



Participatory Snowballing

Evaluation of Coventry's Sure Start Programmes

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Chris Coe, Maria Stuttaford & Nick Spencer

School of Health & Social Studies

The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL United Kingdom
Tel: 024 7657 4139
Fax: 024 7652 4415
Email: c.j.coe@warwick.ac.uk

Participatory Snowballing

The aims of this document are two-fold: to document the process of participatory snowballing so that it can be used by others and to report on the findings of the participatory snowballing exercise.

Background

An examination of numbers of those involved in Sure Start local programmes gave rise to concern that participation in the programmes could be improved. In some cases, less than 50% of the potential pool of families who may get involved are involved. This trend is not confined to Coventry but is reflected nationally with some local programmes achieving as little as 15% participation rates. (Verbal evidence presented at West Midlands Evaluation Conference, September 04, Birmingham). Therefore a strategy to enable understanding of the barriers to participation encountered or perceived by families was important. The participatory snowballing initiative is one component within the overall 'hard to reach' strategy.

The term participatory snowballing was used as it is **Participatory** in that the evaluation team set out to actively involve parents in our research, and **Snowballing**, a research term for a particular technique used to recruit research participants in which an interviewee recommends who else may be interviewed and they refer to others who may be interviewed and the number of interviewees therefore 'snowballs'.

Aims

This initiative had two clear aims: the first was to hear first hand, the voices of those deemed to be 'hard to reach' within the Sure Start programmes. The term 'hard to reach' is an over arching term used in this context to describe those who are eligible to be involved in Sure Start programmes, but for whatever reason, are not currently involved. The term is not ideal, as some groups are possibly not accessed in the right way, rather than being hard to reach, however it is a term that appears to be both acceptable and is widely understood.

The second aim of the strategy was to further engage parents in the Sure Start programmes by involving them as key people. The team hoped to engage parents who had not had an 'enhanced' role within Sure Start in order for them to increase their understanding of Sure Start and also their own participation within the programme. The possibilities of being involved were relayed to parents who were then encouraged to volunteer.

By engaging parents in this way, the team recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that parents' contributions are maximised and that they receive well thought out and responsible support, encouragement and recognition for their time and effort.

We set out to identify two parents from each Sure Start programme who would be willing to interview three others in their area who are **not** using Sure Start. This would yield twenty four interviews.

Parents attended an informal training session at a Sure Start venue where they received instruction on carrying out informal interviews within their own community. An important outcome from the session was for parents to produce a semi structured interview schedule that they were comfortable to use.

Transport to and from the venue was provided by the Sure Start mini bus and crèche facilities were also be available. An early years team member familiar to the child helped in the crèche.

Two, two- hour sessions were conducted with refreshments.

Aims of session 1

To enable and prepare parents to construct a short, semi –structured interview schedule and conduct an interview using their prepared interview schedule.

Objectives

To empower parents to play an active role in their community and to contribute to the research process

To provide parents with the opportunity to directly contribute to the research process

To increase a sense of ownership of the Sure Start programme and evaluation

Learning outcomes; the learner will be able to

- Demonstrate an understanding of the need to set aims and objectives
- Demonstrate an understanding of the uses of research
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to structure a questionnaire
- Undertake a research assignment

Structure session1

Introductions and plans for the morning

The evaluation team and its aims, where and how you fit in

Purpose of this research: Interviews, types of: Questions: types of, Interviewing skills – code of conduct, Questions to avoid, the sequence of questions. Interviewing Skills – Video exercise .Designing a questionnaire Fieldwork .

Completed interviews to be posted back to researcher at the University, in pre-addressed, pre-paid envelopes.

Structure session 2

- **Reflect:** how things went,
- **Analysis:** what do the interviews tell us,
- **Dissemination:** how will we use the information,

Consider; could parents be encouraged to feedback at a Sure Start team meeting? Or even partnership board

Certificate of attendance provided (non- accredited)

Recruiting

Working through programme managers and key people within the Sure Start team, parents were recruited either by the researcher or key worker. Parents were initially approached and given a brief explanation of the initiative and were then asked to volunteer. Parents were given the date of one of two proposed sessions.

The process

Ten parents, with twelve children, attended the initial training session. Participants were fully informed of the research, were given participant information sheets and signed informed consent forms. One of the practical aims of the initial session was to offer an introduction to, and demystification of 'research'. The parents also needed to be very clear regarding the aims and objectives of this research and how it would fit into the wider research context.

