Consultation:
Involving fathers in Sure Start

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# Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Section 1.0 Introduction

1.1. Aims and objectives

At present most services delivered by the Eight Village Sure Start programme are accessed by female parents/carers. Low service uptake by fathers\(^1\) is a problem experienced by many Sure Start programmes nationwide. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify ways of engaging more fathers into the Sure Start programme. To achieve this, the evaluation consisted of the following aims:

- To consult with fathers to identify what types of activities, support and advice they would like Sure Start to provide.
- To consult with fathers to identify when (times and days) they would like to access activities support and advice.
- Identify whether fathers face any barriers in accessing Sure Start services.
- To identify from the literature what works with fathers and the barriers they face in accessing Sure Start services.

Section 2.0 Methodology

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to identify the types of services that fathers would like Sure Start to provide. The questionnaire was used to identify the days of the week and times of the week respondents would like to attend activities or obtain support/advice. The questionnaire also measured the barriers faced by fathers in accessing Sure Start services. The questionnaire was completed by 42 fathers.

Section 3.0 and 4.0 Evaluation Findings and Discussion

Findings suggest that the programme can engage more local fathers if services are male orientated and reflect their interests. However, before these services are delivered the programme needs to address a number of barriers that limit their engagement within the Sure Start programme.

Barriers faced in accessing Sure Start services

Almost all fathers (39 respondents - 93%) faced one or more barriers in accessing Sure Start services. The most prevalent barriers were: did not know service was available (25 responses - 60%); activities are just for women (16 responses -38%);

\(^1\) Within this report fathers refers to male parents/carers
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I work and activities are not available in the evenings (11 responses -26%); inconvenient opening times (8 responses -19%).

Lack of awareness about Sure Start

A large proportion (60%) of fathers were not aware of Sure Start and/or the dads worker. Further, some fathers expressed that the programme needs to do more in advertising activities and it’s dads worker within the local community (12 respondents or 29%). This finding suggests that the programme needs to be publicised and marketed more effectively towards fathers, so as to increase their awareness of Sure Start.

Creating a male friendly environment

A number of fathers expressed that Sure Start activities are just for women (16 fathers – 38%). This perception needs to be broken in order to engage more local fathers within the programme. Working with fathers is an organisational issue which needs to be addressed by all Sure Start staff and partner agencies. This not only involves creating activities for fathers but also re-shaping the Sure Start programme to ensure that all activities and services are ‘male friendly’.

Activities fathers would like to see provided

Fathers overwhelmingly expressed that they would like to see more male orientated activities provided. The most popular activities in order of preference were 5 a-side football (81%), fathers and toddler group (62%), day trips and outings (57%), D.I.Y. workshops (38%), gym training (33%) and training opportunities (29%). Providing targeted activities may help to engage more fathers within the programme.

Support and advice fathers would like to see provided

The most popular types of support/advice were child first-aid (52% of fathers), advice on children’s development (40% of fathers) and advice on dealing with children’s behaviour (45% of fathers). Some of these types of support/advice could be run along the activities that fathers expressed an interest in. It is important that fathers are still encouraged to access services already provided by the programme.

More fathers expressed that they would prefer to obtain support and advice on legal matters and fathers rights in a one-to-one context. If there is a demand support and advice could be provided within drop-in sessions.

Out of hours services

Evidence suggests that providing targeted services during the evenings and at weekends may help to engage more working fathers (Sure Start North Leyton, 2004; Sure Start Weston, 2003 and NESS 2003). This is supported by the findings in the present evaluation as many fathers faced barriers in accessing Sure Start services.
as they were working and activities are not available in the evenings (11 responses - 26%) and/or due to inconvenient opening times (8 responses - 19%). More fathers wanted services to be provided in the weekday evenings from 5.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. Saturday mornings were also quite popular choice for activities and support/advice.

Gender role stereotypes

The present evaluation did not pick up any evidence that traditional gender roles limit fathers caring responsibilities for their child. However, The National Evaluation of Sure Start (2003) identified that traditional, gendered attitude towards childcare and male-female roles may act as a barrier to dad’s involvement in Sure Start programmes. ‘Father’s may have the attitude that childcare is the mother’s responsibility and in turn will not get involved in Sure Start activities’ (Sure Start North Leyton, 2004). It is likely that these stereotypes apply to some fathers within the programme area.

Section 5.0 Summary and Conclusions

- Almost all fathers faced one or more barriers in accessing Sure Start services. To engage more local fathers the programme needs to develop a strategy to address the barriers that fathers face in accessing Sure Start services. If these are not addressed properly it is likely that the programme will continue to reach very low numbers of fathers from the local community.

