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Sure Start Barrow

Local Evaluation Final Report – Part 3

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Partnership Board Interviews **January-March 2004**

Introduction

As part of the evaluation process, all members of the partnership board were asked to take part in an interview. The main aims of the interviews were to:

- gain an understanding of each partnership board member's role and position on the board.
- gain an understanding of the board's functioning.
- obtain views on how partnership board members see Sure Start developing.
- explore what opportunities or difficulties they envisage for the future development of Sure Start.

Partnership board members were reassured that the interview was confidential and that although pieces of what people have said might be in the final report, no information would be used that would result in any individual being identified.

17 of 32 members/attendees of the partnership board were interviewed, over an eleven-week period, after giving their consent.

A number of those attending the board meetings were also involved at an operational level within Sure Start Barrow or Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney:

- 5 were staff members at Sure Start Barrow
- 1 was a member of staff at Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney
- 4 board members were Community Support Workers

Responses to some questions by Sure Start Barrow staff, support workers and parent representatives (who were also Community Support Workers) are more appropriately reported in the Staff interviews report and in the Community Support Workers report respectively. In some cases their responses are reported in both reports (particularly when questions are directly relevant to how the board is functioning).

The partnership board acts on behalf of both the Trailblazer programme and the Fifth Wave programme. The focus of the evaluation is Sure Start Barrow and thus, although establishing the overall functioning of the board was important, specific comments about Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney are not included in this summary report.

Method

The interview took the form of verbal questioning and was divided into the following sections:

1. Roles
2. Processes of Communication
3. Processes of service delivery
4. Service integration
5. Health, safety and security
6. Partnership arrangements and sustainability

Interviewees were then given the opportunity to make any additional comments on any aspect of their work on the partnership board. All interviews were taped and later transcribed. At the end of the evaluation process the tapes will be destroyed.

Results

This section summarises the responses received during the interviews, presented in the six sections listed above.

1: Roles

a.) Individual board members' roles

Many of the board members described having had a long involvement with Sure Start in the area, in varying capacities.

The staff members who attended the board meetings generally saw themselves as having an advisory role on the board and all were non-voting members. Two of the board members, who were also members of Sure Start Barrow staff, felt their role was to answer any queries and questions for the board. One of those members of staff represented a particular service and expressed how important they felt it to be that everyone was represented and the usefulness of being present at meetings to deal with issues quickly, rather than having to wait for messages to be taken back and forth. Another described their role as reporting to the partnership on all matters relating to the development and operations of the programme. Another member of staff noted that they do research and make enquiries on behalf of the board. In addition, one community support worker said they attend to answer any queries about their work within Sure Start.

Three members of staff from both Sure Start programmes spoke of presenting projects to the board for approval. Another had a role of taking minutes and distributing them to those concerned.

In addition, two of the members of staff noted how they also saw themselves as having a role in speaking up on behalf of parents, encouraging them to become involved on the board and helping them to feel comfortable in their role as parent representatives.

Other board members saw their roles as providing a link with and representing other agencies and organisations or advising and supporting the development and operations of one or both of the two programmes:

- Link between Sure Start and Early Excellence.
- Link between Sure Start and the voluntary sector.
- Representing Education.
- Reporting and advising the board on Sure Start builds.
- Finance reporting.
- Helping to steer the project.

It was noted by two board members that their role on the board was more demanding and active, when the bids were in the process of being put together and when staff were being employed, but that now the role was more passive and a 'rubber stamping' of how the managers were running the programmes.

One board member said they had never been entirely clear whether they were actually a formal board member or an advisor to the board and felt it to be an area in need of clarification. They noted that they were not sure of their position and had taken it to be an advisory role. Another described representing a supporting partner rather than a direct service provider.

One board member reported being a non-voting member, another noted that they were unclear about who could vote. Yet another felt they had no remit in terms of voting (having an advisory/supportive role, rather than a service perspective and with another voting member representing the same organisation).

Three board members explained that they attend as a parent representative and that their role is similar to other parents on the board, although numbers of parents attending varied (with there usually been two or three parents in attendance). Two indicated they attended the meetings to give opinions as parents and act as a voice for other parents. One parent representative saw a role for themselves in asking questions and asking other board members to explain things clearly.

Eight board members saw their role as unique and not similar to the other member's roles, emphasising their individual duties and knowledge. One of those members of staff added that although their role is dissimilar to anyone else's it involves working with everyone developing and maintaining the partnerships. Two board members said that although they have a different role to others, in relation to the skills and knowledge they bring and the agencies they represent, their role is broadly similar to others in that they all have the collective responsibility for steering the project.

Two members of Sure Start Barrow staff said they felt their role was similar to other non-voting staff members who attended the board meetings.

No members of the board indicated that there were any inappropriate functions attached to their role on the board, although one board member said there had been in the past.

b.) How/why individuals had become part of the board

Three members of the board who were also Sure Start staff indicated that they had become part of the group by virtue of their position within Sure Start. Another said they had become involved because they had been asked to by the programme manager and the Chair of the board. In addition, one member of staff said they had been a parent representative on the board, before working for Sure Start. One board member said they had been involved in the initial setting up process of the board; becoming a member when the group was a steering group and going on to become a member of the Sure Start team. The parent representatives/community support workers had been asked to become involved in the board by Sure Start staff.

In addition, four board members (non-Sure Start staff) indicated they had also been involved in the beginning, working on the initial bid and delivery plan and consulting with the community. Two board members indicated they had been nominated as representatives due to their role in the main services, with professional experience and knowledge that would be helpful to the board. Two members of staff had inherited the role on the Sure Start board from their predecessors (a role that came with the position in other agencies and organisations). Another board member explained that being involved with the Sure Start partnership was a logical step for them considering their role in the area of developing integrated services for families. One board member explained that they have been involved with the board 'on and off', being seconded from a statutory organisation to deal with specific matters, attending the meetings as a non-voting member.

c.) Satisfaction with role

Interviewees were asked about how satisfied they were with their role on the board. Table 1 illustrates their responses.

Table 1. Levels of satisfaction with role on the board

Level of satisfaction	Number of respondents
Very satisfied	7
Fairly satisfied	7
Not sure	2
Fairly dissatisfied	1
Very dissatisfied	0
Total	17

One board member who was fairly satisfied said that the reason they were not very satisfied was because they were not clear of the role of their organisation in the whole process and that by the nature of their role as an advisor to the board it could be an 'uncomfortable' one. Another board member said their role on the Sure Start board was more a function of their role in their current employment and their involvement was bigger than purely Sure Start. In addition, another member of the board who was fairly satisfied expressed some confusion about the expansion of the umbrella of 'Sure Start', with more initiatives coming together. One board member said that they found the long meetings to be off-putting, but did find it interesting to find out about other people's ideas.

One respondent who was 'not sure' about their role on the board indicated they felt that, although sometimes they feel they are moving along with the board as a group, the board might need to negotiate a common understanding. The other board member who was not sure explained this to be because they had not been a board member for long enough to be sure how satisfied they were with their role.

One person, who said they were fairly dissatisfied with their role on the board, explained that they felt that some of the board members did not fulfil their responsibilities, continually not attending meetings.

d.) Support received

Nine board members described feeling they were supported in their role on the board. The programme manager of the trailblazer programme was acknowledged as providing support by three board members. One of the board members, who said they received support from the programme manager, also acknowledged they received support when needed from the Commissioning Officer for the trailblazer and from the Community Support manager. One member of the board said that although they were supported there was need for self-management. Another noted that sometimes they do not have enough time in their post.

Eight board members said they did not particularly feel supported to carry out their role:

- One board member said they were not really supported to carry out their role, as they saw their role in itself as one that involved supporting others.
- Five board members noted that they did not feel they needed support to carry out their role on the board. One of those also said they felt their role was to support the board.
- One board member indicated that they felt support would be received in the near future.

2: Processes of communication

a.) Communication between board members

All interviewees indicated that the communication between board members occurs mostly at the meetings (usually on a 6-weekly basis), with the minutes and agenda distributed before the next meeting. Eight board members explained they might have contact with some board members between meetings, if and when needed. One member said this, for them, was usually via e-mail. Four members said they had not been involved in any communication with board members about issues relating to those discussed at the meetings between meetings. One said they felt that the board members did not communicate with each other, in that they did not think they got together between meetings and felt that many of the board members were difficult to get hold of.

One interviewee said there was good communication, which was mainly verbal and by consensus. This individual noted that the board rarely ends up voting on issues, because the board has always been happy for the Officers on the board to make decisions and then keep the board informed. Another board member who indicated that communication is limited and only at the meetings, also explained that the managers tend to make the main decisions,

with issues of finance and capital spend predominantly being discussed at the board. Another board member thought that board members felt able to talk to the Chair of the board or the trailblazer programme manager about any issues they had and that members can put things on the agenda.

b.) Feelings of involvement in the communication processes

One board member said they felt very involved in the communication processes between board members and another said they felt 'involved'. Two members of the board said they felt okay about how involved they were in the communication processes. In addition, one member said that the board is open to hear everyone's opinions and felt free to ask questions. Another felt they were listened to at board meetings.

One said they did not feel 'at all' involved with the communication processes and another said they did not feel very involved. Six board members said they were not really involved in the communication processes but did not see that they needed to be involved, unless it directly involved them in relation to their role.

One board member indicated that the majority of communication going on outside of the board meetings goes through them, with board members being mainly the key partners for Sure Start. Another said they felt quite happy communicating with board members representing statutory services or the Sure Start trailblazer manager, but they had no contact with parent representatives outside the meetings.

One member of the board acknowledged that the members are a core group of people who attend many meetings in the area and that Sure Start can be discussed at different meetings in different settings ('it is all part of the same thing').

c.) Communication between Sure Start and community at large

The information reported here details the information received from the 8 board members who were not Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers. As mentioned in the introduction staff responses and parent representative responses are incorporated into the staff interviews report and community support workers interviews report respectively.

Three board members indicated the use of newsletters and other publications as a method of communication between Sure Start Barrow and the community. One member said they thought word-of-mouth was the main method of communication between Sure Start and the community.

One board member felt that Sure Start certainly had a communication strategy, using the community workers to spread the word and get people to engage with Sure Start. This person felt that, although the actual community Sure Start works with knows a lot about them, the wider community does not know what Sure Start represents. Another board member explained that having lived in the area and being involved with Sure Start from the beginning they were not sure how other people perceived it. They said they thought

Sure Start's profile was quite high in the area and that they use the T-shirts, leaflets and the building to communicate with the community but having been so involved found it difficult to tell.

The communication with the community by staff members was acknowledged as being good by one board member. They felt that all those working for Sure Start are very accessible and praised the programme manager for taking a very hands on approach, representing Sure Start 'in a range of community features and that is part of communication and linking'. Two board members felt that Sure Start Barrow was effective at communicating with the community with a good track record for working bottom up and being community led, although one acknowledged that they did not know this first hand, only getting that impression through feedback from the manager's reports. The other person felt that the partnership worked in a similar way:

'They genuinely make an effort to contact and liaise with local people in the area. It is a bottom up partnership rather than being driven exclusively by the board. And that is how it should be'.

One board member expressed the valuable 'street level' information brought to the board by the parent representatives and another commented upon the regular attendance by two or three parent representatives on the board.

d.) Informing board members about the processes and operations (how things work or are planned) within Sure Start Barrow

The information reported here details the information received from the 8 board members who were not Sure Start staff or community support workers.

Two board members said they did feel well informed about the processes and operations within Sure Start Barrow. Another member said they felt they were kept fairly well informed, within the bounds of confidentiality. It was acknowledged by this member of the board that the Sure Start staff attending the board do not hide behind professional confidentiality and are very open, but acknowledged that certain things did need to be kept confidential and that this was respected by the board.

One board member felt they could be better informed and two others noted that although they did not feel very informed it was their responsibility to seek information. Three said they were as informed as they wanted/needed to be and could read the leaflets, minutes, e-mails or ask for information from staff if they wanted to know anything more. A number of board members noted that they know more about the process and operations within Sure Start that relate to their specific role on the board.

e.) Satisfaction with communication between the board and Sure Start Barrow

Four board members indicated they were very satisfied with the level and processes of communication between the partnership board and Sure Start Barrow. One of these respondents felt satisfied with the communication between the board and Sure Start Barrow because the minutes are made

available and people are invited from Sure Start to attend the meetings if there are concerns with their service.

Eleven board members indicated they were fairly satisfied. Two noted that the trailblazer manager takes information from the board to the staff meetings and vice versa when needed. One board member felt fairly satisfied with the communication, explaining that Sure Start staff that attend the meetings communicate back to the board very well about the activities. Another board member said they thought it was not possible to create a mechanism that makes every individual involved feel heard and communicated with all of the time, but that it was important to take the time to listen to others to help them feel heard. Another acknowledged that they felt the onus was on themselves in relation to communication between the board and Sure Start, indicating that the information is available but time and resources are needed to keep fully updated.

One of the board members indicated a wish for more feedback about whether money that has been granted to other organisations, voluntary bodies and local groups has been of value and used in the way specified. This individual felt that the board needed to know more about what is happening to the money that is granted.

Two board members were not sure about the level and processes of communication between the partnership board and Sure Start Barrow.

f.) Ways to update self regarding activities

Again the information reported here, and in the next section, details the information received from the 8 board members who were not Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers.

All board members felt there were ways to update themselves regarding Sure Start's activities. The following methods for doing so were listed by the interviewees:

- Go and ask (3)
- Phone up and ask (2)
- Speak to the manager (1)
- Hear things in the office (1)
- Read board reports (1)
- Read newsletters (2)
- Read the leaflets (1)
- Read the minutes (1)
- Read the emails (1)
- Read delivery plan (1)
- Asking the health visitors (1)

3. Processes of service delivery

Only three members of the board (non-Sure Start staff or community supporters) noted an involvement at some level in services.

One board member listed three services they were involved in and described having a receptionist funded by Sure Start and having released some workers to be involved in Portage. They indicated they were very familiar with how these services were delivered and that they contribute ideas through discussions with the programme manager and relevant others.

One board member said their involvement in services was not from a delivery point of view, but a role of feeding information and opportunities into Sure Start from an organisational point of view, such as finding training opportunities for their staff and funding opportunities.

Another board member said they had been involved in the Children's Centre bid.

4. Service integration

Once again this section details the information received from the 8 board members who were not Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers.

One board member described how they felt every statutory organisation has a service to provide and will look at things from their own organisation's perspective. One board member noted that with a recent emphasis in key government papers for everyone to work together the climate for sharing information is improving, whereas previously different sectors guarded information. Another board member felt that Sure Start is getting there in respect to working with others.

One board member indicated feeling that the people who need to be engaged at a strategic level and making decisions about integrating Sure Start in the longer term into mainstream services are not involved with the board, because they are not in the Barrow area. Another felt that integration would have to come from a central policy level and that it is important to build on integrated working now to reduce inevitable problems in the future with mainstreaming services.

Two board members indicated that it is very difficult when people have different targets to meet.

In general, the board members felt that the different agencies are slowly beginning to work together and that improvements could be seen.

One board member noted that one of the problems for Sure Start is that the board is chaired by a politician who can be confrontational and antagonistic (although not deliberately). They felt that when representatives do attend from Social Services or Education they are not welcomed as they could be.

Health

One board member felt that Health had been keen to integrate and work together. Another commented that Sure Start tries very hard to link with Health. The health visiting service was acknowledged by three board members as very successful in being amenable to change, with a strong level of engagement and involvement. They acknowledged that the health visitors have altered their method and way of working to match and fit in with Sure Start ('using the lessons learnt from Sure Start has enabled the entire service to move forward'). They also noted that they felt it is about having the right person to open up to change and see the change through. Another board member praised the health visiting service for becoming effective in their commitment to the Sure Start process.

The Sure Start Speech and Language Therapist was commended for being influential in her role in developing group work, which was not the tradition for Speech and Language therapy. She was also acknowledged for the work she has done in 'using mums as helpers' and the board member felt that to be a big step forward. The professional influence of the Occupational Therapist was also acknowledged.

In addition, one board member expressed feeling slightly disappointed with the amount of work done with children with disabilities (particularly with the slow and poor diagnosis and assessment process within health). They acknowledged that certain people have not been in place in the health sector to do this work effectively.

The Primary Care Trust was also praised for taking over as the accountable body for Sure Start.

Social Services

One board member felt that Sure Start is trying to build a stronger relationship with Social Services. Four board members felt that integration with Social Services had been more difficult. One board member commented that Social Services seem to be equally affected by the work that Sure Start do (as Health) but are ineffective in linking into Sure Start projects and practices with their every day work. Another board member described finding Social Services very 'insular' and said that it could be difficult to find someone they could work with from the agency. This was attributed to the legal nature of Social Services and the procedures they have to follow, which they felt had made it difficult for them to integrate. Another board member felt that the common assessment framework, due to be implemented, would enable the services to work better together with Social Services.

Education

It was noted by three board members that Education is not as closely linked as the health sector is. It was acknowledged that certain individuals and schools are linked quite well but that the education service was not as integrated as it perhaps should be.

One board member noted that they thought Sure Start was going to become more and more integrated with schools, which they thought was great. Another member felt that using staff in education to develop Portage was a good example of working towards a smoother transition and working to develop links.

5. Health, Safety and Security

Again the information reported here details the information received from the 8 people who were not Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers.

a.) Familiarity with the health and safety policies

Only one board member said they were familiar with the health and safety policies. Another board member recalled having seen the policies but did not have their own copy.

Six board members said they had not seen the health and safety policies at the board meetings. Two felt this was perhaps something they ought to be aware of. Another said they had not read or come into contact with the health and safety policies, but expected they have them, and acknowledged that they felt they should have done. One acknowledged that at other meetings they attend health and safety is a point on every agenda. One board member noted that they thought the issue was being addressed and that people would need to read them and be aware of their own responsibilities.

One member of staff felt they did not need to know or be involved in the health and safety policies, with the policy details being the responsibility of the programme manager.

One board member commented that they are not sure about how rigorous Sure Start are about putting their health and safety policies into practice, mentioning lone workers in particular. They expressed a view that Sure Start does not worry about something until it happens. They mentioned the presence of health and safety notices but noted they are rarely filled in and up to date.

b.) Concerns about health and safety at Sure Start Barrow

Four board members had no concerns about the safety of staff, community members or themselves. One of those board members indicated they were unsure of the issues.

The board member who indicated above that they thought Sure Start could be reactive to situations rather than proactive in policy development and implementation expressed this as a concern.

One board member said they had been concerned in the past about Sure Start workers within minimum training going into people's homes. Their concern had been that families were of the opinion that professionals were visiting them and the concern was for both the family and the worker. This board member thought the issue had been taken on board and training had become more rigorous. Another board member, although saying they were not particularly concerned, did emphasise how important they felt it to be that workers are properly trained to go out into the community. They felt that Sure Start does work very hard to make sure everybody goes on the foundation training and then the advanced training before working in the community.

Two board members talked about lone workers. One noted that in their experience in other services workers do not go out alone, but they also noted that they thought if the Sure Start workers thought there were any risks they would tell others and go with someone else. The other board member expressed a general concern for lone workers, commenting that they felt it was the responsibility of the partnership board, but also an operational issue for the programme manager. They noted they would expect any issues or concerns to be brought back to the board.

In addition, one board member felt there is a tendency for Sure Start to 'stray into areas where problems may arise'. Although they felt that, in some ways, it is the right way to go for Sure Start they expressed some concern about running the café (which involves staff training and insurance) and the 'handyman can' service (competing with the private sector).

6. Partnership arrangements/sustainability

a.) An effective board?

Nine board members said they thought the board was effective (six of those felt it to be very effective). One of those members described some of the people on the board as being very vocal and as having a positive input and influence, bringing strengths to the board because of their knowledge. They felt the board to be 'healthy' and that the variety of people on the board helps to safeguard the programme in a lot of ways by bringing in different perspectives. Another said they thought the board recognises that it is going to be more effective by allowing the projects to progress without going through the strict democracy of the board. This person indicated that parents generally come directly to Sure Start staff to further their wishes. In addition, one person said that if the whole board is not entirely sure about a decision it does not 'go through'.

In addition, one individual said that the board was very effective in answering questions and that the meetings provide a good place to put views across

especially to other service providers. One member said the board makes good decisions and another board member who described the board as being very effective said they felt the board really care and listen to one another to negotiate decisions. This person expressed that meetings are 'respectful'.

One board member felt the board to be quite effective, putting this down to the fact that the board is well supported by the PCT as its accountable body. They also acknowledged that the information that is presented is very clear and decisions could be made on that information.

A board member who said they thought the board to be fairly effective indicated they thought the board overly focussed on outputs and spends and could be more effective by focussing discussions more on medium term issues, sustainability of projects and a coherent and effective exit strategy. They commented that the board could be more effective in its scrutiny role as well, taking more of a critical approach to things that are done, questioning some of the decisions that are made. They felt that the board needed to take a more dispassionate view of service delivery and question whether some projects are being effective in changing things or building new services that would continue beyond the project.

One board member said they thought the board to be effective at this point in time, for what it is being asked to do. They felt that when Children's Centres develop consideration would need to be given as to whether the right people are on the board and how well the board is working. Another member said the board is as effective as it could be with its constitution. They indicated that, although the board had a specific remit at the beginning, they were not sure of what the rationale behind the board was anymore. They said they thought it to be a decision-making body to some extent.

One board member felt that it was difficult to say whether the board is effective. They said they found a lot of the reporting vague and meaningless and that judging the success of Sure Start is difficult when 'any number of numbers can be reported'.

One member of the board said they thought the board was not effective at all. Another said they felt that although there is a lot of input in the form of ideas and opinions from various people decision-making can take some time. They mentioned that after the meetings the group can seem no nearer to solving an issue ('sometimes there are lots of people there but nothing actually happens').

A point was made that the board has very good attendance by parents, but that this had not always been the case.

b.) Specific problems and how board members feel the board could operate in a better way

Specific problems with the board as identified by board members included the following; which are explained below:

1. The need for more parents on the board (7)
2. Language used at meetings (2)
3. Non-attendance by other members (5)
4. Decision-making (4)
5. Not enough information provided to the board (3)
6. Too much focus on the operations of the programmes, rather than on strategies (2)
7. Lack of clarity of who can vote (1)
8. Narrow membership (1)

1. Four board members noted that looking for regular attendance by parent representatives is ongoing. Two of these respondents felt that regular attendance by parents living in the four wards was needed, but that parent representatives can drift in and out of the process. Two people indicated that training was due to take place (and has taken place in the past) to encourage more parents. Training was described as providing information about how the meeting is conducted, what the minutes mean, what the agenda is all about, how people speak at the meetings (speaking through the Chair). These two people also felt that a lot of parents feel intimidated by the board ('I think it can be quite scary for them really'). A parent representative said that other parents would find the meetings intimidating and part of that was because they did not know the board members.
2. The language used by board members was described as sometimes being 'full of jargon'. Although the programme manager was praised for encouraging members to explain abbreviations, two people noted that parents might not always understand the full content of the meetings. It was acknowledged that the board could operate in a better way by using 'real language' that parents could understand, rather than using abbreviations.

One person, who indicated that more involvement by parents would be good, also felt that, although the board has never seen a full turn out of parents, parents have a high level of involvement with the actual programme, irrespective of the board. It was noted that parents do not generally need the board to make lots of key decisions because they are involved in decision-making and in the running of the organisation on a day-to-day basis. It was also pointed out that parents who get involved with the programme often end up doing some training and work with them, so consequently are not appropriate people to be on the partnership. One board member indicated there had been some problems about where the meetings are held, with apologies being sent by parents who struggle to 'get across town'. A parent representative noted that it could be difficult to find childcare whilst attending the meetings. Another commented that they felt attendance by parents was very important and thought that the board does try to get parents involved.

