sure Start area. Also some information such as data on children with disabilities or special needs was not available at the time of this evaluation.
From July 2004 use of the crèches has been monitored and data entered under the headings of the different Sure Start services and activities, which is very useful but different from the system used to count use for the first three months of that period.

Numbers using the crèche over 2004/5

The database for the period April 2004 to end March 2005 was analysed to examine the numbers and characteristics of families who had used the crèches. This data is set out in the tables below.

- Over the year a total of 116 individual children used ABC and 85 used HPC, and together a total of 165 children attended one or the other (without overlap). This 165 children represents 19%, or just under one fifth, of the local under-four population (848) in the Finsbury and Tollington Wards which cover the Sure Start area according to the 2003/4 RICHs database.
- Tables 2 and 3 show the total number of families (87) and children (101) using the crèches from April to June 2004;
- Table 4 covers the remainder of the year, July 2004 to the end March 2005, and shows the numbers of families and children using each crèche, the total number of visits made and the reasons for attendance. A similar breakdown, according to reasons for use, is not available for the earlier period.

Table 2: Number of families using crèches April – June 2004

	April 2004	May 2004	June 2004	Total families April – June 2004*
ABC	19	33	50	57
HPC	16	Data not available	23	30
Total	35	33 +	83	87*

* Some unavoidable double-counting occurs as some families used both crèches and/or used them in more than one month.

Table 3: Numbers of children using crèches per month April – June 2004

	April 2004	May 2004	June 2004	Total individual Children April – June 2004*	Total number of visits
ABC	24	39	59	69	499
HPC	16	Not available+	25	32+	169+
TOTAL	40	39 +	84	101*	668

* Totals include some unavoidable double-counting as some children attended both crèches and/or in more than one month;

+ Data not available for May 2004 for HPC

Table 4: Crèche use July 2004 to end March 2005

Use category	ABC			HPC		
	No. of Individual Families	No. of Individual children	No. of times used	No. of Families	No. of Individual children	No. of times used
Referral to respite crèche	9	12	147	9	12	144
Sure Start Holloway activities	49	56	215	47	55	389
Time out	44	51	216	35	38	201
City & Islington College classes	6	8	149	Not applicable		
Total	108*	127**	727	91*	105**	

*Individual families used the crèches under different categories and so are unavoidably counted twice or more

** Similarly some children have used the crèche under a number of different categories

Use of the respite crèche

The Database records show that for the nine-month period, July 2004 to March 2005, eighteen families and 24 children were referred to the respite crèche at either ABC or HPC. Between them the children used the crèche 291 times in that period, or an average of twelve times each. This is consistent with the analysis of the family support records for the period September 2004 to March 2005, which show that twelve families, with sixteen children between them were referred to one or other respite crèche in that period. Out of these twelve families, seven were allocated three sessions per week, four families two sessions a week and one family once per week.

How families had first come to use the crèche

Most of the information on how families got to first hear about the crèche was gleaned from interviews, as it was not held elsewhere. Seven of the twelve interviewees said they were referred to Sure Start by health workers: four by midwives and three by health visitors. In turn all but one of the latter then saw a member of the Sure Start family support team and were referred to the crèche by them. One person did not recall how they had first come into contact with Sure Start, but was referred to the crèche by a family support worker. In total nine were told of, or referred to, the crèche by the family support team, although they did not all specifically mention using the respite crèche.

Two of the twelve interviewees had contacted the crèche directly themselves after seeing Sure Start information material. One person had noticed the crèche when passing by, made enquires and then signed up for Sure Start. Another was offered support and effectively recruited on the street by a crèche worker who saw her struggling with her children.

It was very apparent from the interviews that the crèche formed part of a broader package of support available from Sure Start as a whole and was not just 'childcare'. For some it was part of a wider amount of family support given because of difficult personal circumstances such as ill-health; while others described it as helping them to access other Sure Start services as well as cope with personal and household needs. While more than half the interviewees had been or were respite crèche users, many of those who were not also said they had needed the crèche's assistance to cope with difficult circumstances.

Why families had used the crèche

All Sure Start programmes are obliged to monitor the extent to which families use each of their services. The information from the different sources (Sure Start Holloway's database, interviews and questionnaire) were analysed according to the categories used by Sure Start Holloway, for example respite referral, or time out. The results are set out in Table 5.

Most of the interviewees reported using the crèche for a mixture of reasons, particularly time out and/or respite and/or attending a class or workshop. The classes and other activities mentioned included IT classes, sewing classes, parenting skills workshops, individual workshops looking at specific child development issues and 'community involvement' groups such as the Parents' Forum and Management Board. It was clear that use tended to fluctuate, especially in relation to families' changing circumstances and needs and the availability of crèche places. For example a period of respite may have ended, but the family were now using the crèche for classes and workshops or vice versa.

Table 5: Why families had used the crèche

Reason given	Day of questionnaire* (n = 37)		Interviews* (n=12)		Database # July 2004 – March 2005	
	Number	% of respondents	Number	% of respondents	Number	% of use
Respite referral	4	11%	7	58%	18	9%
To attend Sure Start class/activity/meeting	22	58%	10	83%	96	48%
To have a break or 'time out'	10	27%	6	50%	79	39%
City & Islington	-	-	-	-	6	3%
Other (college)	1	3%	n/a	n/a	-	-

*There is an overlap as at least six questionnaire respondents were also interviewed and some interviewees had also used the crèche under different categories

Many families used the crèche under different categories and are unavoidably double-counted
This breakdown is not available for the period April to June 2004

The reasons given by questionnaire respondents for crèche use related to which crèche site and which activity they were using that day, as can be seen in Table 6. Most of HPC use was to attend a Sure Start activity or class, while the largest single use of ABC was for time-out. Some of this may be due to the fact that more Sure Start meetings and activities are run at HPC and to ABC having a larger capacity.

Table 6: Reasons why each crèche used on day of questionnaire

	Respite referral	Attend SS class/ activity / meeting	Time out	Other	Total (n=37)
HPC	1	13	0	0	14
ABC	3	9	10	1	23
Total	4	22	10	1	37

Table 7 shows the number of children attending the crèches under each activity heading. Here there is a relatively even spread of use between the two crèches under each category apart from time out which is greater at ABC.

Table 7: Use of crèches by individual children from database

	Total use April – June 2004	Use by categories for July 2004 – March 2005 (9 months)				
		Respite referral	SS class/activity /meeting	Time out	City & Islington classes	Totals*
HPC	32	11	55	38	N/a	136
ABC	69	12	56	51	8	196
Totals*	101	23	111	89	8	332

* A number of children used the crèches under different categories and used both crèches, so there is some unavoidable double-counting

Recorded reasons for referral to the respite crèche

It was clear from the extracted records for the respite referrals that all twelve families were dealing with a range and combination of problems, which formed the basis for their referrals. These are shown in the Table 8.

Table 8: Reasons for referral to respite crèche

Issue	Number recorded (n= 12)
Post-natal depression	7
Other mental health problems	2
Physical illness adult or child	7
Homelessness and /or overcrowding	8
Social isolation	6
Parent and child housebound (for various reasons including physical and mental health problems)	5
'No access to public funds' (no income)	3
Domestic violence	1

The Family Support Team Leader also felt that there was a higher than average level of need in the area. For example there are two reception centres within the Sure Start Holloway area and another nearby. This resulted in high numbers of families who are homeless or seeking asylum, including those who have been refused asylum and have no recourse to public funds. Also social workers were reported to have increased their referrals to Sure Start Holloway, which on the whole were for children on the margins of being classified as 'children in need'. Some children got nursery places at the end of the respite crèche use, on the basis of being classified as 'children in need' by social services. Hence the respite crèche often served to ease the crisis until more permanent or full-time childcare was arranged.

Reasons given by interviewees

The interviews enabled some more detailed examination of why families had been using the crèche facilities to date. Over half the interviewees had used the respite crèche at some stage. Most interviewees explained that they had used the crèche for a number of different reasons and under a range of categories.

- **Help the adults and children cope with health problems** - most commonly mental health problems. Crèche provision usually formed part of wider package of support, commonly for post-natal and other types of depression.
- **Attend appointments** such as with doctors, hospitals, physiotherapists, dentists, housing departments and solicitors. Having the crèche was said to relieve parents of having to entertain children in waiting rooms, or discuss difficult health matters in front of their children.