- Providing targeted services may help to engage more fathers within the programme and may also act as a “stepping stone” for fathers to become involved in Sure Start services. Fathers have different individual needs. Some fathers will prefer to obtain support and advice in a group context and others in a one-to-one context. Even when providing targeted services specifically for fathers, they still need to be encouraged to access other services across the programme.

- Activities used to engage fathers at first may not be directly related to Sure Starts objectives. However, these activities can be used as a stepping stone to other services provided by the programme. If fathers are well informed and given opportunity to share in the care and support of their children, they themselves will have the opportunity to further their personal development and their children will benefit in terms of physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. By engaging more fathers within the programme will not only benefit families within the local area, but will also help the programme to meet it’s targets and objectives.

- The programme needs to be publicised and marketed more effectively towards fathers, so as to increase their awareness of Sure Start. Information about the programme and dads worker needs to be widely publicised in local places that fathers are more likely to visit.
• Addressing the barriers and providing services that reflect fathers interests should increase the programmes engagement with them. However, as fathers are one of the programmes ‘hard to reach groups’ the programme has to recognise that their may be a lack of visible results in a short timescale. During this time it is important that the dads worker continues to learn from the good practice from both regional and national programmes/services in how they deliver services and engage fathers.

Section 6.0 Recommendations

Before services can be developed the programme needs to address the barriers that fathers face in accessing Sure Start services. If these are not addressed effectively it is likely that the programme will continue to reach very low numbers of fathers from the local community. A strategy to engage more local fathers should consist of the following factors:

Developing a male friendly environment

• Engaging fathers within the programme should not be the sole responsibility of the dads worker. This commitment needs to be spread across the whole team.

• Services need to be reshaped to encourage more fathers to attend. This can be achieved by promoting a father friendly culture and policies within the programme and partner agencies.

• Sure Start staff and partner agencies need to be provided with training and information to increase their awareness and understanding of father related issues. This will help to make the service more male friendly. Local fathers could also receive training to deliver this work.

Developing targeted services

• To engage more local fathers services should be made more male friendly by targeting services towards them. There is scope to link support/advice with activities that fathers expressed an interest in. Child-first aid could be delivered within a fathers and toddler group, football sessions or D.I.Y. workshops. It also may be beneficial to run other types of support and advice alongside these sessions (e.g. children's development, dealing with children’s behaviour, home safety, cooking/nutrition, benefits/ money and health issues for fathers). Even when providing targeted services to fathers, it is important that they are still encouraged to access support and advice that the programme already provides.
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- Consult with local fathers to see if there is a demand for one-to-one drop in and advice sessions for advice on issues such as legal matters and fathers rights.

- Any services provided specifically for fathers need to be piloted for a 6-8 week period. At the end of each pilot the service should be reviewed and evaluated to measure the take up and cost-effectiveness of activities.

Out of hours services

- It is of paramount importance that in order to engage local fathers within the programme services not only need to be delivered in the daytime, but also delivered during weekday evenings and Saturday mornings. Delivering services in this way will make services more accessible to working fathers.

Publicity and marketing

- Publicity and marketing needs to be targeted towards fathers to increase their awareness of the programme/dads worker. Publicity should be placed in venues that fathers are likely to be found. Face-to-face contact should be established at these venues. To increase fathers understanding and awareness of Sure Start it may also be worthwhile in developing a welcome/membership pack for fathers.

Follow up work

- It is important that fathers who completed the questionnaire are followed up to provide the types of support/advice that they require. The contact details of fathers who expressed an interest in accessing training and becoming volunteers should be passed onto the parent/carer co-ordinator so that they can gain the information they require.

- Fathers who completed the questionnaire and left contact details need to be followed up to see what locations they would access services and at what times. Consulting in this way should increase the numbers of fathers who attend activities.

- It is important that the fathers who expressed an interest in becoming volunteers are also followed up. Encouraging local fathers to deliver Sure Start services may increase local interest and uptake. This will also lessen the amount of work for the dad’s worker and increase the availability of services for fathers.
Developing a database

- The programme has recently invested in a new database. It is important that this database is used to record the contact details of local fathers. This information is critical for the dads worker to engage more local fathers.
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Section 1.0  Introduction

1.1. Aims and objectives

At present most services delivered by the Eight Village Sure Start programme are accessed by female parents/carers. Low service uptake by fathers1 is a problem experienced by many Sure Start programmes nationwide. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify ways of engaging more father’s into the Sure Start programme. To achieve this the evaluation consisted of the following aims:

- To consult with fathers to identify what types of activities, support and advice they would like Sure Start to provide.
- To consult with fathers to identify when (times and days) they would like to access activities, support and advice.
- Identify whether fathers face any barriers in accessing Sure Start services.
- To identify from the literature what works with fathers and the barriers they face in accessing Sure Start services.

