

Leamington SureStart

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Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) Evaluation – Final Report

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The Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) is a pre-school intervention programme that works with parents, carers and pre-school staff who live and work with 0-5 year olds. It aims to improve children's life chances, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by raising educational attainment, especially in literacy. PEEP began in an area of low socio-economic status in Oxford in 1995.

PEEP supports parents and carers in their role as children's first and most important educators. PEEP works with adults and children, focussing on early learning and development and infant mental health. The programme aims:

- To promote parents' and carers' awareness of children's very early learning and development, through making the most of everyday activities and interactions;
- To support parents/carers in their relationship with their children, so that the children's self-esteem will be enhanced;
- To affirm the crucial role of parents/carers as children's first educators;
- To support parents/carers in the development of their children's literacy and numeracy
- To support parents/carers so that they can encourage the development in children of positive learning dispositions;
- To promote and support parents' and carers' lifelong learning.

PEEP groups originally started in Blackbird Leys and neighbouring estates in southeast Oxford and PEEP is now being taken up nationally through a variety of organisations including SureStart programmes. Research on the effects of PEEP on children's developmental progress has showed that children that have taken part of a PEEP group had made significantly greater gains in various developmental areas than those without PEEP experience.¹ Research has also showed that PEEP has benefited parents as adult learners.²

Sure Start has just published 'The Birth to School Study: A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) 1998-2005' (BTSS)³. This is now the most comprehensive and long-term evaluation of a pre-school intervention in the UK. The BTSS established that:

- PEEP had a significant impact on the quality of parents' interaction with their children when the children were one and two years of age;
- PEEP had a significant impact on children's value-added progress in a number of literacy-related skills, as well as in measures of their self-esteem.

¹ Maria Evangelou & Kathy Sylva 'The Effects of the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) on Children's Developmental Progress.' London: DfES 2003 pp. 2

² Kathy Sylva, Maria Evangelou, Rachel Taylor, Andrew Rothwell and Greg Brooks (2004). 'Enabling Parents: The Role of PEEP in Supporting Parents as Adult Learners.' Learning and Skills Council at <http://www.edstud.ox.ac.uk/research/fell.html>

³ Maria Evangelou, Greg Brooks, Sally Smith. and Denise Jennings. Birth to School Study: A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) 1998-2005, Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Staff from more than 170 SureStart programmes have received PEEP training in the last year and 500 SureStart programmes are now using PEEP's materials and resources. The PEEP programme was introduced to Leamington Sure Start in January 2006.

The Evaluation

The Centre for Social Justice was commissioned by SureStart Leamington to conduct an Evaluation of the PEEP programme. The main aim of this evaluation was:

- To understand how well LSS services are performing and meeting SureStart objectives and standards through the evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) and to make changes to the programme as a result of the evaluation findings.

The objectives of the study were as follows.

- To obtain parents' perceptions on how PEEP has supported them as parents and as adult learners.
- To obtain parents' and staff views of how accessible is PEEP to them and other potential users. In particular, the evaluation will look at how effectively PEEP is advertised.
- To explore staff views of the process of referrals to the PEEP programme.
- To explore parents' perceptions on the role of PEEP in their children's development.
- To obtain staff perceptions on the impact of PEEP in the development of children who have attended five or more sessions.
- To obtain parents' perceptions on the role of PEEP in supporting their parent/child relationship.
- To examine parents' attendance and drop out rates.

Methods of evaluation

After obtaining consent from the Local Research Ethics Committee and the Research and Development Committee, the research used face-to-face and semi-structured interviews and telephone interviews as the main methods of evaluation. A total of 12 interviews were conducted for this evaluation: 2 group coordinators; 5 mothers attending the group; 2 mothers that have attended the group once and then decided to drop out and 3 Health Visitors.

Staff (group co-ordinators and health visitors) to be interviewed were identified through discussions with the LSS' Monitoring and Evaluation sub-group. The researcher attended staff meetings in the Crown and Brunswick wards of Leamington Spa in South Warwickshire to introduce the staff to the aims of the research and ask for their participation. Once staff had shown an interest in being involved, the researcher provided them with a 'Participant Information Sheet' and 'Consent Form' which the respondent completed prior to being interviewed.

Mothers attending the PEEP group were identified through the group's coordinators. The researcher attended one session to invite mothers and gave them a 'Participant Information Sheet' and a 'Consent Form'. A mutually convenient time was arranged for an interview to take place. The interviews were anonymised and all respondents were assured that they did not have to answer any questions they would rather not.

Findings

The following themes were identified from the analysis of the interviews.