3. Two board members described feeling very frustrated when board members habitually do not attend and the board struggles to be quorum sometimes. They put this down to the fact that the board members trust the manager and do not see themselves as having a large role in the whole process. One board member commented that sometimes they do have a problem getting the right amount of people to attend the meetings, but then indicated this only happened occasionally. One person who indicated that attendance was a problem said they thought perhaps some members do not realise the power they have to effect change and that if they did realise that they would maybe make more of an effort and prioritise the meetings. Three board members mentioned a lack of input from Social Services, since one Social Services representative was no longer available. It was acknowledged that the lack of attendance might be because of a duplication of meetings and representatives having full schedules.
4. One board member who felt that a specific problem with the board was decision making, commented the process is laborious. Another (as mentioned above) said they felt that although there is a lot of discussion during meetings sometimes by the end of meetings no solutions have been found or decisions made. They noted that although there is a need for many people on the board, it could sometimes lead to slower decision-making. The member who commented that decision-making was a specific problem for the board emphasised that this was due to the fact that it could be difficult to establish who has the authority to make the decisions, the accountable body (PCT) or the board. It was noted that each has different rules and regulations and this could cause the decision-making process to be slowed down. In addition, one person felt the board could operate in a better way by being more strategic in the way it looks at decisions, looking at the future, rather than simply at the delivery of services.
5. As noted previously, one board member felt a need for more productive relaying of information back to the board, particularly about the commissioning and felt that the partnership board would operate in a better way if this were done. Another board member felt a need for more reporting about where Sure Start is progressing against the targets and felt that this type of information was not reported very often. It was emphasised that the whole board needs to know which of the targets are being met and which are difficult to meet and which the programme will not be able to meet. In addition, another board member requested that the reporting to the board be more meaningful and more concrete.
6. One board member felt the board can sometimes spend a lot of time talking about the operational side of the programmes, which they felt was best left to the programme managers ('I think we don't focus on what we should be focusing on sometimes'). They identified that the programme managers needed to be supported if they had specific

problems, but they were concerned that the board did not support the managers in 'quite the right way'. They commented that the board is 'very good at telling them what to do but not very good at supporting them if they want a steer from us. It is the difference between strategy and operation...have we got that balance quite right?' In their view the board could operate better if they were clearer about the difference between strategy and operations and the role of the board in general. They suggested a need for a possible induction for new members and an away day to enable the group to work together with a more collective focus. As noted previously, another board member thought the board could be overly focussed on outputs and spends and could be more effective by focussing discussions more on medium term issues, sustainability of projects and a coherent and effective exit strategy. Another board member felt that various discussions go over some people's heads and that individuals tend to focus on what they know or are interested in.

7. One person felt unclear about who has the right and entitlement to vote. In contrast to this, another board member thought there was a clear line between those who work at Sure Start and those who can vote.
8. One board member felt the membership of the board was quite narrow and felt it should be made clearer about whom is reporting to the board and who are board members. They acknowledged that this could be a good thing because it usually meant that decisions are made by consensus and that there is no lobbying for votes, for example. It was emphasised that a small number of key people on the board carry a 'huge weight' in the process of decision-making and that at present this seemed to work well because of the nature of those people. This individual expressed some concern that the systems are not in place for if these key people were not 'alright'.

In addition, one board member was not sure whether the Chair of the board is impartial and was not sure they could trust them.

c.) Sure Start Barrow meeting its aims and objectives now?

The information reported in the following four sections details the information received from 8 people on the board who were not Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers.

Seven of the eight respondents thought that Sure Start Barrow was meeting its aims and objectives. One person said they did not know (and they felt their role did not involve them knowing).

Two people thought that, although they felt Sure Start Barrow was meeting its aims and objectives now, they were unsure about the longer term prospects, including exit strategies, sustainability and meeting revenue costs. Another board member felt a need for a greater understanding of where the local Sure Start programme fits into the wider Sure Start agenda. They did, however,

acknowledge that the trailblazer is 'very good' at doing so and they put that down to the strong management.

One board member said they would like Sure Start to be more explicit about how it is meeting the aims and objectives.

d.) Will Sure Start Barrow be able to meet its aims and objectives in the future?

Six respondents felt that Sure Start Barrow would meet its aims and objectives.

'I think it will embrace change very happily. They are not precious at all'.

One felt that it would depend on the funding available and changes in government. Another board member expressed some concern that all the focus about the future seems to be around Children's Centres, with no other alternatives being considered.

e.) Partnership board members' contributions to ensuring that developments within Sure Start Barrow achieve sustainability

One board member said they had been involved in the changed way of working in the health visiting service. They said they thought that the Speech and Language Therapy changes would be rolled out across Morecambe Bay and would be sustainable. In addition, they thought that the buildings and the Community Support programme would be the biggest challenges for sustainability. They felt that Sure Start should be aiming to get people into different sorts of sustainable employment, by initially providing vocational training that is flexible enough for them to take part in ('We seem to be able to get people trained to NVQ 2 and 3 within the programme reasonably easily but then what?').

One board member said they had recently mapped out an idea for Children's Centres which embraced all of the Early Years providers and had an element of sharing resources. They felt that if the government, politicians and local committees saw the idea as favourable then Sure Start could be sustainable.

Another board member said they see a role for themselves in looking to see which services (or parts of projects) could be made into community businesses, social enterprises or charitable groups.

One board member said they did not think they had a great role to play in ensuring Sure Start Barrow achieves sustainability, with the main players for that being Health, Social Services and, to a lesser extent, Education. This individual said they could assist by looking at the way the assets that they manage or own or both are dealt with, for example community centres.

One board member felt that there should be a commitment from every partner across the board to make sure that the services provided and commissioned by Sure Start are for the longer term and moving them into mainstream

services. They felt that if a pilot project is shown to work after two to three years then it makes sense for it to be integrated.

One member of the board described how they felt the government is always coming up with new initiatives (the Children's Centres, extended schools and Sure Start) that encourage organisations to provide all services. They felt that this would lead from too much specialism to too many 'general, diluted' services. They noted that discussions had occurred about Early Years and Children's Centres having the Sure Start logo and thought that if everything becomes part of Sure Start then Sure Start 'won't be anything'.

f.) Partnership board members' visions for the future of Sure Start Barrow

The following responses were received, which have a common theme of mainstreaming and collaborative working:

- 'Sure Start and Early Excellence working together with all the other providers sharing training, and building on the long early years tradition of this country'.
- 'That everything is mainstreamed. My vision would be that it isn't called Sure Start. That everything is delivered in a Sure Start model...I think the Sure Start badge is very powerful but so many people now have it linked to vast sources of government money and I think in the longer term it could become a barrier for people taking responsibility for themselves if people think Sure Start is just going to take responsibility for them'.
- 'To become part of the mainstream services. All the statutory bodies are there fulfilling their functions and ideally Sure Start fits in the middle. But for Sure Start to be truly effective I think it should be connected and all part with everything else delivering children's services rather than one delivering health and the other something else'.
- 'To mainstream much of the innovative work that has been done. So taking on board community wishes and aligning them with county and national priorities'.
- 'Reaching more people in the community. And starting to see some visible results in a few years time probably by the education system. Hopefully children will progress more readily with Sure Start. It will have improved their opportunities'.
- 'That the principles on which Sure Start were founded, that is that pre-school age children and their families are supported. That should become an integrated part of education, social services and health. The values and objectives of Sure Start should be mainstreamed. All services should free up part of their budgets to run centres like Greengate'.
- 'Getting people into sustainable employment that will give them a decent life for the rest of their lives really. Once you get a big enough critical mass of those people you don't need Sure Start. In a good

programme (and this is a good programme) that is one of the things it has to achieve. And Education is the biggest support for that’.

g.) Board members’ thoughts about whether the board has a common vision

Ten board members felt that the board has a common vision. One board member said that they felt members were much more able to ‘take off their hat’ when they enter the Sure Start meetings to represent Sure Start and the children in the town. One person said the board has the common vision of wanting services for families and families to be supported in the best possible way and for children to have the best possible start in life. One person felt that perhaps staff in statutory services do not necessarily have the same vision, acknowledging that the health visitors found it stressful to move towards a different way of working, but thought they felt more holistic now and that they are delivering a better service.

Four board members felt that the board does not have a common vision. One of those people said they did not think the board had a common vision, but they did not really like to say. Two people who didn’t think the board has a common vision said they thought it was difficult because people are representing different statutory bodies, parents and communities all of whom see things from a different angle, with different visions about what Sure Start should be. This person felt a need for joint training where members could begin to see things from the other board members perspectives. Another board member also felt that individuals attended the board with their own agendas (particularly in relation to where money is spent) and indicated feeling that some agencies are still precious about ‘what belongs to them’.

One person felt that the board is focussed on the delivery of projects, but does not have a vision clearly set out. They said they thought the board is powerful in that it feels it is successful and moving forward, but that they should be looking beyond that to see where they are going next. Another board member noted that although they thought the board had a common vision about where Sure Start is to be over the next one or two years they were not sure how common the longer term vision is.

One board member did not indicate whether they thought the board had a common vision but did indicate that they find they have to ‘put a different hat’ on when coming to the Sure Start board, acknowledging that they are not there to push the interests of their own service. They noted that it is useful to share information, but that Sure Start is at the front of their agenda.

One board member said they did not know whether the board has a common vision (not meaning yes or no, but that they truly did not know). They indicated that there are a lot of issues that they do not follow and are not aware of.

h.) Challenges foreseen by partnership board members that Sure Start Barrow will face in the future

The 8 board members (excluding Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers) foresaw a number of different challenges. The majority of

responses were directed at the possible challenges involved in finding more funding, mainstreaming services and sustaining the activities in the longer term.

- More funding, mainstreaming and longer term sustainability of activities (7)
- Continuing to try to reach the hard-to-engage groups (1)
- Keeping the balance between the way Sure Start Barrow wants to go and the way Barrow County Council thinks it should go (keeping the local flavour whilst staying in the national agenda (1)
- Being absorbed into the wider Sure Start agenda- having tight operational planning that links into the County Council, strategic development planning and national guidance from government whilst at the same time tying that in with what the community wants (1)

Some concerns were raised about how services could be mainstreamed. One board member indicated that work needed to be done to get the community to take responsibility and move from a culture of dependency. Two others felt that getting longer term funding was difficult, with one person noting that other agencies have their own targets to meet and money may not be available. Suggestions about the future direction of Sure Start included the development of a Children's Trust, a Children's Centre, or the buildings becoming a community asset (community based or trust based).

One board member felt that the innovative approach of Sure Start might be sidelined and moved away from with education taking the lead. Another noted that with the development of Children's Centres the ethos of Sure Start would need to be held onto quite strongly.

One board member expressed the need for more jobs and opportunities in the area and they felt that developing prosperity would be a real achievement.

i.) Where board members see Sure Start Barrow being in 5 years time

A range of responses was received from the 8 board members (excluding Sure Start Barrow staff or community support workers) about where they saw Sure Start Barrow in five years time. The majority of board members felt that Sure Start would be in a different form to how it is now, although some felt that certain parts would remain:

- 'Bigger and better, but maybe in a different form- more integrated with education perhaps'
- 'That education, health and social services were all working together as Sure Start. One service for all young children and parents and families'.
- 'Integrated with Children's Centres and other initiatives, working within the Sure Start model'.
- 'Operating as some form of trust based organisation'.
- 'Sure Start seen as a co-ordinator and supporter rather than a provider'.

- ‘Everywhere, with schools and nurseries involved (Sure Start no longer clearly a separate entity, but as an umbrella for any service for children)’.
- ‘Probably not as a single entity, but absorbed into the way services are delivered in any local community, but with a Barrow flavour’.
- ‘Greengate, and other buildings that Sure Start has an influence over, still functioning in the way it is, as a community centre’.
- ‘Escalator in place of people getting into employment (whether it be Sure Start funded or not)’.

One person expressed an interest in seeing the longer-term effect of Sure Start in the area since it started. Another person said they were not sure where they saw Sure Start Barrow in five years time and felt that it depended on the government and any changes in administration.

Additional comments

One board member described feeling impressed by people working together at the beginning of Sure Start Barrow and still felt that people worked for a common purpose now. Another board member commended the work of the two programme managers, noting that it has not been easy in Barrow ‘because of the culture’. This person felt that the success of Sure Start in the area is due to the commitment of certain key people.

Two board members acknowledged that, although in Barrow many of the same people sit on different boards, the Sure Start partnership board is slightly different in that it has a diverse group of parents, users and professionals (‘that is quite refreshing’).

Conclusions and recommendations

Although many of the board members expressed a high level of long-term commitment to Sure Start, felt satisfied with their role on the board and saw the board as being effective, we feel that we can make a number of recommendations to enhance the board's functioning for the benefit of Sure Start.

Role clarity

- Some board members were unsure of their remit (and the remit of their organisation) on the board. In addition, some board members were not clear about which members had the right to vote. In order to clarify this:
- *It is recommended that the membership of the board is clarified, as are individual board members' roles and the provision of clear role descriptions and voting rights.*

Increasing involvement by parents

- The problems of encouraging parents to regularly attend the board meetings were described. Although there appears to be a high level of engagement by parents within the actual programme, the following recommendations are provided, which might enable parents to be more involved in the management and future direction of the Sure Start programme:
- *It is recommended that:*
 - *the language and procedures used in board meetings are not overly formal.*
 - *an away day with parents in attendance would allow them to have contact with board members outside the meetings.*
 - *consideration be given to developing a parents' forum.*

Increasing attendance by members

- Some board members described repeated non-attendance by representatives of key statutory authorities as frustrating.
- *It is recommended that the board takes action to reduce the likelihood of this arising in the future:*
 - *identify the reasons for non-attendance by certain individuals*
 - *strive to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment to encourage attendance.*
 - *an informal away day involving training designed to identify and remove any barriers may allow trust to be established and partnership relationships to prosper.*

Improving the type of information received by board members

- Some board members expressed a need for:
 - updating members about projects and services that have been commissioned so they are aware of how the resources are being utilised
 - more reporting of information against local and national targets

- *It is recommended that time be allocated for this process- perhaps an additional meeting to discuss these points.*

Understanding different perspectives, developing a common vision and developing the decision-making process

- Some board members felt that the board did not have a common vision about Sure Start and future developments and it was noted by some that different members have differing perspectives about Sure Start. In addition, some board members felt that decision-making was not forthcoming.
- *It is maybe useful for all members to attend an away day or open meeting to:*
 - *raise awareness and understanding of the different perspectives brought to the board by members*
 - *to negotiate a common vision*
 - *develop group decision making skills*

Raising awareness of Health and Safety Issues

- Many of the board members were not up-to-date with the health and safety policies within Sure Start Barrow, although some felt that perhaps they should be.
- *In consideration of the health and safety issues raised in the interviews with Sure Start staff (particularly those around lone working and the emotional and physical health of staff) it is recommended that:*
 - *Health and Safety is a standing agenda item.*

Focusing on strategy and sustainability

- A small number of board members expressed some concern that the board can be overly focussed on 'outputs' and 'spends' and the operations of the programmes, rather than looking at the strategic developments. It is important that the board remains largely focussed on strategy and issues of sustainability, rather than with the details of operational management.
- *It is recommended that the Sure Start partnership board:*
 - *Focuses more on sustainability issues.*

Supervisory and Partnership Board Meetings: Barrow. Jan 2000 – Feb 2004.
Analysis of Minutes.

Introduction:

The minutes of the Supervisory and Partnership committee meetings (for the period between 28th January 2000 and 3rd February 2004) were examined.

The purpose of examining these minutes was:

- To evaluate information gained against stated objectives, terms of reference and processes.
- To track developments, events and meetings over the period of evaluation
- To help understand how decisions were made.
- To help understand the relationship and communication channels between the various groups and agencies operating in the internal and external environment of Sure Start
- To assess present processes and how they impact on the future structure of Sure Start Barrow.

The Partnership: The supervisory board was set up in the first instance, meeting on average once every month. This group acted mainly as a steering group, with those interested in the project coming together to put form to the vision of Sure Start. Primary concerns included the set up and development of services. It ran from the date of the first meeting up until Sept 10th 2002, at which point it became known as Barrow Sure Start Partnership.

Communication Policy: The communication policy states that 2 people from each ward should be present at each meeting. Programme Manager Reports and Finance Reports to be given each meeting (from February 2000). Sub-groups and external contacts give presentations whenever necessary.

Membership: Although the board aimed to recruit 12 parents in October 2002, the minutes only note four parent representatives. Up until the date of the last minutes (Feb 2004) this issue has yet to be acknowledged. Four parent representatives are mentioned in Sept 2000, but two were unable to attend the upcoming meeting. However the minutes suggest that this was due to legitimate reasons.

The agenda for Feb 3rd 2004 reports Linda Hadwen stepping down as Programme Manager, leading to the suggestion of one unified Sure Start programme in Barrow (with integrated management). This coincides with the last set of minutes received for analysis.

Attendance: Although the number of members present at each meeting drops slightly after the first four months, attendance remains steady throughout the meetings with some members attending regularly. There are usually between 12 and 20 board members at each meeting.

In July 2000 the board reported attendance problems from the 'Commissioning Group', with their last meeting failing to make quorum. This issue was raised again in Sept 2000 as a critical issue. However this matter appeared to be quickly resolved as is not noted in any further minutes.

Sub Groups: Two main sub-groups were created during the time of the supervisory board. These were the 'Staffing Group' (responsible for the set up and procession of staff members) and the 'Set-up Group' (responsible for raising Sure Start awareness). The 'Executive Group', set up in January 2000, aimed to take responsibility for any urgent issues.

The development of the Partnership Board led to the demise of the afore mentioned sub-groups and the creation of the 'Commissioning Group' and the 'Sustainability Group'.

Funding and Financial Matters: Sustainability of Sure Start Barrow is clearly an issue for members of the board, being continually brought into question throughout the minutes. Although problems with funding occur in June 2000 they are immediately rectified. The board suggested that funds should be tapered by 20-40% in August 2000 and a margin for overspend was agreed (it may be worth noting that 3 projects failed to get approval in this month).

Under- spend becomes a recurring theme from around July 22nd 2003. This becomes more significant when it is decided that roll-over of funds will become the exception rather than the rule (on Trailblazer Dec 2003). However it appears that the Partnership board are aware of this issue, and will monitor finances in more depth in 2004.

Accounting Body: The minutes make little reference to the accountable body until March 2001 when it is noted that CRC are lacking in funds. At this stage it is noted that the board may have to look elsewhere for an accountable body. This concern is followed up throughout the meetings of the next few months. In Oct 2001 the board obtains independence from CRC board, and begin actively looking for a replacement. By March 2002 PCT take over as the accounting body for Barrow, Ormsgill and North Walney Sure Start. This matter is dealt with competently from the beginning and is followed through at each stage.

Project Approval: The minutes illustrate the efficiency of the Partnership Board in approving projects. Suggested projects are approved or rejected promptly, and no projects are over looked.

External Contacts: Members of the Partnership Board express a keen interest in involving external contacts. Early minutes indicate a wish to meet with Sure Start groups in neighbouring communities. This is acted upon at several stages.

Other external contacts include health professions, University researchers (from John Moores, Lancaster and UCLAN Universities) and government agencies (BSA, JobCentrePlus).

Evaluation: The board are aware of the importance of evaluation from an early stage, noting the need for academic evaluation and for evaluation from fellow board

members. In March 2002 an evaluation group is suggested; by July 2002 the 'Commissioning Group' extend their duties to include evaluation and audit. By April 2003 UCLAN are onboard as external evaluators.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Analysis of the minutes show that the Partnership board are successful in achieving their objectives. The board appear to work well together, making decisions as quickly and efficiently as possible. Any delays are reported and fully explained, and unresolved issues are recognized and promptly settled. Early problems in attendance were brought to light immediately.

Communication between the sub-groups takes place during each meeting through the use of presentations and handouts. After requests from other board members financial reports are now issued prior to meeting to ensure that all members have the chance to look over any relevant financial matters. It is vital that members are aware of any changes in the finances and there may be a need to budget more economically. Early on the minutes record concern about overspending, in contrast later minutes report concern on under-spending.

The board are now at a crucial stage in their development. After the resignation of Linda Hadwen, the two Sure Start programmes in Barrow are to be unified. Although this is seen as a positive move, particularly in relation to ending uncertainty and confusion between the two programmes, it will mean that certain members may have to re-establish their role on the board. It is also worth noting that Selwyn Wright will now have more responsibility and thus may need more support in upcoming months.

In relation to future evaluations it may be of use to provide any handouts issued during meeting along with the minutes.

Consultation with parents July 2004

Two members of research staff held small group discussions, with a total of thirteen parents, during a Sure Start activity. Some of the parents were new to the group, whilst others had attended for some time. The aims of the evaluation were explained to the groups and they were asked a range of questions about their use and experiences of Sure Start, the local area and what they would like to see in Sure Start Barrow.

Throughout this report the term 'parents' is used to mean both parents and other guardians or carers.

How parents first came into contact with Sure Start

A range of responses was received from the parents about how they first came into contact with Sure Start. The majority of parents heard about Sure Start through friends or because they live near to the Greengate Centre.

- Through friends (4)
- Live near one of the centres (2)
- Word-of-mouth
- Midwife (giving out Aqua natal leaflet)
- Sure Start went to home to visit after birth of first child
- Sure Start sent information pack home
- Attended party when Sure Start first opened
- Used to work at nursery attached to Greengate Centre
- Child attended nursery attached to Greengate Centre

How parents found attending Sure Start for the first time

Four parents found attending Sure Start for the first time quite nerve racking and difficult. One person said that Sure Start staff helped them through this. Four parents had first attended Sure Start with a friend, partner or with people they had made previous contact with and they reported that this had made it easier. One parent said they would not have come alone.

Four parents said they had found it quite easy attending Sure Start for the first time. One person said they feel they have to do these things for the sake of their child. Two people said they had found the Sure Start staff to be friendly and welcoming. Another parent acknowledged that when they first attended a Sure Start group it was a small one so it was not hard to get to know others.

What parents felt Sure Start is for

The majority of parents said Sure Start was there to help and support families. Other functions of Sure Start (as indicated by the parents) included the following:

- Meeting and getting to know people/making friends
- Helping parents to get out of the house with their children
- Getting children to interact with other children before attending school
- Providing trips out for families (and for some, holidays)
- Providing information on childcare
- It is about the community

Levels of contact with Sure Start

Parents were asked to list any other Sure Start services attended (either currently or in the past). The majority of parents were accessing at least one other Sure Start service, with one parent listing six different Sure Start services either currently accessed or used in the past. The following is a list of these services mentioned by the responding parents:

- Café (3)
- Little Rainbows Community Nursery (3)
- Baby Massage (2)
- Aqua Splash (2)
- Hunky Dory Bedtime Story (2)
- Swimming Group
- Aqua Natal Group
- Parent and Toddler Group
- Young Mums Group
- Post natal Group
- Community Support Workers
- Tumbling Tigers
- Summer Trips
- Breast Feeding Support Group
- Community Parents
- Baby Talk
- Bags of Fun
- CSW training
- Counselling
- Renting of Sure Start rooms

Positive responses were received about Baby Talk, Bags of Fun, Hunky Dory's bedtime stories and Aqua splash. No negative feedback was received about any Sure Start service accessed.

One parent noted that it could be difficult for them to access more services because they also have older children, for whom Sure Start do not cater.

What parents thought of the services available for children

All responses were positive:

- They are good (5)
- They are really good (2)
- They are excellent
- They are wonderful
- They have helped a lot, given a lot of support. They are always helpful and easy to talk to
- Most are free, which is really good when not working
- Before existence of the Sure Start building had to travel further
- Can now attend activities and services every day of the week

One parent indicated they were reluctant to return to work because they would miss out on services.

Attendance at courses

Only one person had done any Sure Start courses. This person was in the process of completing the Community Support Worker training.

Two parents said they were due to start courses in September. Those courses included the following:

- Community Care Work
- Community Parents
- Community Support Worker Training
- Breast Feeding Training

Five parents said they were not aware of any available courses. All expressed an interest and said they would like more information about what courses are available. One person, who was unaware of the courses available, said they would like to undertake courses but did not think it would be possible to find childcare. Two people said they had expressed an interest in courses in the past, but had received no further information. In addition, two people expressed an interest in undertaking a First Aid course. One parent who is due to start courses in September responded that it is necessary to approach the Sure Start staff and enquire about courses.

One parent simply responded that they had not done any Sure Start courses, whilst two others (one of whom had not undertaken any training with Sure Start) said they attended courses elsewhere.

