



**SureStart**

Catton Grove, Fiddlewood and Mile Cross

# Inclusion Evaluation

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Where names are cited in this report they have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the participants and their children.

We would like to thank everybody who was involved in this study, particularly the families and professionals who gave their time to enable us to do this.

Copies of the report or the executive summary are available from the author;

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### **Executive summary**

This report examines the level of inclusion and the reasons behind attendance or non attendance in local services in the Sure Start Catton Grove, Fiddlewood and Mile Cross area of Norwich.

Inclusion in this instance is taken to mean to make Sure Start services available to all families with children under 5 in the area taking into account their particular needs whether due to language, literacy, race or ability or other factors. Due to difficulties accessing unknown families, non service use can be taken to include accessing midwifery and health visiting services but not others.

The objectives of the study were to assess;

- Which families are using our services ?
- Why are they using our services ?
- Which families are not using our services ?
- Why are they not using our services ?
- How can we increase our inclusion of families ?

## Methodology

The study built on statistics gained from several sources, the Office of National Statistics and local monitoring data.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with three groups of people, 10 service users, 17 non service users and 8 professionals, using 13 questions regarding inclusion which were adapted according to whether a participant is a user, non user or professional. Data was analysed using thematic analysis<sup>1</sup>.

## Key findings

Results were divided into three categories, examining the responses of service users, non service users and professionals separately to study their own perspectives. Three main categories arose within each of the three groups; current access, barriers to access and enabling factors. Main findings indicate that there is a general level of awareness in the area regarding the name Sure Start but what this means is not apparent for some families. The majority of service users and non service users report not receiving enough or any information to enable them to make an informed decision about attending services. Professionals indicate that the community is gradually responding positively to Sure Start despite a difficult start but awareness is still an issue for a lot of families.

The majority of families report low self confidence in themselves and in other families in the area and cite this as a reason for non attendance and restriction in what services they will access and how they will access them. Professionals also report low self

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<sup>1</sup>Thematic analysis is a method of sorting data into codes - the most frequent themes arising through analysis of the data are coded and less frequent themes are arranged into 'sub codes'. The data is reread several times in order to become familiar with what is being said and this further shapes the coding structure.

confidence in families in the area. The majority claimed that they would not access a service without someone familiar who will go with them. This is particularly apparent in some non users who reason that a lack of self confidence will prevent them from attending any services, whether they are offered by Sure Start or not. However once a family has engaged with a service, the majority of them report an increase in self confidence since coming to an activity or service and this may influence their return.

## Conclusion

This study revealed a strong focus on two main themes, one being the issue of low self confidence and the other being a lack of awareness. While the number of families accessing services is increasing all the time, considering a more visible community development approach to further increase inclusion for hard to reach families should be a priority. Recommendations are listed below;

- Form links with existing services in the area
- Organise more effective methods of advertising
  - Word of Mouth
  - School Gates
  - Home Visits
  - Community Groups/Events
  - Chemist/Surgery/Post Office
  - Texting
  - Pictures & Maps
  - Radio Broadland - Black Thunder
- Form a support group for older parents
- Consider ways to link with or provide facilities for older children
- Encourage parents and staff to welcome new people and include them
- Group facilitators to 'police' events, provide a behaviour protocol
- Provide an outreach service for families using one to one support and home visits
- Use community development techniques to reach families through personal visits to events, public spaces and homes.
- Consider staff training in community development.
- Set aside specific time for outreach in the community, at groups and knocking on doors
- Endeavour to set up services in each area where possible or provide easy access for families having to travel
- Suggest a re-visit/diarised system to go back & invite initial refusals to offers of services
- Form a fathers group and encourage fathers to assist with running it

- Reinstate parental involvement, start a parents involvement group again and feed their knowledge and opinions into the running of the programme
- Reconsider services to increase self confidence, assisted attendance and home visits, link with other professionals

## Introduction

This report looks at the subject of inclusion in the Sure Start Catton Grove, Fiddlewood and Mile Cross (CFM) area. Inclusion in this instance is taken to mean to make Sure Start services available to all families with children under 5 in the area of which there are currently 950<sup>2</sup>. This takes into account their particular needs whether due to language, literacy, race, ability or other factors. Sure Start programmes of this kind are targeted towards neighbourhoods where a high proportion of children are living in poverty. Sure Start CFM provides numerous services to support the local community, including;

- Childcare at Milestones Day Nursery at the Norman Centre in Mile Cross.
- Working in partnership with Norwich Primary Care Trust, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Trust, the Speech and Language Service, Norfolk Library Service and Homestart to deliver extra support services.
- Providing support to assist families to identify suitable training and employment opportunities alongside providing information on access to appropriate childcare and welfare/advice.