- Targeting strategy
- Attendance
- Suggestions for improvement
- Impact and benefits of the PEEP group on mothers and babies:
 - Social Support
 - Learning for mothers and babies
 - Enhancing the bond between mothers and babies

Targeting strategy

Leamington Sure Start aims to develop an innovative programme of services and activities which challenge the impact of poverty, strengthen families and communities, and build an environment in which young children can thrive. Following this aim, PEEP coordinators aimed at targeting hard to reach groups within the area so that parents who needed the service the most would benefit from it. The criteria adopted were first time mothers and young mothers living within the Sure Start area.

In the end, staff welcomed all mothers living within the area even though they didn't fit the criteria. However, targeting 'hard to reach' groups affected the way the group was advertised and consequently the level of attendance. The PEEP group was advertised through news letters and posters. There was an open invitation to parents in the Sure Start area but no information regarding time and venue was provided in order to control the number of attendees to the group and to try to reach families that most needed the service.

We were not going to advertise it with posters (massively) that would say 'open to everyone at this time'. Instead we asked people to contact us if interested, so that demanded a lot from parents, so that the ones really interested would contact us. We asked home visitors that if they found someone that they think would benefit a lot from the group and would fit the criteria to ask that person for permission for us to contact them.

The way in which the group has been advertised has not been very open, it is in the newsletter but, for instance, it did required you to find out about the time and venue, which is quite demanding, but we didn't know how to advertise without having the group attended mainly by parents that did not fit our criteria, we want to get hard reach groups.

Mothers who attended the group regularly found out about the PEEP group through a friend or through their Health Visitor. All mothers interviewed were happy with the venue and time when the group was run.

There are different levels of awareness among Heath Visitors regarding the promotion and advertisement of PEEP among 'hard to reach' groups living in the Sure Start area. Some health visitors are confused between the PEEP group run by Sure Start and another delivered by a local parents' centre. Some health visitors' were aware of the LSS PEEP group and were actively advertising the group with their clients. There were some that have offered to accompany mothers to the group so that they won't feel intimidated. As one health visitor explains,

I have a poster in my surgery and give them leaflets. Sure Start approached me about advertising and I have mentioned to my clients. And they are given membership and get a

newsletter, most people are aware of it. I have offered to go with them to introduce them to the place and no one has been interested to go. Especially with the younger mothers, I have offered to go with them or meet them there but rarely someone takes me up on it.

Attendance

At the moment Leamington Sure Start is running one PEEP group with six to nine mothers attending the group in a regular basis. During some sessions the attendance is low and generally there has not been a large number of mothers making enquiries about the group or expressing interest in attending the group. This may be due to the limited way that the group has been advertised.

Some parents thought that PEEP's targeting strategy was affecting attendance to the group and that it was not good to exclude parents living outside the Sure Start area. Although parents were aware that Sure Start services were designed for parents and children within the area, they felt that the group would benefit from a more open policy that would welcome mothers within and outside the area.

Something that made it easier to go and keep going to PEEP was walking through the door with someone. It may be good if Sure Start link people up who live near each other to go together.

Staff felt that the group's attendance may also be affected by the nature of the group and the way it was designed. Compared to other services run for babies such as music groups or playgroups, the PEEP group demands more interaction between babies and parents and consequently a more engaged participation from parents.

PEEP demands more from parents, they have to fully participate, where stay and play, I mean we encourage interaction between parents and child, but in others (services) parents come and talk to other parents and the children are isolated. PEEP demands full attention, which puts parents off, but they see the benefits so quickly.

Staff felt that the group's attendance may be affected by the lack of confidence some parents may have about going to the group when they don't know anyone there. Some parents attending the group agreed with this perception. PEEP's coordinators felt that one way to increase awareness and attendance at the group would be to involve coordinators in home visiting to invite mothers to the group and arrange a time and a date to go with them. Staff felt that by starting a relationship before mothers go to the group they could facilitate mothers' experience attending the group for the first time. However, this strategy would be difficult to achieve with the time that is currently allocated to PEEP.

If you try to get to the most disadvantaged group you have to invite them yourself, because they have to trust you. And preferably someone younger than me that they can relate, and then to be there, running PEEP so that when they see you there they would feel more confident. If they don't see someone familiar there they won't come.

Staff felt that investing more time in running and advertising PEEP groups was the main way to improve service provision and levels of attendance from 'hard to reach' groups. Staff felt that coordinators needed to invest time to develop a link and relationship not only with potential service users but also with professionals working alongside families in the area.

Home visits will take time and that is an aspect that we need to review, the time that people is allocated to work on PEEP, because it involves not only running the group, but planning the sessions and advertising in a more effective way to reach the groups we want to reach.