Benefits to children

A number of responses were received from parents about benefits they had seen in their children from attending Sure Start. Many referred to the opportunities for their children to have contact with other children and the enhancement of social skills:

- Chance to play with other children

- Plays more with others
- Learning to be with other children
- Sees other babies
- Communication skills- with other children
- Brought him out of self
- More social
- Socialise more with other children- more kids, more noise
- Brought him on- didn't like strangers
- Watches children walk- will get up to copy

One parent responded that the Sure Start activities get their child 'out of the house'. Another parent said that Sure Start had brought their child on more.

Two parents said their babies were a bit young to see the benefits yet.

One parent said their child loved Baby Massage and another described how their child loved attending the Sure Start centre and that they cannot pass the building without the child wanting to go in.

Benefits to parents

Many of the parents indicated that Sure Start had provided them with opportunities to get out of the house and provided them with support when it was most needed. A selection of those comments is as follows:

- Means you are not stuck at home
- Gets you out and about
- Better to be out and about
- Got me out of house- interacting- making me mix
- Got me out of house and meeting others
- Been there when needed them. Can ring them anytime
- Support network if needed- knowing you can talk to someone if need to
- Lot of support from Sure Start
- Had help when partner in hospital
- Someone looked after children when in hospital
- Emergency placements in nursery
- Helped with safety equipment

One parent said that Sure Start had given them the opportunity to spend time with their child and another said they would not have anywhere to go if it was not for Sure Start.

The parents generally felt that Sure Start had helped them meet some other parents with children aged under 4, although some indicated they knew other parents with children under 4 prior to using Sure Start. Some parents had had other children and therefore knew where to go to meet people. One parent mentioned that they meet other parents through school.

Timing of services

Four parents said the services were at the right times for them. One person indicated that the times were suitable because they were not working. Other parents made comments about the timings of services in general or specific services (mostly saying that all services are held in the morning):

- Most activities are in the mornings- playgroups. Afternoon playgroups needed
- Services mostly mornings- but it makes you get out of bed
- Baby Group hard to get to in the morning (10am)
- Hard to get organised in time
- Early groups are good for when baby gets up early
- Toddler Splash (Dalton) inconvenient time- can't get back to pick children up from school in time

Ideas suggested by parents about what they would like to see in their Sure Start

A number of ideas were proposed by the parents about what they would like to see in their Sure Start (listed below):

- Services should carry on through half term (4)
- Weekend activities- for older and young children
- More holiday/summer sessions
- More afternoon sessions
- Summer services for all the family (including juniors)
- More social groups for first time mums
- Aqua natal (prenatal) classes should lead straight on to Baby Group (contacts already made)
- More advertising
- More information about sessions needed- basic information about what to bring, how much care you will get (who looks after your baby whilst in toilet). Need someone to phone
- Continued funding as Sure Start helps a lot
- More services in other areas
- More services for younger babies (aged 6 weeks to 6 months)
- Better parking
- Services for junior aged children in centre (e.g. Youth Club, Disco, Computer Club)
- Services where parents can bring all their children (split room in two for infants and juniors)

Sessions in the afternoon and over holiday periods appeared to be a priority need for a number of parents. One parent noted that it had not been advertised that there would be no activities running over the holiday.

In addition, two parents said that attending Sure Start services was not always easy, as they do not live near the Greengate Centre. They expressed a need for more activities and services to be held in other areas, and hoped there would be more services when the Abbotsvale centre is finished.

A lack of awareness of different services and activities became apparent during the small group discussions, with some parents querying others about how to go about accessing a range of different services/activities mentioned.

Good things about Sure Start

A range of positive comments were received, mostly referring to the nature of the staff at Sure Start and the facilities:

- Helps you get out of the house
- Variety of children of different ages
- Facilities for the children
- Different toys and activities
- Free services
- The support received- nothing is too much trouble (they put themselves out for you)
- Receive help and support ('They are a lifeline')
- Very friendly, non-judgemental staff

Things that are not so good about Sure Start

Parents were asked to indicate if there was anything they thought was not so good about Sure Start Barrow. Three people said they could not think of anything (two said they thought Sure Start was 'very good' and another said they had only accessed Sure Start services in the past 3 months).

Other responses included the following:

- There is nothing in the summer holidays
- There is not enough advertising- don't find out about sessions like Chatterbox and Baby Talk- feel awful asking all the time. Get information through the post but no details about times and days are provided
- Previous difficulty once of getting in touch with the leader of an activity
- It took a long time to get initial visit (3½- 4 months)

Feelings about the area

Two parents said they quite liked the area in which they lived, commenting that they felt it to be a safe area.

Five parents said they thought the area they lived in was 'alright'. One parent said they did not interact with any people in the area in which they lived.

Two parents described how they lived on a busy main road (with one indicating there were no safe areas for their children to play). A need was expressed by these parents for a crossing on Greengate Street.

One person said they hated the area in which they lived.

Important issues/problems for parents in the area

Similar responses were made about a lack of services in the afternoons and over holiday periods and a lack of information about services.

In addition, two parents described the problems in their area of people drinking alcohol in the streets and fighting and children throwing eggs and stones at windows, resulting in their own children not being able to play outside. These parents said they did not think anything could be done to reduce the problem because the people in the area do not care.

One person said they would like to see the traffic being slowed down in their road.

Two people said there were not really any issues/problems that they felt needed to be addressed in the area in which they lived. Two parents said they have always had their needs met by services.

Reasons for parents not using activities/services

Parents were asked “if there are people in their neighbourhood who were not using Sure Start services, why do you think they do not use the services?” Five parents said they thought that the majority of other parents in their area used Sure Start.

Two parents indicated that the majority of the people in their area were not accessing Sure Start services and felt this to be because people could not be bothered. One of these parents said they thought that some parents were of the opinion that Sure Start was linked to Social Services.

Other parents indicated why they thought people were not using Sure Start services:

- Lack of interest
- Hard to organise self
- Difficult with more than one child
- Session times clashing with working hours
- Dad’s Club is at tea-time (not a good time)
- Dad’s don’t want to go to Dad’s Club

Some parents suggested what they thought might encourage more parents to use Sure Start services:

- More information given. One person suggested more information could be given at hospital by Sure Start parents/workers informing parents in detail about what is available through Sure Start
- More ongoing advertising
- Change the times of services
- Option of different times for the same session

Two parents felt that if people wanted to come they would.

Where parents saw themselves fitting into Sure Start

Parents were asked how they saw their role in Sure Start, whether they feel involved in the design and working of the programme and whether any attended the partnership board meetings.

Two parents said they felt listened to by Sure Start and that their opinions were respected and taken into consideration.

Four parents indicated that Sure Start asks for their opinions and that they fill out questionnaires. These parents also said that they were not sure they were listened to, but noted that they will find out if their opinions are valued if summer services are arranged.

One parent said they thought they did not need to be involved at a design and implementation level within Sure Start because it works well without their input.

No parents were members of the partnership board but three expressed interest at being involved at that level. One parent said they felt they would have to 'get used to the people' before attending.

Additional comments

Parents were given the opportunity to add any additional comments. Some parents reiterated previous comments, which included the following:

- The need for sessions during the summer
- The need for more advertisements

One parent said they would like a Play Gym for babies (at Baby Group). Another commented that other groups they had attended (which were non-Sure Start) were held in bigger rooms with more toys.

One parent felt the Sure Start Greengate centre is not pram-friendly and indicated that the doors are very heavy.

Positive comments about Sure Start included the following:

- 'Keep up the good work' (3)
- 'They are spot-on'
- They are there when you need them
- Glad interacted here- could have been sat at home
- 'I don't know what I would do without them'
- 'It is a lifeline'
- You don't have to be a single parent to receive the help and support, anyone is welcome

The research team had previously written to a number of parents to invite them to a meeting to discuss their views. The meeting was cancelled due to poor uptake. One parent, however, wrote to the team with their views about Sure Start. They said they thought Sure Start was geared towards providing

services for young mothers and mothers-to-be and that there were no services appropriate to older mothers. They expressed their own needs for support and a wish for Sure Start to be seen to cater for all parents.

Conclusions and recommendations

In general, the thirteen parents were experiencing benefits from accessing Sure Start (with many attending more than the one activity). The majority expressed satisfaction, with some expressing high levels of satisfaction with the help and support received from Sure Start staff.

Some parents had found attending Sure Start for the first time quite difficult. ***It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow consider the possibilities of having a group of volunteer parents who could offer to meet or call for '1st timers' to advertise the services available and go with them to the groups.***

Some parents were unaware of the training opportunities and some of the activities and services available with Sure Start and many parents expressed a wish for ongoing advertising to raise levels of awareness.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow raises levels of advertising, providing parents with more detailed information about the services available, including what is involved in each and the times and locations of different activities and services.

A theme running throughout the group discussions was a need for activities and services over the holiday periods, with some parents expressing some concern about what they would do with their child/ren during the 6-week summer vacation.

It is recommended that Sure Start liaise with parents to identify their needs over the holiday periods and consider the possibilities of providing services at these times.

Some parents also expressed a wish for more services in the afternoons. ***It is recommended that Sure Start consult with parents to identify the most convenient timings for services and take this into account when planning activity timetables.***

No parents were members of the partnership board (nor had heard of it), but three expressed some interest in becoming involved.

Considering the problems the board has had in retaining parent representatives, it is recommended that Sure Start Barrow liaise closer with users about the possibilities of being involved at the board level.

Case Study

Sure Steps/Portage Service

Information was collected over a period of 6 months (January 2004 to June 2004) via:

- discussions with **members of the Portage team**
- the **Sure Start database**, providing information about the number of people accessing Portage from January 2002-April 2004
- **previous monitoring and evaluation** information received from the commissioning officer
- **discussions with parents** who have received support from the Portage team

The Portage Specialist Teaching Team

Sure Start, with an emphasis on evidence-based practice, promotes Portage as a valuable service¹. The early identification of children with special and additional needs was specified as being a priority for Sure Start Barrow in their 1999 delivery plan. The Early Years Specialist Teacher joined the Sure Start team in March 2000 and began setting up the Portage service, a specialist home teaching service for children with special needs. In April/May 2000 the Greengate Infants Outreach programme began. This involved Sure Start funding for 2 part time nursery assistants, seconded from a local school to work with pre-school applicants in their home environment. In May 2000 a Portage trained Social Worker joined the Sure Start team, working part time on the outreach programme. At that time, a clinical psychologist was also available to offer advice to some families. Four outreach parents started the Community Support training.

The current Sure Start Portage team comprises of eight active workers:

- The Early Years Specialist, who continues to manage it, now working part-time
- The Portage co-ordinator, appointed in March 2002, working full-time
- Portage workers (part-time)

Four newly trained Portage workers within the Portage Team were previously or are continuing to work as Community Support Workers, going on to complete the Portage training. They had a long induction period and receive close supervision.

In addition to the core team a variety of different people from local childcare provision, health and social services have also undertaken Portage training over time. A few well established workers are still supporting children in their own setting (that is, the setting of the worker) in addition to home support, funded by Sure Start.

¹ Sure Start (2002) A Guide to Evidence Based Practice. London: DfEE Publications

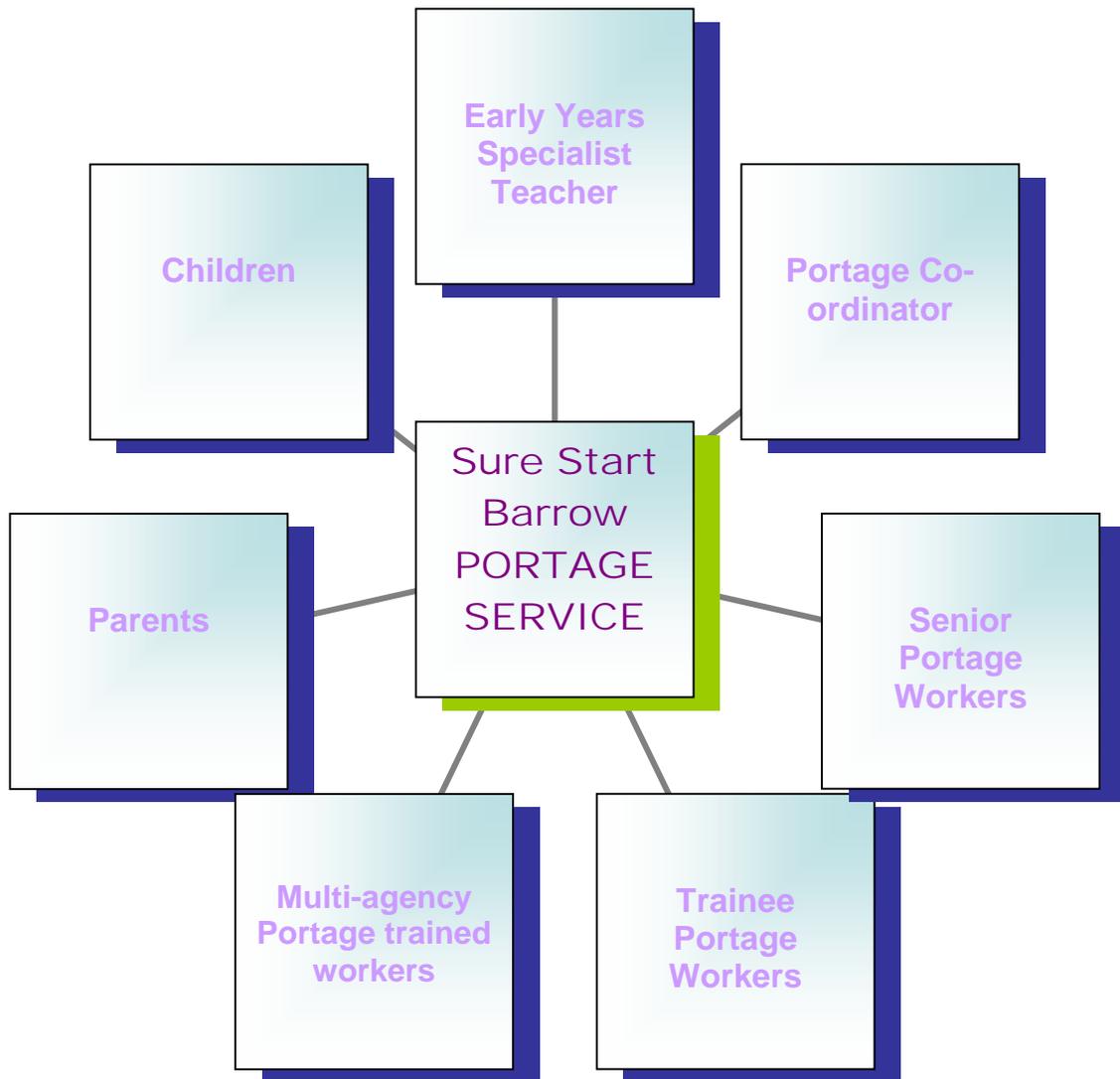


Figure 1: Sure Start Portage Service

Interviews with five members of the Portage team (one of whom was also working at that time as a Community Support Worker) indicated that four members of the team were ‘very satisfied’ with their posts in Sure Start Barrow and the fifth was ‘fairly satisfied’.²

Members of the Portage team explained how their work involved working alongside many other Sure Start staff members, particularly those within the Speech and Language Team and the Occupational Therapist. Examples of joint working and pooling of resources in work with families were provided. In

² Although five members of the team were interviewed (names were provided by the team manager), only four actually mentioned their work with Portage during their interviews.

addition, members of the team described liaison and work with other professionals within education and health services, which they found to be productive and valuable.

The team meets regularly for fortnightly group supervision. In addition, those working with families on a one-to-one basis receive individual supervision from the specialist teacher or the co-ordinator. The supervision sessions were described as an opportunity to update the Portage team on progress with families, to receive feedback from the rest of the team and to discuss training. All workers interviewed were 'very satisfied' with the support received from their line manager. Additional comments were made about the support received:

- 'They are always there to talk to'.
- 'Everyone is eager to listen'.

Training Programmes

Portage workers have to complete a three-day National Portage Association intensive training workshop. The workshop involves learning about the core principles of the Portage approach, assessing children, setting and teaching targets and goals and recording information. The Early Years Specialist who manages the Portage team is a certified Portage trainer (although not yet accredited) and a certified NAS Early Bird Trainer.

In November 2000, 21 trainees who were from local childcare provision, health and social services took part in a Portage workshop. In February 2002, 20 more trainees undertook another Portage workshop.

A sample of five evaluation feedback forms, which was collected at the end of the February 2002 basic training workshop, was received by the evaluation team. The feedback forms ask trainees to specify which aspect of the workshop they appreciated most. At this workshop the trainees appreciated the following aspects:

- Learning about the different strands to Portage (5)
- Learning about specific approaches (4)
- Talking to each other and sharing ideas (4)
- Working in a small group (3)
- The Portage material file (2)

Aspects that trainees found difficult to understand were as follows:

- Day 2- working through behaviours, conditions and especially criteria
- Would have liked more explanation of checklist and initial home visit as I needed to ask further questions to clarify
- Task Analysis

Four of the five respondents said the workshop had met their expectations.

Additional comments about the workshop included:

- Very informative, comprehensive. Well delivered
- More than matched my expectations

At this point in the evaluation form trainees are asked to indicate if they would be willing to 'continue Portage training within Sure Start, by working with designated families, with supervisory support for a minimum period of six months'. The sample feedback from the five trainees indicated that four were interested in working within Sure Start on Portage. Two of those trainees indicated that it would depend on their current workload and time commitments. Those who were planning on incorporating Portage in their own work environment rather than work for Sure Start are also asked if they would be willing to join a supervisory group. Two trainees, of the five, indicated they were willing, whilst one said they would hopefully be able to be involved.

Other comments were as follows:

- It will certainly help understanding with young children I will take on in a fostering role. I would hope to be able to take Portage further
- I would like to be able to use Portage in my current practice and would be willing to consider it as time allows

Six trainees attended the last workshop, in July 2003, which took place in Penrith. The Portage Co-ordinator attended the workshop to provide additional support to the trainees. This training took the total number of portage trained workers up to 47 in total.

A further Portage basic training workshop is planned for July 2004. Although people will be invited to undertake the training from outside the Sure Start wards it will be necessary for them to offer some time supporting Sure Start families.

Training was described as ongoing, with in-house training being provided for all Portage workers and other interested parties. Information about courses held by the Early Years Partnership is also accessed and interested workers are enabled to attend.

Other work by the team

Summer Work

The Portage team has worked with families over the summer periods. In 2001, a summer outreach programme was offered.

In July and August 2002, a group play session called Summer Fun, was held by the team and Portage families were invited to attend. This entailed holiday provision for under 12 year olds. Over the 5 week period 17 families attended the sessions, which were run at Burlington House by the Portage Co-ordinator

and a Portage Worker. This group highlighted the need for support through the summer period. Summer play sessions in 2003 saw an average attendance by twelve families and eighteen children. A second room was available for the older children. No internal evaluation was undertaken about the Summer Play sessions.

Also, in 2003 three local schools used their Portage trained staff to provide summer outreach supporting twenty-seven additional children over the summer term.

At the time of data collection five schools had responded with interest to a proposed summer outreach programme for 2004. Portage trained staff from the schools would need to be released for the initial screening home visit and supply staff would be funded by the project.

Greengate Pre-school Programme, Portage Support and Portage Bridge

The portage service began as the 'pilot outreach programme' in April 2000. Staff were seconded through contact with local nursery schools to work with Sure Start's funding and support. Greengate Pre-School Programme (who were the first school to respond) were new entrants to the reception in September 2000. It was thought that those with a birthday between April to September 1st (without prior access to playgroup or nursery) would benefit particularly from the scheme. Two part time nursery assistants were brought in, each worked with ten children (and their parents) in the home environment.

The initial plan was to work with other wards and nurseries but the availability of Early Years staff in the autumn term was limited. As a result, the Basic Portage Training programme was set up (see under 'Training Programmes' section below). Twelve of the trainees who took part in Portage training in November 2000 were available to work for the project and gave one hour weekly support to one or two families each. At that time there were approximately fifteen families on the register. Those Portage trained workers received individual support and attended a weekly group supervision meeting.

The current Portage Team works across both local Sure Start programmes, which includes the four wards of Sure Start Barrow and the two wards of Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney.

In some cases, a need for input by the Portage team is identified at groups run by Sure Start or at first visits by Sure Start. Alternatively, referrals are received from external sources, for example from schools, GPs, health visitors, speech therapists or the family themselves. In addition, members of the team visit schools (playgroups and nurseries) providing them with information about the service and who to contact if they have any concerns about a child. A pattern of visiting, usually weekly, is agreed with the family. Usually the support is for a long term period of time. This is an example of

good practice, with Sure Start Barrow taking a pro-active role in seeking out those who may benefit.

In October 2003, Portage Bridge began. This involves working with rising 3 year olds in the nursery who have previously received support from the Portage team in the home. The aim is to link home and school activity using an integrated approach (part of the 'Ready to go' Sure Start).

In 2000, the Portage team made 200 visits/contacts (these and the following figures include contact with both parents and children). In 2001, this figure rose to 600. The database indicated that:

- **In 2002 the team made 620 visits/contacts**
- **In 2003, the team made 977 visits/contacts**
- **In 2004 (from January to April) the team made 354 visits/contacts with local families (with a predicted annual number of 1062)**

It should be noted that in some cases a child was recorded on the database as being seen many times in one month, which seems unlikely considering Portage involves a home visit.

The figure below shows this information. Altogether, since Portage was initiated (up to April 2004), the team has made 2751 visits/contacts. 103 families have received support from the Portage team (this figure includes those seen through summer outreach).

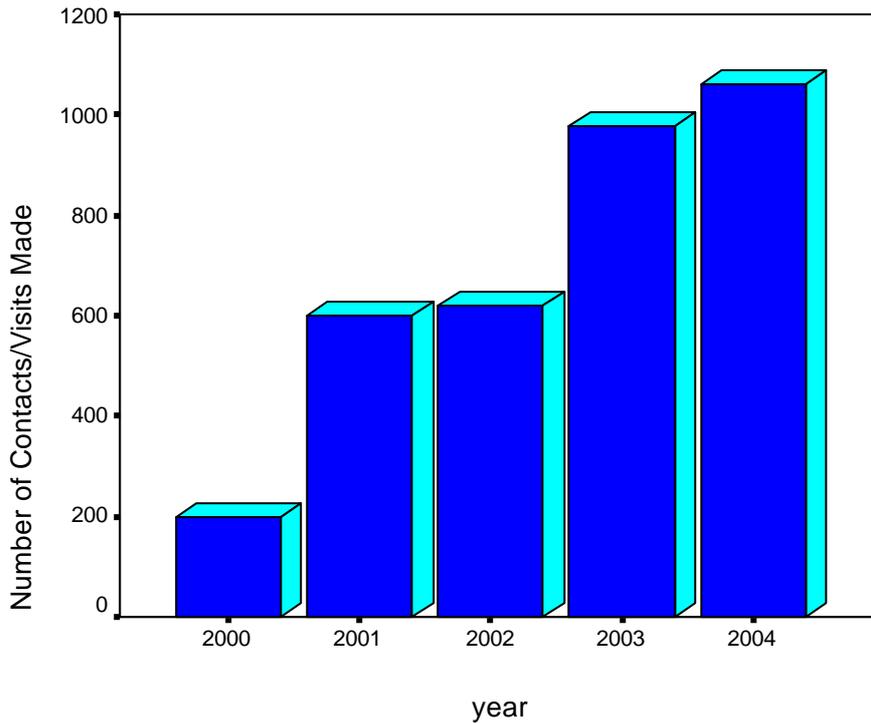


Figure 2: Number of visits/contacts made by the team across the years

An increase has been seen in the number of visit/contacts made by the Portage team. It is likely that the end of 2004 will see another increase in the number of contacts made. These increases show that local families are receiving more Portage support. The figure below illustrates the number of visit/contacts made by the team across the months in 2002.