"It's mainly shopping and sometimes I use it for physiotherapy appointments as well. I have a lot of back problems ... It's easier without her because I just can't do everything when she's around"

- **Attend Sure Start activities classes and workshops** such as Sure Start meetings, learning English or other skills (IT and sewing were mentioned), learning about parenting ideas. These in turn indirectly brought other, and potentially long-term, benefits such as getting to know other parents in the area, improving employment skills and feeling more confident.
- **Have 'adult' time and get a break from childcare** to relax, exercise, or sleep.
- **Get either or both the adult and child out of the house** and to an extent allow some separation from each other
- **Do household chores** such as cleaning, paying bills, shopping, cooking, make telephone calls without children around.

"Certainly, I can't do without this little crèche, 'cos without them I wouldn't be able to do what I want to ... because I'm able to get a couple of little bits and pieces done"

Amount and frequency of use

The database, questionnaires, interviews and respite crèche records provide some insight into the amount of use. Over the year April 2004 to end of March 2005 the database shows the following use:

In ABC crèche	116 children	made 1264 attendances
In HPC crèche	85 children	made 905 attendances
Total	165* children	made 2169 attendances

* 165 is the total number of children without double-counting: 46 children used both crèches.

This gives an average of eleven visits per child for both ABC and HPC.

- The total of 1264 attendances at ABC crèche averages at 33 attendances per week over a 38-week period. This represents slightly over a third of their target of an average of 90 per week.
- The total of 905 attendances at HPC crèche averages at 24 attendances per week over a 38-week period. This represents roughly one half of their target of 50.5 attendances per week for this period.

However averages disguise the range of use, whereby some people only used a crèche once or twice and other people more often. Further analysis of the recorded visits for the year show that for both crèches the amount of use ranged from one to just over 80 visits per child as can be seen in Table 9. At ABC over half the children made five visits or less and thirty-seven of these made just one visit. The vast majority (91%) made under twenty visits, but six children made 40 to 90 visits. The highest number of visits recorded, for one child, was 81.

Similarly for HPC over half the children (54%) made five visits or less, with seventeen making just one visit. Just over three quarters, or 76%, made ten visits or less. Four children made over 50 visits (59,62,82 and 86). The highest figure recorded was 86 visits for one child.

Table 9: Number of visits per child over year

Number of visits	ABC %*	HPC %*
5 or less	57%	54%
6 - 10	18%	22%
11 - 20	16%	9%
21 - 30	3%	9%
31 - 40	3%	2%
41 - 50	1%	1%
51 - 70	2%	2%
71 - 90	.7 (86 visits)	2% (82 visits)

* totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

Some of the higher rates of use were by those accessing the respite crèche. The 24 children using the respite crèche for the period July 2004 to end March 2005 attended an average of twelve times each. It is consistent for these to have a high rate of use as families are normally allocated two to three sessions

per week and most referrals were found to be renewed and therefore continue after the six-weekly review assessment.

The twelve interviewees reported that normally they used the crèche as follows:

Three to four times per week	1*
Two or three times per week	7*
Once or twice per week	3
Once to date	1

Seven of those interviewed had had respite referrals at this time or previously which may be reflected in their relatively high rate of use.

Moreover, as can be seen earlier from Table 4 the crèches are most heavily used for attending Sure Start activities. This encompasses Sure Start Management Board and Parents' Forum meetings, which meet regularly, as well as Sure Start classes and workshops. As with the respite crèche, high use for these reasons is totally consistent with Sure Start's aims and objectives to engage parents and support parents in these ways and with the aims and objectives set for the crèches.

Duration of crèche use

This data derives from questionnaire respondents and respite crèche records. Of the questionnaire respondents (*n= 35):

- Over half of those who answered this question (20 or 57%) had started using the crèche in 2004, and so had used it for a period between six and eighteen months;
- A further nine had started using it within the previous 6 months;
- Six families had been using it for roughly two years, since 2003

The data indicates that families have been using HPC and ABC crèche provision for similar lengths of time.

The respite crèche records show that while the standard referral period to the respite crèche was six weeks

- Three out of the twelve families, with five children, were assessed to need a long-term referral. In other words they had already been and were likely to remain high priority at each six week review;
- Four families had accessed it for twelve weeks;
- Five families used it for periods ranging between one to six weeks - two ceased because they moved out of the area, two opted not to use any more and one family received reduced priority on their six-week review.

Ages of children using the crèches

As can be seen in the table below the age range of children was quite similar in each crèche, the vast majority of children were aged under three (84% of total).

- Over one third of children were aged between one and two
- Roughly one quarter of children were aged between two and three
- Almost another quarter were aged under one

Table 10: Ages of children using ABC and HPC crèches*

	Under 1	Over 1 but under 2	Over 2 but under 3	Over 3 but under 4	Over 4 but under 5	Total
ABC	27 (23%)	44 (38%)	25 (22%)	16 (14%)	3 (3%)	115*
HPC	20 (24%)	29 (35%)	23 (28%)	11 (13%)	0	83*
Both	38 (23%)	58 (36%)	41 (25%)	22 (14%)	3 (2%)	162**

*On figures available

**The total figures avoid double counting of children who attended both crèches

Ethnicity of children using the crèches

The following tables, derived from the Sure Start database and monitoring records, provide a breakdown of the ethnicity of the children using each crèche and the total percentages for each ethnic group. Taking both crèches together, almost one in four children are Black and one in three White. Looking at the crèches individually, the data shows that HPC has slightly more Black and Asian users and slightly less White and mixed ethnicity users than ABC. These rates are broadly in line with, but slightly higher for some minority groups, than the local population of children in the area, as compiled by the most recent RICHs database for 2003/4.

Table 11: Main ethnic breakdown of children using each crèche*

Broad ethnicity categories	ABC	HPC	Both together	RICHs 2003/4
Black/Black British	41 (36%)	38 (46%)	63 (39%)	33.33%
White	36 (31%)	23 (28%)	47 (29%)	38%
Asian	8 (7%)	10 (12%)	14 (9%)	11%
Mixed	13 (11%)	5 (6%)	17 (10%)	8%
Other	3 (3%)	2 (2%)	5 (3%)	9%
Unknown	14 (12%)	5 (6%)	11 (10%)	1
Total	115*	83*	162 (100%)	100%

* This table only shows ethnicity for those recorded and so totals of children differ from previous figures.

Tables 12 and 13 provide a further breakdown for each crèche.

Table 12: Further breakdown by ethnicity of children using ABC crèche

Group- Sure Start categories	Sub -Totals*	Main category	Total
African	26 (23%)	Black or Black British	41 (36%)
Caribbean	10 (9%)		
Other Black	5 (4%)		
Bangladeshi	6 (5%)	Asian	8 (7%)
Indian	1 (.9%)		
Other Asian	1 (.9%)		
White British	16 (14%)	White	36 (31%)
White Irish	5 (4%)		
White other	15 (13%)		
Mixed: White-Asian	3 (3%)	Mixed	13 (11%)
Mixed: White-Black Caribbean	7 (6%)		
Mixed: White-Black African	0		
Mixed: other	3 (3%)		
Other	3 (3%)	Other	3 (2%)
Unknown	14 (12%)	Unknown	14 (12%)
Total	115		115 (100%)

* This table only shows ethnicity for those where recorded and so the totals of children differ from previous figures.

Table 13: Further breakdown by ethnicity of children using HPC crèche

Group - Sure Start categories	Sub-Totals*	Main group	Totals*
African	25 (30%)	Black or Black British	38 (46%)
Caribbean	11 (13%)		
Other Black	2 (2%)		
Bangladeshi	8 (10%)	Asian	10 (12%)
Indian	0		
Other Asian	2 (2%)		
White British	9 (11%)	White	23 (28%)
White Irish	3 (4%)		
White other	11 (13%)		
Mixed: White-Asian	1 (1%)	Mixed	5 (6%)
Mixed: White-Black Caribbean	2 (2%)		
Mixed: White-Black African	0		
Mixed: other	2 (2%)		
Other	2 (2%)	Other	2 (2%)
Unknown	5 (6%)	Unknown	5 (6%)
Total	83 (100%)		83 (100%)

* This table only shows ethnicity for those where recorded and so the totals of children differ from previous figures.