Providing support for families is critical to breaking the cycle of deprivation across generations. Sure Start's aim is to address this by providing access to effective nurturing in a child's early years. The Social Exclusion Unit's report, "Breaking the cycle"<sup>3</sup>, shows how we have had a major impact on transforming the lives of vulnerable children and families. Research indicates how policies in different spheres have worked well as a package to produce positive impacts, particularly for lone parents<sup>4</sup>.

While this approach has provided a largely effective service to date, there are still issues regarding the number of families who do not use services and the reasons this may be the case. The offer of services to all families with young children is imperative, as stated in the Children's Green Paper, "Every Child Matters."<sup>5</sup> There is also the risk that some of these children will fail to thrive<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Norwich Primary Care Trust, May 2005

<sup>3</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, Social Exclusion Unit, 2004, "Breaking the cycle: taking stock of progress and priorities for the future" Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. 2004, [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/ofa/reports/2004/a1\\_18](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/ofa/reports/2004/a1_18)

<sup>4</sup> Graham J, Mowlam A, Woodfield K and Dixon J, 2004, "Making a difference to disadvantaged families? Qualitative case studies," a report for the Social Exclusion Unit in the "Breaking the cycle of social exclusion" series, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education and Skills, 2003, "Every Child Matters" Cm5860, The Stationery Office.

<sup>6</sup> Definition of failure to thrive (Iwaniec, D., (2004)); 'Failure to thrive in infants and children is failure to develop in terms of weight-gain and growth at the normal speed and amount for their ages as a result of inadequate calorie intake'.

A considerable number of 'disadvantaged' families find it more difficult to cope and they and their children suffer. There are barriers including poor housing, inadequate transport, poor nutrition, low self esteem and educational attainment, which leads to low aspirations and expectations for families and their children. A result of this is that children can be in poor health, can be low achievers at school and at work and can have behavioural and emotional problems. A longer term effect of this is that these children are likely to find parenting difficult when they have their own children. However, there is also a lot of research linking parenting and outcomes for children and young people showing that 'Many parents in poor environments are resourceful and their children do grow, develop and achieve in spite of financial and environmental factors'<sup>7</sup>.

One group with particular problems in the local area is the Traveller community. The fact that Travellers are often transient exacerbates the problem of community integration and children's education when they are not in one place for very long. Ofsted has shown that these pupils have the lowest educational results of any ethnic minority group and are most at risk in the education system<sup>8</sup>.

Sure Start CFM stretches across two electoral wards, encompassing the three areas of Catton Grove, Fiddlewood and Mile Cross. Mile Cross and Catton Grove (which also covers Fiddlewood) wards are in the top 10% of multiply deprived wards in the country<sup>9</sup>. Broken down, this includes measuring the level of income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and disorder and the living environment. The three communities cover a large geographical area of some three miles end to end which is physically divided by major routes through the city of Norwich and these roads also provide a barrier through which many families will not cross - animosity between these areas is apparent.

Our reach, while increasing constantly, is lower than it could be. Local monitoring information indicates that a fairly large number of families regularly access services, and the vast majority of these also access services which are provided by health visitors. Some families access more than one service, the second activity is probably sourced through the first and is often in the same area. For instance, a high number of families (n = 150) between January and September 2005 have accessed the music and movement group Jo

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<sup>7</sup> Desforges C, 2003, "The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A review of the literature", Department for Education and Skills Research Report RR433, The Stationery Office.

<sup>8</sup> Office for Standards in Education, 1999, "Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils".

<sup>9</sup> Norfolk County Council, 2005, "Deprivation in Norfolk 2004, The English Indices of Multiple Deprivation", at [www.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk)



Jingles at the Norman Centre in Mile Cross and have also attended Milestones Nursery in Mile Cross. A large number of families also either access once for instance the summer trips, or do not access at all, although the exact figures for this are not currently available. Of these families, most are registered but there are some who access services and are not registered and some who are registered but do not access services. Families who access our services regularly are more likely to have their needs heard and therefore met, while families who access services rarely or not at all are unlikely to have their needs met and in turn will probably not attend services.

Paradoxically, those families who are not accessing services and are therefore termed 'hard to reach' are those whom services are trying to include the most. However, nearly all families have contact with midwifery services or health visiting. Due to difficulties accessing unknown families, non service use is taken to include accessing midwifery and health visiting but no other service. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that there are a considerable number of families who not access services at all, and a mapping exercise shows that there are pockets within the area where there are a very small number of households using services. In order to investigate both why families use services and what prevents families from using services, a piece of research has been conducted which addressed the following questions;

- Which families are using our services ?
- Why are they using our services ?
- Which families are not using our services ?
- Why are they not using our services ?
- How can we increase our inclusion of families ?