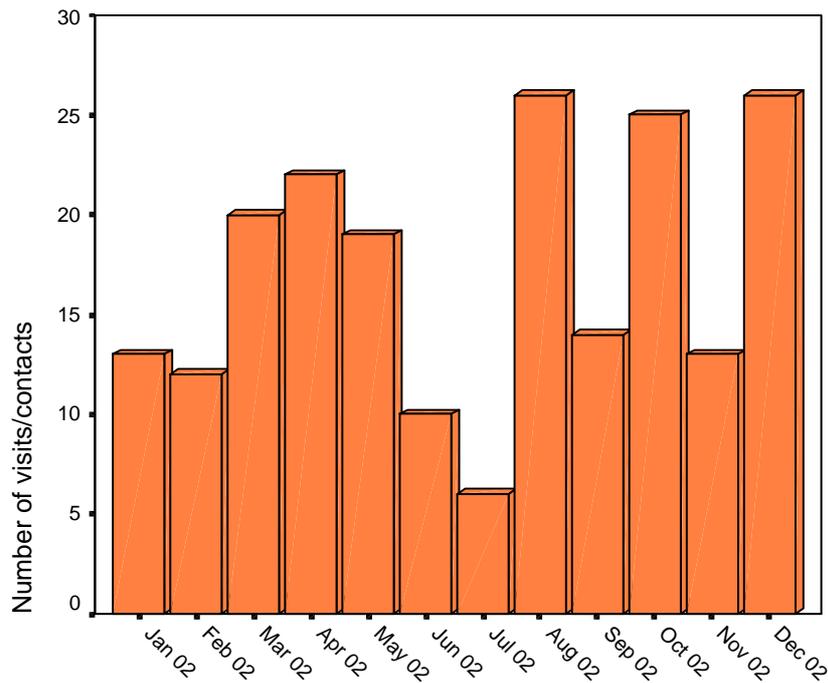


Figure 3: Number of visits/contacts made by the team across the months in 2002

The figure below illustrates the number of visit/contacts made by the team across the months in 2003.

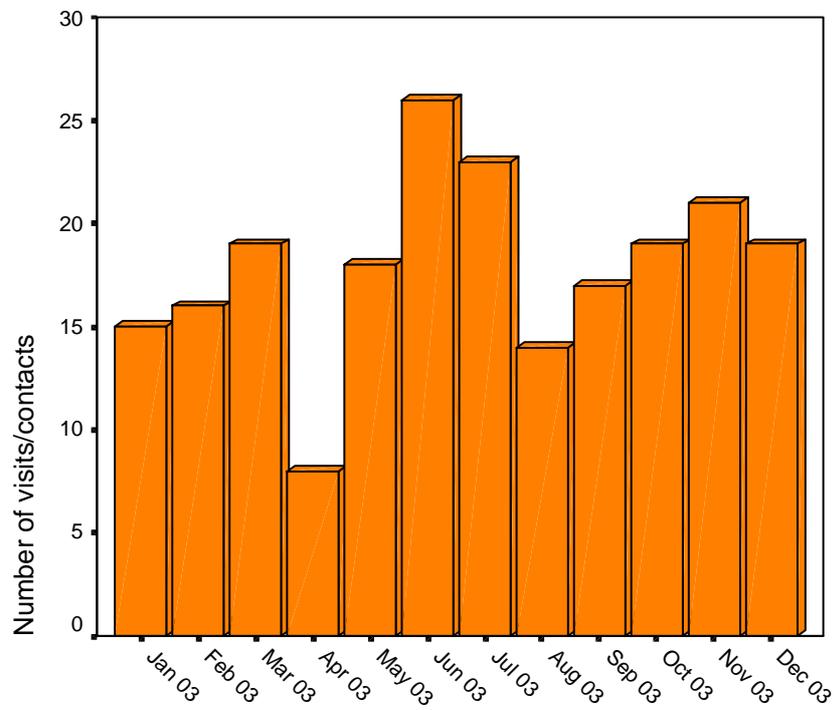


Figure 4: Number of visits/contacts made by the team across the months in 2003

The figure below illustrates the number of visit/contacts made by the team from January to April in 2004.

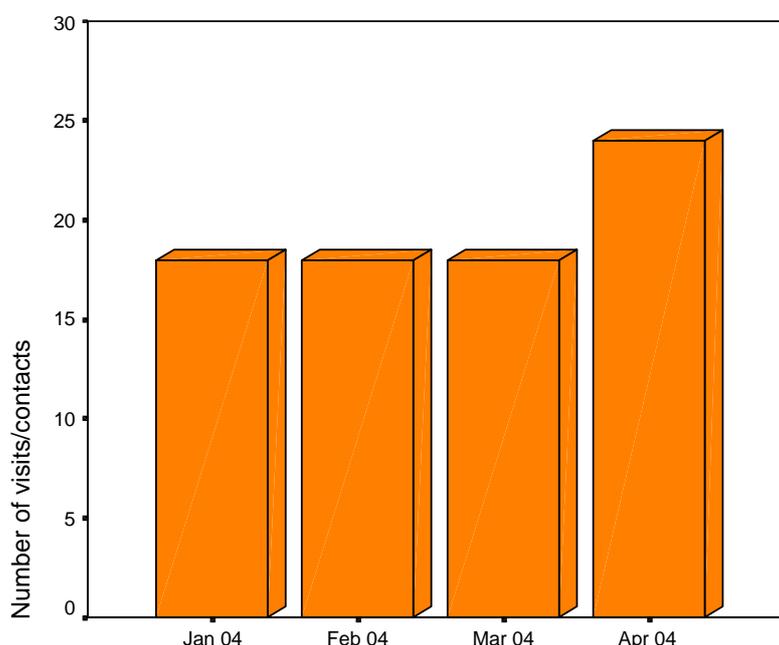


Figure 5: Number of visits/contacts made by the team from January-April 2004

User feedback about the Portage service

Internal evaluation of the Greengate Pre-school Programme

A sample of feedback was received from the Portage team about the Greengate Pre-School programme. A total of 12 questionnaires were returned. Responses are shown in the table below.

Table 1 Parents' responses to evaluation questions

Question	Yes	No
Did a member of staff talk to you about the programme?	11	1
Did you receive a letter and information about it?	12	0
Did you receive enough information?	10	0
Were the aims of the programme clear to you?	12	0
Did you find it helpful to work on certain aspects of your child's development?	12	0
Has it been helpful to leave toys with you for the week?	11	0
Would you like to be offered more toys?	5	5
Have you seen progress and new skills developing?	12	0
Would you recommend this programme to others?	12	0
Would you be interested in forming or joining a parents group for pre-schoolers?	10	2
If Yes, would you be willing to go to another venue close to Greengate?	11	0

Some questions required a more in-depth response. These can be seen below

How did you feel after the first home visit?

- 10 positive responses were given (including 'pleased' 'happy' and 'very positive')
- 2 parents did not respond

Is there anything you could suggest which might have improved it?

- 2 parents suggested that more time would be useful
- 1 parent suggested the need for a baby-sitting service
- No other improvements were suggested

Describe your child's response to their weekly visits

- 10 positive responses were given (including 'Excited', 'Very Interested', 'Keen' and 'Looked Forward to it')
- 2 parents did not respond

Please tell us the aspects you were most happy about

- 4 parents indicated that they were happiest about their child's development and the fact that their child enjoyed it.
- 3 parents indicated that meeting staff and receiving advice was the aspect they were most happy about.
- 2 parents indicated that they were happiest about the time spent one-to-one.
- 2 parents stated that they were happy with all aspects of the programme.

Please tell us the aspects you were least happy about

- 1 parent indicated that more time was needed.
- No problems were raised.

Have you any suggestions about how the home visiting programme could be developed further?

- 3 parents indicated that more visits/more time was needed.
- 2 parents showed interest in Parenting Classes
- 1 parent requested the need for 24 hour/overnight respite
- 1 parent suggested the need for "something for older siblings".

What would you like to move onto next?

- 4 parents would like to move on to 'family/parent' support/social groups
- 1 parent would like to move on to home visits
- 1 parent would like to move on to summer schooling groups

Further Comments:

- 2 parents commented further on how much their child had enjoyed, and developed from the course (for example "(Child) has enjoyed the time spent with (worker) and I feel it has benefited her enormously")
- 1 parent commented that the helpline gave "good parenting guidelines and informal support"
- 1 parent suggested the need for a 'safe play' area for under 5's.
- 1 parent suggested the need for "parents meetings to get their thoughts re(garding) their community"

Overall feedback on this programme was very positive. All 12 parents said that they would recommend the programme to others, and that they had seen their child was developing new skills. All parents found it helpful to work on certain aspects of their child's development and found that both they, and their child, reacted positively to the first home visit. Of those who responded to the question regarding their child's response to the programme, all were encouraging. Only one complaint was made and this was in relation to time (more needed), rather than the quality of the programme.

Interest in Future Courses

The figure below shows the number of people who indicated that they would be interested in attending a variety of future courses.

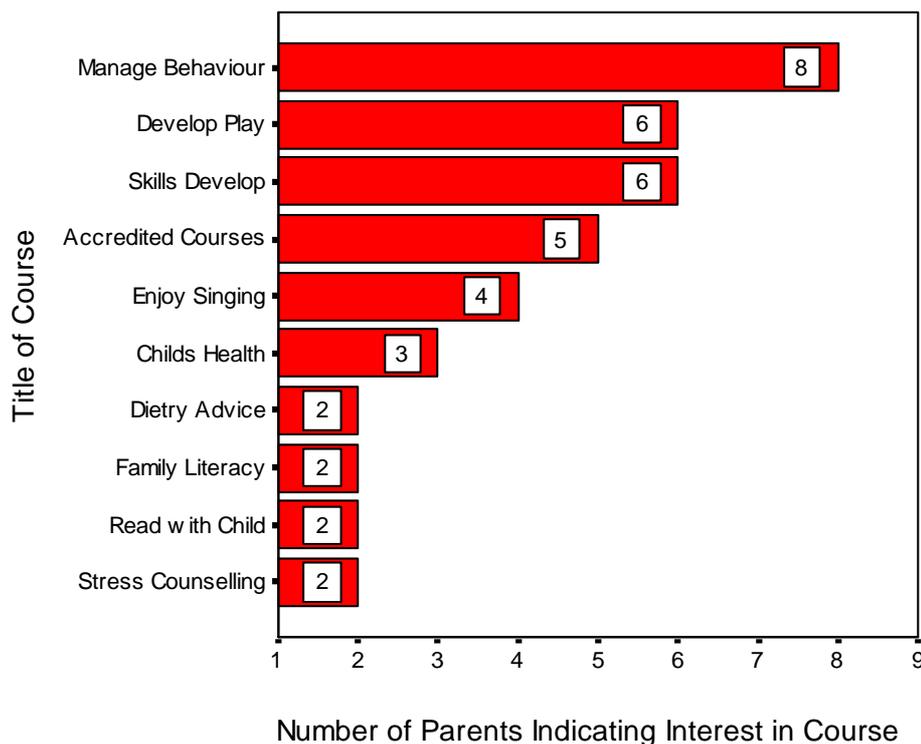


Figure 6: Interest by parents in future courses following involvement in the Greengate Pre-school programme

All suggested courses received some interest. The course on managing behaviour was most popular with 8 out of 12 parents indicating interest. The least popular of the suggested courses were Dietary Advice, Family Literacy, Reading with Children and Stress Counselling. Despite being the least popular these courses did receive two votes each. Parents also suggested the need for a basic computer course, a short course in Childcare/Nursery work and a COPE course.

The information received from parents about the programme was used by Sure Start Barrow. For example, the whole evaluation of the programme mainly highlighted the need for Summer Fun provision and Fun Days were arranged by Sure Start to meet this need. This is an excellent example of good practice, and a constructive response to the needs expressed.

Internal evaluation of the Portage Home Visit Programme

Feedback from parents via standard evaluation form is received before the home visit programme with each family finishes. Evaluation can also take place at other times if the Portage worker feels this is necessary. A sample of evaluation forms completed by nine parents (from August 2002 to January 2004) was given to the research team by the Sure Start Portage team.

All nine parents indicated they had been spoken to first by a member of the staff about the programme and felt that the aims of the programme were clear to them.

Eight parents found it helpful to work on certain aspects of their child's development, whilst one parent felt this was not relevant. One parent commented that working on their daughter's speech development had been most helpful.

Seven parents indicated that it had been helpful for toys and books to be left with them each week. One parent felt that it had not been particularly helpful to have toys and books left with them each week, indicating that with two older children it was too much responsibility to stop them being lost or toys broken. The ninth parent indicated that this question about the loan of toys and books was not applicable to them.

Parents were asked how their children had responded to the weekly visits by a member of the Portage team (see Figure 7 below).

HOW CHILDREN RESPONDED
TO THE WEEKLY VISITS

He was really happy

Got more confident after first couple of weeks. Enjoyed the visits very much

Really looked forward each week to the visits

He really enjoyed it

Looks forward to them. Happier at school now. Mixing better. Making progress with her talking.

Very cautious at first. When she got used to it she looked

After 4-6 sessions (daughter) would ask when (Portage worker) was coming and look forward to seeing her

My child responded very well to her visits

Figure 7: Parents' responses about how children responded to the weekly visits

Parents were then asked to tell the team about the aspects of the programme they were most happy about and not so happy about. No parents indicated any aspects they were not happy about. The following responses were received indicating what aspects parents were happy about:

- Worked at a steady pace until enough confidence was gained
- He took to a stranger very well. Looked forward to (worker) coming
- All of it
- (Worker) was able to reassure me about (child's) development and advise me on how to help her
- How friendly (worker) was. Also patient and helpful
- The effect on her development at school and social skills
- All
- I was pleased to be involved in the playing and the cooking. Other children involved. Pleased with outcome.

In addition parents were asked if they would be interested in future courses (see Table 2).

Table 2: Interest shown by parents in courses

Course	Number of parents (9)
Developing children's play	4
Managing Behaviour	3
Children's health	3
Dietary Advice	2
Stress counselling	2
Family Literacy	1
Personal skills development	1
Accredited courses	1
Reading with children	0
Enjoying singing and rhyme	0

The evaluation form also gives parents the opportunity to add any additional comments or suggestions:

- Thank you so much for all your help. I didn't think it would be possible to achieve so much in so little time. A special thanks to (worker) whom

the children will really miss as they seem to have formed a special bond with her

- (Child) enjoyed playing. Helped with his talking and sharing
- I would like to thank (worker) for all her help and encouragement she gave to (child) and myself
- (Child) plays well with (worker) and he enjoys her coming to visit
- I am pleased that (child) is now willing to try new foods, therefore more than happy with the outcome. Thank you (child) for all your help.

One parent expressed a wish for more projects in the area of Roosegate.

Independent feedback about the Sure Start Portage Service

Four users were interviewed to seek their views and experiences of the one-to-one support received by the Sure Start Barrow Portage/Sure Steps service. Three of the parent's children were receiving the support in the home, whilst one child received the support in the nursery environment.

How parents first found out about the Portage Service

Two parents found out about the Portage service whilst attending a course at Sure Start. One parent noted that members of Sure Start staff highlighted the need whilst their child was attending the course crèche. The other parent indicated they themselves had shared their concerns with the staff and were directed towards Portage.

Another parent said they were referred to the Portage service from Chatterbox.

The fourth parent explained how they had been to the hospital to see the consultant and found out about Sure Start through seeing posters. They were given the contact details by the consultant at the hospital.

Who made the first contact and how

Three of the parents were referred on through their previous contacts with Sure Start and staff at Sure Start initiated the first contact after that. One parent said that they made the first contact by phoning Sure Start.

How many sessions attended so far and how often the sessions were

How many sessions parents were expecting

Two parents indicated that the support had been ongoing for about a year on a weekly basis. Another parent said the support had been received for about eight months, again on a weekly basis. The fourth parent said they had received the support through

weekly sessions. One parent noted that they were not actually entitled to Portage and so felt very lucky that they received one session of support per week.

One parent explained that their Portage worker had left Sure Start, but the support from another member of staff was due to start the next day and would be weekly. Another parent commented that the support they had been receiving from Portage had been suspended whilst their Portage worker was waiting for their police check to come through they had not received Portage support for two months. This parent noted that health professionals external to Sure Start had said they should get another Portage worker, but they felt that their child was familiar and used to the current Portage worker.

Two of the parents said the support would continue as long as their child needed it and they were still benefiting from it. One of those parents noted that the support did initiate with 12 sessions but that it was identified that more, ongoing support was required. Another parent indicated that the support would probably finish when their child turns four, but they hoped that the support might continue at least until their child had settled at school.

One parent explained that the Portage support used to be received in the home environment after school hours but their child was too tired after school and thus the support was now being received in the school environment. Their child was seeing the Portage worker for two hours during the school week, but the support was due to be reduced to one hour per week. This parent noted that Sure Start had contacted their child's new school.

What parents hoped to gain from the Portage Support

Parents were asked to say what they hoped they would gain from the Portage service. The following list was shown to them for ideas, but parents were asked if they had hoped to gain anything from the support that was not listed.

What parents hoped to gain:	Number of parents
Spend more time with your child	1
Improved relationship with child	2
Develop your child's learning	4
Learn new skills yourself and discover new interests	4
Other	2

One parent said they hoped to gain an understanding of their child and enjoying their childhood. Another parent said they had hoped to learn how to play with their child who was non-verbal and gain an insight into their learning. They hoped that the support from the Portage service would provide the stimulus that their child was missing out on. This parent felt that their child had not been receiving the support they needed, yet had the greatest need for learning. A third parent noted that they had hoped to be given advice and suggestions from someone away from the situation.

What the support consisted of

A range of examples of were provided by the parents what the support consisted of, which varied between the children:

- Using toys Sure Start Staff bring with them from the Toy Library to help the children play.
- Gearing sessions to appropriate play with child.
- Toys lent out each week.
- Cards used to represent food.
- Photos used around the house.
- Desensitising child to different things, e.g. water, sand.
- Teaching behaviour modification.
- Breaking learning tasks down into steps to achieve each week.
- Trying different tasks each week.
- Mastering tasks and assessing them each week.

Parents gave examples of what the support consisted of for them personally:

- Can talk to them and 'offload' about anything.
- If had a bad week can talk about it- nice to share information and get advice from someone who knows.

One parent noted that the support has become part of their child's weekly routine.

Another parent explained how they had done the Early Bird course, which helped them learn how to teach their child. This parent explained that a number of people were involved in supporting their child and that they were involved in different activities, including a fortnightly meeting entitled 'Friends of the Early Bird' based at Bram Longstaffe.

How involved parents felt in the process

All parents felt very involved in the process ('she got me extremely involved throughout' and 'you are very much involved'). One parent described how all three people were involved in the support (the worker, the parent and the child) and that the process helped to teach and guide parents.

One parent noted that if they did not agree with the Portage worker about a specific task then the task would not be continued. Another parent commented that the worker brings suggestions to the sessions, rather than coming into the home and dictating what the session would involve. In addition to this, another parent commented that the Portage worker brings to the sessions ideas about different ways of communicating with their child.

The parent whose child received the support in the school environment described how they receive feedback on how their child is doing and what

they have been like. This parent felt that the staff member kept in touch with them, providing tasks and discussing them with them every week.

Satisfaction with the activities

All four parents felt very satisfied with the activities. One parent commented that some of the tasks have been very basic, but noted that this was what their child needed. Another parent said they were very satisfied because their child had made so much progress. They noted that they had observed their child change ('from sitting on floor and doing nothing they are engaging with interest').

Satisfaction with the opportunities for their child to play and learn

Three parents said they were very satisfied with the opportunities for their children to play and learn in the sessions. One of the parents who felt very satisfied acknowledged that working with their child could sometimes be difficult because sometimes they 'just do not want to know'. They praised their Portage worker for being very understanding about this. One parent said they were fairly satisfied with the opportunities for their child to play and learn, but indicated that they would like to see more opportunities. This parent felt that without Portage they would be no opportunities. They felt the support should be received based on need rather than where they lived and expressed a need for the support to be provided two sessions a week for one hour per session.

Overall satisfaction with the support received from the Portage service

Three parents said they were very satisfied overall with the support received from the Portage service. One of these parents did again comment about the time taken for staff to undergo police checks and felt that their child had settled into a routine prior to this interruption. One parent said they were fairly satisfied with the overall support received from the Portage service.

What parents like most about the Portage Support they receive

A range of responses was received from parents about what they like most about the support. Comments were made about the information; advice and support parents felt they and their children received:

- It is another helping hand.
- Help, understanding and support.
- Someone there to give advice and information.
- Open information and support.
- Identifying gaps and supporting appropriately.
- Gives children with learning deficits the support.
- Open door for opportunities for child.
- If didn't have Portage wouldn't have link to address problems.
- It is about their understanding too.

Other comments reflected satisfaction with the nature of the support, the environment in which the support was received, and the approach by staff:

- Individual.
- One to one contact- benefits more like that.
- It is personal and in the home, rather than having to go to the centre with twenty other children.
- The fact that they come into the home environment.
- They can come to school, rather than having to take my child somewhere else out of school.
- Child liked the worker in the crèche and so knew them before they came to their home. Confidence had already been gained.
- More relaxed.
- Doing things that don't faze their child out.

One parent said that they could not rate the Portage service highly enough.

What parents like least about the Portage Support they receive

One parent commented that they felt Sure Start could have identified the problems with their child sooner, noting that the problems were only really addressed when they had become critical.

Another parent felt that it was 'absolutely appalling' that the Portage service is only accessible to children in 'poorer areas'. They praised the work of Sure Start in providing them with the support based on need as opposed to the area in which they lived.

Another parent said that the time taken for staff to be cleared through police checks was what they liked least about the Portage support received.

One parent said they liked nothing least about the Portage support received.

What parents thought their child had gained by attending the session with the Portage team

The four parents described how they had seen their children improve in a number of areas:

- Can tell the difference when they have been to Portage.
- Big improvement in behaviour in general.
- More relaxed/calmer and not as uptight about things.
- Did not used to get involve in activities or the rest of the world- would look at books, sit on the floor and eat.
- Having someone else other than family to play with child- can interact with others.
- Has become more social.
- Takes notice and makes eye contact with others now a bit. Not as insular as used to be.
- There were limited things that child could do- didn't mix with others or play with others.

One parent commented that their child really looks forward to the Portage sessions.

Another parent felt the police check process had disrupted their child's progress and put them back to 'square one'.

What parents thought they had gained by attending the session with the Portage team

One parent felt they had gained 'a less stressed child', who could now communicate better and was less frustrated. This parent appreciated the fact that this meant they could spend more time with their other child.

Two of the parents appreciated the fact that they could continue the work with their child whilst the Portage worker was not there throughout the week, reinforcing and continuing the work done in the session.

One Portage worker was praised for always being interested and for being 'really good'. The personal insight of this worker was appreciated. One parent appreciated the ability of another worker to 'look in from the outside' and give another perspective ('usually they have another way of looking at it that helps').

In addition to this, one parent felt they had gained knowledge, whilst another felt they were being directed in ways that enhance their child's skills.

What parents wanted to see changed about the Portage Service

The different parents expressed different ideas about what they would like to see changed about the Portage service:

- More support.
- More accessible and available earlier.
- More Portage workers to increase consistency of support.
- More services.
- More regular courses for parents.
- More of a range of courses.
- Support groups where other parents understand, not having to excuse child.
- Longer term funding so they do not just disappear.

One parent said they did not think the Portage service could do a better job.

In addition to this, one parent commented upon what they would like to see changed about support for special needs children in general. This person felt

they would like to see 'less resistance' about providing support (assessment etc.). This parent, who generally felt they had had to 'fight for it', identified a need for more services to be more accessible to special needs children and their parents. This parent also highlighted a need for more advertising about the availability of different services.

Other Sure Start activities

One parent mentioned a number of courses they had undertaken through Sure Start. Another parent listed a range of activities and services accessed and described the Greengate centre as 'great'.

Two parents said they had been on days out with Sure Start.

One parent noted that they could use the centre if they wanted to and had previously used the sensory room through Portage. Another parent mentioned that they used to attend another Sure Start activity, but felt it had been too difficult to find the time (due to problems with their child).

One parent said they did not use any other Sure start activities or services.

General comments

Parents were given the opportunity to make any additional comments about the Portage service. A number of comments were made about the service, the staff and the progress that their children had made. Those comments are as follows:

- I think it is a good service.
- I think Portage is a good idea. There are lots of people with more problems and it must be a big relief to have someone there.
- Helping and supporting parents is very important.
- The two people are lovely- totally enthusiastic.
- Teachers with excellent experience.
- They adapt what they know and are trained.
- Child has come on so quickly.