According to these figures the largest single group of, or over four in ten, children attending both crèches are Black African and approximately one tenth are Black Caribbean. One in ten children using HPC are Bangladeshi. There is no further breakdown of those who categorised themselves as 'white other', but given the relatively high proportion of European, Turkish and Kurdish people in the area it would be interesting to disaggregate this group in the future.

Areas where families lived

The database records were analysed to provide information about where crèche users lived and to assess how many families came from local estates. The database only holds records according to a small number of local estates and the figures available show that over a third of children come from these. Areas with mostly on-street housing or types of tenure are not recorded.

Table 14: Estates where children lived, where recorded

Area	April – June 2004		SS Activities		Time-out		Respite referral		City & Islington classes	Total
	ABC	HPC	ABC	HPC	ABC	HPC	ABC	HPC	ABC	
Andover Estate	10	1	4	5	19	5	7	2	5	58 (47%)
Harvist Estate	3	5	6	14	3	14	0	1	0	46 (37%)
Six Acres Estate	4	0	5	2	2	2	2	0	3	20 (16%)
Total	17	6	15	21	24	21	9	3	8	124

Of the recorded areas most children lived on the Andover Estate, Harvist Estate and the Six Acres Estate respectively. Over two thirds of those from the Andover Estate (69%) used the ABC crèche.

5. Parents' and carers' satisfaction with crèche services

Having established why families needed childcare facilities it was important to look at what extent the Sure Start crèches satisfied those needs.

What families felt were the most important aspects of a crèche.

Interviewees were asked what the three most important aspects of a crèche were to them. Echoing other findings, the following answers were given: ($n=12$)

- Children being happy and getting good quality care, fun, nice experiences, stimulation and socialization (10)
- General safety and cleanliness (7)
- Staff attitudes, experience and being responsible, qualified, trustworthy and gentle with children (6)
- Allowing the adult some time for themselves (3)
- Cost – in this case being free (1)
- Communication with parents (1)

Levels of satisfaction

“Sure Start is really good to me. I haven't got anything else to say about them, they're really good to me. They have helped me a lot”

This quote illustrates what most people felt about the crèche itself and how it helped them deal with their lives. Very high levels of satisfaction were found especially with how staff interacted with the children, the activities pursued and the equipment and toys available. The main areas of discontent were opening times and availability.

The questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with different aspects of the crèche on a scale ranging from being 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. The results and percentages for each crèche are shown in the following tables. However all the 'very dissatisfied' columns and most 'dissatisfied' columns have been omitted as no-one had selected these. Note that the percentages given are the percentage of respondents from each crèche respectively. Respondents were also invited to write their comments in their own words.

Interviewees were also asked how satisfied they were with the crèches. Their responses were analysed thematically and have been grouped as far as possible along with the questionnaire responses.

▪ **Staff skills and interaction with children**

Tables 14 and 15 show very high levels of satisfaction among questionnaire respondents on these issues.

Table 15: How staff interact with my child (n=38)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	14 (61%)	8 (35%)	1
HPC	12 (80%)	3 (20%)	0
Total	26 (68%)	11(29%)	1 (3%)

Table 16: Staff skills (n=38)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	13	9	1
HPC	11	4	0
Total	24 (63%)	13 (34%)	1 (3%)

In addition 22 questionnaire respondents wrote their own positive comments about the staff's "*friendliness and welcome*", the "*understanding and respect shown to the children*" and how they "*trusted in the staff*". Many glowing terms were written about individual staff such as '*she's a diamond, a real treasure.*'

When rating their satisfaction levels with 'the care and attention shown to my child' five questionnaire respondents were relatively more neutral, as can be seen in the table below. However nonetheless satisfaction was high with 87% being either satisfied or very satisfied.

Table 17: The care and attention shown to my child (n=38)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	13	7	3
HPC	8	5	2
Total	21 (55%)	12 (32%)	5 (13%)

All interviewees felt very positive about either or both crèches and the staff there. Most praised the staffs' skills and how they treated children. They made it clear that the approach of the staff '*was integral*' to how they felt about a crèche and feeling able to leave their child there. Many commented on the skills of individual workers at either or both ABC or HPC. A few showed a clear preference for either one or the other crèche. One had felt very unhappy with how she was treated at one crèche and had made a complaint, but was completely contented at the other. Ten interviewees commented on the positive environment which was created in the crèche

"...the crèche is more than just a place"

Staff were described as '*experienced*' and '*caring*'. In particular many said they admired how the staff had created a calm, happy, atmosphere in the crèches, instilled calm behaviour amongst the children, helped put new children at their ease, managed to teach children a lot, how they had pursued a wide range and stimulating activities with children. Two people mentioned that the staff treated all users 'equally' and felt that this was very important.

▪ **The location of the crèches and other access points**

A total of 97% of questionnaire respondents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the location of the crèche. The ABC received a slightly higher rating for location, which may be partly due to more of its users coming from the Andover estate. Three respondents also voluntarily wrote that the convenient location was a positive attribute.

Table 18: The location of this crèche (n=38)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	12	11	0
HPC	9	5	1
Total	21 (55%)	16 (42%)	1(3%)

Nearly every interviewee said they found the location very convenient and for many this aspect of accessibility was a major consideration to their ability to use the crèche. Those who had experienced illness found it difficult to get out and about and many had been housebound. So getting to the crèche in itself posed a major challenge and it was crucial that it was so close by.

Some interviewees mentioned other accessibility aspects of the crèches. A few said being treated equally in terms of ethnicity had made a difference. One woman said she would not have managed to get there at all without the help of the crèche worker who helped her out of the house with her children.

A number of interviewees clearly appreciated the fact that the crèche was free. Most said they would not have been able to afford to pay or use the crèche if it was not free, but a few said they would be willing to pay a small amount, but not normal, current, childcare rates.

▪ **Satisfaction with activities and equipment**

95% of questionnaire respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with both the activities pursued with children and with the toys and equipment available in the crèches. One wanted to see more outside play equipment.

Table 19: The activities pursued with children (n=38)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	13	9	0
HPC	8	5	
Total	21 (63%)	14 (32%)	2 (5%)

Table 20: The quality of the toys and equipment (n=38)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	14	7	2
HPC	10	5	0
Total	24 (63%)	12 (32%)	2 (5%)

Interviewees were also very positive about the activities pursued with children and the equipment available to them. For many these activities especially art and messy play were not possible at home. A number of people did not have gardens and found it hard to give children the play experience they could enjoy with the larger and outdoor equipment at the crèches. Nearly everyone said they were pleased with how their children's happiness and development was enhanced by their experiences at the crèche.

Two interviewees and two questionnaire respondents said they would like to see more direct academic teaching such as of the alphabet and numbers.

▪ The building and premises

95% of questionnaire respondents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the condition of the building. Two wrote in their own words that they liked the cleanliness of the crèche.

Table 21: The condition of the building (n=36)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
ABC	10	14	1
HPC	10	3	1
Total	20 (56%)	14 (39%)	2 (5%)

Many of the interviewees said they liked the fact that each crèche had been purpose built and designed and that everything was proportionately sized for young children, including the outdoor area, although one questionnaire respondent felt there needed to be more cleaning of the outside equipment. Some preferred the spaciousness of the ABC crèche and others the 'coziness' of the HPC crèche. However, a few people felt both sets of premises were too small, especially HPC. This was linked to a desire to see more crèche places available.

"It's a bit small for all the children they take in. They should have a bigger place"

▪ Crèche opening hours and availability

Whilst the questionnaire results in the table below show high levels of satisfaction, timing and availability attracted the highest number of negative comments by both questionnaire respondents in their own words, and by interviewees.

Table 22: Opening times (n=36)

Opening times	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
ABC	8 (35%)	11(49%)	1	1
HPC	8 (53%)	7(47%)	0	0
Total	16 (44%)	18(50%)	1(3%)	1(3%)

Length of sessions: In an open question, eleven questionnaire respondents wrote that they were unhappy with the length of sessions. Amidst all the otherwise very positive comments most interviewees said they would like the sessions to be longer, especially at ABC.

“it’s good but it would be brilliant if it was for a longer period of time”

A number reported that they had to be “very quick” and “very organised” to use them.