1.2 Profile of the Eight Village area

Eight Village Sure Start is a fifth round programme, which commenced in April 2002. The area that makes up Eight Village lies about a mile to the North East of Wolverhampton town centre. The area is ethnically diverse, where over 37 languages are spoken. The area is made up of eight distinctive communities, each with particular needs and priorities. These include Heath Town, Springfield, Park Village, New Park Village, Heath Park, Nordley, Hickman and Wednesfield Village.

1.3 What steps has the programme taken to engage fathers

Fathers are a ‘hard to reach group’ within the local community, which the programme has found difficult to engage. Due to this in April 2004 a dads worker was employed within the family support team. The primary aim of the dads support worker is to engage more local fathers within Sure Start services. The dads worker has focused his efforts on raising awareness and making contact with local fathers. Within the last year the dads worker has supported approximately seven local fathers.

During 2004 local fathers were consulted with to identify what activities they would like to see Sure Start to provide for them. More fathers expressed a need for a father and toddler group. Fathers decided on where and when the group would run. The group ran on a Saturday morning for 6 weeks. At the end of this trial period the group ended as only 1-3 fathers were attending each group.
Evaluation: Involving fathers in Sure Start

It is possible that few fathers attended the groups as it was difficult to engage many of them within the consultation process. Further, consultation did not ask whether they faced any barriers in accessing Sure Start services. Previous research suggests that fathers face a number of barriers in accessing Sure Start services. These need to be understood and addressed in order to provide accessible services to fathers.

1.4 Barriers faced by fathers in accessing Sure Start services

Most Sure Start programmes report low levels of father involvement (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2003). Evaluation findings from Sure Start programmes across the country suggest that fathers face very similar barriers in accessing Sure Start services.

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) has conducted a major evaluation of Sure Start programmes’ engagement with fathers (Father’s in Sure Start, 2003). Findings suggest that parents perceive Sure Start as ‘very female orientated and few fathers feel confident enough to use it’. The evaluation identified a number barriers that limit fathers access to Sure Start services:

- Predominantly female environment/lack of male presence
- Sure Start opening hours and fathers’ employment hours
- Traditional, gendered attitude towards childcare and male-female roles: ‘mother knows best’
- Female-centred orientation of services
- Lack of knowledge about Sure Start

Supporting evidence from Sure Start North Leyton (2004) suggests a number of barriers that make fathers a ‘hard to reach’ group. These may be cultural attitudes where fathers may have the attitude that childcare is the mother’s responsibility and in turn will not get involved in Sure Start activities. Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree foundation has indicated many fathers are comfortable ‘earning their place’ through their role as provider, compared with the challenges of trying to become an 'involved' father (Fathers, Work and Family Life 1999).

Further, socio-economic factors may serve as a major barrier as many father’s work long hours or shifts. Statistics show that British fathers work longer hours than fathers anywhere else in Europe. This will severely limit the time they can spend with their children. This is supported by finding from Sure Start North Leyton (2004) where fathers expressed that they could only access services at the evenings or weekends. In addition to this many fathers had limited awareness of Sure Start services.
1.5 What steps can be taken to engage fathers within Sure Start services

The national evaluation of Sure Start reviewed the extent of men's/fathers’ involvement in 118 round 1 and 2 Sure Start programmes (Melhuish, et al., 2003). This study identified successful strategies for engaging fathers:

- Fathers are more likely to take part in outdoor, fun-type activities designed specifically for them. Events for fathers and children can be a stepping stone for fathers to become involved in integrated services for families.

- Providing services in the evening and weekends can encourage participation from working fathers.

- Fathers continued to come to Sure Start when they had seen a positive benefit to themselves or their children from a service.

- In programmes with high father involvement there was an attempt to spread commitment to fathers to every aspect of the programme and to everyone involved. There was a joined-up approach to involving fathers.

- An important encouragement for fathers was the presence of a staff member dedicated to involving them. Such workers have helped Sure Start programmes discover and respond to issues that affect fathers e.g. concerns about child development or anger management.