## **Methodology**

Three different methods of gathering data were used in order to gain a full picture of what is happening in the area regarding inclusion. Statistics show information gathered both locally using a specific database (Smartstart) to record attendances at Sure Start events and nationally using information from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) demonstrate these issues in the wider context. A mapping exercise at one point in time shows a snapshot of levels of attendance. Semi structured interviews with local people form the final part of the study to gain a more indepth insight into people's opinions regarding inclusion in the community. These methods and their findings are reported using statistics and the mapping exercise and then detailing the interviews in the majority of the report;

- **Local statistics**

1. Background data to illustrate the status of the two wards in the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
2. Local monitoring data to illustrate numbers of attendance and non attendance of families in the area.

- **Mapping exercise**

A snapshot of attendance at one point in time (March 2005) using local monitoring data.

- **Semi structured interviews**

1. With 9 services users (9 females, 0 males)
2. 17 non service users (13 females, 4 males )
3. 8 professionals (8 females, 0 males including 1 from Sure Start CFM)

All the interviews were conducted using a semi structured interview schedule over a 45 to 70 minute period using a dictaphone wherever possible, otherwise using a pen and pad. Written informed consent was gained by all participants.

The interview schedule differs dependant upon the audience - service users are asked questions regarding their use of services, non service users are questioned regarding their non use and professionals asked their opinion of use of services.

- **Analysis**

This report will examine the findings from the service users, non service users and professionals using thematic analysis (searching for similarities). This method allows themes to develop from the data rather than searching for particular themes, and is therefore a 'bottom up' approach to analysis, ensuring that important data is not disregarded. Finally the evaluation will analyse the final themes to consider any overall common themes which occur throughout all of the interview transcripts. Themes were not treated as exclusive - if they are relevant to several questions they would then appear across the analysis.

## **Understanding Diversity**

The Sure Start area covers a large geographical site which is divided into three. Professionals report that families do not mix - for instance a family from Catton Grove may not cross the road to attend a service in Mile Cross. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these three areas are viewed as separate communities by the residents, having separate identities and some areas are split into even smaller communities.

Mapping exercise - Patterns of service use

Families accessing Sure Start services are asked to complete a registration form which entitles them to receive regular information from CFM regarding services, events and activities which they might be interested in. Once they are registered they receive information regardless of whether they are attending services or not. The figures below give a snapshot of attendance in the area as at March 2005;

- Families registered and using services = 359
- Families registered and not using services = 400
- Families not registered and using services = 81

(The month of March is taken as a single point in time to measure attendance levels)

Service use by families is spread across the area, with concentrated areas of use in Fiddlewood, concentrated areas in Catton Grove and also entire streets with no use at all to the east of the ward. In Mile Cross the pattern is different again with a few households on each street using services on average and few streets with no use at all.

Having consulted existing literature on inclusion and consulting with the programme regarding what questions need to be asked, it was decided to address the aims of the evaluation using the following issues which are reflected in the questions asked in the interviews;

- **Use of services**
- **Influence in use of services**
- **Awareness of services**
- **Organisation**
- **Fees**
- **Support systems**
- **Improvements**
- **Barriers to using services**
- **Improving access**
- **Opinion of Sure Start**
- **Increasing attendance**

## **Results**

### **Service Users**

The questions asked of the service users consisted of 13 questions. Using thematic analysis<sup>10</sup>, the questions were repeatedly searched for arising themes in the data. It became clear that four key themes are (1) current access, (2) support

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<sup>10</sup> Thematic analysis is a method of sorting data into codes – the most frequent themes arising through analysis of the data are coded and less frequent themes are arranged into ‘sub codes’. The data is reread several times in order to become familiar with what is being said and this further shapes the coding structure.

systems, (3) barriers to using services and (4) facilitating change.

### **Current access**

Families are documented to access services in many ways and for many reasons. Two main categories arose from the analysis which highlight the background into current use of services, reasons for use and influencing factors.

### **Reasons for use - why do families use services ?**

The first reason that families are able to go to services is that they become aware of what is available and are therefore able to make a decision as to whether to attend. However, the availability of information appears to be sporadic, with the majority of families indicating that they gain information informally by word of mouth either from Sure Start staff or friends, and others indicating a lack of paper information sent through the post, and some families inform themselves as they know from experience where to look, as two parents indicate;

*'I haven't had any stuff from Sure Start for a long time but I don't need to as I see things anyway'.*

*'I give information to others and get information from others by word of mouth'.*

Other factors which influence use of services are whether attending an activity will present an opportunity to do something which a family might not be able to afford or have the transport to attend by themselves. However, some families would still attend even if it cost money, and this indicates that there are other factors to attending Sure Start events, both of these views are expressed by two mothers;

*'I can probably afford it, if it was full price I would probably still go'.*

*'But Banham I probably could not afford it myself due to the entrance fee.'*

Once families are aware of what is available, being able to reach services easily is a factor in attendance, with families feeling that local services are important to support, and in turn provide enjoyment for their children and other families. The locality of most services makes them very convenient to access, with the majority of families indicating that they prefer to reach services on foot, even if they have their own transport;

*'It is important to support local things- I want to continue, want children to enjoy it and other families to have a good time'.*