“by the time I drop [child] off in the morning and come back here I can only start the cooking and then switch it off again to go back and pick her up”

Some said sessions were not long enough to help them to attend certain essential appointments such as in hospitals and the Home Office.

Availability: While happy that they had been able to access the crèche, eight questionnaire respondents wrote in their own words, and a large number of interviewees said, that were unhappy with the availability of crèche places, particularly to attend Sure Start activities or to get time-out places.

As over half the interviewees had respite places at some stage they had been given priority for places and in many cases their placements had continued on successive reviews. Thus they had had guaranteed access for the duration of their referral. They were extremely grateful for this and felt the crèche had helped ease their situation. Nonetheless like others they reported difficulty in booking places for time out or activities when their priority for respite had reduced.

“as soon as you are aware there’s an activity going on, the same minute you really have to book”.

▪ **Need for more childcare**

To assess the extent the crèches met families’ childcare needs, questionnaire respondents were asked if they also needed further childcare in addition to the crèche. Just over a half of those who answered this (16 or 53%) said they did need more and just under a half (14 or 47%) said they did not. Five of those who would have liked more said it would help them cope with their other children such as new babies and three wanted more to allow time to study or attend classes.

This indicates that crèche facilities are appropriate for the childcare needs of almost half of this sample, or in other words families who, at least at this juncture, only want short-term or ad-hoc childcare rather than full-time nursery provision.

6. Outcomes for parents and carers

Information on what parents and carers got out of using the crèche was accessed through the questionnaires - both in their own words and in a closed question, the face-to-face interviews and the respite crèche records. Interviewees both reinforced points made in the questionnaires and mentioned other benefits they had experienced. These outcomes have been grouped thematically, with some additional context, explanation and depth added mainly from the interviews.

Time to attend classes, workshops, or other activities and study

As well as many interviewees, twelve (32%) questionnaire respondents described this as a major benefit in their own words. Some people had used the crèche deliberately to pursue classes or workshops. For others using the crèche had been the first step and this in turn had subsequently made them aware of, and interested in, pursuing classes or other activities run by Sure Start, such as First Aid, IT and parenting skills.

“The staff [said] ‘why don’t you attend, while [your child] is playing in there you can attend [courses] and you could learn English, you could learn, lots of other activities that goes on from here ...”

Knock-on benefits from attending Sure Start classes and activities

Being able to attend classes had lead on to other benefits. One woman, who had used the crèche to attend an IT course, felt that the course had clarified potential career options for her.

“Opened my eyes more to IT ‘cos before I wasn’t sure exactly what I wanted to do so I said let me try it ... So I think that’s a field I want to go into”

Another had completed a childcare course in the hope of this leading to employment. Those who attended the child development and parenting workshops found them extremely useful for learning about their children and said they also helped them feel more confident as parents.

Opportunity to get out and socialise

Four questionnaire respondents and a number of interviewees said that being able to access courses and other Sure Start activities had also brought social benefits. Many felt that they had met other families whom they would not have known otherwise and that this made them feel less isolated – especially those new to the area. Some appreciated meeting a more diverse range of adults than they probably would have met otherwise and having the opportunity, for example within workshops, to share information with other parents and carers.

Assistance in dealing with ill-health and caring commitments

While only two questionnaire respondents mentioned that using the crèche allowed them time to deal with other caring and family commitments, this issue was highlighted by many interviewees and is also evident from the recorded respite crèche outcomes. Using the crèche facilities had helped a large proportion of the interviewees deal with their own or their partner's physical and/or mental ill-health. Many had experienced depression, often post-natally. Some had been housebound. Using the crèche had given them some relief from the demands of childcare, allowed them to rest, deal with problematic issues in their lives and enabled them to cope better when their children were around. For those who had been housebound getting the child to the crèche and doing something besides childcare during that time had got them out of the house, provided some routine and reduced their feelings of isolation and stress.

Opportunity to attend health and other appointments without children

While only one questionnaire respondent mentioned this, many interviewees said that they really appreciated being able to attend appointments without children in tow. Appointments mentioned included those for welfare advice, counselling, psychologists, doctors, other health professionals, housing departments and solicitors.

The opportunity to deal with issues causing stress in their lives was reported as a major benefit in itself and as in turn helping to address some of the problems and sources of stress they faced.

“... like going to the dentist, ... and circumstances like that you can leave your kids when you've got an appointment ... That's it really, special appointments that I can't take him on, otherwise I don't leave him all the time”

Adult time and having a break from childcare

Nearly a quarter of questionnaire respondents (9 or 24%) and most interviewees said that the crèche gave them a period of time for themselves to relax and reduce stress, without having to worry about the children. Some called this 'adult time' and it was clearly valued. A few people said they sometimes caught up on sleep during the crèche time. Others gave examples such as not having to worry where they put a hot drink, or being able to go to the bathroom alone or make phone-calls without interruption. A break from childcare was also a reported benefit for those using the respite crèche, who commonly were living in very stressful circumstances. So in effect the crèche gave the parents and children a break from each other.

“Sometimes it's good for me and him to be in separate places and for me to have at least an hour break for myself to embrace it.

Three interviewees were able to use a gym or attend exercise classes, which they felt benefited them directly and also helped them cope.

“So it's like heaven, just to have a break from the ... two hours that I can go to exercise, come back, have my shower and I'm ready for them again. Whereas

before I was housebound. I couldn't do anything. There was nothing out there for me"

Opportunity to shop, pay bills, do housework without children

Five questionnaire respondents and most interviewees found that being able to do household chores, shopping or cooking without the children around was both quicker and less stressful for them. In turn this meant that they were able to concentrate more on the child later on.

"...It gives me time, sometimes to do what I have to do ...when I do the shopping, it's not ... easy when I have him, especially when he didn't use to walk. "

Reliance on good quality

Most people emphasised that being able to 'switch off', or do adult things during crèche times was totally dependent on the understanding that their child was safe and happy and getting something for themselves out of the crèche.

Outcomes observed by staff

The crèche coordinators reported that parents got the following benefits from using the crèche

- Skills gained from attending workshops or classes
- Separation from their children
- Increased confidence that they could leave their children in a safe environment
- Being able to focus on something else and deal with stresses in their lives, especially if using the respite crèche
- Peace and quiet, to '*get their heads together*' without being interrupted and/ or "*get back on an even keel*"
- A gentle introduction to Sure Start and activities through using the crèche first and then moving on to other Sure Start activities
- Access to advice from other professionals, such as speech and language therapists and child psychologists
- Access to other local service providers who visited the crèche venues, such as Jobcentre Plus, to give employment advice, and Islington Children's Information service

7. Perceived benefits for children

As with the adult benefits above, the findings in this section were derived from interviews and questionnaires, from both closed and open questions, and the outcomes recorded from the respite crèche by the family support team leader. All reported a number of different and often interlinked benefits and changes. However, as we did not interview the children themselves, the outcomes reported are reliant on the observations and perceptions of the relevant adults. Moreover it was not possible in a short-term evaluation of this type to establish the true extent to which any changes can be attributed to their attendance at the crèche, rather than being due to other inputs or factors, for example the child getting older.

Questionnaire respondents were asked to say whether they felt their child had got any of the benefits listed in the table below from using the crèche.

Table 23: Answers to listed potential outcomes in questionnaire

Outcomes provided in questionnaire	Number who agreed (n= 36)	% (n= 36)
<i>'My child gets to play with more other children than otherwise'</i>	34	94%
<i>'My child can play with different or more toys than at home'</i>	26	72%
<i>'My child is developing more social skills'</i>	26	72%
<i>'My child takes part in more or different activities than otherwise'</i>	24	67%
<i>'My child gets used to being away from me'</i>	23	64%
<i>'My child gets to interact with more adults than otherwise'</i>	15	42%

The comments made by respondents in their own words and the face-to-face interviews consolidate these findings. As far as possible these are given in order of frequency.

The opportunity for children to socialise and interact with others

The opportunity for their children to meet and socialise with other children was one of the most highly valued outcomes. In the open questions 22 people gave this as a positive outcome from using the crèche. Nine of the twelve interviewees also appreciated the opportunity for their children to mix with others and interacting with other children was a noted outcome from the respite referrals. Many did not have any family nearby or know other families with children of a similar age, but had formed strong friendships at the crèche.