1.6 Developing a male friendly culture

Sure Start Meden Valley (2004) found that ‘men felt the biggest hurdle to get over was convincing dads that they were welcome, and that Sure Start was for them and not just for women’. Findings from Sure Start Maltby (2004) suggest that that this may be achieved by employing more male staff. Supporting this Tunstill (2005) suggests that having more men working within the team encourages the more reluctant fathers or male carers from the community to use Sure Start services (National Evaluation of Sure Start). Further, increasing staffs awareness and understanding of father related issues can help ‘to make the service more dad/working parent friendly’ (Sure Start Maltby, 2004). Recommendations from an evaluation conducted by Sure Start Weston (2003) suggest that Sure Start can be made more male friendly by ‘improving marketing and publicity by increasing the publicity targeted at dads and developing a welcome pack for dads’.

1.7 Out of hours services

Consultation from Sure Start Meden Valley (2004) suggests that fathers need ‘more events in the evening and weekends’. This finding is supported by evidence from
other Sure Start programmes where fathers have suggested that Sure Start can be made more accessible by opening services on Saturdays and in the evenings (Sure Start Weston, 2003 and Sure Start Maltby, 2004).

1.8 Different types of fathers

An evaluation from North Leyton Sure Start (2004) points out that to provide services for fathers, services need to recognise that there are many different types of male carers. Successful projects working with fathers have targeted services to specific groups such as working and non-working fathers, first-time fathers etc. ‘However, the evaluation found that despite the diversity of fathers, there are some features which seem common to many different fathers. In particular, men reported that they preferred physical or activity-based things, rather than talk-based things’ (North Leyton Sure Start, 2004).

1.9 Summary

Evidence suggests that fathers face a number of barriers that limit their access to Sure Start services. These barriers can be addressed by making Sure Start services more male friendly and accessible by increasing staffs awareness of dad related issues; targeting publicity and activities towards fathers; opening services in the evenings and weekends. Evidence suggests that fathers do not belong to a homogenous group and that specific services may be needed to meet their needs. Activities used to engage fathers at first may not be directly related to Sure Starts targets and objectives. However, these activities can be used as a stepping stone to other services provided by the programme. By engaging more fathers within the programme will not only benefit families within the local area, but will also help the programme to meet it’s targets and objectives.
Section 2.0 Method

2.1 Design

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed to identify the types of services that fathers would like Sure Start to provide. The questionnaire identified days of the week and times of the week respondents would like to attend activities or obtain support/advice. The questionnaire also measured the barriers faced by fathers in accessing Sure Start services.

2.2 Sample

An opportunistic sample of 42 fathers completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire stated that only fathers living in the programme area with a child under 4 years old could complete the questionnaire. In total, 19 (45%) questionnaires were completed by fathers living within the programmes catchment area. Fifteen (36%) of the questionnaires were completed by fathers living just outside the programme area. When the Sure Start centre gains Children’s Centre status it is likely that many of these fathers will live within the programme area. Nine (21%) of the fathers did not leave any contact details, so it is not possible to determine where they live.

2.3 Procedure

Sure start staff handed out questionnaires for local fathers to complete during home visits. The majority of questionnaires were completed on two Saturdays at the programmes open day for the new building and at a local carnival day just outside the programme area. Consultation was carried out at weekends so as to engage more working fathers in the process. Respondents were given a gift for completing the questionnaire.
Section 3.0 Evaluation Findings

Results from the 42 completed questionnaires are summarised below in the form of proportions and percentages.

3.1 Activities fathers would like to see provided

Fathers overwhelmingly expressed that they would like to see more male orientated activities provided. The most popular activities in order of preference were 5 a-side football (81%), fathers and toddler group (62%), day trips and outings (57%), D.I.Y. workshops (38%), gym training (33%) and training opportunities (29%). Graph 1 and table 1 below show fathers most preferred activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type</th>
<th>Number of fathers</th>
<th>Percentage of fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 a-side football</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers and toddler group</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trips and outings</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.I.Y. workshops</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym training</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training opportunities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music workshops</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cricket</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Types of support/advice fathers would like to see provided

Graph 2 and table 2 below show the types of support and advice that fathers would like to obtain. In total 31 (74%) out of 42 fathers expressed an interest in receiving advice/support. All types of support/advice were quite popular. In total 24% (10) of respondents were interested in even the least popular type of support/advice (father’s rights and cooking/nutrition advice). However, three types of support/advice were more popular than the others. These included:

- Child first aid (22 fathers - 52%)
- Advice on children’s development (17 fathers – 40%)
- Advice on dealing with children’s behaviour (19 fathers – 45%)

With child first-aid there was a greater preference for this to be delivered in a group format (15 out of 22 fathers). However for the other two popular choices there was no major preference between group and one-to-one support. However, more respondents expressed that they would prefer advice on legal matters and fathers rights to be given as one-to-one support than group support. When looking at the other types of support/advice in most instances there was no overwhelming preference for group or one-to-one support as responses were quite mixed reflecting respondents individual needs.