One parent felt it was about time that problems and needs were identified in Barrow.

In addition to this, comments were made about personal experiences of services in general and suggestions about what should be changed about service provision:

- Health Visitors should know about Sure Start. If had accepted at the beginning that there were no services available then wouldn't have had access to any services.
- Services should be available to all children. Because otherwise some children miss out on a whole range of specialised services.

- Sure Start should advertise more with flyers and leaflets. If you don't go to the centre you do not know what is available and that is a shame because some people do not live near the centre.

Conclusions and recommendations

Internal and independent feedback from parents indicates high levels of satisfaction with the Sure Start Portage service. Parents had experienced the service to be a valuable one, which their children had seen much benefit from. It is clear that the Portage team places great emphasis on working in partnership with parents and families, encouraging them to become involved in the Portage programme with their children. Parent feedback indicated they were impressed with the approach of Portage practitioners and felt very involved in the whole process. Parents are also encouraged (as evident from the evaluation sheets received) to become involved in the wider Sure Start programme. As noted above, a number of parents who have received support from the Portage team have undergone further training with Sure Start, developing new skills and confidence.

The Portage service also shows evidence of collaborative working both with other people within Sure Start and with practitioners and the local community. Further good practice is continually liaising with schools to promote and advertise the service. By inviting other practitioners from a variety of different agencies and interested parties to undertake the Portage training they are working to ensure that the skills and knowledge associated with Portage are shared amongst different practitioners in the area for the benefit of local families.

The Portage service takes a flexible approach to service delivery, receiving referrals from a variety of different sources and working around the needs of each family.

Future developments

It is recommended that the Portage service considers the possibility of organising a group activity for parents and their children with special needs. Sure Start Barrow should consult with parents to determine whether this be a support group for parents or a parent/child activity where parents would feel comfortable taking their children for playing and learning opportunities with other children.

In addition, it is clear from the data received that the service has witnessed expansion since it began. One major future development for the service is to expand the capacity to provide support to more children and their families with special needs.

Case Study

Community Support Programme

Information was collected over a period of 6 months (January 2004 to June 2004) via:

- Discussions with the **Community Support Manager**
- Discussions with other members of the **Community Support Team** (including Community Support Workers)
- the **Sure Start database**, providing information about the numbers of people receiving family support from the team between January 2002-April 2004
- **Previous monitoring and evaluation** information received from the commissioning officer
- **Feedback from trainees** undertaking the latest training
- Discussions with **parents** who have received support from the programme had also been intended, but could unfortunately not be carried out

The Training Programmes

The first Community Support Training course was run in November 2000. By February 2004 ten courses had taken place training 153 people in total and a further 22 people were currently training. Of those who had been trained 22 were male and 130 were female.

The foundation course runs once a week for 11-12 weeks on average (approximately every four months, excluding holidays). The course is free and trainees are given £5 to cover travel expenses each time they attend. In addition, a free crèche is provided, a free lunch and the programme runs in schools hours (from 10.30am until 2.30pm)

The first 6 weeks of training provides information about social issues, amenities, services etc. The following 6 weeks of training involve listening to speakers presenting about issues such as smoking cessation, sexual health, drugs awareness, etc. Sure Start workers in a variety of different jobs also speak to the trainees about their work, increasing the trainees' understanding of the different aspects of Sure Start's work. The length of each course can vary slightly depending on the number of people in the group and different interests by attendees.

In addition to this, the advanced community support runs for 4 weeks and is an intensive course, designed particularly for those wanting to work with individual families. The course covers a number of topics including:

- Child protection
- Domestic violence
- Sexual health
- Mental health issues

The courses have proven to be popular, so much so that there were waiting lists at the time of data collection for the next foundation course. Interviews with staff members indicated that people hear about the foundation course primarily by word-of-mouth. The courses have also reportedly seen a low drop out rate (usually 2 or 3 per course). Reasons for dropping out can include childcare issues, finding alternative employment or finding that the course is not for them.

All staff are now required to undertake the community support foundation training course when they begin working at Sure Start.

User feedback about the Community Support training

Independent feedback

Feedback from trainees via questionnaire

Questionnaires and a pre-paid envelope (addressed to the research team) were distributed to those attending the foundation Community Support Training Programme during the evaluation period. Four trainees returned their questionnaire to the team. Responses are shown below.

1. How did you hear about the Community Support Training?

- 2 trainees heard through friends and family
- 1 trainee heard through contacting Sure Start
- 1 trainee heard through their place of work

2. Why did you attend this course?

- To meet people (2x)
- To improve job prospects/ gain experience (3x)
- To help community/sure start (2x)

3. What did you hope to gain from this training?

Make New Friends/ meet people	Gain More Confidence	Learn New Skills	Discover New Interests	Get More Opportunities for Further Training	Become more Involved in the Community
1	3	3	3	4	2

4. Course expectation comments:

- 1 trainee felt that the course allowed them to help others
- 1 trainee commented that the course had improved their skills

- 1 trainee commented that course leaders often had difficulty starting the course on time, as delegates were often late.

5. To what extent do you feel the training fulfilled your needs?

Fully	Partially	Not at all
3	1	0

6. Think about the overall pace and ability of the course to meet your expectations

- All 4 trainees stated that the course had met their expectations

7. Additional course expectation comments

- 3 trainees commented that the course had affected them positively
- Comments included:
 - I developed new skills
 - Helped me find a new direction
 - Made me more confident and outgoing

8. How would you rate the following

	Excellent	Good	Ok	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Structure (length/ timetable)		3	1		
Content	1	3			
Presentation style of trainers	2	2			
Environment	1	2	1		
Course Material/ Handouts	2	2			

9. What did you like most about the training?

- All 4 trainees reported that the relaxed atmosphere, and the ease at which they were able to communicate with each other were the best aspects of the training
- In addition 1 trainee reported that the information provided was what they liked most

10. What did you like least about the training?

- 2 trainees felt that all aspects of the training were good
- 1 reported that time was not always used efficiently (spending too long on certain areas and 'wasting time.... by splitting into groups')
- 1 trainee disliked speaking out in class at the beginning, however they then became more at ease with this as they got to know the group.

11. What would you like to see changed for future training?

- Improved time management
- Less small group work
- More time spent on topics such as Drugs, Smoking and Child Protection
- More details should be given about other Sure Start Training courses
- The advanced CSW course should run immediately after the first course.

12. What additional training would you like to see included in this training?

- I.T
- Home Safety
- Working with Special Needs Children

13. Are you interested in doing any further training?

- All 4 trainees were interested in doing further training

14. Would you be interested in advanced training in the future?

- All 4 trainees expressed an interest in advanced training.

Internal feedback

Internal feedback from training was requested but was unfortunately not available.

After training

The foundation programme is designed to provide the trainees with a range of skills, not just those useful to working in Sure Start. Some attend the course for their own personal or professional development. For example, some people have attended the course in the past to spend time with other adults. Others have attended because they are looking for employment (the foundation programme includes a CV writing session) and many have been successful in securing employment elsewhere.

For those who are interested in working within Sure Start as a community Support Worker there are a number of possible areas, depending largely on personal interest. Community Supporters receive £5.15 per hour. Work may involve any of the following:

- Working to support local families
- Working in cafés
- Cleaning
- Working in reception
- Working in nurseries/crèches
- Administration
- Running/supporting groups or community activities

The Community Support Team (and wider Sure Start team)

Sure Start Barrow and Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney have recruited a large number of people who have completed the training since 2000. **The current Community Support Manager, the Community Support Co-ordinator and the Community administrator all joined the team after completing their community support training.** In addition to this core team **around 80 community support workers** are on the Sure Start bank staff list working across both programmes on a sessional basis, with 21 community supporters working more than 16 hours a week. The current community support team works across both Sure Start Barrow and Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney.

By February 2004 the following had also been recruited into other areas in Sure Start after completing their training:

- Speech and Language Co-ordinator
- Centre manager
- Nursery Manager
- Assistant Nursery Manger
- 4 crèche workers
- 2 speech and language project workers
- 4 cook and eat workers
- 4 café assistants
- Dads group co-ordinator
- Activities co-ordinator
- 1 Family Support Co-ordinator
- Family support worker
- Story sacks co-ordinator
- 5 part time receptionists
- Personnel advisor
- Community link worker
- Community project co-ordinator
- 3 part time portage workers
- 3 domestic assistants
- 1 full time receptionist

- Information officer
- Shop manageress
- Dads club resource co-ordinator
- 3 mini bus drivers
- 4 allotment workers

Interviews with the contracted Community Support Team staff January-February 2004

The Sure Start Barrow Community Support Team has three contracted members of staff:

- Community Support Manager
- Community Support Co-ordinator
- Community administrator

Interviews with these team members indicated high levels of satisfaction with their work within Sure Start Barrow.

These members of staff saw multi-agency working as useful and productive. Close links with other agencies were seen to facilitate both work with families and the development of effective training for workers. In addition, these staff members saw themselves as part of the bigger Sure Start team, working closely alongside other colleagues, particularly the Family Support Co-ordinators who conduct the initial visits (which are arranged by the Community Support Co-ordinator) to establish the form of support required by each family.

Interviews with Community Support Workers February-March 2004

Introduction

The fifty Community Support Workers working for Sure Start Barrow at the time were invited to take part in an interview (more workers work specifically for Sure Start Ormsill and North Walney). The main aims of the interviews were to:

- Gain an understanding of the roles undertaken by Community Support Workers.
- Determine levels of satisfaction with different aspects of the work.
- Obtain views on how Community Support Workers see Sure Start developing.

Eight were interviewed, over an eight-week period, after giving their consent. The Community Support Workers were reassured that the interview was

confidential and that although pieces of what people have said might be in the final report, no information would be used that would result in any individual being identified. Two of the workers were also on part-time contracts with Sure Start Barrow.

Method

The interview took the form of verbal questioning and was divided into the following sections:

7. Roles
8. Processes of Communication
9. Service integration
10. Health, safety and security
11. Progress and future of Sure Start Barrow

Interviewees were then given the opportunity to make any additional comments on any aspect of their work.

Results

Section 1. Roles

Section 1a: General aspects of roles

Roles undertaken by the workers

The eight Community Support Workers undertook varying roles depending on need, interest, hours worked and skill and these included (or had included in the past):

- Working in the office/reception, covering when staff members are ill
- One-to-one work with families (specific work involved depends upon the nature of the referral and family)
- One-to-one work with families (for Portage service)
- Helping to run a Mother and Toddler Group
- Helping to run Dad's Club
- Crèche work (for example, whilst training is taking place)
- Cleaning
- Handyman work (for example, wood work in Sure Start Centres and fitting safety equipment in homes)
- Work on local allotment

Overlap in roles

Four workers did not think there was any overlap in their role with the role of others. One of those workers said that all roles vary.

Four felt there was overlap in roles with the roles of others. Two people said it depended on the work being undertaken, for example, one said there was

overlap with those who work in the crèches and another said their role was similar to other workers running Dad's Club.

Inappropriate tasks and duties

All interviewees said they were not doing any tasks or duties that they felt should not be part of their role. One person emphasised that when someone is a Community Support Worker 'they do everything/anything that needs to be done'.

Two people said that if they did not feel comfortable doing something they would simply say, with one commenting that if they need help with something they will just ask for more support from other support workers.

Section 1b: Hours worked, distance travelled and when and why people came to work for Sure Start

Number of hours worked each week

The number of hours worked per week varied between individuals and weeks (again, depending on need and interest), ranging from 2 hours to 30 hours per week. Generally there appeared to be flexibility both in working hours and in workers' attitudes to working hours.

All interviewees were satisfied with the amount of hours they work per week. One person said they could ask for more hours if they wanted them.

Distance travelled to get to work

All eight workers lived in the local community.

When workers began working as a Community Support Worker and how people got involved

The eight Community Support Workers started working for Sure Start at different times:

- Eight months ago.
- Completed training ten months ago.
- Completed training about a year before (3).
- Started training about a year and a half ago.
- Completed the training two years previous.
- Two and a half years.

One of the workers, who indicated they had worked as a support worker for just over a year, also said they had worked voluntarily for about a year before that (for Sure Start). In addition, one worker who said they had worked as a Community Support Worker for 8 months, also indicated they had done voluntary work for several months for Sure Start before that.

Two workers noted that they had shown an interest in different areas within Sure Start after doing initial training and had undergone further training, applying for their current contracted positions within Sure Start, whilst still continuing their work as Community Support Workers.

Individuals had gone to work for Sure Start for a variety of reasons. Some of those, as indicated by the workers are as follows:

- Saw the building being built, had opportunity to do the training.
- Heard about Sure Start by word-of-mouth, enquired about the training and then completed the training.
- Heard about training by word-of-mouth (2).
- Partner involved in Sure Start.
- Accessing Sure Start services, heard about the training.
- Had the personal experiences and understanding to help others and loves working with children.

One person noted they were sitting at home doing nothing during the day and they thought doing some training with Sure Start would be a good step forward. Another said they enjoy being helpful, especially when it provides an opportunity to get out of the house.

Section 1c: Levels of satisfaction

Satisfaction with work in Sure Start

Six workers said they were very satisfied with their post in Sure Start and two said they were fairly satisfied. Comments included:

- Sure Start works for the people.
- Get lots of support, not just the people, but the workers too.
- It works around personal schedule, which is helpful.
- Very happy.

All interviewees said they had enough time in their post to carry out all the duties expected of them.

All workers interviewed said no; they were not actively seeking other employment.

In addition, all eight workers said that Sure Start is a supportive and friendly place to work. Two workers said that the Community Support Workers are very well supported by each other, meeting monthly. In addition, one person said that the other Sure Start workers 'befriend everyone'.

Aims and objectives of Sure Start

All eight workers felt that Sure Start has clear aims and objectives. A range of responses were provided:

- To work with families that need help with their children under 4, to promote better living (3).
- Helping single parent families (1).
- Communicating more and supporting younger parents (1).
- Working with and supporting the families of children with special needs (1).
- Providing what the public wants (1).
- Bringing the community together (1).
- Providing ideas about positive upbringing (1).
- Providing opportunities for friendship for parents (2).

- Fitting safety equipment and providing affordable handy man rates (1)
- Providing opportunities for people to get back into work (2).
- Building relationships between families and organisations and agencies (1).

One worker described how Sure Start could not help every family, but felt that a lot is being done. The clubs encouraging early learning were acknowledged as being beneficial.

One worker did note that although they thought Sure Start has clear aims and objectives it can be difficult to 'see the bigger picture'.

All workers interviewed said yes; they did understand how their role fitted in with the overall aims and objectives of Sure Start Barrow.

Levels of satisfaction with a number of different aspects of the work in Sure Start

a.) Wages

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

b.) Flexibility of working hours

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
6 (75.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

One person acknowledged the benefits of flexible working hours, for example being able to look after their children if they are ill. Another said they thought the flexibility of working hours was brilliant.

c.) Own level of input into decision making within Sure Start

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
6 (75.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

One person said they make their own decisions.

d.) Opportunity for professional development

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

One person said they felt they had learnt a lot since becoming involved with Sure Start. Another person said they had completed many different courses.

e.) Security of employment

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
2 (25.0%)	4 (50.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

f.) General guidance and managerial direction from Sure Start Barrow

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
6 (75.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

One person commented that if they need any guidance or direction they can ring the office and another said they felt able to ask for it. One person described how the managers and staff are always there to talk to. As can be seen, the majority of ratings given were 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied', with only two people reporting anything less on any of the items enquired about.

Ways to develop and update skills, for example by getting relevant training.

Seven of the eight community support workers said they thought there were ways to update or develop their skills. One person said they did not really know where their work within Sure Start was going.

All eight workers had completed the Community Support Worker training. Other courses completed within Sure Start (some interviewees also listed courses completed external to Sure Start) included the following:

- Sign Language Level 1
- Community Food/Health Matters
- Breast Feeding Support
- Portage
- First Aid
- Computing
- Counselling

Four people added additional comments about the opportunities for developing and updating their skills within Sure Start. They described times when they have felt they needed further training in a particular area, have brought this to the attention of staff members and Sure Start has provided the relevant training. One person said that regular supervision sessions and meetings provided them with the opportunity to discuss any personal development needs. One person indicated that they receive details of training opportunities in the post. Another person said that there were lots of opportunities, with more coming up soon.

One person expressed a high level of satisfaction with the Community Support Worker training programme.

Section 1d: Open-ended questions

The best things about working for Sure Start Barrow

Most of the Community Support Workers gave more than one response. Responses were very positive. The following categories (which are closely linked to each other) could be drawn from the responses:

The people

- All the people are nice (2)
- The people we work with (1)

The work

- Knowing you are helping people and making a difference (3)
- Working with children (1)
- Variety of the work (1)
- Seeing projects through (1)
- Succeeding in what you do (1)
- Enjoy coming to work (1)
- Not pressured- don't feel you have to do things (1)

The opportunities

- Meeting people (2)
- Can try different things of interest (1)
- They gave me a job (1)
- Learning new skills (1)

The strengths of Sure Start Barrow

Again, most of the Community Support Workers gave more than one response. There was overlap and similarity between 'the best things about working for Sure Start' (previous section) and the 'strengths of Sure Start' (this section). The following categories (which are closely linked to each other) could also be drawn from the responses:

The team

- Working together as a team (2)
- Working with other agencies (1)
- Being a large support network for families that need it (1)
- The team constituting members of the local community who have raised their own children locally (1)
- Friendly (1)
- Not judging- give support and ideas (1)
- Made to feel equal with other workers irrespective of status (1)

Working with the community

- Close relationship with the community (1)
- Working with what the community wants (1)
- Community based (1)

The work

- Helping single parent families (1)
- The Home Visits (1)
- The difference they are making in the community (1)

The management

- Good leadership (allows workers to develop) (1)

What could be improved about Sure Start Barrow

Four people did not feel that anything could be improved about Sure Start Barrow. One person said they felt Sure Start Barrow was doing what it set out to do. One person felt that a lot could be improved about Sure Start Barrow, but acknowledged restrictions due to resources.

Responses about what could be improved about Sure Start Barrow included the following:

- Centre open longer (1)
- Activities run for more weeks (1)
- More involvement with the community (1)

One person referred to the 5th Wave programme (the Community Support Workers work across both the local programmes), describing a lack of provision of services on Walney, commenting that Sure Start is trying to get services and activities up and running for children.

Section 2. Processes of communication

This section of the interview was concerned with finding out about:

- individual views about communication processes and the quality of communication within Sure Start and with the community as a whole
- support received from line managers
- regular sharing of information
- how informed workers are about the processes and operations within Sure Start Barrow
- how satisfied workers are with the level and processes of communication

Communication with people within Sure Start Barrow and the community at large

People within Sure Start Barrow

The eight workers responded that there was good communication between workers at Sure Start Barrow (with staff and Community Support Workers). A number of different ways of communicating with people within Sure Start were listed by the Community Support Workers:

- Phone calls (4)
- Face to face contact
- Seeing people around (2)
- Can make arrangements to meet people, depending on when they are needed (2)
- Regular meetings for Community Support Workers (2)
- Other team meetings (2)
- Can go into the office (1)

Two comments about the communication processes were as follows:

- 'Everyone is approachable'
- 'They are always there for you to talk to'

The community at large

A range of different ways of initialising and maintaining communication with the Barrow community was noted and they included the following:

- Fun Days (2)
- Running/attending groups (3)
- Taster sessions (1)
- One-to-one contact with parents and children (1)
- Summer Portage Play scheme (1)
- Meals (1)
- Weekends away (1)
- Using leaflets/cards to advertise and promote services (1)
- Being familiar to people in the local community (1)
- Working to encourage parents to join in and put children at ease (1)
- Building friendships with people (for example, supporting each other during training) (1)
- Community contact worker by phone (1)

Two workers expressed the importance of treating everyone who comes into contact with Sure Start as equal.

One person felt that many people are still not aware of Sure Start.

Support from line managers

All the community supporters have a line manager/supervisor and know who this is. Five people described daily or weekly contact with line managers/supervisors.

Supervision by some was described as regular (weekly, fortnightly or monthly), particularly for those who supported families. Three people noted that allocated time for supervision varies depending on the work being undertaken and the amount of hours being worked. Two workers

acknowledged that they attend Clinical Support Meetings arranged for those workers whose work involves supporting families on a one-to-one basis, providing useful group supervision and support.

One person noted that they could also approach the Sure Start counsellor for confidential support.

Levels of satisfaction with support received from line managers/supervisors with regard to Sure Start work

Seven workers were very satisfied with the support received from line managers/supervisors, whilst one person was fairly satisfied with the support received.

Five workers commented positively about the quality of the communication with or accessibility of line managers/supervisors:

- Communicate very well
- If have a problem can get to them straight away
- They are all really nice- if have a concern supervision is within a day
- Not needed support so far but they are there if you need them
- They are always there at the end of the phone
- Always puts time out or makes an appointment

Regular sharing of information

Workers tended to share information with their immediate line manager/supervisor and appropriate colleagues within Sure Start. One person said they did not share information on a regular basis with anyone.

How Community Support Workers are informed about the processes and operations (how things work or are planned) within Sure Start Barrow

The majority of workers (5) said they are informed about the processes and operations within Sure Start Barrow (including news, meeting dates, job opportunities, other opportunities and general updates) via letters and newsletters posted to their home, but a number of other ways included:

- Things just get passed down the line- get told (3)
- Through phone calls (1)
- By phoning the office (1)
- Reading minutes of staff meetings (1)
- Attending meetings (for example, to find out about changed guidelines) (1)
- Attending Community Support Worker meetings – once a fortnight (1)
- Attending staff team meetings (contracted staff)

Levels of satisfaction with the level and processes of communication within Sure Start Barrow

Four workers said they were very satisfied with the level and processes of communication within Sure Start Barrow, whilst four people said they were fairly satisfied.

One worker noted that sometimes information is not passed between managers effectively. Another worker commented that it could sometimes be difficult to get in touch with the right person.

Section 3. Service integration

Workers were asked about their thoughts on how they see the different agencies working together and whether they thought they all work together easily and effectively to provide a multi-agency service.

Comments generally referred to how different agencies worked together, rather than how the agencies work together within Sure Start. One person felt that agencies could work together to provide a multi-agency service, describing how they had seen a range of different agencies working together effectively to provide appropriate support to a family.

One worker felt the different services did not work together easily. They felt that multi-agency working would be more integrated by the presence of a joint database, including all information about the care received by each family.

One worker said when they had worked with social workers in the past and thought they could be limited in the support they can give when working in teams. Three workers, who had worked with social workers, had experienced no problem (two said working with the Social Services team had been really good).

Three workers acknowledged that they had found the health visitors to be excellent to work with.

One worker felt there should be better communication between schools and parents in general.

Section 4. Health, Safety and Security

In general Community Support Workers felt that safety and security procedures were good. The training for Community Support Workers was said to include discussions around health and safety issues. The following list summarises their responses about how the health, safety and security of workers and service users is maintained:

- Most trained as Fire Wardens
- Food Hygiene Certificates
- First Aid course
- First Aid Kit present
- Recording of incidents
- Appropriate inoculations
- Police check
- General health and safety practices in centres (e.g. posters warning about hot water)
- Receiving emotional support

One worker said that the Community Support Workers and other staff are trained in a range of different health, safety and security matters. One worker emphasised that workers are 'all very aware' of the issues. Another worker emphasised that Sure Start staff were very supportive.

Only one worker had a concern about any aspect of health and safety at Sure Start Barrow. Their concern was with lone working. One worker noted that there were no concerns about health and safety because the support was there and they could just pick up the phone to discuss any concerns as they arose.

Whilst one worker said there were definite policies about lone working, another worker said they were not aware of any lone worker policy and was not offered a mobile when they started working with Sure Start. They acknowledged that they had not really thought about the risks of lone working before, but always carried their own mobile on them. One worker acknowledged that the lone worker policy was under review. Another worker said that although there had been recent developments in the lone worker policy (for example an increased emphasis placed on reporting in when a visit is over and the presence of a timetable in the office for recording where you are going) they felt the policies needed to be reviewed. Two workers noted that they would not be sent to a home where there was any cause for concern. Sure Start staff were described as very honest and straightforward when providing information about a family. Two workers felt that maintaining their own and service users health and safety was their own responsibility (for example, one worker said they would not go into a home if they had any concerns).