"she's got lots of [toys] at home with her. It's just there's no babies her age, so mixing with that age is the greatest thing about it all"

“... and he knows all the girls, he calls them by their names and they are friends. They built up a relationship...”

Without the crèche the children’s social spheres were described as severely limited. Many had been virtually housebound before starting at the crèche. A few people said they preferred the crèche to using childminders because of the greater opportunity to meet more children.

“you’re making friends, playing with other children, whereas childminders maybe she’s got two or three children staying home, just like me, I don’t like that”

Four interviewees found that their children were getting used to interacting with other adults besides parents or carers, such as the crèche workers. The children were said to have both gained more confidence in that area and become less ‘clingy to mum’.

The development of more social skills

Eleven questionnaire respondents said that their child was developing more social skills as a result of attending the crèche. This was echoed in the respite records and by the interviewees, who also expanded a bit on what they felt these social gains had been. Most interviewees were pleased that the crèche experience was teaching their children how to take turns and how to share with others. This was appreciated both by those whose children were the only children in the house and those whose children had previously seemed to bicker and argue a lot with their siblings.

Three people noted that their children were more willing to sit down to eat as they were encouraged to sit at a table and eat with each other at the crèche and felt that their behaviour at mealtimes at home had improved as a result. One person credited the crèche with successfully toilet training their child, which had proved difficult previously.

Happiness, enjoyment and having fun

Children’s happiness was paramount: 37 out of the 38 questionnaire respondents (97%) reported that their children were happy at the crèche. The other person did not answer this question. ‘Being happier’ was also an outcome noted in the respite records. Reported happiness and enjoyment at the crèche was emphasised in the interviews. Ten interviewees said how much their children loved, and were happy at, the crèche.

“he likes everything, just being there, with other kids, enjoying”

“I can see her face and how happy she is there”

All the children were reported to like or even ‘love’ the crèche and to look forward to going there, or be disappointed if they could not go on that day. Many reported that their children were always demanding to go there even on days off and got very excited when they saw the building.

“They look forward to it...and every day when I get them [dressed] and it’s ‘mummy nursery?’ (they call it nursery) ‘nursery? nursery?’.. They miss it...”

“and every time she knew she couldn’t go she was miserable. I have seen her eagerness to get up in the morning once we’ve said ‘you’re going to [the crèche]”

After their initial settling-in period, which was very short for some, most were said to go into the crèche very happily *‘without looking back’*. It was also very clear that if the children were not happy the parents and carers would not have left their children at the crèche and that the child’s happiness was more important than the adult’s need for childcare.

“...all I want for certain.. was that my baby was happy in the crèche”

In a few cases the children were reported to have strong preferences for one crèche or the other, often because they had made more friends at that particular crèche.

Exposure to different activities and experiences

All the interviewees and five questionnaire respondents said that their children benefited from different play activities and experiences than they would have at home. Three people mentioned not having any garden or accessible outdoor play space at home. So being able to use the outdoor area and play equipment at each crèche was appreciated. A number of people said that their child was more stimulated and interested than they had been prior to attending the crèche. Having the space and opportunity to play in comparison to the lack of these facilities at home was a recorded outcome in the respite records.

Being able to play in a safe, tailored, environment was mentioned as a benefit by a few people, especially as the outdoor play equipment was proportionately the right size for children and so safer as well as cleaner than that in parks. In practice therefore this in turn made it more accessible than many parks.

Most interviewees said that they knew their child loved the painting, art-work, play-doh, face paints, water play, sand play and other ‘messy play’ that they could do at the crèche and which most could not do at home.

“because she’s so small she tend to put it on the wall, so no playing with paints in here...”

“Painting I wouldn’t allow... they will get on the walls, they will be painting each other [and the baby]”

Four people reported their children were learning songs, nursery rhymes and dancing which they would not have done at home. Some parents said that they were learning the children’s songs and rhymes from the children for the first time themselves. Parents who had not grown up or attended school in Britain, or for whom English was an additional language, appreciated this chance to learn with the children, reinforce their English language skills and to help them learn an aspect of local culture.

Three parents mentioned that their children were eating a wider variety of food at the crèche and sitting down to eat, all of which was said to be a 'struggle' at home.

"...cos he doesn't eat, it's so difficult for him to have vegetables at home and he goes there and he eats everything, probably because he sees other children eating it.."

Opportunity to get used to separation from parent

Four questionnaire respondents and seven interviewees mentioned this as a benefit for their children from using the crèche.

"I had a problem [feeding her] .. and she was used to being just with me and no one else, so now she is ok and spends time elsewhere without me for hours"

Getting a break from their parents and their home, especially where there was illness or other stresses at home was also a major outcome noted in the respite records. In many families, especially where there had been depression or other ill health, the children had been as house-bound and isolated as the parents.

"[she] goes there for a break from here.. there's another world there for her"

Changes in behaviour

Although only one questionnaire respondent mentioned changes in their child's behaviour, improved behaviour was noted by seven interviewees and was also noted in many respite records. Some described their children as becoming 'calmer' and more able to concentrate and focus on an activity and a few said that their child was less destructive at home.

"[child's] attitudes have changed, she used to throw things, break things in the house, she used to get frustrated and all that sort of thing, and going to the crèche...she's a different child, playing with the other children she's not the child I saw a few months back... she reads books, before she'd [rip] them to pieces"

" she's a bit more calm now though, compared to how she used to be...I think it's the fact that she's being around other children"

Many commented on how the staff at each crèche seemed able to gently instill an idea of acceptable behaviour and boundaries and were happy with how this was approached. Some parents said that they had previously found their child's behaviour difficult to deal with, but that this had eased as a result of using the crèche so that time together had become more harmonious.

Improved language skills

Seven questionnaire respondents and five interviewees felt that the crèche had assisted their children to speak more and to use more words. This was also a recorded outcome from respite records.

“songs, words, speaking, ... she doesn't stop basically”

“..and he has just learnt to talk... He couldn't say a word. I was getting really, really worried about him and he's just come out of his shell.. so it's benefited him a lot in his speech and just the person he is...”

Some of the parents who normally did not speak English at home said that their children were also building up a larger English vocabulary than they would have managed otherwise, prior to starting school.

“there was a big development in his speech... and when he's out and about... he speak more English than [home language]”

Many were said to be reciting nursery rhymes and songs in English, which they had learnt at the crèche, which parents enjoyed learning from and singing along with them.

Learning

Many interviewees said that their children were learning a lot through using the crèche, which they attributed to the activities pursued with the children as well as to the interaction with other children and staff.

“I noticed a lot of development, intellectual development, from him since he started going to the crèche, and interacting with other children... cos they play loads of games and ... they do lots of art and crafts for children, painting, its amazing...”

Getting more stimulation was an outcome noted in the respite records. One questionnaire respondent and one interviewee said their children had learnt to name colours at the crèche. Many interviewees were pleased that their children had learnt numbers, letters and a love of stories since attending.

“she's more into reading...you pick up a book and she'll want you to sit down and read with her....”

One mother felt that her eighteen-month-old baby had learnt a lot.

“Well she is learning a lot of things ... a few words as well and she responds to nursery songs, although she doesn't know what they are, but she responds ... I'm happy she's learning as well as staying away from me”

Four people said that the structuring of the crèche session along with the activities pursued prepared children for nursery. One mother said she felt this had been the case for an older children who had started school nursery after using the crèche for a while and who had had no problem settling into the

nursery. Interestingly many families called the crèche either 'nursery' or 'school', partly to help prepare their children for the transition.