Graph 2.
Table 2. Types of support and advice that fathers would like to see provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of support/advice</th>
<th>Percentage of fathers who want one-to-one advice/support</th>
<th>Percentage of fathers who want group advice/support</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child first-aid</td>
<td>27% (7)</td>
<td>36% (15)</td>
<td>52% (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home safety</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>29% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking/nutrition advice</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>24% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on legal matters</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>7% (3)</td>
<td>26% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit and money advice</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>29% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health issues for dads</td>
<td>12% (5)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>26% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers rights</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>24% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on children’s development</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>21% (9)</td>
<td>40% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on dealing with children’s behaviour</td>
<td>26% (11)</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>45% (19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Times of day and week fathers would like to see services provided

Graph 3 and table 3 below shows that there was no major agreement on what days of the week respondents would like to attend activities or obtain advice/support. However, graph 4 and table 3 clearly show that more respondents would like such provision to be provided during week day evenings from 5.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday evening were slightly less popular. Saturday mornings were also quite a popular choice for services to be delivered.

Graph 3.
Table 3. Days and times of the week fathers would like to access services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of week</th>
<th>Number/percentage who want services delivered in the evening</th>
<th>Number/percentage who want services to be delivered in the afternoon</th>
<th>Number/percentage who want services to be run in the morning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>38% (16)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>38% (16)</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>33% (14)</td>
<td>12% (5)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>36% (15)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>33% (14)</td>
<td>21% (9)</td>
<td>14% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>24% (10)</td>
<td>31% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>26% (11)</td>
<td>19% (8)</td>
<td>21% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 4.

Times of day that fathers would like to access services

3.4 Barriers faced in accessing Sure Start services

Almost all respondents (39 fathers - 93%) faced one or more barriers in accessing Sure Start services. Only 3 fathers expressed that no barriers were faced. The range of barriers faced was 0-5. On average each respondent faced 2 barriers. Graph 5 and table 4 below show the barriers faced by fathers in accessing Sure Start services. In order of consensus the most prevalent barriers were:

- Did not know service was available (25 responses - 60%)
- Activities are just for women (16 responses - 38%)
- I work and activities are not available in the evenings (11 responses - 26%)
- Inconvenient opening times (8 responses - 19%)
Two related barriers that a number of respondents expressed that they faced in accessing Sure Start services was that services are run at inconvenient times and that some respondents work and activities are not available in the evenings. This is reflected in the earlier finding that more fathers wanted services to be provided in the evenings.

Graph 5.

![Barriers faced by fathers in accessing Sure Start activities](image)

Table 4. Barriers faced by dads in accessing Sure Start services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier type</th>
<th>Number of fathers</th>
<th>Percentage of fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not know service was available</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not offer anything I would use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel it’s for me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities are just for women</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one to go with</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No male staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too far to travel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t afford it</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient opening times</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work and activities are not available during the evenings and weekends</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 How can Sure Start engage more fathers

Respondents were asked how they felt that the programme could get more fathers involved in Sure Start. The most consensus surrounded that the programme needs to do more in advertising activities and it’s dads worker within the community (12 respondents or 29%). It was suggested that this could be done by using flyers, face-to-face, door to door contact and notice boards.
Further, some respondents (6 respondents or 14%) suggested that more activities were needed. Suggestions mainly focused around male orientated activities. Quotes from fathers are summarised below.

‘More activities on weekend.’

‘More father child activities’

‘By doing bloke things like activities involving football, basketball, cricket, D.I.Y.’

‘To do more men things.’

‘More programmes for dads.’

‘More orientated marketing and male only sessions.’
Section 4.0  Discussion

Most Sure Start programmes report low levels of father involvement (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2003). Findings suggest that the programme can engage more local fathers if services are male orientated and reflect their interests. However, before these services are delivered the programme needs to address a number of barriers that limit their engagement within the Sure Start programme.

4.1  Barriers faced in accessing Sure Start services

Almost all fathers (39 respondents - 93%) faced one or more barriers in accessing Sure Start services. The most prevalent barriers were: did not know service was available (25 responses - 60%); activities are just for women (16 responses -38%); I work and activities are not available in the evenings (11 responses -26%); inconvenient opening times (8 responses -19%). These barriers and others identified in the research literature are illustrated below in diagram 1.