Section 5. Progress and future of Sure Start Barrow

Progress of Sure Start Barrow

All workers felt that Sure Start Barrow was meeting its aims and objectives. One worker noted that there have been improvements in all areas and some have reached their present goals. One person felt that there were too many projects going on and that Sure Start should 'slow down a bit', considering the limited funding. Another worker emphasised the large number of families involved in Sure Start and commended the opportunities for parents and children to learn within Sure Start.

Seven workers felt that Sure Start should be able to meet its aims and objectives in the future. One of those felt that the ability of Sure Start to meet all its aims and objectives in the future did depend on whether the funding continued. One worker said they were not sure whether Sure Start would meet its aims and objectives, noting that it would depend on the type of help needed by the community. In addition, one worker acknowledged that it would be good if Sure Start could branch out to more areas.

Visions for the future of Sure Start Barrow

The following list represents comments from all interviewees:

- Continuing in the longer term (4)
- More activities and more children involved (2)
- Working towards bringing the community together to be able to work by themselves
- Modernisation of service (putting the responsibility on the residents)
- That more people trust us in the long term
- Branching out into different areas

Sure Start Barrow in five years time

Generally, seven workers saw Sure Start continuing and expanding in the future, whilst one was not sure:

- 5 years ahead of where we are now
- Should still be here - can see long term effects with families - know it works.
- Still very active, seeing the positive effects
- Still going strong
- Expanded out of Barrow, into other areas
- Right round Cumbria, helping people

Additional comments

Workers were given the opportunity to add any further comments. Three workers made additional comments. One worker said they thought Sure Start really worked. Another said they were really happy with their work in Sure Start and felt listened to ('I feel my voice is heard'). In addition, two comments were made about the Sure Start staff:

- 'The people involved are wonderful'
- 'They are very good'.

Family Support

As noted previously the roles of community support workers are varied depending on the personal interests of the worker. In addition to facilitating groups and conducting other work within Sure Start some community support workers work with individual families.

Referrals are received from a number of sources, including other workers within Sure Start (usually from those who undertake the initial Sure Start visit to the family), professionals from other agencies or from the family themselves.

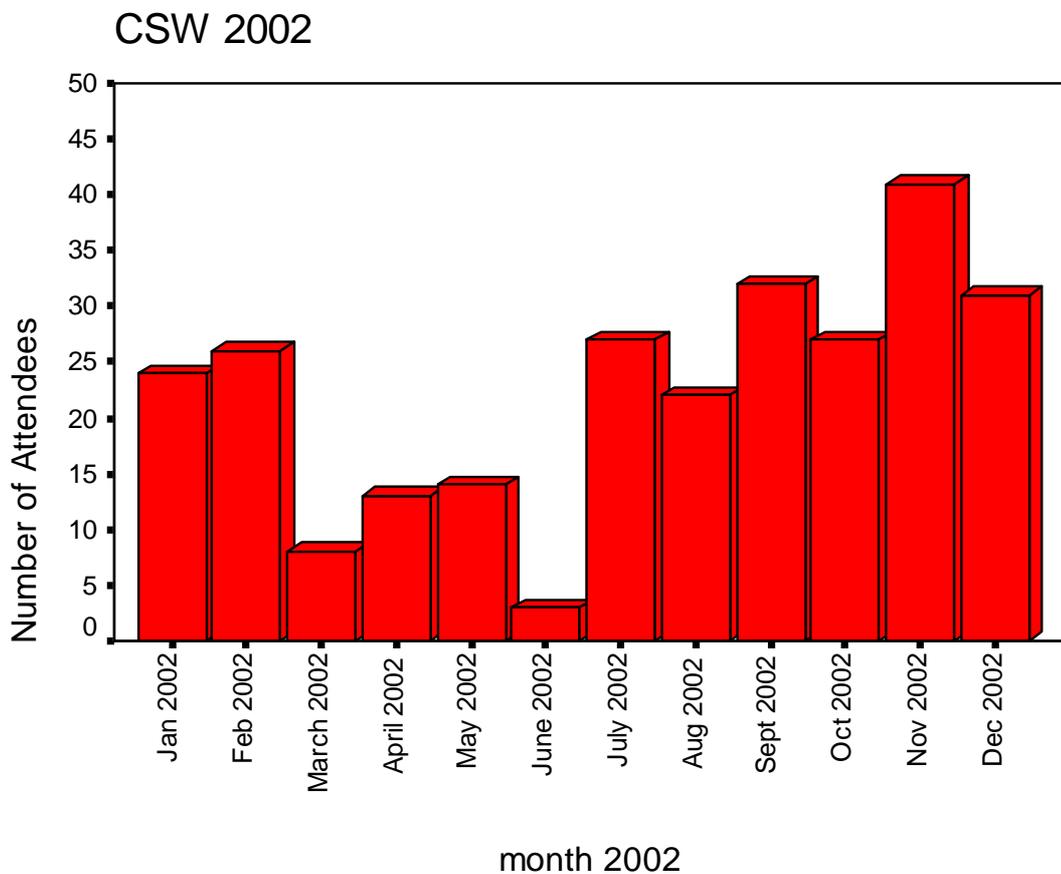
The support provided can vary enormously depending upon the needs of each family, but is clearly very flexible, ranging from joining a family when they attend a group to helping them decorate ('*such a simple thing that makes such a big difference*' - team member). It was noted both by community support workers who work with families in this way and by the contracted staff that the aim of the support is to 'help families to help themselves'. In taking

this approach, parents and carers are encouraged to become involved in a range of appropriate Sure Start activities. All support is reviewed on a 12-week basis with the family (and on a monthly basis in supervision with the community support worker).

Community Support Workers:

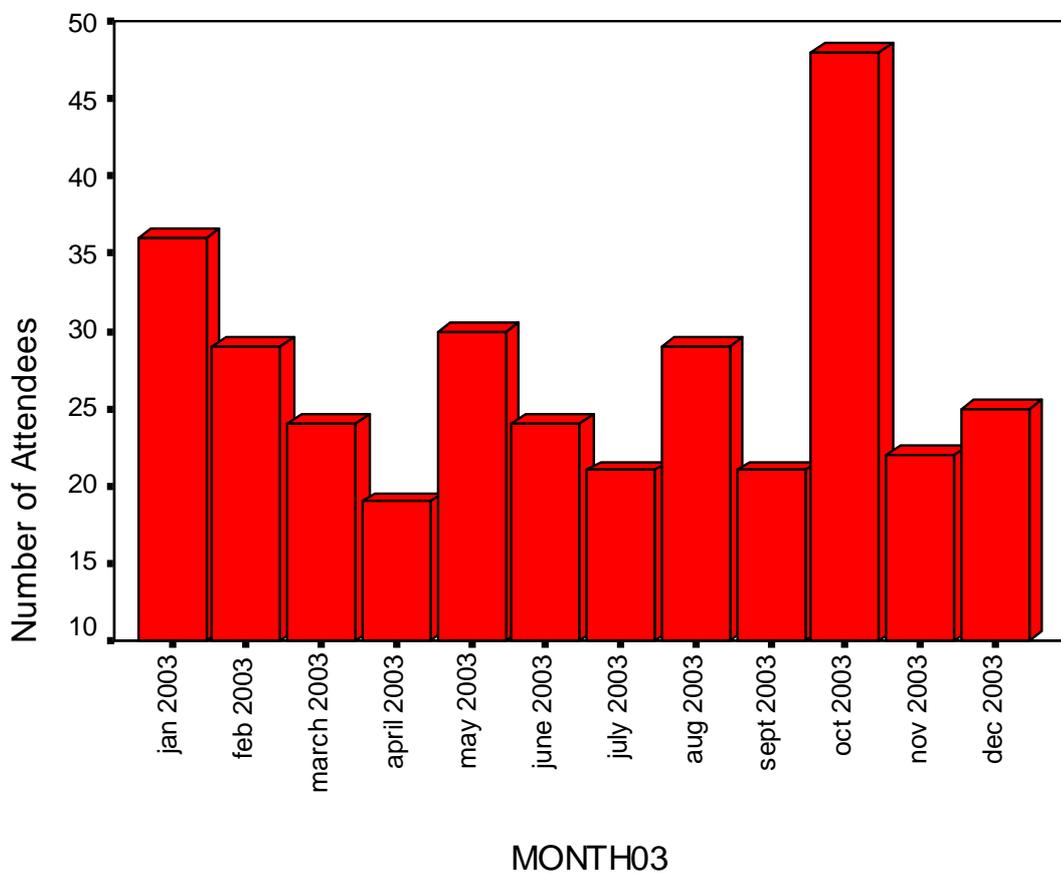
The data below represents the number of individuals seen by Community Support Workers (CSW) in 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Community Support Workers: Contacts 2002



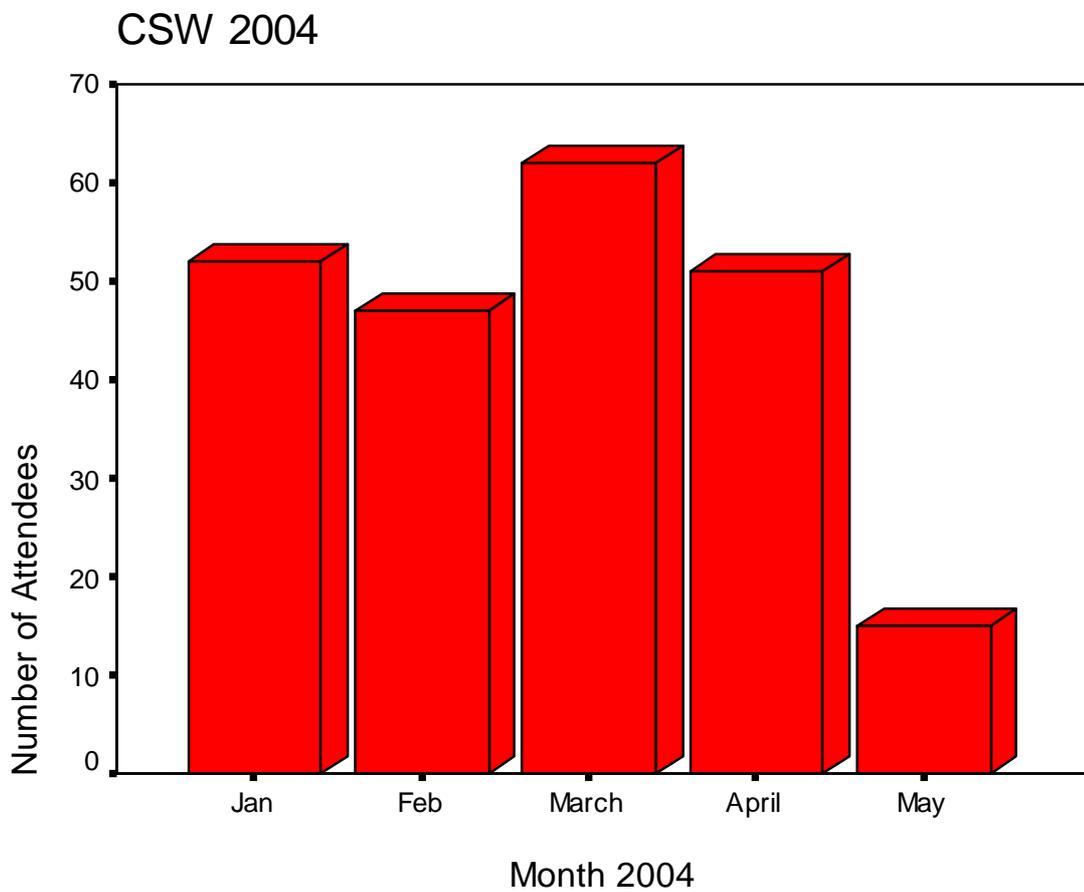
The number of visits made by CSW starts at 24 and remains steady for the next month. However it drops dramatically in March 2002 (8), before arriving at a low of 4 in June. July sees a significant increase to 26, after which figures remain relatively steady for the remainder of the year. There were 268 overall visits for 2002

Community Support Workers: Contacts 2003



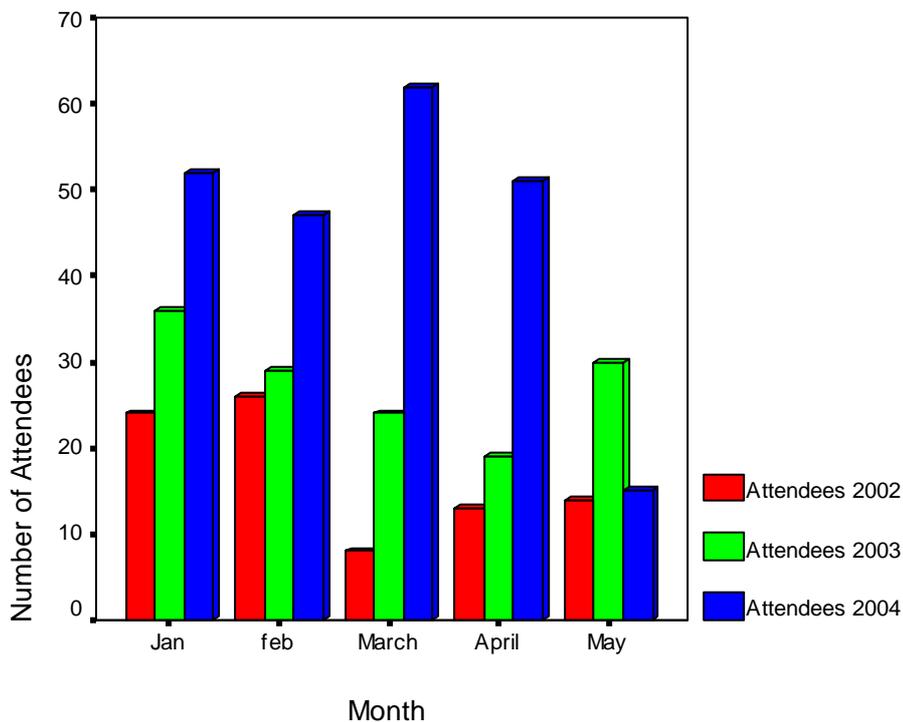
The number of visits made in this year started well at 36 (January) but dropped to 30 in February. Figures remained under 30 for the majority of the year, with the exception of the high of 48 in October. There were 401 visits made overall for 2003.

Community Support Workers: Contacts 2004



The data provided for 2004 runs from January to May of 2004. Contact figures begin well (52) and remained relatively stable until April when the figure drops suddenly to 14. There were 227 visits made up until May 2004.

Community Support Workers: Contacts 2002, 2003 and 2004.



The figure above shows the number of visits made by CSW in 2002, 2003, and 2004. The figures used run from January to May so comparisons with 2004 figures can be made fairly.

It can be seen that the number of visits made increase steadily throughout the years, with 2002 showing least visits overall (85). 2003 sees 138 visits up until May while 227 are seen by May 2004

Contacts for 2004 are notably higher throughout, with number of visits almost doubling from 2002 to 2004 in January, March and April.

This is a positive result indicating that the service is becoming more popular as more people become aware of the services provide by the CSW. However the low figure of 15 visits for May 2004 is a cause for concern, although it is possible that the figures provided do not run until the end of the month and

thus are deceptively low. It may be useful for Sure Start to investigate the reason for this apparent drop in contacts, in order to ensure it does not cause further difficulties.

Conclusions and recommendations

Strengths and evidence of good practice by the Community Support Team and Sure Start:

- The staff and community support workers are people from the local community
- Strengthening the local community (*'People's lives change so much after the training, people who were struggling at the time but are now the ones supporting others'*- team member).
- Staff and community support workers appear to be dedicated and enthusiastic about their work (*'I was glad to get the opportunity to do it and will fulfil it as best I can'*- team member). Interviews with the contracted members of staff indicated that the team is responsive, accessible and flexible to need.
- Monitoring and evaluating the training programmes (via weekly feedback and end-of course interviews) and the support provided by the Community Support Team.
- Working towards mainstreaming Community Support, as a viable business.
- Encouraging men to become involved in the training and Sure Start, with strong links to Dads Club.
- Continuing professional development for community support workers.

Future developments:

- The possibilities of holding a course in the evening were being considered, which will allow a wider range of people to attend.

Case Study

Speech and Language Service

Information was collected over a period of 6 months (January 2004 to June 2004) via:

- discussions with the **Speech and Language Therapist**
- discussions with other members of the **Speech and Language Team**
- the **Sure Start database**, providing information about the use of the Speech and Language services and activities from January 2002-April 2004
- **previous monitoring and evaluation** information received from the commissioning officer
- **the user satisfaction survey**
- **observations** of a Speech and Language Group
- **discussions with parents** whose children have received support from the team

The Speech and Language Team

The Speech and Language Therapist joined the Sure Start team in May 2000. A nursery nurse, who was involved in the first Community Support worker training, was the first worker to become involved in facilitating a group. In November 2000 the first group was run by the Speech and Language service. In addition to the Speech and Language Therapist, the current team has one Speech and Language Assistant who has been in post since 2002 and who initially began working with the service as a Community Support Worker in January 2001. The team also consists of three Speech and Language workers who have all been in post since 2003. Two of the three workers previously worked as Community Support workers within the service prior to taking up positions as Speech and Language workers. A number of Community Support Workers have facilitated groups for the service, particularly in the early stages.

Members of the Speech and Language team noted that their work involves liaison with the Sure Start Portage team and active, ongoing communication with librarians, teachers and other professionals. Members of the team described good working relationships with the community Speech and Language Therapist, which had also been noted during consultation with one parent accessing the service. The therapist has worked on joint pilot projects with the community team, using the opportunities of available resources within Sure Start to establish and share best practice (assessments piloted in Barrow have now been mainstreamed across the Bay).

Interviews with the Speech and Language team members indicated that they are satisfied with their posts in Sure Start Barrow (with three members of staff being 'very satisfied' and two being 'fairly satisfied').

The team meets on a weekly basis for a number of purposes, including discussing case studies, receiving feedback, sharing experiences and refreshing skills. In addition, those working with families on a one-to-one basis receive individual supervision, the timing of which depends upon caseload and need. All workers within the Speech and Language team were 'very satisfied' with the support received from their line manager and additional comments about the Speech and Language Therapist included the following:

- 'She is extremely good to work for'
- 'She always puts time out or makes an appointment if we need to speak before that'.

Speech and Language services

In addition to one-to-one Speech and Language support offered by Sure Start Barrow, the team offers four group activities: Baby Talk, Sounds Fun, Hunky Dory's Bedtime Stories and Chatterbox, and a course ('You Make the Difference'). In 2003, Talkabout, a Library project, was initiated.

The Speech and Language Team works across both local Sure Start programmes, which includes the 4 wards of Sure Start Barrow and the 2 wards of Sure Start Ormsgill and North Walney. In addition, some children are seen who live outside the Sure Start areas and who are over 4 (for example, those in need of support who attend a nursery in the Sure Start area).

A number of distinctions were made, by members of the team, of how the Sure Start Speech and Language Service differs from the local NHS Speech and Language Therapy service:

- A service for all pre-school aged children aged 0-4/5 years in the Sure Start wards with an emphasis on prevention and promotion (rather than children aged between 0-16 years already presenting with speech, language or communication difficulties)
- Involves focusing on and working with the family rather than just the individual (child rarely seen without parents being present and involved)
- Offers a range of services: not only speech therapy, but group sessions and workshops for all parents (not just parents with children with already identified difficulties)
- Involves skill sharing, training workers, volunteers and community support workers to facilitate groups
- Involved home visits for Speech Therapy
- Takes a flexible approach to meeting targets and investigating best practice

Speech and Language Therapy

Three team members work with families for one-to-one Speech and Language Support and the other two team members were expecting to start one-to-one work in the near future. Referrals are received either from within or external to Sure Start. In some cases, a need for input is identified at groups run by either the Speech and Language team or the wider Sure Start team and parents are asked if they feel their child might benefit from extra support on a one-to-one basis. A set number of sessions (usually no less than 6) are agreed with the family, to fit in with their schedule and a review is undertaken after a period of sessions. If a worker is visiting the family to provide the support the therapist does a joint review with them.

The database indicated that:

In 2002- 123- adult and child

Chart here showing figures across the months

2003- 208- adult and child

Chart here showing figures across the months

Need to put some figures in here, but the figures provided by the Speech Therapist and those in the database are not the same. Still need to know (see email from Joanna):

- *do the figures in the database include those seen who do not live in the Sure Start area and those children aged over 4?*

User feedback about Speech Therapy service

One-to-one consultation with three parents

Three users were interviewed to seek their views and experiences of the one-to-one support received by the Sure Start Barrow Speech and Language service. Two parent's children received the support in the home, whilst the third parent's child received support in the school environment.

How parents first found out about the Speech and Language Service

Two of the three parents had found out about the speech and language one-to-one support through attendance at Chatterbox (a speech and language activity) and other Sure Start activities (including Messy Play). One parent also noted that they had been attending a course at Sure Start and the Sure Start staff running the crèche highlighted a possible need for Speech and Language one-to-one support. One parent described how they had gone to the Sure Start centre and received a leaflet about the different groups available, which led to them attending Chatterbox

A nursery teacher at a non-Sure Start playgroup had asked the third parent if they would be interested in some one-to-one support with the speech and language team.

Who made the first contact and how

One parent indicated that the Speech and Language Therapist had visited them in their own home, because their child was disruptive in group settings. Another parent commented that they had met the Speech and Language Therapist at Chatterbox and a weekly pattern of one-to-one home support was arranged, initially with the therapist and then with a speech and language worker. The third parent explained that the Speech and Language Therapist initiated contact via the playgroup, visiting their child once a week.

Two of the three parents noted that referrals had been made to the NHS Speech and Language service.

How many sessions attended so far and how often the sessions were

How many sessions parents were expecting

The three parents indicated that support from the Speech and Language Service had been ongoing. One parent said the support had been received for 'a few months' and another said the support had been received for about a year. All three parents described weekly patterns of visiting.

All three parents felt that the sessions would carry on for as long as the support was needed or until their child made the transition into school. One parent expressed a wish for the support to continue once their child moved into nursery. One parent hoped that once their child became too old for Sure Start other speech and language support would be provided.

What parents hoped to gain from the Speech and Language Support

Only two parents responded to this question, because the third parent felt it was not relevant, as they do not attend the sessions with their child.

What parents hoped to gain:	Number of parents
Spend more time with your child	1
Improved relationship with child	1
Develop your child's communication and language skills	2
Learn new skills yourself and discover new interests	2
Other	1

One of the two parents felt they already spent a lot of time with their child and also felt they had a good relationship with their child.

One parent said they had hoped to gain opportunities to do things they would not normally do with their child.

Developing their child's communication and language skills was noted to be the main expectation of the service. In addition to this, it was hoped by one parent that the support would allow them to spend more time with their child on a one-to-one basis.

What the support consisted of

All three parents gave examples of the kind of support received. One parent described how their child was learning to communicate through music and rhythm. One parent said they were aware that some of the support consisted of playing games with their child and mentioned that their child has brought games home for them to play with them. Another parent mentioned how their child was learning how to play and being encouraged to use words. That parent described how they were learning not to answer for their child and were picking up how to respond and encourage.

One parent acknowledged that if their child does not want to do something then the support consists of playing with their child, getting them to communicate before moving on to focus more on speech therapy.

Parents commented further upon what the support consisted of. Their responses were as follows:

- Good that someone is there/nice to have someone there.
- Getting advice and a point of view.
- Getting definite information about the problems.
- Good to have a professional involved.
- Staff are happy to come to the nurseries and know which schools have the good nurseries.
- The NHS and Sure Start therapist work together, coming together on the initial visit.

One parent, whose child received the support in the playgroup setting, mentioned that they were not sure if the support was one-to-one.

How involved parents felt in the process

Two of the parents felt very involved in the process. One parent said they 'do it all together'. The other parent mentioned that their child likes to know they are there.

The third parent whose child received the support in the playgroup expressed satisfaction that their child was slowly progressing. Although they were not present during the sessions they felt involved in the process, noting that they have met with the Speech and Language Therapist on a number of occasions

to discuss their child's progress and felt aware of what the support consisted of. This parent explained how they feel able to contact the therapist if they have any concerns.