Staff reports of benefits for children:

Children who used the crèche under respite referrals were observed and any outcomes noted for either parents or children were noted and reported formally to the family support worker, who recorded these outcomes. Observations about other children were not recorded as such, because of the turnover of children and the potential lack of continuity. Overall the crèche coordinators said that they commonly perceived the following benefits for children:

- Increased confidence
- Increased self-esteem and independence
- Time away and increased ability to detach from parents and carers
- Having fun
- Improved social skills
- The development of friendships and trust with other adults and children
- Understanding of social and personal boundaries
- Reduction of what might previously have been labelled 'behavioural problems', such as smacking, hitting and kicking
- Learning from other children and from the planned activities
- Language development
- Learning to play
- Increased sense of routine and time
- A base for moving onto nursery or school

“ Socially interacting with other children and adults. So you see their speech coming on, you see they learn to play. A lot of children don't know how to play... some children, to start off with they come in and they see the toys and they throw them around, they don't know how to play with them they just pick up everything and they're so excited that they'll throw it all over the place but then you start to see them play with the toys, you show them how the toys work, what they can get from the toys, sitting doing puzzles, puzzle pieces don't just go scattered across the floor. They'll actually sit and start to put them in, they play with each other, imaginative play, they'll play in the home corner, take on roles of mums and dads, granny maybe ... They're happy to be around other adults whereas before they might not so have been”

8. Barriers to achieving objectives

While respondents were very positive about the service they and their children received from the crèches, nonetheless they identified a number of key concerns. The main issues identified by both questionnaire respondents and interviewees and acknowledged by crèche coordinators concerned the length and availability of sessions. Attempts were being made to address these. In addition the future, and especially the future funding, of the crèches caused concern for the crèche coordinators.

Length and number of sessions

Many interviewees and eleven questionnaire respondents (29%) wanted longer opening times.

"[the crèche] is great but would be brilliant if longer period of time"

At the time of this evaluation the ABC crèche was limited to providing five morning sessions which lasted one hour 55 minutes each. It was apparent that most people had not understood why ABC sessions must, until Ofsted registration as a crèche was successfully completed, last for less than two hours. Unfortunately a number of parents took this as ABC staff being very 'inflexible' and awkward.

Some complained that they occasionally needed childcare while attending hospital, Home Office, or other appointments, which were potentially too long and unpredictable to make using the crèche feasible or useful.

Eleven questionnaire respondents (29%) and some interviewees said they would like to see more space, especially at HPC, to cater for more children.

Most said they would like to see more time-out places and had found these especially difficult to access. The crèche coordinators had observed that time-out places over the past year had reduced as places for Sure Start activities had increased. They estimated that they turned away at least ten families per week, for time-out places alone.

Bookings, administration and allocation

The booking system and administration were criticised by a number of interviewees and one questionnaire respondent.

"the care the children get is obviously great, but the administration is a bit disorganised"

Some said that they found that the first-come-first-served system difficult for them to negotiate, given the immense pressure and demand on places. It was reported that crèche places had to be booked as soon as an activity was announced, but that usually there were not enough places even if you did.

Some interviewees had been disappointed and felt that Sure Start Holloway made somewhat misleading and unrealistic promises regarding crèche facilities for activities, when in reality the number of places was very limited. Three people reported not being able to attend community involvement activities or classes because of the lack of crèche places. The crèche coordinators made similar observations:

“Sure Start wants to run this exciting activity. Gets in about 20 odd parents and guarantees that they’re all going to get a crèche space. They don’t, and we end up with disappointed parents and this person looking rather stressed, because we’d said ‘no’ and ‘you have to take the babies in [with you]’ “

Some of the issues mentioned above may also indicate difficulties in how information is conveyed to families. The crèche coordinators reported that they regularly got the blame for the lack of places by disappointed families.

“... I end up being the person who has to [tell them]. ‘But so and so says I can be in, I booked weeks ago’. But unfortunately, so have other parents, and I end up having to be the person that takes ... the flak from parents as well.”

Some interviewees and the crèche coordinators also reported that there was a problem of people not turning up to use their booked place. They felt that if the crèche was notified in advance these places could have been passed on to others, especially those who wanted time-out.

“If we know that there’s somebody that was wanting that space we could phone them and say, look, I am actually able to fit your child in tomorrow, but sometimes we don’t get a call at all or we might get a call halfway through the session saying, ‘oh sorry forgot I had a crèche session today’ and [we say] ‘oh that’s OK don’t worry about it, never mind’... it can become quite frustrating.

The crèche workers observed that the places pre-booked for Sure Start classes, meetings and other activities often suffered from people not taking up their allocated places. However this usually only became apparent too late to offer the places to others. In turn this created an uneconomical use of the crèche. They felt that some of this was attributable to the administration of crèches bookings, the fact that Sure Start was sited in a separate building and an occasional gap in communication. At the time of writing, efforts were being made by Sure Start Holloway and the crèches to address this.

Equitable access

There was a perception amongst interviewees that the crèches were used by a small number of families. It was felt that in practice only those who booked a place as soon as a Sure Start activity was announced would get a place. This meant that those already using the crèche or Sure Start activities were also most likely to find out first about subsequent activities and thus be in a better position to book the crèche. For some accessing accurate information was a problem, aggravated if English was not their first language.

Two said they found it difficult and too expensive to ring the crèche all the time and possibly missed places because of this. Others complained that messages were never returned which exacerbated access difficulties.

“ a core group of people who use Sure Start a lot and they're in the system, as it were. But for people like me, who come in and out just a little bit, it's quite difficult to get in there and access that.... That's why other people may not have got picked up, or may not have the time, or may not have the language, or the contacts and perseverance- a lot of people. If you leave messages on answer phones, somebody doesn't ring you back.”

The crèche coordinators shared some interviewees' views that the crèche places seemed to be predominantly used by a relatively small number of families due to a mixture of reasons, such as familiarity with Sure Start, linguistic proficiency and being more 'sussed' about the systems in use.

“I just feel that sometimes it means that a lot of other families do miss out because the same families are accessing everything over and over again”

However the monitoring data show that only a handful of children could be called 'heavy users'. In both ABC and HPC over half the children had used the crèche five time or less and it is likely that many of the heavy users use the respite crèche.

While over one third of the Sure Start Holloway's registered families had used the crèche over the year 2004/5, the crèche coordinators felt it was difficult to attract and keep families new to Sure Start or new to the crèche. The database records show that a large number of children had only used a crèche once, which perhaps reinforces such concerns. However besides the comments made about the difficulties in booking places, no other information on the nature of any dissatisfaction were given by parents to explain other reasons for not returning to the crèche. It was outside the remit of this evaluation to explore non-use by other families.

The users to date were found to be ethnically diverse and representative of the local population in terms of ethnicity, but no other indicators of need are collated or could be assessed. However the methods used to allocate respite crèche places certainly seem to try to address need on an individual basis.

Funding

Both crèche coordinators were very concerned about how the future reduction of Sure Start funding would affect crèche provision. Neither crèche had yet successfully identified alternative sources of funding. Indeed the small amount of contracting to City and Islington College for crèche places at ABC had proved problematic when they had run out of money at Easter and Sure Start had had to step in to meet these costs from April to September. Equally, relying on just one funder also caused some inevitable tension, as this effectively meant that Sure Start directed crèche planning and allocation of places, although each crèche had its own autonomous management.

HPC reported that although Sure Start funding was provided quarterly in advance they experienced difficulties making ends meet, which created problems including retaining longer-term staff.. However Sure Start felt that much of this was due to HPC's lack of core funding for its general running costs and activities besides the crèche and its disproportionate reliance on Sure Start funding. The current SLA states that the Sure Start grant is expected to cover 20% of HPC running costs.

"We've had times when we haven't been able to pay staff and we've had to wait for cheques to clear, money to come in, clear the bank and then we've told staff that 'you will get paid, to get hold of your cheque, put them in in two weeks time, you will get paid then'"

Despite Sure Start funding, HPC reported that they had insufficient money for equipment, toys and maintenance within annual SLAs, to the extent that they commonly took donations of toys from parents and staff undertook the decoration and maintenance tasks.

"It needs maintenance and there's been no money for maintenance within the crèche itself and within the garden area"

Moreover, the garden which had taken almost £25,000 to design and build was reported to have been poorly designed for the age of children using the crèche. For example the sand-pit and slide were more suitable for slightly older children and therefore most crèche children could not use these as independently as intended. The revenue funding was described as inadequate to cover much on-going, essential maintenance.

Staffing

The crèche coordinators felt that inadequate time was allowed for them to provide good supervision to staff due to the various demands on their role, which related in turn to funding.

Funding also made it difficult to secure further professional training for staff development. HPC in particular said they could normally only access courses which were free. However the SLA with Sure Start shows that money was allocated for staff training.

Improvements already planned

At the time of this evaluation many of the difficulties concerning opening hours and availability were already been recognised by the crèche coordinators and efforts were being made to address these.