4.2  Lack of awareness about Sure Start

The fact that 25 (60%) fathers did not know the service was available can be interpreted as they were not aware of Sure Start and/or the dads worker. Supporting this, evidence from Sure Start North Leyton (2004) and NESS (2003) also suggests
that fathers have limited knowledge and awareness about Sure Start. However, in the current evaluation 17 (40%) of questionnaires were completed by fathers who lived just outside the programme area. In consequence these fathers will not be receiving any information sent through the post about Sure Start. This will limit their awareness of the programme and dads worker. However, from the 19 questionnaires completed by fathers who lived within the programme area, 12 (71%) of these fathers did not know the service was available. Within the present evaluation fathers expressed that the programme needs to do more in advertising activities and it’s dads worker within the community (12 respondents or 29%).

These findings suggests that the programme needs to be publicised and marketed more effectively towards fathers, so as to increase their awareness of Sure Start. Information about the programme and dads worker needs to be widely publicised in local places that fathers are more likely to visit such as schools, shops, pubs, sports facilities, working men’s club and possibly the local pool hall. Face-to-face contact at these places should also be made. It also may be beneficial for the programme to develop a welcome/membership pack for fathers.

4.3 Creating a male friendly environment

A number of fathers expressed that Sure Start activities are just for women (16 fathers – 38%). This perception needs to be broken in order to engage more local fathers within the programme. Fathers who hold this view are unlikely to enquire about what services the programme has to offer. It is also likely that dads have this perception as no activities are specifically targeted towards them. Evidence from the National Evaluation of Sure Start (2003) also suggests that Sure Start programmes have a predominantly female environment and female-centred orientation of services.

A report from Sure Start Denaby Main and Conisbrough suggests that working with fathers is an organisational issue which needs to be addressed by all Sure Start staff and partner agencies. This not only involves creating activities for fathers but also re-shaping the Sure Start programme to ensure that all activities and services are ‘male friendly’. This is vital to ensure that men feel comfortable in accessing all elements of the Sure Start programme and not just working with the dads worker. Supporting this NESS (2003) found that in programmes with high father involvement there was an attempt to spread commitment to fathers to every aspect of the programme and to everyone involved. There was a joined-up approach to involving fathers.

4.4 Targeted services

Findings from the National Evaluation of Sure Start (2003) suggest that parents perceive Sure Start as ‘very female orientated and few fathers feel confident enough to use it’. One way of creating a ‘male friendly’ environment is to target activities, support and advice towards fathers. During the consultation a number of fathers suggested that the programme needs to deliver more male orientated activities. Evidence from NESS (2003) suggests that dads are more likely to attend activities
Evaluation: Involving fathers in Sure Start

4.5 Activities fathers would like to see provided

Fathers overwhelmingly expressed that they would like to see more male orientated activities provided. The most popular activities in order of preference were 5 a-side football, fathers and toddler group, day trips and outings, D.I.Y. workshops, gym training and training opportunities. Providing such activities may help to engage more fathers within the programme. Some of these activities that fathers expressed an interest may not be directly related to the programmes targets and objectives. However, evidence from the national evaluation of Sure Start (2003) found that one widely used strategy for involving fathers was to provide services exclusively for men or fathers and children in the hope that they would act as a “stepping stone” for fathers to become involved in integrated services for families.

4.6 Support and advice fathers would like to see provided

All listed types of support and advice were quite popular. The most popular types of support/advice were child first-aid (52% of fathers), advice on children’s development (40% of fathers) and advice on dealing with children’s behaviour (45% of fathers).

With all of the types of support and advice some fathers expressed that they would prefer to obtain this in a group context and others in a one-to-one context. With child first-aid there was a greater preference for this to be delivered in a group context (15 out of 22 fathers). This activity could be run within a fathers and toddler group or alongside football or D.I.Y workshops which were all popular activities. Alternatively the fathers could be encouraged to attend the child first-aid training provided by the programme which is open to both men and women. Home safety and cooking nutrition and advice, benefit and money and advice and health issues for fathers could also be delivered in this way. However, some men requested these activities to be provided as one-to-one support.

Two of the most popular activities were advice on children’s development (40% of fathers) and advice on dealing with children’s behaviour (45% of fathers). There was no major preference between group and one-to-one support. These fathers could be re-contacted to refer the onto the new nurturing programme group which will cover these topics. Alternatively these groups could be run for fathers only within a fathers and toddler group. However, again some of these fathers will still require one-to-one support and advice.