Satisfaction with the activities

One parent said they were very satisfied with the activities, whilst another said they were fairly satisfied. The third parent felt unable to comment.

Satisfaction with the opportunities for their child to play and learn

Two parents said they were very satisfied with the opportunities for their child to play and learn. Another parent said they were fairly satisfied. One parent commented that their child was making more and more sounds. Another parent noted that they could tell when their child has been receiving the support from the Speech and Language Team.

Overall satisfaction with the support received from the Speech and Language service

Two parents said they were very satisfied with the support received from the Speech and Language service. One parent said they were fairly satisfied with the support received.

One parent showed appreciation that the support was received in the home environment rather than in a clinical setting that their child does not like.

What parents like most about the Speech and Language Support they receive

The personal nature of the support was what the parents liked most about it. Other responses included the following:

- Staff going out of their way to be there.
- Feeling more confident with the person- you can just ring up and talk to them.
- Worker getting to know child quite well.
- Worker constantly talking and always listening for words.
- NHS support wasn't anywhere near as good- not challenging enough for child.
- Progress child has made.

One parent appreciated the fact that the Speech and Language Therapist had completed an Internet search and returned within the hour to give them information to reassure them.

What parents like least about the Speech and Language Support they receive

All parents immediately said they could not think of anything they liked least about the support received. One parent said they thought it had been 'brilliant'. Another commented that they thought it was 'absolutely great', noting that their worker had never missed an appointment.

One parent commented upon the fact that sometimes the same task is undertaken for a couple of weeks but they felt that could be a good thing.

What parents thought their child had gained by attending the session with the Speech and Language team

Parents commented upon what they felt their child had gained from attending the speech and language sessions:

- Communication better.
- Eye contact getting better
- More confident- used to be very withdrawn.
- Speech is getting better.
- Opportunity to do activities would not normally do.

What parents thought they had gained by attending the session with the Speech and Language team

Parents commented upon what they felt they had gained from attending the sessions or from their child receiving the support:

- Being involved in the process.
- Support in the home.
- Being able to carry on the support whilst worker not there.
- Learning to encourage their child to speak through play.
- Reassurance that child is getting seen to.

What parents wanted to see changed about the Speech and Language Service

One parent expressed a wish for the support to be more regular than once a week, but also noted that they would not like their child to be separated from other children too much.

Two parents did not comment upon anything they would like to see changed about the one-to-one support, but said what they would like to see changed about another service provided by the speech and language team. Although Chatterbox was described by one parent as a 'brilliant idea', both parents felt that the Chatterbox sessions should be revised because the activities were the same 'over and over again'. A need was expressed for new ideas and activities that children are interested in doing. One parent noted that their child lost interest in the activities in about three minutes and began to refuse to attend.

Other Sure Start activities

Parents were asked if they were involved in any other Sure Start activities. One parent mentioned they were involved in the Portage service. Two parents noted they had stopped attending some activities because they were of no benefit to their children for the following reasons:

- Same activities repeated.
- Child too young.

- Groups too big.

The support in the controlled environment of the home was identified by one parent as much more beneficial.

One parent said they did not attend any other Sure Start activities and had been unaware of its existence before having contact with the Speech and Language service.

Another parent said they attended a Mother and Toddler group run in the Sure Start centre and had used the sensory room in the past.

General comments

The three parents made general comments about their views and experiences of the Speech and Language Service. Satisfaction was expressed about the service in general and some comments praised Sure Start's proactive approach. Their responses were as follows:

- It is a brilliant idea- fantastic.
- Very very good idea.
- Can tell the difference when child has been there that morning – 'wow, they said a sentence and I understood it'.
- Good thing that child is getting their help for it.
- Worker is great- she really is. Nice person and very good with child. Quite happy.
- Takes so long for NHS referrals because they are so busy- through Sure Start you receive immediate care.
- The Health Visitor was going to leave it 6 months before referring.
- I was really grateful for help- consultant said wait until school starts- this is a bonus.

Feedback from parents about Speech Therapy via the User Satisfaction Survey

When asked to indicate which community services parents would like to see more of five parents indicated they would like more speech therapy.

One parent commented upon their child's progress, having received support from the Speech and Language team:

- 'My child attended Speech Therapy and now you can't even tell that at one point he wouldn't talk'.

Speech Therapy Drop In

Speech Therapy Drop Ins were held in April 2003 and September 2003. One person attended in April and 10 people attended in September (19 attendances between them).

Waiting for some figures from Debbie Wheeler (ST) - these figures above do not seem to be very high- The drop in info is held at the clinic- Debbie is going to find it for us.

Baby Talk

Baby Talk consists of a course of 3 or 4 sessions for children aged between 0-12/18 months. The information covered is similar to the Chatterbox course content.

The Sure Start database indicated that Baby Talk was held in November 2003 and April 2004 with 6 people attending in each of those months. In November the 6 people attended 18 times between them and in April the 6 people attended 10 times between them.

Sounds Fun

The database indicates that 6 people attended Sounds Fun in May 2003 and 2 people attended in June 2003.

Hunky Dory's Bedtime Stories

This group, which runs in the early evening, has been running weekly since May 2004. The group has seen good attendance with an average of 8-10 children attending each week with their parents.

Chatterbox

Chatterbox groups tend to run for eight weeks at a time, but may be shorter or longer depending on holidays. The overall content is planned to fit into the number of available weeks each time.

In addition to Chatterbox groups, and other Speech and Language groups, being run in the community centres they are also run by members of the team in two local schools (for the past two years). The content of the programme run in the schools is linked to the curriculum. There are plans to start up Chatterbox groups in other schools in the near future.

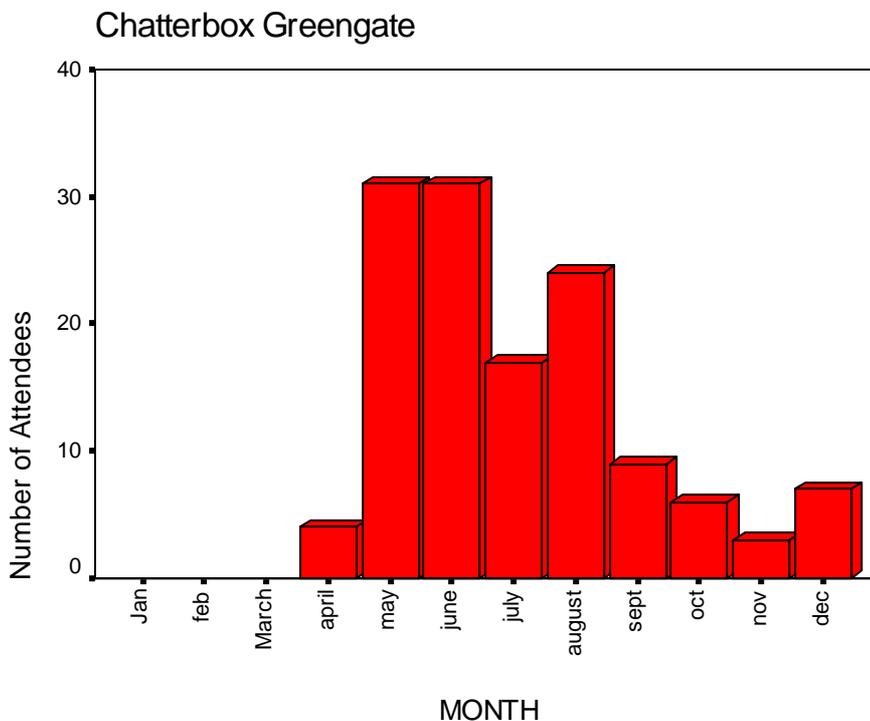
Information received from the Speech and Language Therapist indicated that:

- There have been approximately 12 Chatterbox courses per year (although the number depended upon the number of staff available).
- Attendance at Chatterbox has generally been less than 100% with parents on average attending 4/6 sessions

The Sure Start database indicated that:

The Chatterbox sessions ran most frequently in Greengate. The data below reflects this, with each year showing a graph for attendance at Greengate, followed by a table for attendance at all other locations. Each year is looked at separately, before an overall attendance is produced at the end.

Chatterbox 2002



Attendance data for the Chatterbox course at Greengate begins in April 2002 with 4 attendees. This increases to a high of 30 for both May and June, before dropping steadily thereafter.

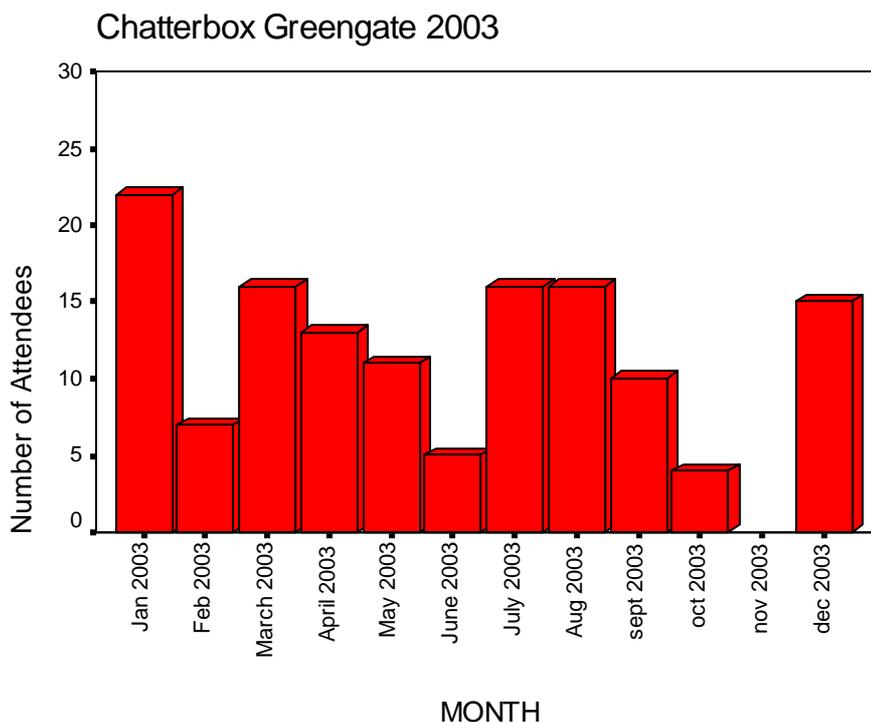
Table 1: Attendees at Chatterbox 2002: Other Locations

	Attendees Hindpool	Attendees St Georges	Attendees Abbots Vale
January	23		
February	3		
August		69	
October	5		
November			6
TOTAL	31	69	6

69 attendances were recorded at St Georges in August 2002. This is a surprisingly high figure, more than double the number of attendances for Greengate in August (25). Despite the apparent popularity of this location it is not used again for the remainder of the year.

Attendance at Hindpool starts well (23 in January) but suddenly decreases to 3 (February) and 5 (October). Abbots Vale is the least popular location with a total of 6 attendances over the year.

Chatterbox 2003



Attendance at Greengate remains relatively steady throughout 2003, although it does drop in February, June, and October (6, 5, and 4 respectively). There appears to be no explanation for this as the course is not held anywhere else during June or October, and is only held once in Barrow Island in February. (see table below). No attendances were recorded for November.

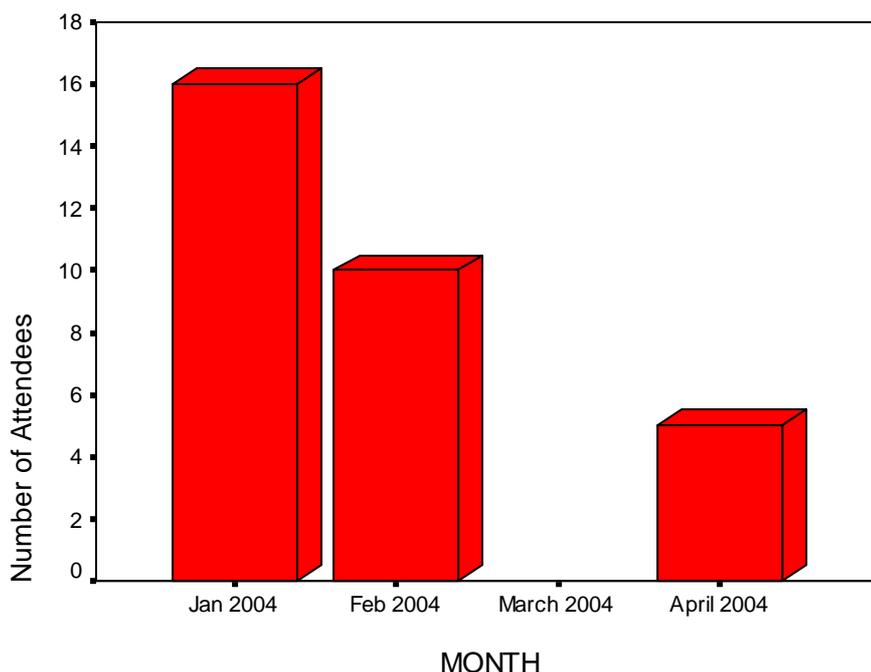
Table 2: Attendees at Chatterbox 2003: Other Locations

	Attendees Hindpool	Attendees St Georges	Attendees Abbots Vale	Attendees Barrow Island
January	4		4	
February				4
March				4
July		6		
September			4	
October			5	
TOTAL	4	6	13	8

Attendance at all other locations is significantly lower than that at Greengate in 2003. After Greengate, Abbots Vale attracts the most attendees (13) with Hindpool attracting the least (4).

Chatterbox 2004

Chatterbox Greengate 2004



Attendance data for 2004 was available from January to April (with no attendance recorded in March). Attendance starts at a high of 16 before dropping to 10 (February) and 6 (March), meaning a total of 32 attendees were seen over these months. This is a drop on last year's figures when 55 attendees had been seen by April 2003.

9 people attended the Chatterbox at St Georges in 2004. Chatterbox was not held in any other locations in 2004.

Overall Attendance

	Greengate	Hindpool	St Georges	Abbots Vale	Barrow Island	TOTAL
2002	232	148	69	15		464
2003	332	4	6	24	20	386
2004	58		9			67
TOTAL	622	152	84	39	20	917

Chatterbox has had a total of 917 attendances across the 3 years (note that these figures include attendance from children and their parents). Most children are seen at the main Greengate location (622) with least seen at Barrow Island (20).

There were 464 attendances in 2002 which dropped to 386 in 2003. Although the total number of attendances in 2004 (64) appears dramatically lower, it should be noted that the figures for 2004 are up until April only.

In addition, taster sessions have been run to introduce parents to the programme. In March 2002, 63 parents and children attended Chatterbox taster sessions and in April 2002, 19 attended these sessions. As a result of the taster sessions in March and April, 26 children were signed up for Chatterbox sessions. In February 2004 taster sessions were held again, which saw 18 parents and children attending.

Observation of Chatterbox Groups

Two Chatterbox Groups were observed by a member of the evaluation team. The first group observed was advertised via posters around the school and invitations were sent to selected parents of children in the school nursery. Invitations were also sent to all parents of children in the two nursery classes at the second group to be observed. The Chatterbox courses held in community centres are advertised through Sure Start publicity (for example, newsletters) and invitations are sent to parents of children of the appropriate age who are registered on the Sure Start database. As parents have to attend with their children working parents are unable to attend.

St George's Primary School

Background to group and location of sessions

This was the second course of Chatterbox to be run at St George's Primary School. The last course was attended by children attending the nursery and was held in the school library. The current course, in its third session, was held in the school hall.

Attendance

Full attendance was seen at this session with 4 parents attending with 5 children between them. Invitations were sent to a selection of parents of children in the nursery class. Only 2 children attending the group were of the correct age for the group (that of nursery age). 2 children attending were two years of age but, with elder siblings in the school, their parents had become interested in the group having seen posters around the school.

Purpose of the current session

The purpose of the session was to think about how parents can adapt activities to share experiences with their children.

How was the group opened or closed

The group started with the Speech and Language Worker explaining to one parent what they had missed during the previous session. A range of colourings were placed on the floor for the children to choose from. The children coloured for fifteen minutes. The group facilitator indicated this was used to settle the children into the group.

Direction and leadership of the group

One group facilitator was in attendance, but normally two co-facilitate the group. Parents and children were directed by the facilitator and children were also directed by their parents. A number of activities were pre-planned and well organised by the group facilitator. A handout was provided to the group about the purpose of the session and was briefly discussed at the outset. The importance of positioning oneself at the same level as their children, by sitting on the floor or having the children sit on their knee, was highlighted by the group facilitator. Direction and leadership of the group varied across the session, but generally activities were provided by the group facilitator, who spoke in a calm and friendly tone, and encouraged the parents to be involved with their children. The children were constantly praised by the group facilitator.

Levels of engagement of participants

Children were encouraged to actively participate by both parents and the group facilitator when their attention drifted from the task at hand. There was a good level of engagement during an activity where the children, with their parents, were making a face on a paper plate, choosing their own eyes, nose and mouth. Only one child was not engaged in this task. He was re-engaged later by his parent, who completed the task for him and openly praised the work with the child. Towards the end of this task a number of the children became distracted and began to run up and down the hall. In an attempt to re-engage the children the group facilitator moved the whole group onto a different task.

General comments about atmosphere created, levels of learning, socialising and support

All parents either sat on the floor with the children or on low benches. The atmosphere was calm, relaxed, friendly and comfortable. Throughout the session attention was directed at the children and the activity. Communication between group members was respectful and communication with the children was direct and clear, involving gestures and positive body language. The group provided a situation for children to socialise with other young children. Learning was through observation and parental guidance and encouragement.

General discussion with the group facilitator

The group facilitator talked of the difficulties of holding the group in the large hall, which is tempting for children to run around in and hoped the next group of sessions would be held in the school library where the setting is 'more like a classroom'.

Greengate Primary School

Background to group and location of sessions

This was the fourth session of the third course of Chatterbox to be run at Greengate Primary School. The group met in the school library.

Attendance

Five parents attended with four children between them. Four parents who had attended previous sessions of the course were absent. All children attending the group were of the correct age for the group (i.e. of nursery age).

Purpose of the current session

The purpose of the session was to think about the use of music to develop children's speech and language skills. The content of the group sessions had been purposefully planned to coincide with the content of the school curriculum (stories and music).

How was the group opened or closed

The group started with a colouring session lasting around fifteen minutes for children to settle in. The group was closed with a singing session where the children used the musical shakers they had previously made.

Direction and leadership of the group

Two members of Sure Start staff co-facilitated the group. Parents and children were directed by the facilitators and children were also directed by their parents. A number of activities were pre-planned and well organised by the group facilitators. The purpose of the current session was briefly discussed at the outset by one of the group facilitators. Direction and leadership of the group varied across the session, with the two facilitators taking turns in a natural manner to direct the tasks. The involvement of both children and parents was encouraged throughout. Constant praise was provided to the children by the group facilitators and the parents.

Levels of engagement of participants

Attention was maintained by the children throughout the session and active involvement was encouraged. Evidence of engagement can be seen in the photos below. Tasks changed before the children became disengaged. Evidence of good time management was observed. Everyone, including the staff, appeared to enjoy the session.

Activities involved

The first main activity, as illustrated in the photo below, involved the children and parents decorating gingerbread men with icing and sweets.

The next task involved making musical shakers. A range of different decorating materials were provided. The children made a shaker each out of the material provided with the help of their parents and staff. Some parents also made a shaker themselves. This activity can be seen in the photo below.

At the end of the session the children were encouraged by staff and parents to use the shakers whilst they all sang. Actions were used by a member of staff to help describe the words of the songs.

General comments about atmosphere created, levels of learning, socialising and support

The session involved a range of different activities. All children sat around a table during the activity tasks, with parents sitting close to their children around the table. In the middle of the session, there was a break where cold drinks were provided and the children ate the gingerbread men they had just made. At the end the group moved to the other side of the room to sit in a circle for song time. The atmosphere was calm, relaxed, friendly and comfortable. There was a lot of laughter. Communication between group members was respectful and communication with the children was direct. It was clear that the group facilitators had developed positive and close relationships with the children, which appeared to maintain levels of engagement.

Chatterbox feedback

Internal feedback

Sure Start staff collected internal feedback from parents about the Greengate primary school Chatterbox group. Five parents/guardians completed the feedback form provided by Sure Start Barrow.

Location and timings of the group

Four parents indicated that the location and timings of the group had been convenient for them. One parent felt that, although the timing of the group was good, the room the group had been held in could have been bigger.

What parents liked about Chatterbox

A number of responses were received from the parents about what they had liked about Chatterbox:

- 'Different activities'.
- The variety of different things for them to do and keep'.
- 'Making things'.
- 'The messy play'.
- 'Enjoyed the songs'.
- 'Play'.
- 'One to one'.
- 'Everyone got on well'.
- 'Comfortable atmosphere'.
- 'Lots of fun'.

What parents did not like about Chatterbox

Three parents indicated there was nothing they did not like about the Chatterbox course they had attended. One parent said they did not like the small room.

What parents felt they and their child had gained from Chatterbox

One parent felt that Chatterbox had provided them with special time with their child on a one-to-one basis. Another parent said they had gained from Chatterbox the 'one-to-one experience'.

Two parents indicated that Chatterbox had provided them and their child with the opportunity to mix, get to know and interact with other children.

One parent said that Chatterbox had given their child the opportunity to do new activities.

Another parent indicated that they and their child had enjoyed Chatterbox.

Other comments and suggestions

One parent reiterated they had enjoyed Chatterbox. Another parent, not the same parent who mentioned the size of the room previously, suggested that the sessions could be held in a bigger venue. One parent noted that they were waiting to see the Speech Therapist through school, but it had been three months since they had requested some input.

Additional internal feedback

A random selection of feedback from eight parents about Chatterbox across various months (Sept/Oct 2001, April/May 2002, May/June 2002, Sept/Oct 2002, June/July 2003, Nov 2003 and Jan/Feb 2004) was received from the Speech and Language Therapist. All respondents found the locations and timings of the Chatterbox course convenient. One respondent (in June/July 2003) said the room could have been bigger.

Parents were asked to indicate what they had liked about the course (see diagram below).

The different activities were good to do together

Could watch how your child interacted with others in a different environment from home

Meeting other parents

The group size is right so each child gets attention

Integrated activities, for example crafts linked to rhymes

What parents liked about Chatterbox

Friendly, helpful staff

Child interacting with others

Small, intense group

All the activities and the way we learnt to interact with the children

Having the time to play and learn with my child

Involvement in the community. Meeting people and getting my child to make friends

Mixing with other children and trying to get them to share games

Only two of the eight parents indicated something they did not like about the Chatterbox sessions. One person said they thought there were too many people in the group they attended and felt that more one-to-one work would help. Another parent said they thought the group would have been better if more people had turned up (they completed their form in November 2003).

Parents were asked to indicate whether they thought their children had gained anything by attending Chatterbox:

- I think I gained more than (child) at Chatterbox.
- Gave child chance to learn to work in small group with different children and parents.
- (Child) has developed well during the course, knows where she is going when she gets to the building and gets excited!! She enjoys the sessions, normally won't play with other children but seems to interact well here. I think it has helped (child) to have input from the Speech Therapist alongside the sessions.
- He started to sing nursery rhymes at home and is a bit more patient with other children.
- We both learnt how to play together and (child) learnt how to wait.
- Feel that they learn more and give ideas on how to help your child at home.

In addition, parents were asked if they thought they had gained anything by attending Chatterbox.

- I learnt things about her speech I'd never picked up on before. I now always take the time to look and listen when she talks to me.
- Have attended other types of courses and work in a pre-school so I knew what the course was about.
- I got to know my child better and enjoyed our time together.
- Meeting people and spending time with my son.

Some parent made additional comments or suggestions about Chatterbox:

- Good course for both children and parents. Gives parent insight into what other children and parents do. Gives lots of ideas for parents to do at home with child. Lots of interesting things for children to do.
- Definitely more one-to-one with the children. I am so glad there are courses for help with children's speech. I will definitely be recommending it to others.
- I think the group is well-run and I was pleased with the results that I've seen from all the children. We learnt how to communicate with them, not to them. I always got the feeling that (child) always learnt something new.
- I would like to do another Chatterbox and hope they will do another one soon.
- To keep coming back as (child) seems to really enjoy herself every time she comes.