For instance, ABC was in the process of achieving full registration as a crèche by Ofsted. It was inspected in May 2005 and expected the registration process to be completed by November 2005. It was hoped that with full registration the sessions could be extended to last three to four hours each and that extra afternoon sessions could also be provided. However the funding for this extension of services had not yet been identified.

HPC had applied to have some of its other rooms registered by Ofsted and for the age limit to be extended to include five year olds, so that more children could be looked after.

The crèches and Sure Start officers had also started discussing ways of improving the booking and allocation system to address the issue of non-attendance.

9. Conclusion

1. The crèche provision, organisation and management

Over 2002/3 Sure Start Holloway funded the creation of two new purpose-built crèche facilities in its programme area; the Holloway Parents' Centre (HPC) and the Andover Brightstart Centre (ABC). Since then Sure Start Holloway has funded the provision of approximately 140 half-day crèche places per week at these centres. Both ABC and HPC are independent, not-for-profit agencies with their own management structures and systems and predominantly reliant on Sure Start for their funding. At the time of this study, each employed a full-time crèche coordinator who has operational responsibility for staffing and planning.

Sure Start Holloway contracts the crèches and some other facilities under Service Level Agreements, which stipulate how the crèches are expected to help meet Sure Start aims and objectives and provide specific outcomes. Free crèche places are intended to be available to all Sure Start Holloway families to enable them to attend Sure Start activities such as classes, workshops and meetings; or get respite from parenting if they are in stressful circumstances, or to have time-out or a break from childcare for whatever reason.

2. Patterns of use and characteristics of those who use the crèche

According to Sure Start Holloway's database records, a total of 165 children made 2169 visits to the two crèches over the year 2004/5. Slightly more children (116) used the ABC crèche in comparison to HPC (85), but this is probably attributable to its larger capacity. Although there was a perception amongst staff and interviewees that a relatively small number of people made very heavy use of the crèche this was not borne out by an examination of the database records. These showed that the vast majority of children (85% and 91%) had used the crèches less than twenty times, or less than once per week, over the year 2004/5 and that over half the children had used them less than five times each.

In terms of age, in ABC 62% were aged two and three years of age and in HPC the majority of children were slightly younger - 60% were aged one or two.

In terms of ethnicity, both crèches were used by a diverse range of children, and broadly reflected the ethnicity ratios in the local population of children. Approximately four in ten children were Black or Black British and another 40% were White.

3. Why people used the crèche facilities, their views on the provision and what outcomes they and their children have experienced

According to the database the highest proportion of use (53%) was to attend Sure Start classes, meetings or other activities. Just over one third of use was for time-out.

Similarly, the largest group of questionnaire respondents (58%) had used the crèche for a Sure Start activity, class or meeting that day. In order the twelve interviewees reported using the crèche most for Sure Start activities, respite referral, an opportunity for adults and children to get a break from each other and for adults to deal with domestic issues. Moreover interviewees reported a number of different reasons for using the crèche, which had changed over time and with their own changing needs and circumstances. The reasons noted for the respite referrals indicate that the respite crèche fits Sure Start Holloway's broader aims and objectives to provide support to families. Thus overall the crèche use fitted closely within and supported Sure Start's aims and activities.

Very high levels of satisfaction were found. Respondents were particularly pleased with how staff interacted with and cared for their children, the range of activities, equipment and toys provided, the convenient location and the purpose-designed premises. However some discontent about the availability and length of sessions was obvious and some concerns were raised about how equitable the booking procedures were in practice.

Parents and carers reported a large number of benefits for themselves and their children, which were reinforced by the observations of staff. They particularly appreciated the opportunity the crèches gave them to attend meetings and classes, which in turn they felt had led to personal, social and other benefits. Getting to know more people in the area was valued, especially by those who had no family or friends living locally. The crèche provided the opportunity to deal with pressures and problems, including ill-health, as well as to get on with domestic chores. Getting a short break from childcare helped many to cope better and was said to be a huge benefit for those using the respite crèche.

It is not possible in a short-term evaluation of this nature to identify precise outcomes for children solely attributable to the input from the crèches. Hence the outcomes reported relied on the perceptions and observations of staff and may also be partly due to other intervening factors. Nonetheless children were described as getting many benefits from attendance and undergoing several changes which parents and staff attributed to the crèche. Clearly the opportunity provided to socialise and play with more children and the development of more social skills were two very highly valued benefits. This may reflect many families' isolation and lack of social contacts in the area.

Children were reported to be very happy at, and to look forward to going back to, the crèche, which adults said was vital. Regardless of how much they needed childcare most said that they would not leave their children in the crèche if they were not happy there. Parents and carers said their children enjoyed the exposure to different activities and more play equipment than they would have otherwise encountered. Many felt their children had learnt a lot, had

developed more, had acquired better language and social skills, were more confident and independent and were more able to spend time away from parents than previously.

4. The extent to which Sure Start Holloway's aims and objectives and the needs of families are being met by the crèche provision

Section 2 sets out the numerous aims, objectives, targets and outcomes the crèches are expected to meet. Altogether the findings, especially the range of interrelated outcomes reported by parents and staff, indicate that the crèches are successful in supporting various Sure Start aims and objectives. The crèches obviously meet at least two primary Sure Start aims to '*improve children's life chances*', namely: the provision of services, which support families and parents; and the development of play, learning and childcare.

Some affirmation of the 'quality' of the provision can be gauged from successful registration with Ofsted and from the positive report given by Ofsted in the case of HPC to date. Moreover, the very high levels of satisfaction reported by parents and carers and the comments they made indicate that they consider the crèches to be of high quality. Clearly children would not have been left in the crèches if the parents or carers had doubts about the quality of provision and care given to their child. Nearly half of the parents and carers surveyed felt satisfied that the crèches met their childcare needs.

Besides enabling access to good quality child-care provision, the crèches gave parents and carers the opportunity to attend workshops and classes, some of which are directly related to improving parenting knowledge and skills. A number of benefits were also reported for children, but it must be noted that these derived from parents' and staff perceptions. This evaluation cannot measure exactly the extent to which these outcomes are attributable to attending the crèches, as opposed to other influences in the children's lives.

Meeting specific Sure Start aims and objectives

- i) '*Promote the physical, intellectual and social development of children, particularly those who are disadvantaged*': On the basis of what was reported by parents, carers and staff the crèches do indeed seem to contribute to meeting this objective. Moreover, in addition to living in a disadvantaged area, many interviewees faced other, severe, individual disadvantages and challenges and could not have accessed any other childcare. Most could not have provided the type or degree of stimulation and resources for their children which were provided by the crèches.
- ii) '*To improve the social and emotional development of young children*': Most parents and carers felt that their children had developed more social skills and many were reported to be much calmer and focused when at home. Again given many families' social isolation the crèches offered scope for social interaction with both other children and adults which was not available otherwise.

- iii) *'Improve the health of young children'*: Although this was not actually specified in the SLA with the crèches, it may actually be addressed through providing children with greater opportunities to play, be physically and mentally active, explore, have fun, learn healthy eating habits and allowing children to get a break from sometimes stressful home lives.
- iv) *'To improve children's ability to learn'*: Parents, carers and staff commonly reported that the children had learned 'how to play' as well as how to focus and concentrate on an activity. Some were said to have improved their language and other specific skills.
- v) *'To strengthen families and communities'*: Sure Start nationally expects this to be achieved through enabling people to participate in meetings and in Sure Start management as well as through increasing employment amongst families. As such, this objective was difficult to assess from a short-term study of this nature. However the crèches were used by many parents and carers to attend meetings, training courses and activities to improve skills. In the future these may enhance their local participation in meetings and employability. Certainly those interviewed felt that directly and indirectly the crèche had helped them cope better as parents, which in turn benefited the whole family.