More respondents expressed that they would prefer advice on legal matters (8 out of 11) and fathers rights (8 out of 10) to be provided as one-to-one support only. In addition to this some fathers expressed that they would prefer advice on money and benefits and health issue for fathers to be provided in a one-to-one context. There are a number of possibilities for the programme to engage these fathers by continuing to provide one-to-one support within home visits, through referrals or by developing a drop in session.
4.7 Times of activities

Another way of creating a male friendly environment and making services more accessible is to provide services out of office hours. Sure Start opening hours and fathers’ employment hours limit fathers’ access to Sure Start services (NESS, 2004). Providing targeted services during the evenings and at weekends may help to engage more working fathers (Sure Start North Leyton, 2004; Sure Start Weston, 2003; and NESS, 2003). This is supported by the findings in the present evaluation as many fathers faced barriers in accessing Sure Start services as they were working and activities are not available in the evenings (11 responses -26%) and/or due to inconvenient opening times (8 responses -19%). More fathers wanted activities/support/advice to be provided in the weekday evenings from 5.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.. Saturday mornings were also quite popular choice for activities and support/advice.

4.8 Gender role stereotypes

The present evaluation did not pick up any evidence that traditional gender roles limit fathers caring responsibilities for their child. However, The National Evaluation of Sure Start (2003) identified that traditional, gendered attitude towards childcare and male-female roles may act as a barrier to dad’s involvement in Sure Start programmes. ‘Father's may have the attitude that childcare is the mother’s responsibility and in turn will not get involved in Sure Start activities’ (Sure Start North Leyton, 2004). It is likely that these stereotypes apply to some fathers within the programme area.

4.9 Limitations of findings

There are a number of possible limitations to the findings within this evaluation. Most questionnaires were completed on carnival day just outside the programme area. In consequence even though there were filter questions only to sample within area fathers, 17 (40%) of questionnaires were completed by fathers who lived out side the programmes area. However, despite this it is possible that needs reflected by fathers who live out the area reflect needs of fathers who live within the programme area. Soon the programme will become a Children’s Centre and it's boundaries will be extending, possibly including some of these fathers who lived outside the area and completed questionnaires.

In addition to this the current evaluation did not identify the locations that fathers would like to have services provided. It is important that fathers are consulted with about this to increase their engagement when services are delivered.
Section 5.0 Summary and Conclusions

- Almost all fathers faced one or more barriers in accessing Sure Start services. To engage more local fathers the programme needs to develop a strategy to address the barriers that fathers face in accessing Sure Start services. If these are not addressed properly it is likely that the programme will continue to reach very low numbers of fathers from the local community.

- Providing targeted services may help to engage more fathers within the programme and may also act as a "stepping stone" for fathers to become involved in Sure Start services. Fathers have different individual needs. Some fathers will prefer to obtain support and advice in a group context and others in a one-to-one context. Even when providing targeted services specifically for fathers, they still need to be encouraged to access other services across the programme.

- Activities used to engage fathers at first may not be directly related to Sure Starts objectives. However, these activities can be used as a stepping stone to other services provided by the programme. If fathers are well informed and given opportunity to share in the care and support of their children, they themselves will have the opportunity to further their personal development and their children will benefit in terms of physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. By engaging more dads within the programme will not only benefit families within the local area, but will also help the programme to meet it’s targets and objectives.

- The programme needs to be publicised and marketed more effectively towards fathers, so as to increase their awareness of Sure Start. Information about the programme and dads worker needs to be widely publicised in local places that fathers are more likely to visit.

- Addressing the barriers and providing services that reflect fathers interests should increase the programmes engagement with them. However, as fathers are one of the programmes ‘hard to reach groups’ the programme has to recognise that there may be a lack of visible results in a short timescale. During this time it is important that the dads worker continues to learn from the good practice from both regional and national programmes/services in how they deliver services and engage fathers.
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Section 6.0 Recommendations

Before services can be developed the programme needs to address the barriers that fathers face in accessing Sure Start services. If these are not addressed effectively it is likely that the programme will continue to reach very low numbers of fathers from the local community. A strategy to engage more local fathers should consist of the following factors:

Developing a male friendly environment

- Engaging fathers within the programme should not be the sole responsibility of the dads worker. This commitment needs to be spread across the whole team.

- Services need to be reshaped to encourage more fathers to attend. This can be achieved by promoting a father friendly culture and policies within the programme and partner agencies.

- Sure Start staff and partner agencies need to be provided with training and information to increase their awareness and understanding of father related issues. This will help to make the service more male friendly. Local fathers could also receive training to deliver this work.

Developing targeted services

- To engage more local fathers services should be made more male friendly by targeting services towards them. There is scope to link support/advice with activities that fathers expressed an interest in. Child-first aid could be delivered within a fathers and toddler group, football sessions or D.I.Y. workshops. It also may be beneficial to run other types of support and advice alongside these sessions (e.g. children’s development, dealing with children’s behaviour, home safety, cooking/nutrition, benefits/ money and health issues for fathers). Even when providing targeted services to fathers, it is important that they are still encouraged to access support and advice that the programme already provides.