Independent feedback

Feedback from parents via questionnaire

Research staff collected independent feedback from nine parents who had attended Chatterbox. Four of the parents were attending the Chatterbox sessions at St Georges School and three had attended the Chatterbox sessions at Greengate Primary School at the time. In addition, feedback from two parents was received whilst collecting feedback about the one-to-one support received from the Speech and Language service.

How parents first heard about Chatterbox

One parent said they were attending training at Sure Start and Chatterbox was running in the room next door. One parent said they received a letter through the post informing them about Chatterbox, whilst another said they received an invitation. Another simply responded that they heard about Chatterbox through Sure Start. One parent said they saw a flyer about Chatterbox on the community centre window, whilst another had visited the centre for a list of activities.

One parent said they heard about Chatterbox by seeing a poster in the nursery and another said they heard about it through a primary school. Another parent said they had heard about Chatterbox through the 'Rainbow group'.

When parents had first started attending Chatterbox

Five parents had begun attending Chatterbox at the start of the current course (the previous month) they were attending at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Other parents had attended Chatterbox with their children for longer periods of time, attending previous courses. One parent had first attended fourteen months previously and two others indicated they started attending the year before (2003).

One parent said they attended 18 months previously with their other child.

How often parents attended

All nine parents said they had attended Chatterbox on a weekly basis.

What parents hoped to gain from the attending Chatterbox

Eight of the nine parents had hoped that attending Chatterbox would develop their child's communication and language skills. The table below shows the number of parents indicating what they hoped to gain from attending.

What parents hoped to gain:	Number of parents
Make new friends/meet other parents with young children	4

Spend more time with your child/ren	6
Improved relationship with child/ren	3
Gain more confidence	1
Develop your child's communication and language skills	8
Learn new skills yourself and discover new interests	2
Other	1

The parent who indicated 'other' said they hoped that their child would be helped to work in a group and that their attention would be improved.

Satisfaction with the venue

Three parents were very satisfied with the venue and six parents were fairly satisfied with the venue.

Satisfaction with the times

Five parents were very satisfied with the times of the sessions and four parents were fairly satisfied.

Satisfaction with the activities

Three parents were very satisfied with the activities at Chatterbox and four parents were fairly satisfied. In addition, two parents were fairly unsatisfied with the activities.

Satisfaction with the opportunities for their child to play and learn

Four parents were very satisfied and three were fairly satisfied with the opportunities for their child to play and learn at Chatterbox. In addition, two parents were fairly unsatisfied with the opportunities for their child to play and learn.

Overall satisfaction with Chatterbox

Five parents were very satisfied overall with Chatterbox and two were fairly satisfied. Two parents were fairly unsatisfied overall with Chatterbox.

What parents like most about Chatterbox

A range of responses was received about what parents liked most about Chatterbox. Two parents said they had liked the 'friendliness' about Chatterbox, with one mentioning the staff. Another parent said that the trainers and other parents all got on very quickly and they liked the fact that everyone was enthusiastic about the course. In addition, one parent said they had liked the venue for Chatterbox, because there was 'plenty of space'.

Two parents said that Chatterbox gave their child the chance to meet other young children. One of those parents said they also liked the fact that they got the opportunity to meet other parents with similar aged children. The opportunity to spend time with their child on a one-to-one basis was for one

parent what they liked best (they noted that this can be difficult for them in the family environment).

One parent noted that what they liked most was that their child was learning to talk better and was putting words together better. Another parent reported that they liked the use of activities to encourage speech.

In addition, the opportunity to do different activities and the fun playing was acknowledged by one parent as being what they liked most about Chatterbox. Another parent said that they liked the fact that their child enjoys it.

What parents like least about Chatterbox

Two parents noted that the children are not interested in the activities and get bored easily. One parent felt that there are not enough activities and another commented that children are expected to sit too long for activities.

One parent said that trying to fit everything from an 8-week course into 5 weeks was what they had liked least about the course they were attending.

Finally, one parent said there was nothing they liked least about Chatterbox.

What parents thought their child had gained by attending Chatterbox

One parent wrote that their child was talking a bit more; having attended Chatterbox and another said their child was learning to use play to encourage words. Another parent said their child had gained confidence from attending Chatterbox.

Four parents said their child had gained opportunities to mix with other young children. One of those parents said their child was learning to tolerate other children and another said their child was learning to share and communicate with other children. One of the parents said that Chatterbox was giving their child the opportunity to build relationships with other children in their class.

Two parents also acknowledged that Chatterbox gave their child the opportunity to spend time with them without other siblings around.

What parents thought they had gained by attending Chatterbox

Four parents described what they had gained from attending Chatterbox:

- Listening and learning more about child's abilities.
- I am learning some skills to help me interact with my child.
- Rebuilding my interest in activities with my child.
- Learning how to use play to encourage words.

One parent said that although Chatterbox had not helped them with Speech Therapy, they felt the sessions were fun time with their child.

One parent said they did not think they had gained anything from attending Chatterbox. Another parent said that they had at first gained from attending Chatterbox but that they found the activities had become very repetitive.

What parents wanted to see changed about Chatterbox

Some of the parents indicated what they would like to see changed about Chatterbox.

- **Bring more toys.**
- A longer course and a larger venue.
- More pronunciation of vowels and concentrating on the speech side of the group, and playing games- incorporating this into the games.

Two parents expressed a wish for a wider range in activities at Chatterbox:

- A change of activity from one term to the next- the 8-week schedule is repeated.
- I would like to see more activities introduced so that children and parents don't get bored.

One parent said they would like to see nothing changed about Chatterbox noting that the course 'met the needs of the children and the expectations of the parents'.

Additional activities wanted by parents

Four parents indicated what additional activities they would like to see:

- Music
- Toys to play with.
- More dealing with specific speech problems.
- Playing outside.

Other Sure Start activities

Five of the nine parents were not attending any other Sure Start activities at the time of completing the questionnaire. Four parents listed the following Sure Start activities attended at the time of questioning:

- Portage, Play Therapy and Early Bird.
- **Mother and Toddler group.**
- Messy Play.
- You make the Difference.

General comments

Two parents added additional comments. One parent said that they and their child had 'loved the course', commenting that the trainers really cared about the children and their interests and remained enthusiastic throughout. Another parent said they thought Sure Start was a fantastic organisation and that,

although Chatterbox had become boring after some time, the other activities their children had attended 'were great'.

Feedback from parents about Chatterbox via the User Satisfaction Survey

18 people indicated use of Chatterbox in the user satisfaction survey (4 were current users and 13 had attended in the past). The majority of respondents had attended Chatterbox on a regular basis, gave a 3 star rating to the activity and felt that it had met their needs very well. Three parents commented upon Chatterbox:

- 'Chatterbox has been fantastic'.
- 'Chatterbox was very good for learning but my child was not quite old enough to do this'.
- 'A crèche for those with more than one child, so parents can focus on the child the activities are aimed at, e.g. it is difficult with a baby at Art Club and Chatterbox'.

You Make the Difference

The Hanen You Make the Difference course is a parent and child interaction group. The Speech and Language Therapist indicated there had been seven courses run since her training in 2002. The course sees better attendance than Chatterbox, with parents on average attending 8/9 sessions.

Need to put some figures in here, but the figures provided by the Speech Therapist and those in the database are not the same.

*2002 You Make the Diff- 26 attendances- adult and child?
2003- 207 attendances- adult and child?*

It is difficult to tell when one course started and one finished from the database- How many attended each course?

Have asked Debbie to tell me exactly how many courses there have been and how many attended each.

Internal feedback

Sure Start staff collect internal feedback from parents about the 'You Make the Difference' Programme. A random sample of 6 feedback forms were provided to the evaluation team.

Whether parents felt their way of talking and playing with their child/ren had changed

All 6 programme attendees felt they communicated in a different way having attended the course. Some parents added comments about how they talked or played with their child differently:

- 'I always go down to their level and make sure I make eye contact when speaking'.
- 'Yes, I listen to what he is saying'.
- 'Yes, I've realised that it really is important to take more time to help him learn'.
- 'Yes, we play more constructively than before'.

What parents learnt that was most helpful

A number of responses were received by the parents about what they had learnt that had been most helpful to them:

- 'To be more patient and to give them more time to lead'.
- 'I learnt to be more patient'.
- 'To listen face to face'.
- 'How to 'tune in' to the best way for him to develop'.
- 'I learnt to listen properly to what (child) was saying and not just to pass sounds off as garbling'.
- 'Even when it seemed he was not listening he was taking everything in'.

Whether parents thought their child had changed the way they were communicating with them

All parents felt that, in some way, their child/ren had changed the way they communicated since starting the programme and some expanded upon this:

- 'Yes, (child) seems to listen more'.
- 'A little bit'.
- 'Definitely- his language has improved because I've learnt to interpret him better'.
- '(Child) will try harder to make herself understood'.
- 'Yes, I think he has'.

Suggestions to improve the 'You Make the Difference' programme

Only one parent gave a suggestion of how the programme could be improved:

- 'A less cheesy video! More natural environments for the videoing- I know this would be hard'.

Two people said they could not think of anything and one said the programme was okay as it was.

Whether parents would recommend the programme to their friends

All 6 parents said they would recommend the programme to their friends:

- 'Yes, I would, you see things from a different point of view'.
- 'Yes, I think it gives you the opportunity to express yourself to your child with expert advice'.
- 'Everyone could learn something, no matter how 'good' a parent they are'.
- 'Yes, I feel both of us got a lot out of the course'.
- 'Yes, because (child) has come on in leaps and bounds'.

Whether parents were happy with the childcare provided whilst attending the programme

All 6 parents were happy with the childcare provided whilst attending the programme and some parents made additional comments:

- 'Yes, the childcare was great'.
- 'Yes, although he did not stay in the crèche very often. Only suggestion for improvement would be to employ (Sure Start worker) as full-time crèche carer'.
- 'Yes, it was nice to get a break from (child)'.
- 'Very happy, can't fault any of the childcare'.

Feedback from parents about You Make the Difference via the User Satisfaction Survey

5 people said they had attended this course. The majority had attended on a weekly basis, gave a 3 star rating and felt that the course had met their needs very well.

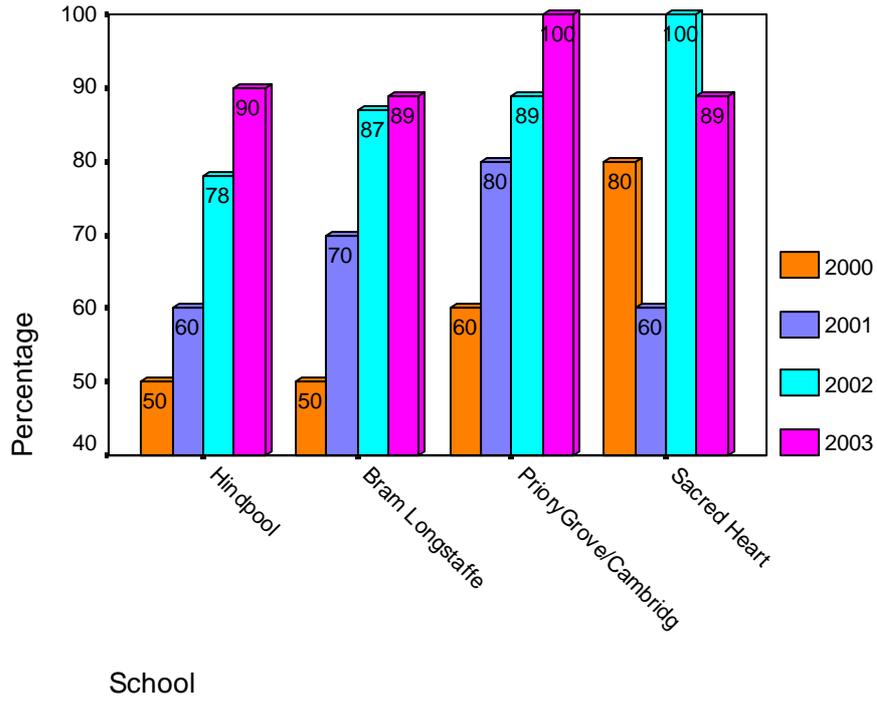
Talkabout

Talkabout is a joint venture with the Children's Library service, designed to encourage continued use by parents and children of the local libraries. The project is run by the Speech and Language Therapist and the Librarian and was designed to be ongoing, initially for 12 months, with 'parties' every three months. Any parent with a Sure Start registered child celebrating their 2nd birthday receives an invite to attend the library. Talkabout involves singing and story time and selection by the children of their own library books, with a focus on developing language and literacy. On their initial visit the children are given a Talkabout Bag and on returning their library books receive a gift to put in their bag (the number of weeks taken to receive a gift increases as time goes on).

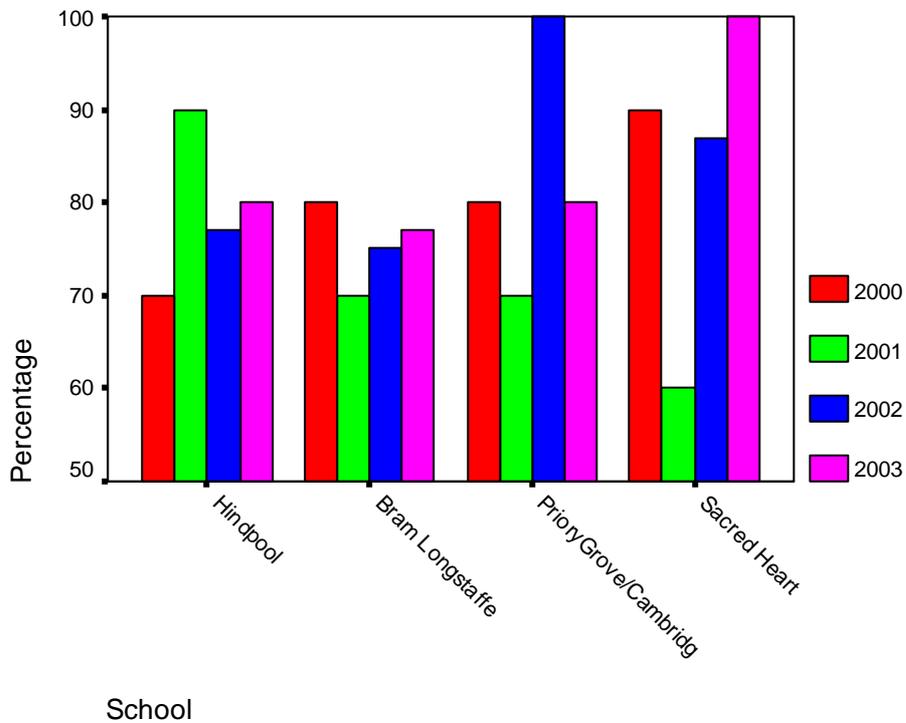
57 parents and children accessed the project from May 2003 to April 2004. Due to poor attendance the team began promoting the project whilst taking the Speech and Language measures, informing parents that they would be receiving an invitation. With poor attendance it is not thought that the project will continue.

Preschool Assessment (baseline measures)

The Speech and Language team annually assess nursery aged children using Speech and Language measures (Pre School Language Scales). 10 children from one school in each of the four wards of Barrow Sure Start have been assessed since the programme began in 2000 (although in 2003 only 9 were available in two nurseries). The control measure was the area of Ormsgill, which is no longer a control as the Fifth Wave Sure Start programme now covers that area. The following figures illustrate the information provided by the Speech and Language Therapist about the children's scores on the measures across time.



Percentage of children with total language scores within the normal range (i.e. above-1sd)



Percentage of children with articulation within the normal range

Although the number of children registered with Sure Start out of each school sample was recorded, information was not retrieved about levels of contact with Sure Start. Future assessments in 2004 are due to cross reference this information and also involve more schools and an increased sample from each school which would enable inferring the benefits of Sure Start.

Training Programmes

The Speech and Language Therapist offers a variety of training programmes and workshops. Those most widely taken up are S.A.L.T (Speech and Language Training) and ELKLAN ('Speech and Language Support for the Under 5's').

S.A.L.T (Speech and Language Training)

S.A.L.T is informal training and non-accredited, taken by the Speech and Language Therapist and consisting of two-training days (Level One and Level Two). It is compulsory that the Speech and Language workers complete the S.A.L.T training. Nursery staff in the Early Excellence Centre have also completed the S.A.L.T training.

A sample of internal feedback from 9 trainees was received from the Speech and Language Therapist. The feedback suggested high levels of satisfaction with the training day. The training day met all of their expectations. Comments were made about what they had liked about the training:

- Presentation friendly and light hearted. Learning about adapting to the child's needs
- Relaxed, good mix of information/humour
- Friendly, relaxed atmosphere- well introduced and instructed
- Really enjoyed the whole day- it was presented very interestingly
- Enjoyed Three A's and playing games
- Well presented and easy to understand
- It gives a greater understanding on how to put skills learnt to good use
- Understanding how it all works
- I could relate it to my own children

None of the 9 respondents who attended the S.A.L.T training indicated anything they did not like about the training. A number of comments were made about what they had found most helpful:

- Learning about adapting to the child's needs
- How to interact with children in a more positive way and in ways which are more beneficial to the child
- Playing games
- I learnt that it was easier to talk face-to-face
- Understanding being on child's level
- Learning the 3 A's way and the importance of learning through play
- How to interact in play
- Understanding how it all works

Two respondents indicated the training day would have been better if it had been longer. One person felt more activities would have made it better and

another said more games would. Another respondent said the room could have better.

Four respondents said they would like further training or information. Two wanted a follow-on course. One person requested a 10 week Speech and Language course. In addition, one person said they may be interested in additional training, but would need more information.

ELKLAN (Speech and Language Support for the Under 5's)

ELKLAN training, which is a ten-week accredited course, is encouraged but not required as a Speech and Language Worker. At the time of enquiry there had been one ten-week ELKLAN course, with another commencing in April 2004.

The course was attended by a mix of people including Sure Start workers, Portage workers, a Speech and Language worker from the Community Team and 4 nursery representatives. 14 people who attended the course completed course evaluation forms (dated 1/12/03).

Overall impressions of the course

Overall impressions of the course were all very positive and encouraging:

- Very informative and interesting. It was also relevant to my work now and provided good examples of activities that can be developed for future use.
- Very good and informative- gives an insight and awareness into the areas that the Speech and Language Therapist looks at when working with the children.
- Useful and interesting.
- I thought the whole course is very informative and useful to my job.
- Very interesting and very useful. Very well delivered.
- Excellent, very relevant to my work.
- Excellent, I enjoyed all aspects of the course. It has helped me to develop my practice in the area of speech and language development.
- Brilliant, lots of practical advice that can be implemented in the classroom. Explanations of what and why and how we can help the development of language in young children.
- Enjoyable and informative. Delivered in a friendly, relaxed environment.
- Very good (rushed at times)
- Really enjoyed the course.
- Excellent. Really enjoyed the course and have put lots into practice within the nursery.
- Very good- lots of helpful information to help in my work.

Aspects of the training that attendees liked and did not like

Most people appeared to have enjoyed all aspects of the course, particularly the practical elements of the teaching:

- Group discussions and practical work made understanding easier. Liked the mind map activity.
- Practical activities to help take the theory on.
- The practical examples
- I enjoyed the lessons when we did practical work. IT was easier to take in and learn than just listening and looking at overheads.
- All aspects. I really liked the practical as it gave us a chance to have a go at some of the tasks that we were asking the children to do.
- All of it. The links between the sessions and the tasks were good, giving us the opportunity to put theory into practice. I really enjoyed the modelling of expressive language; it's given me more confidence.
- I liked the group sessions. Handouts and support given by both tutors. Venue- very good.
- The relaxed and informal approach that the tutor took, only expecting participation if you were willing. I would recommend this course to others.
- Sharing ideas with others. Practical activities. Ideas from Early Language Builder.
- Great group work (practical)
- All topics were delivered well by the tutors, given time and extra help if you needed it.
- All of it. All topics and teaching methods were delivered well and if something not understood time was taken to explain.
- All of it.
- All topics enjoyable. Teaching methods excellent. Enjoyed the interactive/practical teaching.

7 people indicated aspects of the training that they did not like or found irrelevant:

- Sessions cram a lot of information into the two hours. More time needed to digest the information.
- Some of the videos were not good, useful examples.
- I didn't dislike the overheads but found it hard concentrating when these were on.
- It would have been good to have the portfolio before starting the course- not everyone has access to the net.
- It would have been better if a portfolio was available for students as I found it difficult to access this from the internet.
- Some weeks a lot of activities to plan, implement and evaluate.
- Not enough time for notes etc.

Recommended changes by students

10 people recommended changes they felt could be made to the course, most of which were requests for the course to be longer:

- More time to discuss areas where I am not confident. More time to plan, implement and evaluate activities.
- Perhaps a longer period of time for handing in tasks involving practical work with groups- due to the amount of hours worked with the children- would be an advantage.
- Keeping a diary of when you use things from the course.
- Two weeks in between sessions to fit in with the demands of work and home.
- Perhaps an extra few hours as some of the sessions were rushed and perhaps would have been better over two weeks.
- Spread the course over a few more weeks.
- Maybe to extend the length of the course as sometimes find it hard to fit homework in.
- Found some of the activities hard to fit it in in a week.
- Possibly spread out over a longer period of time would make it easier to digest information and complete practical tasks in homework.
- More time- longer length 2-3 hours and longer time for homework.

Additional training

Workers are also trained by the Speech and Language Therapist to undertake Speech and Language measures (as part of a national survey which assesses children when they are about two years of age).

The Speech and Language Therapist also has input into the Community Support Worker Training, providing some information about the service to those training and offering more training if a few are interested.

In addition, more training is being sought by the therapist, including an NVQ in assisting therapies and an OU course.

Other work by the team

The Speech and Language Therapist also offers programme writing for children in nurseries, so if the teachers want to work with a particular child they can.

The Speech and Language team operates a system of continual monitoring of their service through ongoing evaluation and consultation with users, working to move the service on. The Speech and Language Therapist was particularly keen on expanding to offer services in more local schools and also interested in discovering why take up of services is slower in some areas than others.

In addition, the Speech and Language Therapist described looking into the sustainability of different services, for example arranging for workers to gain

experience with the community team and by piloting and mainstreaming groups, drop ins and assessments.

Conclusions and recommendations

Strengths and evidence of good practice by the Speech and Language Service:

- The members of the Speech and Language team appear to work together well, all speaking highly of their manager. The team also has good communication processes.
- Community Support Workers have been encouraged and supported in developing professionally within the core team.
- The team are very parent led, taking a proactive and responsive approach. Feedback received from parents (both internal and independent) is generally very positive. Many parents were particularly impressed with the personal nature of the service and the reliability of staff.
- The sending of personal invitations to parents informing them about activities.
- The team are keen to work alongside the generic services, sharing ideas of best practice, and seeing different agencies as an asset to each other.
- There is good collaboration with local schools and the team is looking to expand this further. Evidence of good cooperation with schools was also seen, for example by linking the activities to the curriculum.
- Activities are offered at a range of different venues to increase accessibility.
- The services offered by the Speech and Language service add values to those available within the generic services.
- The Speech and Language Therapist is keen to reflect on the practice.

Future developments

Some parents expressed a wish in the user satisfaction survey for more speech therapy to be available. The local 5th Wave Sure Start programme are looking to recruit a Speech and Language Therapist to work in the two wards covered by the programme, which would enable the Sure Start Barrow Speech and Language Therapist to expand and develop the existing services **(need to check whether this has been done before report is finished)**.

Chatterbox is identified as a very good way of identifying difficulties in speech, language and communication at an early age. Some parents indicated that although they and their children had initially really enjoyed the Chatterbox programme they had stopped attending after their children became disinterested with the repeated activities. ***It is recommended that the Speech and Language Team review the structure and content of the***

Chatterbox sessions, perhaps to include a rolling pattern of programmes, each with a different theme.

In addition, reasons given by some parents for no longer attending other Sure Start activities suggest that the following may be necessary:

- A review of activities to reduce the issue of repetition.
- Clarity for parents about the age group each group activity is suitable for.
- The running of smaller groups, if possible.
- More active publicity about Sure Start.