You got to put more time into it, instead of having someone (employed for) for four hours they should have someone all day. So that you can go out and meet the people, you've got to meet the people; you've got to keep talking to Health Visitors and build up a relationship, building up that trust with professionals and service users, which takes a lot of resources, it's very time consuming. You have to invest in time. Do presentations with professionals, social services, anyone that works alongside, selling it takes a lot of time.

Suggestions for Improvement

All parents interviewed were happy with the way the group was running and they did not have any particular suggestion to improve the sessions. Staff felt that the group could be improved by allocating more time for planning sessions. Staff felt that time was allocated for planning how the group was going to run generally but there was not enough time allocated for the advanced planning of each individual session.

There have been cases when mothers have attended the group once and not continued. One of the mothers interviewed said that she and her baby enjoyed the group and that it was for other reasons she decided to stop attending the group. The main reasons were tiredness and the difficulties of travelling with two babies. The other mother also enjoyed the group but because she is living outside the Sure Start area she did not feel welcome by the group. The research team had the opportunity to contact only two of these mothers so no conclusions can be made on the reasons that mothers had to stop attending the group. Here are some of the comments that mothers interviewed made about their reasons to stop attending the group,

The group was fine, I have two small babies (one 5 months and the other 23 months) and I feel very tired, you can't go to all these things can you? It's very difficult for me to get out of the door with both of them. It is hard even to go shopping with them. The venue and time was OK I guess, it's just that I am very tired. I sometimes go to the Sure Start shop when I can, and because I can arrive and leave at any time that's good for me. The first time I went to PEEP my baby was in a very bad mood and that just put me off.

My friend told me about the group, but because I am not in the Sure Start area, I felt that shouldn't be going,I didn't feel welcome by staff, they told me that I could go to the group as long as other mothers from the area were not interested in attending, and that made me feel unwelcome.

Impact and benefits of the PEEP group on mothers and babies

Social Support

Staff felt that mothers benefited from the group in many ways. One of the main benefits of the PEEP group as perceived by staff and parents was the social support gained from the group. All mothers interviewed felt that PEEP provided them with the opportunity to meet other mothers from the area and build a support group that cared for their babies and themselves. Mothers also felt that staff running the group cared for their babies and themselves.

You met people, I have learnt from other mums. It is nice to get to know someone with a baby with a similar age because you can learn about what to do and what is normal and not and things like that. We help each other quite a lot.

I have also met other mums and learnt from them tips and stuff. It is also good that my baby gets to see other babies of similar age.

You just feel supported there, you know they are interested in your baby and how you are and there things that you can learn to do with your baby. As a parent, the good thing about PEEP is that it gives you confidence and support. Meeting up with a group and knowing you are not by your self.

Learning opportunities for mothers and babies

All mothers interviewed felt that the PEEP group helped them to learn new ideas about a diverse number of activities to have fun and encourage their babies' development. Some mothers felt that the group made them aware of the importance of talking and reading to their babies.

I don't know, I am more talkative to my baby now after I saw other mums always talking to their baby. I am a very quiet person, before I used to never talk to my baby and now I talk to her about everyday things. I just picked that up and I thought, that is good, I am going to start to talk to her more and sing to her more.

They talk a lot about books and show them books and I don't think I would have started with books this early, and she enjoys that....

It helps you to learn different things and activities you can do with your baby, I have also learn what is my baby able to do at each stage of her development an which activities are good for her. You learn a lot about the development stages of your baby.

It has encouraged me to be more adventurous I guess with giving him different things and play...it has made me more confident.

According to parents and staff, babies also benefit from the group's structured programme. It prepares children for schools and gives them security as they know what to expect from the group's activities. Staff felt that it was difficult to comment on the impact of the group on babies' development because of the complexity of a long-term assessment. However, staff believed that the group's activities were designed to develop babies' social, vocal and literacy skills.

Where else can you get babies all together for thirty weeks of similar ages, and you can see some social interaction. They are touching each other and looking at each other, there are developing early social skills and literacy, that's what PEEP stands for.

The group also helped parents to become more aware of their babies' developmental stages. One of the main benefits of the group as perceived by staff was that as mothers learnt more about their babies they became more confident. The group can also be an opportunity for mothers to develop new skills and training, one of the mothers attending the group will be funded by Sure Start to be trained on how to run the PEEP group.