*'I have transport but walk locally'.*

Once a family has accessed an event, findings indicate that the atmosphere created by the location, the staff and the other families who attend is a deciding factor in whether they will return to that service, with some saying that they feel comfortable and providing comparisons. One mother expressed the relief that she felt when joining local groups for the first time;

*'anything goes here...(before) I was used to these people who were really snobby'.*

These families do access services but there are other factors which can present difficulties in attending, although the majority of families are able to arrange their routine in order to attend something. The majority of the families using services feel that they have time constraints which impact on their overall use of services, and this is quoted as being due to limited availability because of work commitments, sleeping times or school pick up times as illustrated by two mothers;

*'But it is not easy because of work and things'.*

*'Time constraints. I need to get somewhere and have the time for playschool and school'.*

Findings indicate that the difficulties presented by time constraints have been recognised by one Sure Start staff member who asked parents what time would suit them and structured that service around what the majority of parents said, as illustrated by one mother;

*'A few weeks ago a group asked which times were better for people so they went with which was the best time for most people'.*

However, a minority do not feel that they have significant time constraints, and are free to choose services by being entirely guided by the needs of their children, trying new activities as appropriate, as one mother stated;

*'I pick my days depending on (child)...We try things and if he doesn't get on or adapt or learn things...we won't go'.*

#### **Case study 1 Emma's experience of Sure Start**

Emma is single and has 3 children, aged 8 months, 3 years and 7 years. She is a full time mother and moved to the area 5 years ago.

Emma found out about Sure Start through looking at the local noticeboards and attends Sure Start services weekly. She feels at ease with Sure Start services and knows most of the staff there and a lot of the other mothers. She doesn't have any family

locally and relies upon her friends and Sure Start services when she needs support. She went through a period of post natal depression and was helped through

### **Influencing factors in service use**

Other influences in the use of services are friends, providing the motivation to go to activities by being a source of information and a companion to attend services. This is seen to provide opportunities for their children to learn social skills and allows parents to meet other parents. Findings indicate that going to activities is viewed as a way to make new friends for parents and for children. The possibility of making new friendships and a growing familiarity with others that use the service and the staff, enables parents to begin to feel more comfortable;

*'...I know quite a lot of people now I know there's always one person I know'.*

*'I want my child to have opportunities to share, know others, you only get that through groups, but myself I get contact with others through children'.*

Most, but not all families stated that what the service actually offers them or their children has a large impact on whether that service will be accessed. Various influences in attending were stated, particularly the perceived level of expertise which Sure Start staff provide in caring for them and their children instils confidence in parents to use services, as stated by one mother;

*'Groups are run by experts - good information, I wouldn't go if people weren't good'.*

This may indicate that Sure Start services are viewed as safe and nurturing places to bring children. One mother also pointed out that the staff get involved with their children and they learn new things, praising the facilities on offer. She indicated that this is something which other services are seen to be lacking;

*'Staff get involved with your kids and I find there aren't many that do. They are great facilities. The kids learn a lot and bring things home. They get involved'.*

An overall familiarity with services, other parents, children and staff may all contribute to a growing sense of self confidence which most of the mothers interviewed indicated they had experienced since going to a Sure Start event. Some parents who would not initially attend a service on their own, or felt self conscious about walking into a room where they knew some or none

of the people in it, now feel able to do this as one parent illustrated;

*'I'm OK now I would walk into a group where I knew most people but a year ago I found it very hard if some I knew, some I didn't'.*

Growing self confidence may have a far reaching effect. One parent even said that once her confidence had increased since going to Sure Start groups she felt able to help other people to go to groups;

*'I got my confidence up and used to go to groups and then used to help other people to go to groups'.*

Support systems are a vital part of all families lives, providing encouragement and assistance when it is needed. For some families this is provided by other members of their family, some of whom are local and therefore easily accessible, but unfortunately the majority of parents feel that the support provided by both their own families and their partners' is either inadequate or non-existent, with one mother suggesting that she has to push her mother to help her;

*'If I want support from my mother I have to push her...she pretends everything is fine'.*

*'There's not much support from either family'.*

Some families' relatives were not in the county or even in the country and were therefore unavailable physically for support for geographical reasons, as indicated by one mother;

*'My family are not in England. My husbands family aren't either...'*

Friends are viewed as alternative sources of support, and all parents indicated that they have friends in the local area, and feel that their friends would rally around whenever they were needed, although this also seems to be an inconsistent source of support for many families, with some parents reporting that their friendships can suffer through unforeseen problems;

*'Friends do come round if I want any help'.*

*'I have very good friends which is a strong network for me. But my friends group has fallen apart a bit recently through ill health'.*

In addition, Sure Start is seen by these families as a source of support, particularly health visiting. Overall, these families feel that they can approach their health visitor for advice and support, and have been made to feel that their problems can be shared and relieved. Some families feel that although they may

not need this service at present, if they ever face difficulties again they know that they have this support system in place, as one mother said;