- Consult with local fathers to see if there is a demand for one-to-one drop in and advice sessions for advice on issues such as legal matters and fathers rights.

- Any services provided specifically for fathers need to be piloted for a 6-8 week period. At the end of each pilot the service should be reviewed and evaluated to measure the take up and cost-effectiveness of activities.
Out of hours services

- It is of paramount importance that in order to engage local fathers within the programme services not only need to be delivered in the daytime, but also delivered during weekday evenings and Saturday mornings. Delivering services in this way will make services more accessible to working fathers.

Publicity and marketing

- Publicity and marketing needs to be targeted towards fathers to increase their awareness of the programme/dads worker. Publicity should be placed in venues that fathers are likely to be found. Face-to-face contact should be established at these venues. To increase fathers understanding and awareness of Sure Start it may also be worthwhile in developing a welcome/membership pack for fathers.

Follow up work

- It is important that fathers who completed the questionnaire are followed up to provide the types of support/advice that they require. The contact details of fathers who expressed an interest in accessing training and becoming volunteers should be passed onto the parent/carer co-ordinator so that they can gain the information they require.

- Fathers who completed the questionnaire and left contact details need to be followed up to see what locations they would access services and at what times. Consulting in this way should increase the numbers of fathers who attend activities.

- It is important that the fathers who expressed an interest in becoming volunteers are also followed up. Encouraging local fathers to deliver Sure Start services may increase local interest and uptake. This will also lessen the amount of work for the dad’s worker and increase the availability of services for fathers.

Developing a database

- The programme has recently invested in a new database. It is important that this database is used to record the contact details of local fathers. This information is critical for the dads worker to engage more local fathers.
References


Sure Start Weston (2003) How can Sure Start Weston encourage more dads and male carers to use their services? www.nessbbk.ac.uk.

Sure Start Denaby Main Conisbrough – Evaluation of the Male Inclusion Project. www.nessbbk.ac.uk.
Sure Start Whitmore Reans and Dunstall would like to get more local male parents/carers involved in the programmes activities. Please complete the following questionnaire if you are a male parent/carer of a child below the age of 4 years old and live in the Whitmore Reans and Dunstall area. Please only complete the questionnaire if you would like to get involved in activities provided by the programme.

**Activities you want to do**

1a. If Sure Start was to provide activities, which of the following would you like to do? Please tick all the activities you would like to do.

- 5 a side football
- Cricket
- Rugby
- Gym training
- Athletics
- Fathers and toddlers group
- D.I.Y. workshops
- Music workshops
- Gardening
- Training opportunities
- Volunteer work
- Day trips and outings

1b. Are there any other activities you would like to do? If yes please explain below.
…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
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**Advice and Support**

2a. If you would like to obtain one-to-one advice/support or group support on the following issues, then please tick the appropriate box(es)

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<tr>
<th>Advice/support</th>
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<td>Child first aid</td>
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<td>Home safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking/nutrition advice</td>
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<td>Advice on legal matters</td>
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<td>Benefit and money advice</td>
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<td>Health issues for dads</td>
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<td>Fathers rights</td>
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<td>Advice on children's development</td>
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<td>Advice on dealing with children's behaviour</td>
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2b. Are there any other types of support and advice you would like to receive. If so please write them down below?
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…………………………………………………………………………………………………………

3. Would you prefer these activities/support and advice to be provided for:

- Only male parents/carers
- Both male and female parents/carers
- Not sure
4. On what days of the week and times of the week would you like to attend these activities? Please tick all the days and times you could attend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of week</th>
<th>Morning (9.00-12.00)</th>
<th>Afternoon (12.00-5.00)</th>
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<td>Sunday</td>
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5a. What stops you from attending Sure Start activities? Please tick as many responses below that apply

- Did not know this service was available
- Does not offer anything I would use
- I don't feel it's for me
- Activities are just for women
- No one to go with
- Negative impression/bad experience
- No male staff
- Too far to travel
- Does not meet my cultural needs
- Language barriers
- Can't afford it
- Poor access (i.e. no ramp, no lift)
- Inconvenient opening times
- I work and activities are not available during the weekends and evenings

5b. If you have any other reasons that stop you attending Sure Start activities then please write them down below?

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6. How do you think that Sure Start and Whitmore Reans could get more dad’s involved in the programmes activities?
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7. Do you attend any other local groups/activities. If yes please explain below
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Evaluation: Involving fathers in Sure Start