Meeting specified targets and outcomes

Many of these overlap with aims and objectives described above and the outcomes desired

- *'Providing access to quality childcare to support children's' learning and social development'* This is already addressed above and confirmed by interviews, other respondents, staff, and the Ofsted inspection for HPC.
- *'Providing information and support to parents.'* The crèches were reported to provide invaluable support to parents and enabled parents to attend parenting skills workshops and longer parenting courses. Many interviewees reported learning very useful information and insights to assist their parenting through these sessions. However this evaluation could not assess the longer-term effects of these courses on parenting.
- *'Support parents to access training and employment and support capacity building and parents' involvement in the programme'*: The crèches were found to have helped many to access training, which may in turn would hopefully enhance their longer-term employability. However the crèche facilities were not intended and indeed were too limited to meet the childcare needs for anyone working. A number of crèche places were reserved for people attending community involvement meetings, such as the Parents' Forum, and the records show that attending meetings was a major reason for using the crèches. However some problems were reported with their allocation and thus some parents' access to these meetings.
- *'Providing access through childcare to other service provision'*: The crèche certainly seemed successful in achieving this. Most families used the

crèche in order to access Sure Start, health and other services. This in turn enabled many families to address other serious issues in their lives such as housing and health difficulties. Moreover many services were indirectly made available at, or accessed via, the crèche, such as child psychology and speech and language advice.

- *'Access to flexible and accessible childcare'*: Through creating and subsidising these crèches, Sure Start Holloway had provided access to childcare which was not otherwise available to families in the area. Making the services free had also enhanced access and most interviewees said they could not have afforded childcare at the normal rates. Moreover the Holloway area had high levels of deprivation. Users reported finding the crèches very accessible in terms of location and the approachability of the staff. Allocations to the respite crèche were found to be particularly flexible and responsive to families' needs.

Unfortunately an inevitable tension was found between the high and apparently increasing demand and the limited number of places. While time-out places were very desired, these were becoming more limited due to the increasing number of places used for Sure Start activities, which in itself is desirable and in keeping with Sure Start's aims. The limitation on spaces, combined with difficulties in booking places and allocation, needs addressing to maximise equitable access.

- *Additional outcomes specified for ABC*: The findings show that access to other services were enabled by the ABC crèche and that families on the Andover Estate were the highest users of this crèche. Unfortunately promoting participating in the management board and the creation of a discrete parents' forum had proved difficult, mainly because of users' limited time to give to this. Separate family support by ABC was planned to start in September 2005, after this evaluation was completed.

5. The extent to which the crèche provision enhanced family support

Crèche provision was integral to family support and clearly those referred to the respite crèche had extensive needs and reported definite benefits from using the crèche. Most said it enabled them to tackle some of the stressful issues in their lives and get some relief from childcare. It also enabled children and parents to have some time apart. These outcomes were echoed by the records kept by the family support workers and by the observations of crèche coordinators. Many of those who were referred to the respite crèche had enjoyed relatively long-term access to it, which serves as an indication of both their difficult circumstances and of Sure Start's efforts and responsiveness to help families deal with these.

6. The unit cost of crèche provision

This evaluation was asked to examine the unit cost of crèche provision at each venue. However it must be stressed that this is not an analysis of cost effectiveness. No comparison is attempted here between the costs of the Holloway crèches and an average or typical cost of similar types of childcare provision. Indeed when investigated no national or local benchmark could be found by which to judge whether a particular cost counts objectively as 'cheap' or 'expensive', let alone 'good value'. Moreover even if available, any such benchmark would be of questionable reliability, as the precise calculation would depend on many interdependent and often locally specific, variables as well as a fair degree of subjective judgement. Furthermore it must be noted that the accuracy of the figures given rely in turn on the accuracy of the data available, such as the numbers of crèche users.

The initial capital funding Sure Start Holloway provided for developing the buildings and transforming them into suitable premises for crèches was:

- £74,299 for HPC and
- £41,593 for ABC.

Revenue funding provided by Sure Start since set up also covers stay and play provision, outreach support to families and some other facilities such as meeting rooms and parenting skills courses. Therefore, each crèche was asked to calculate the cost for the crèche alone and provided the following figures.

For HPC:

The grant for 2004/5 was £46,980, out of which £43,305 went towards the crèche. This covers all overheads connected with the crèche as well as staffing and management. This means that the average unit cost of each of the 50.5 places was £22.56 (over 38 weeks per annum) on the basis of all places being used. In practice the unit costs come out higher as not all places booked are used and on average only 24 places were used each week.

The grant for 2005/6 was £46,600, out of which £39,360 has been allocated to the crèche. This means that each of the 55 places per week would cost £18.35 (over 39 weeks).

For ABC

The grant from Sure Start for the five months, November 2004 to end March 2005, was £29,212. This covers staffing and all overheads connected with the crèche for that period. However the costs associated with ABC's direct managed by Sure Start for the period April to November are not available.

According to ABC figures the actual amount spent on the crèche for that period was £18,131.09. This produces an average cost of £12.59 per place on the basis of 90 places per week over sixteen weeks. In reality the unit costs come out higher as not all places booked were used and on average only 33 places per week were used, according to the data provided.

ABC's grant for 2005/6 (full year) is £45,581. Out of this ABC estimates that the crèche will cost £42,271. The SLA states 77 to 92 places per week will be used for Sure Start including provision for courses held at City and Islington College. This means that each crèche place would cost between £12.78 and £14 per child over a 39-week period.

As mentioned already no reliable benchmark is available on which to judge the relative costs of providing crèche facilities. Besides the costs of accommodation the majority of the costs in both crèches are for staff, which is unavoidable and cannot be reduced if the crèches are to retain both quality provision and legal compliance with Ofsted regulations, such as the minimum ratio of staff to children. The relatively higher unit costs at HPC are likely to be somewhat attributable to its more limited capacity. The smaller space means that fewer children can be catered for at any one time. Unfortunately it is not easy to see how this can be resolved without creating more registered childcare space at this venue.

7. Implications for the development of Children Centres locally

These purpose built and well-equipped local crèches have taken considerable financial and other investment. Simultaneously a body of expertise and local knowledge has been developed and the crèches have become increasingly familiar to local families.

The environment created by and the input from staff were highly valued and considered as, or more, important than most other aspects, indicating that successful childcare facilities require much more than a good building.

Given the indications of unmet demand at both these crèches, it is quite likely that any Children's Centre childcare facility would need to supplement rather than replace these crèches. Furthermore for those on low incomes there will remain a need for free or very low cost childcare. Ideally these facilities should be built on and incorporated into further Children's Centres' plans rather than being replaced by new premises. However the proposed Children's Centre on Hornsey Road would be relatively close to both existing venues.

At the time of this evaluation it was planned that the Mitford Sure Start Children's Centre would promote and support childminding, as well as provide 48 full-time nursery places and crèche facilities. The latter is planned to provide care for up to fifteen children at any one time under similar criteria as currently applies, such as attending meetings and courses (Sure Start Holloway Service Plan for 2005/6 and information from programme manager).

It is notable that a number of interviewees clearly preferred a shared childcare facility such as a crèche or nursery to childminders, on the basis that the contact with children felt more transparent and therefore more trustworthy. Many families in this evaluation also showed a preference for crèches to

nurseries as they prefer to provide the main child care themselves. This indicates that a mix of childcare facilities are best for meeting families' childcare needs and that for example increasing childminding capacity would in itself only meet some needs.

Moreover there were some indications in the evaluation that many could not travel further to a crèche sited elsewhere, especially those experiencing mental or physical ill health. Hence maintaining very local facilities such as on the Andover Estate is crucial to access.

Overall

The crèches provided good quality childcare and were highly valued by families. They were reported to help meet families' needs, on their own and in association with other Sure Start services.

Crèche facilities were clearly integral to Sure Start Holloway's overall support to local families and certainly helped meet their aims and objectives. They were of particular assistance to those accessing respite places.

10. Recommendations

- Increase the length of sessions at ABC at least, if not at both facilities.
- Increase the number of sessions available each week at ABC.
- Explore ways to increase the space and capacity at HPC.
- Continue the referrals to the respite crèche for those needing family support.
- Explore methods to improve the booking and allocation systems, in particular to make access more coordinated and equitable.
- Increase efficiency by exploring the causes of, and ways to reduce, the number of unused booked places.
- Improve the monitoring of use in both crèches.
- Record the degree of unmet need, especially for those on low incomes in the area. This could usefully include the numbers turned away from sessions, why some families do not use the crèche and why some only use it to a limited extent.
- Streamline and simplify the aims, objectives and targets in the Service Level Agreements.
- As substantial amounts of money have gone into building, equipping and developing quality childcare facilities which are highly valued by users, it would be appropriate to assist both crèches to explore and develop future, alternative funding strategies, especially in the context of the development of children's centres.
- Incorporate these existing facilities into, and use the existing knowledge and experience base to inform the plans for, future Children's Centres.