*'The thing with the health visitor is that if I start to feel down again I just phone up'.*

This feeling that support is there in the background is echoed by another mother, who indicated her confidence in the Sure Start team and the fact that she feels supported even though she has not approached any of the services for support specifically;

*'I think Sure Start do support you although I haven't really asked for it. You all would do. You are such a team that you are very well supported'.*

Other forms of support are activities, where the majority of families feel they receive really valuable peer support, and many attend these groups due to this as well as gaining the possibility of making new friends for both themselves and their children, as previously discussed. Parents report incidences where they have confided in their peers as illustrated by one mother;

*'I told people in the group that I cried all the time when I had my second child'.*

However some parents who attend groups infrequently feel that the regular attendees become cliquey and exclusive and this can make some parents feel uncomfortable;

*'The ones who go all the time know each other well and group off'.*

Many families feel that they need more support than they receive, reporting that their health visitor is either very busy or that the families are experiencing problems and need support and information to help them. There appears to be some confusion as to how much support a family is entitled to receive, and one mother reports having to investigate how to gain support and search for it when she was experiencing problems, feeling that she needed more support due to her circumstances. She reports that she did not receive this eventual support through her GP or health visitor;

*'I haven't seen my health visitor for months, struggled to get my GP to help in the end I got my dad to call and he got help for me. I was told it's normal not to see my health visitor I feel as a single mum I need more support'.*

Most families stated that they need more 'one to one' support, indicating that their contact with their health visitor is not as frequent as they need. Some feel that they are unable to approach them at clinic due to them appearing busy and talking to other professionals. When families do approach the health visitors they



report not receiving the information or support that they need, and request uninterrupted attention on a one to one basis at home, as illustrated by one mother;

*'At groups they talk to themselves they don't come to you and say are you OK. I feel I can't go to them and ask things. Some groups I can, some can't'.*

*'It has stopped now and I feel alone, everything has stopped. There is the clinic on Thursday which I used before I went back to work and I don't want another clinic. I want someone at my house giving me attention one to one'.*

*'Sometimes I go to things craft things but need assistance but am left to do things which makes me feel worse. My daughter is also shy and needs more assistance, you need more people to help'.*

Another mother indicated that she did not receive support, the health visitor available to her was constantly changing and her first health visitor was familiar with her problems. After she left, for a period afterwards she felt that she did not receive any support at all. She also reported being asked by her health visitor whether she had received any support from Sure Start, indicating that this is viewed as a separate entity and possibly adding to her confusion;

*'The health visitor asked if I had had any support from Sure Start so I said I didn't know. I changed health visitors four times, they changed - were moved or promoted. It was quite difficult the first health visitor knew what was happening and then I didn't get help when I had so many problems'.*

### **Barriers - what do service users feel prevents families from using services ?**

This section examines a range of factors which are seen to contribute to non use of services. A major factor is viewed as a lack of awareness. Service users report difficulties that they face in gaining information about events and groups even though they do attend services, and that they sometimes have to go out of their way to gain information, otherwise they would not be able to attend. It is apparent that if other families who do not currently access services are not aware of what is available to them then they cannot chose whether to attend or not. There are many elements to this perceived lack of awareness, the first one being that service users themselves are aware of the majority of events and activities which are available in their immediate area because they attend other local events, but don't know about anything happening in the other areas as stated by one mother;

*'But then I don't know what goes on in other areas. Is it equal in each area ?'*

Reasons for lack of awareness are stated as difficulties that families experience in gaining information about events and activities. This can be through posters and leaflets on noticeboards not being replaced often enough for information to be current and therefore is past the date of the activity, as one mother reported and this will probably discourage people from looking at that source in the future;

*'Sometimes Sure Start is on the noticeboard but it is not replaced often enough - it is out of date'.*

Being aware that a service is happening but not being informed about when or where is an issue for some parents, and has been throughout the life of the programme. A lack of communication between the service providers and the families attending the services can discourage service users from attending groups and activities, and they certainly can't if they are unaware of where they are regardless of how much they want to. If this is true for service users, then non service users are probably much more likely to be discouraged from accessing a service. Two mothers indicated that they wanted to attend a service but faced difficulties in doing this;

*'When it first started I went to a couple of parent involvement groups. If you missed one you wouldn't have a clue when the next one was. No one bothers to tell you'.*

*'The flyer system is not always adequate. For Bumps and Babies I asked in the library and there were no leaflets. I knew it was on but trying to get information, I needed to get to the Norman Centre sometime'.*

Not being told when an event has been changed or cancelled can be an issue for some families. One mother reported that she was informed about an event, arrived at a venue to attend it and there was nobody there. She reports that she was not informed that the group was cancelled and that this angered her;

*'My health visitor told me about play and talk. I went twice. No one was there. I got annoyed. No one told me it wasn't on. It was 12 midday at Mile Cross library'.*