It is difficult to say because we have had different mums going to the group. At the beginning we had a group of mums that clearly ... one of the mums greatly benefited from the group, she became very confident and took on board lots of the things we were doing. She is actually going to be trained on how to run PEEP. I have also noticed changes in the mums that attend regularly in their responses to their children and their awareness of what their babies can do and enjoy doing. Mums have also benefited from the social support that they received from the group, from other mums in the group. I have also seen mums becoming more confident and more communicative with their babies.

Enhancing the bond between mothers and babies

One of the programme's aims is 'to support parents/carers in their relationship with their children, so that the children's self-esteem will be enhanced'. Staff felt that the PEEP group helped parents to build or to reinforce the bond between parents and babies by encouraging constant contact and interaction between them. This coincides with the findings of the longitudinal evaluation of the PEEP group published in August 2005 where it was found that when the children were one year old, the PEEP sub-group, who had attended at least one weekly session, reported a significantly enhanced view of their parent-child interaction.³

Parent and child relationships benefit from the group because of the actual physical set up of it, it's not like they are encouraged to sit on chairs, they are encouraged to sit on the carpet, holding their babies and they are prompted to do so because it's part of the programme. Bouncing and up and down and have the baby facing you.....they have that concept of an eye contact, does your baby like this? So it's like a bonding thing, an emotional thing.

Conclusions

All mothers interviewed were very happy with the group and felt that the group should continue to be run in the same manner. All mothers were happy with the time and venue of the sessions. Staff had also a positive experience running the group and both believed that the group provided clear benefits for both mothers and babies. The main benefits of the PEEP group as perceived by mothers were the social support received from the members of the group and the learning opportunities for them as mothers and for their babies. The benefits of the group as perceived by staff were: increased confidence among mothers attending the group; increased awareness of babies' developmental stages and increased communication and bonding between mothers and babies. Staff and mothers also perceived as a main benefit for babies the development of social, vocal and literacy skills.

The PEEP group designed a targeting strategy to attract 'hard to reach' groups within the Sure Start area. This strategy affected the way the group was advertised through posters and health visitors' promotion of the group among their clients. Because previous PEEP groups have proved to be very popular around the area, Sure Start wanted to ensure that the group was going to be used by those mothers and babies that in most need. However, low key advertisement of the group and a reactive attitude towards potential users probably impacted on the number of mothers around the area aware and/or interested in attending the PEEP group.

Both mothers and staff felt that lack of confidence could be one of the main reasons for low attendance. Participants felt that a more proactive strategy that will link mothers, coordinators and potential users could benefit attendance to the group. A more effective communication with other professionals such as home and health visitors could also improve parents' awareness of the group. However, if any of these changes are to take place more time should be allocated for coordinators to be more involved in the promotion and running of the group.

The issue of engaging potential service users has been commented on in the national SureStart evaluation⁴. Tunstill et al point to a 'range of organisational, psychological and physical/material constraints, such as the impact of rationing and thresholds....., stigma....,

4. Jane Tunstill, Debbie Allnock, Sofie Akhurst and Claudia Garbers, Sure Start Local Programmes: Implications of Case Study Data from the national evaluation of SureStart. Children and Society 2005, v.19 pp.158-171.

culturally inappropriate services, building design and geography' (p164). Statham ⁵ has concluded that families are more likely to maintain attendance if the intervention concerned allows them to discuss general life concerns as well as focusing on their child. The NESS identified three kinds of service user: *autonomous* service users who would use services as long as they were given adequate knowledge; *facilitated* service users were helped to access services by other parents, offers of practical help such as transport and, especially, through the role played by key workers. *Conditional* service users were likely to access services such as PEEP if they were provided services at home by a key worker first and if the orientation of the whole SS programme was towards leaving the service user in control.

The NESS also pointed to a range of problems in trying to target services on an age or geographical basis as this could present problems for families with children across the age range or who had friends from outside the designated area. They also point to a risk of increasing stigma by targeting services on families thought to need them most. The national findings reinforce the local experience that targeting by rationing – however well meant – may have unintended negative consequences. Evidence would support targeting by identifying appropriate families and applying relevant strategies to encourage their engagement while keeping membership criteria open.

Recommendations

- Thought needs to be given to the targeting strategy planned for PEEP. Sure Start Leamington should consider revising its approach to attracting 'hard to reach' groups in line with evaluation evidence.
- More time should be allocated for coordinators to plan individual sessions and to advertise the group in a more proactive manner.
- Links with potential service users and other professionals working alongside families may help to attract more parents to the group.
- Coordinators should continue to monitor parents who drop-out of PEEP groups to ensure that factors causing avoidable withdrawal are addressed.

1.11.05

5. Daphne Statham Guest Editorial: partnership between health and social care. Health and Social Care in the Community 2000, v.8, no. 2, pp.87-89.