Due to parents delivering children to schools, picking up from nursery and work commitments, the session was scheduled to last for one hour and a half. Two hours would have been more feasible, however, the parents met all the learning outcomes and devised a questionnaire that they were happy to use. (Appendix I). A 'code of conduct' was discussed with parents and they were each given a copy, (Appendix ii) There had been no time to evaluate the session, which was disappointing as the researcher was left with no direct feedback.

Participants received a wallet containing a notebook, pen, interviewing skills code of conduct, pre-addressed pre – paid envelope and contact details for the researcher. They also were given area specific leaflets about the Sure Start programmes, should they be asked for information.

Participants agreed to send completed interviews back to the university in the envelopes provided and also to meet again to reflect, analyse the data and to think about dissemination. Parents were also encouraged to make contact with the researcher should they need clarification or further support.

A second session was scheduled with parents for a month hence, in the mean time parents agreed to conduct their interviews and send results back to the researcher at the University where they would be printed out in preparation for the second session.

Second session

The group met for the second session one month after the first. Six of the original group of 10 were present. Of the missing four parents, one parent had to work, one had just started a new job so was also working, one had a hospital appointment for her child, and one had an unwell child.

Data had been sent from two participants so were able to be analysed on the day, only one parent was unable to supply the data, the remaining were collected and examined by the researcher following the event.

The aims of the session were to reflect, analyse and think about dissemination.

Reflect

Interviews had taken place in a variety of places ranging from the street, door knocking, outside the local school and in friend's homes. Participants reported that interviews went smoothly but could be quite nerve racking. One participant had managed some 'on the spot' snowballing of her sample whilst conducting her interview, by interviewing another person who just happened to be close by.

Discussion with parents yielded the following points:

- Registered without knowing why
- Problems of area based initiatives
- Some people just can't be bothered
- To gain 'freebies'
- Turn up for a free breakfast
- Problems with having children of different ages, old & young
- Not just for children for but also for Mums, isolation
- Shy
- Need wider advertising, people don't know about Sure Start, national advertising needed as well as local.
- Use big shops such as Mothercare or Adams

Analysis

The parents read or talked about their own interviewing experiences and began to familiarise themselves with the data. Interviews that had been returned to the researcher had been typed and printed. Using all available floor space parents began a thematic analysis, identifying common 'groups' or 'themes' within the interviews. Six themes were identified;

1. Never heard of Sure Start
2. Timing / work problems
3. Heard of but not used
4. Registered, but not used
5. Location
6. Using other services

The process of analysis took up most of the available time.

Dissemination

What do we do with this information?

Parents were very interested to know what would happen with the results of this exercise and the idea of themselves feeding back their experiences at a Sure Start team meeting or partnership board was suggested. A surprising number agreed that this was a possibility and agreed to the researcher contacting them with the possibility of taking this further.

Each participant was presented with a Certificate (Appendix 3), to demonstrate their contribution and also a voucher to thank them for their time and efforts.

Presentations to Partnership Board's

Two parents from Sure Start West were contacted, and the researcher made face to face contact with both parents at a Stay and Play session they were attending. Both parents agreed to present their experiences to the next Partnership Board meeting. The meeting happened to be taking place the following week, on May 18th 2005.

The researcher met with the parents twice more in order to prepare and support their presentation.

Both participants spoke at the Partnership Board meeting, the researcher introduced the women and the initiative they had been involved in then each introduced themselves and related how they became involved in Sure start and how they became involved in this particular initiative. They then related their findings in brief.

An unexpected and pleasing outcome to this event was that both parents were particularly interested in the Partnership board and its work and pressed the researcher for more information, expressing a desire to become further involved.

A parent from Sure Start North East was also contacted and agreed to present to the Partnership Board. The researcher met once with this parent in order to prepare and support and a parent presentation was duly made to the partnership board on Friday 8th July.

Again the board were impressed with this parent and they suggested that she may consider becoming a parent representative. The community development officer is to follow this up.

The research team presented to the Sure Start South East Partnership Board one of the snowballing participants was also a board member and she was present during the presentation.

The Foleshill participants had all been selected at the last minute and were heavily involved with another Sure Start initiative, therefore a decision not to pursue them further was taken.