Some parents also indicate that the amount of paper information they receive through the post from Sure Start will discourage them from reading it unless it stands out from the other information received particularly if they are busy. It will probably go straight into the bin without even being glanced at as one mother reported;

*'I used to throw mine straight in the bin until once something caught my eye'.*

An issue of loyalty arose for some of the families, stating that when two very similar services are being offered at the same time, one Sure Start service and one external service, families have to choose between one or the other, and decide that loyalty dictates that they use a particular service. This loyalty is probably linked to the historical issues that Sure Start has been faced with which are discussed on page 18. One mother indicates that she uses the service which she is most familiar and happy with;

*'Sometimes there is dual provision from Sure Start and others and sometimes I prefer the other service or I am used to the other service for instance the music group, Bookstart and the library overlap so much I am happily settled in Bookstart groups'.*

This issue is also linked with timing of services, and some families feel that this can sometimes coincide with other commitments and can prevent them from attending some groups and activities. The most commonly stated time was school pick up coinciding with attending an event for a younger sibling, and this means either rushing from one to the other or not attending the Sure Start activity, as something has to be left out if there is not much time as one mother pointed out;

*'Timing, some things if you have older children and you are doing the school run you can't do things it would be a mad dash'.*

Another perceived barrier is that of age, the age of the mothers and the children. Parents feel that Sure Start concentrates on young mothers. This they feel may alienate older mothers, as the age difference means that they probably have little in common with the younger mothers, and this may feel worse if it is the mother's first child;

*'At toddler groups elsewhere there are mums from all age groups but Sure Start seems to like to get the young mums in. What if you were in your mid thirties having your first baby and mixing with all these barely teenage girls ?'*

Attempting to access services when a family has two or more children of different ages is seen as a barrier. Families feel that bringing a child under five to a group but having to bring older children as there is no activity available for them either results in the younger children being in danger perhaps from being subjected to more physical play or the older children becoming bored with toys for younger children. One mother particularly felt that pre-teen children are not taken into consideration when accompanying their younger siblings to events and groups;

*'A friend of mine took their older child to an event but they got bored. It is difficult with kids that age not in the remit of Sure Start, 8-12'.*

Negative feedback, possibly fuelled by historical problems which CFM has been faced with, is reported to have a large impact on families not using services. Parents perceived that issues such as the fact that in the early days of the programme services were set up seemingly regardless of what was being provided in the community already provided a barrier to use, indeed there may have been no need for an extra service, and therefore no need to attend, and some families feel that Sure Start had the money to support existing groups and that it should have been used for this rather than duplicating existing services as one mother indicates;

*'Some groups feel that Sure Start has the funding and could be supporting groups rather than being competitive'.*

Local families report feeling suspicion toward any new services being set up in the area, and particularly a service which is Government run as Sure Start is. This has a negative impact on families' motivation to use services as reported by one mother;

*'A bad start coupled with the suspicion that families regard anything new anyway have hampered it, the fact that it is a Government initiative makes people wary of anything too official, which alters their way of life for instance the Norman Centre and existing groups made for a difficult relationship from the beginning'.*

Some service users report a negative attitude towards some of the families in the area. Three particular factors arose, their opinion of other families, outsiders' opinion of people that live within the area and the feeling that using services renders parents exposed to judgement by other parents and professionals. One father summed up his feelings about some of the other families in the area, stating that families who do not use services are selfish;

*'Parents need a good kick. They are deadenders, drug addicts, alcoholics. People get paid to have them. But you shouldn't push people to go back to work. People are bone idle. We make an effort with our kids. The majority of parents think of themselves not their kids. They are selfish that's why they don't use things...'*

Another reason why families may not attend services, is that when they do they feel they may be exposed to judgement and therefore don't go to avoid this happening, as one mother indicated;

*'I think in the area people judge people too much and I think that's why a lot of people don't go to Sure Start things because they feel they're going to be judged'.*

The majority of service users feel that Sure Start are doing everything possible to encourage and support families in using services and that nothing more can be done, the parents themselves have to make the decision to access services themselves as one father indicates;

*'You are doing all you can really parents have to meet you half way'.*

Another problem for families is the complaint that bad language is reported to have been experienced by some mothers attending groups, used by other mothers towards their children. This has several impacts. One is that families are concerned that their own children will begin to use the language they are hearing and subsequently are deterred from attending some services where they know certain parents use this language. One mother stated that she had actually stopped attending a service due to this and that other parents are aware of which parents do this;

*'I have used swimming once there were a lot of rough families 'effing' and 'blinding' and when I speak to other mums they know who they are as well. I won't go again because of that. I don't like the way they talked to their little boy - they need parenting skills'.*

Another observation was made by one of the mothers who indicates that the staff at one event do not comment when bad language is used by some mothers, and imply that this should change;

*'Problem with a couple of groups the language used you wouldn't expect from others with kids. I don't want my children using that language and the staff don't say anything'.*