Six themes were identified by parents:

1. Never heard of Sure Start

I think most people aren't aware what Sure Start offers and if they can use it. Leaflets and advertising are not very clear. Some people also think because Sure Start is based in regeneration areas it is not open to everyone

CV3 3FF

No, never used Sure Start as I'm not sure what services they provide. Said she would register with Sure Start and would try a Stay and Play session to see if her and little boy enjoyed it, once explained what services were about.

CV6 5FR

I have never heard of Sure Start

CV6 6GS

I have just moved to Foleshill area, I have not heard of Sure Start

CV6)

Sure Start is new for me, because I don't know what they do. I have never heard of it. I'm not working and I'm very interested to go with my children, can I have Sure Start address and telephone number? I want to know more about it.

CV6 4DP

Never used Sure Start

Do not know what Sure Start is

Would like somewhere for the children to go out to play

CV2 1DD

Never used Sure Start

Never been told what Sure Start is.

Would like to see some educational activities

CV6 4EB

Yes, have heard of Sure Start

No, have not used

Do not know anything about it, would like to know more

CV3

I have not heard of them because I have just moved in but will I be able to use them? Is it for me or just those who know Sure Start. I would love more information about it and what and how I can use them. Will I be welcome and will I find other Mums like me, can you come with me?

I will introduce you to someone who uses Sure Start services and they will help you.

2. Timing / work problems

CV4 8EU

No, I don't use Sure Start services at present due to work commitments. I work full time and my youngest child goes to a childminder who obviously has various needs to consider due to number of children and age groups she cares for.

If I didn't work full time I'm sure I would use my local Sure Start group

CV4 8FW

No, I don't use Sure Start services.

The main reason is that I don't drive and I have to get my older child to nursery and back. He is only there for 2 ½ hours but because I have to walk, it

takes me about 20 minutes to get there and then about 30 minutes or so to get back as he is slower than me.

By the time I drop him off the group has normally started and when I have to pick him up, it is around the time the local group is on. He is normally tired and ready for a sleep when he finishes nursery!

Maybe, if there was a minibus service, that might encourage people to attend.

(CV6)

I chose not to use Sure Start because I don't have time to go. I'm working, that's why I don't have time to experience it. Maybe I will go but now I'm very busy

CV3 3EU

Yes, I have heard of Sure Start and am registered but I only went to a couple of stay and play sessions then my child started nursery which clashed with the Stay and Play times.

To improve the facilities and services they could put on a few more stay and play sessions throughout the week at a place close to my home.

CV4 8BT

Parent of three children ages 7, 4 & 2 years.

Had heard of Sure Start through word of mouth. Did register, but does not use as she finds it difficult to get to different groups as middle child attends nursery school in the afternoons and eldest child a different school.

Afternoons are slightly difficult at home times as she has to go from one school to another. She will enquire about morning groups.

(CV6)

I have used Sure Start in the past, that was a very good service for me. They help with a lot of things, like find school and computer course. Sure Start was a very good service and now I'm going to school.

(CV6)

I used to go with my son who is four years old. I don't go any more as I have a new born. I want to go back as soon as possible

3. Heard of but not used

She was about to give birth. Was interested in groups like bumps to babies and breastfeeding but wasn't sure if she lives in catchment area. I advised her ring Sure Start and gave her leaflets. (CV4 9JT)

I used to live opposite Sure Start in Foleshill, I thought it was for disadvantaged people and not people like me who are working. Because I was working I didn't think I could join in. It wasn't until I moved here [Canley] that I met the midwife and found out I could come along.(CV4)

CV4 8FL

No, I don't actually use Sure Start services, I have heard of it but I haven't actually used it.

To be fair, I could use it but I go to visit my Mum when one of the sessions is on and I do my shopping on the other day that I know there is a session on. My mum only gets one day off in the week but I suppose I could change my shopping day and attend the other session. I don't know of any other sessions to be honest.

CV4 8BT

*Parent of two children, ages 9 months and 3 years
Heard of Sure Start (posters in the doctors surgery)but has never registered. Not originally from the area so she does not know many people and feels she cannot go to groups on her own. I have offered to meet her there and gave out Sure Start leaflets.*

CV4 8FL

Parents of two children, 18 months and 7 years

*Heard about Sure Start from poster at Doctors surgery, hasn't registered. She didn't realise what Sure Start does, re courses, trips etc
She thought it was just a weekly playgroup. She did say she would go to the Sure Start play session on Friday to register*

CV6 7GR

*There is a stay and play near to where she lives, which is not organised by Sure Start, she went there twice. Hardly anyone there both times, so she thinks there is not point to try anything else.
She and the family moved to Coventry not long ago, she is still feeling pretty isolated but at the same time is too scared to make new friends and meet new people.
She's pregnant with the second baby (5 months) sometimes its more comfortable to stay in her own house, she can lie on the sofa and keep her eyes on the 15month old son.*

Parent said, if she feels lonely she should come out and meet new people, Sure Start is the best place. I invited her to the breast feeding café, she loves it!

CV6 7LH

*Adopted daughter. Works three days, visits family on other days.
Thinks Sure Start is where full time Mums meet up, she has better things to do on her day off. She hangs out with other adopting families, The children play together as well (Child is nearly 3 years)*

CV6

Have heard of Sure Start, but am working and work shifts, so cannot use things regularly. Am interested to know more

4. Registered, but not used

CV3 3FL

Yes I am registered but I have never used the Sure Start Service as I'm not sure what they provide.

I think Sure Start could advertise what they provide in more places as most people do not know where Sure Start is based or what is provided and who it is for.

I always thought Sure Start was only for people who had just had a baby. This is because I have only seen 'Mums to be' and 'Baby massage' advertised down my local clinic

CV6 ??

This lady is registered and has missed out a few times, feel embarrassed to come back

CV3

I was registered but I was only interested in the nursery but not in the other services because am not too sure about them. I have heard of them but I feel strange to go, then again I am a refugee and I am not sure that their services are for people like me. If am made comfortable and am introduced to other Mums from my community then I would go because I would have someone to go with.

5. Location

She knew about activities @ Jardine Crescent but it is difficult for her to get there with 2 young kids. She doesn't like walking far. I have told about the drop in @ Tanyard Farm which is her area and she was keen to pop in. (CV4 9UG)

6. Using other services

The second person I have spoken to said she goes to other toddler group where she knows people and has no real interest in trying Sure Start. She is happy with the group she attends (CV4 9JX)

CV3 1FJ

I had the first visit from Sure Start when I had my baby and after that I never go and know more about it. I have seen their nursery but I have not been in because I was not sure about it and then again I didn't know that they would be able to help me and I thought it was only for people only on low income. I went to the play and stay and didn't find the other Mums friendly – very few of the ethnic minority.

If more people from the ethnic minority were asked to come, then I would come.

Conclusions

Parents claimed to enjoy being involved in the participatory snowballing initiative; they demonstrated enthusiasm throughout the training sessions and interviewing process. It is very pleasing to note that as a direct result of this initiative three parents are likely to be involved as parent representatives on their respective partnership boards.

The data collected by parents gives us unique first hand information as to why some parents may not be involved in Sure Start programmes and together with additional information collected as part of the 'hard to reach' strategy we hope to gain a greater understanding that will inform targeted, realistic future activity in the hard to reach strategy of each Sure Start area in Coventry.

Appendix 1

Interviewing plan

1. Find the person who you are going to interview!
2. Can I just ask you, do you live in * (name the Sure Start area)
3. My name is, I am a parent who uses Sure Start * (name the Sure Start area), we are trying to find out why some parents may choose not to use Sure Start. Could you spare me just a few minutes to ask some questions?

If yes,

I won't be collecting any names and addresses, so every thing you say will remain anonymous.

4. Could you just tell me your postcode?
5. Do you use any Sure Start services?

(If yes, make sure that they attend something on a regular basis, thank them for their time and finish the interview).

(If they have used in the past but don't any longer, try and find out why they stopped going and what might make them start again)

6. If no, can I ask if there is any particular reason why not?

(If they say they have never heard of Sure Start try and find out if they use the local library or public buildings where Sure Start may be advertised, or where they think poster should be on display).

If they are interested and ask you about Sure Start give them some printed leaflets or details)

7. Could Sure Start put on any thing that would appeal to you and your children?

Try to write the answers that people give you as soon as possible, and use the same words. Good luck!

Appendix 2

Interviewing Skills: Code of conduct

- Always introduce yourself
- Always fully introduce the research
- Make sure you listen carefully to the answers
- Don't use leading questions
- Only ask one question at a time
- Allow people to talk for as long as they wish about the question you have asked them (within reason)
- Allow people to see what you are writing down
- Use simple language
- Avoid interpreting peoples answers, only write down what they actually say
- Always thank people for taking part

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Appendix 3