Not being literate is seen as a problem by a minority of families who consider that the usual method of posting flyers and leaflets to families in the area means that some are unable to gain information about available services if they cannot read the information given to them. However it is perceived that there is usually someone in the household who is able to read and therefore this is not necessarily a barrier;

*'I think not being able to read leaflets coming through the door could put people off but there is usually someone in the house who can read'.*

One parent commented that even though she is able to read herself, she empathised that if you were outside a building and you couldn't read you wouldn't necessarily know where you were if you can't read the signs and this could influence your ability to access that building and any services within it;

*'Because I can read and write it is difficult to know. If you are standing outside the Norman Centre to use a service how do you know it is the Norman Centre ?'*

While the Nursery is increasingly viewed as a good thing for the community, some families feel that it is too expensive and alienates some families who are less well off than others. Most of the families who do use it say that they use it to enable both partners to work but the majority find that they are no better off financially. One father indicated that the nursery is expensive for his family and leaves them with no money;

*'The nursery takes all the money - I have to work but we're no better off'.*

Some families feel that as it is in a Sure Start area it should be more affordable, and some poorer families are unable to use it due to the costs. One parent suggested;

*'...It should be a lot cheaper as it's in a Sure Start area but it's not cheap'.*

However, some families who are unable to afford the nursery fees are fortunate in being able to leave their children with parents who live locally and can access adult services, although this may be seen as less than ideal, and could provide a barrier to service use for families who do not wish or unable to rely upon their relatives;

*'There are a lot of people on the course...who wanted to leave their kids somewhere and can't, their parents have to look after them'.*

There are a number of parents who feel that the costs of childcare coupled with the loss of benefits when gaining employment means that using the nursery and going to work it is not worth it, and they are financially better off being unemployed. One mother stated that her mortgage is paid while she is on benefits and this prevents her from looking for work;

*'There is no incentive to get back to work I get the mortgage interest paid on benefits.'*

### **Personal feeling - confidence, fear and apathy**

A major factor in not using services is felt to be a lack of self confidence as indicated by all the families. This is explained as a fear of going somewhere where you know no-one, where you may be judged as a parent or watched by other parents and staff, and the need for families to have extra support in order to attend are the most common issues and are possibly one of the most important factors in non service use.

Once a parent has overcome their initial fear of accessing an activity, the next step of meeting new people and feeling comfortable is sometimes perceived to be made more difficult by factors such as other parents who may pass comment which could be interpreted as negative to a new, less confident and possibly vulnerable parent. One mother feels that she is unable to return to a particular activity as another parent has complained about her child's crying and as she is unable to stop her child from doing this unfortunately it may be easier for her not to return;

*'One mum complained when my child cried as he woke hers up and I don't feel I can go again as I can't stop him crying'.*

A strategy adopted by some of the mothers for coping with being in a new environment with new people is hiding behind their child. Several mothers reported that when their children were babies they were able to concentrate all of their attention on their baby and therefore resist eye contact and interaction with others. Once the baby was older the mothers' confidence reduced as she found that she couldn't focus solely on her child any longer and was forced to begin to interact with others and this was difficult but as some initial contact with others had been made over the time at the group this difficulty was usually overcome. One mother explains how she felt;

*'When (child) was a baby I could hide behind him but when he was a older I found it hard to go...you are going literally for you and not your child'.*

However, it is perceived that a certain level of self confidence is needed to be able to attend in the first place and some parents are not seen to not have this and gaining it is seen as a vicious circle; the longer it takes for a family to engage with a service the more difficult and less likely it becomes;

*'It's getting going, if you don't go and they get older and you get more in yourself through not going then you have made it worse for yourself it's a circle you can't get out of'.*

Another common factor is the personal feeling that asking for help is seen as a weakness, and parents do not want others to view them in this way. One mother suggested that some people do not ask their health visitor for assistance for fear of this;

*'For all the people with kids in the nursery you probably get a handful of people too embarrassed to ask their health visitor in case they appear to be failing as a parent'.*

Another aspect of non attendance is reported by some of the parents who said that they had approached friends and relatives to encourage them to attend a service but this was often met with resistance. A number of reasons for not attending services have

been reported and one mother said that her friend commented that the people at the group were not friendly but when this was dismissed by the mother the friend replied with yet another different reason for not attending, as she explains;

*'My friend has just had a baby...I mentioned baby massage...she said 'oh it's not really me and they're not very friendly down there' and I said I know quite a few mums down there and they all seem friendly to me and she said 'oh no I don't do things like that'.*

Some parents suggest that they do not receive enough information about what is on in the area but when they are told about a service they report being given that one chance to attend a service and if that opportunity is not taken they are not approached again. Reasons for turning down the first offer are given as a lack of self confidence often due to adjusting to motherhood, but parents report that once self confidence is higher again they are not reapproached and so they miss the opportunity to benefit from the service and in gaining new friendships and support. This is illustrated by a mother who experienced this;

*'The health visitors when they see you when they are born should give you more feedback on what is on in the area. I didn't get enough. Plus I don't really fancy doing it my confidence was down. They feel they don't want to pressure you into it. But they don't come back and say do you want to do it now? So you get left behind. Cause you've never joined the people who have gone who keep going...'*

Although self confidence is seen as a barrier for families who may want to attend services, another perceived barrier is low aspirations which are seen as a reason for families not wanting to attend services at all, or even seeing any need to do so. Generations of families have lived on the estates and a large number of parents comment that the offspring of parents with low aspirations see what their parents have done and feel they can get through life with a similar outlook and there is no need to alter things. They receive no encouragement from their relatives who seen no need to change and therefore remain the same. One father indicated that this is an unhappy cycle;

*'...it is sad that people come from the estate, their parents do, and they aspire to what their parents did'.*

Another view expressed by a minority of the mothers is that once a child is born the mother becomes apathetic about going to anything which may be further than a few minutes away, preferring to not bother rather than make the effort. One mother expressed her own feelings about getting to activities once she had had a child;

*'I am lazy since I moved and had a child. If it's over Mile Cross Road I think oh I can't be bothered'.*



## **Facilitating change**

By talking to service users, reasons for current use of services and the barriers which prevent or hinder engagement with services have been explored. Ways to make changes in order to attract, support and retain families will be examined in this next section, as suggested by families who currently engage with Sure Start CFM's services.

Through interaction with others, people's levels of self confidence may grow, and some parents indicate that this inspired them to encourage others to attend services. Parents who did not attend originally through a lack of self confidence can empathise with parents in that same position and can assure them that it does get easier. One mother commented that she has been able to help others in this way;

*'I got my confidence up and used to go to groups and then used to help other people to go to groups...that was word of mouth and getting on with different people now they go now which is really nice. Cause I've been there. It was hard to start with. It was alright in the end'.*

The majority of parents stated that there were not enough activities during the holidays, and long periods without contact with other families can be isolating for those who do not access services easily, particularly during the summer break. One parent commented that there used to be activities on at a local community centre;

*'There used to be things on at the Jewson Road Community Centre two days a week in the summer holidays - a community event'.*

One parent feels that being isolated from others during holiday periods can demotivate parents as they get used to seeing people, and concludes that services are needed throughout the holiday periods;

*'Groups stop- it is really hard. You get used to seeing people I don't know why things stop for the holidays. You feel isolated for 6 weeks don't have groups to motivate you. You need services through the summer'.*

Providing affordable services is seen as an important factor to enable families to engage with Sure Start CFM. Most services are perceived to be very affordable, if not free, and the majority of parents feel that charges could be higher and one father questioned the logic of providing low cost or free services;

*'We appreciate free stuff but is it the best use of Sure Start money sometimes ?'*

Other parents indicated that all families should be able to access services as most of them are free, and those where there is a charge are very reasonable and many families would be prepared to pay more if they can see a benefit in attending, as one mother commented;

*'If the service is good and worth going to if it is more money I think what is best, is it beneficial for my child and me to go or not ?'*

More courses is what the majority of families stated they feel is needed in the area. However, rather than running courses which parents imply are currently provided without consulting families, actually asking what families feel is relevant to them together with support for their children is suggested as the way forward as one mother recommended;

*'Do courses actually relevant to people and with crèche support'.*

The type of course needed and the way in which it should be conducted is suggested by one parent who felt that confidence courses are necessary and they need to be constantly accessible to families rather than being offered occasionally;

*'... self help, confidence, that sort of thing and run them constantly'.*

Another point of view suggested that confidence courses are not sufficient on their own and should be provided in conjunction with whatever is underlying the low self confidence otherwise the cause is not being addressed, as one father suggested;

*'All very well having confidence building courses but if you're not addressing the cause eg numeracy and literacy you are not going to improve confidence. I've never seen the point in confidence building courses for the sake of it. Courses need to be backed up'.*

Despite a minority of families feeling that the benefits of employment and the costs of childcare are outweighed by the benefits received during unemployment, most families offered suggestions for encouraging and supporting people who are searching for work, with some even stating what they would like help with themselves. Most of the requests for assistance were from mothers who wanted employment to fit around their children, mostly working from home during the evening as one mother suggested;

*'Typing and stuff I could do in the evening when I have time on my hands'.*

While it is seen as important by the majority of families to assist people in gaining employment, it was felt that it should be the decision of the individual whether to work or not. Support is welcomed, but not force as one father put it;

*'...you shouldn't push people to go back to work'.*

Looking at services themselves, there was a lot of suggestions for providing new activities for different groups of people, particularly fathers, parents without their children, and for older children. Fathers in particular are seen as a group which are not catered for at all, and parents feel that they would benefit from having a service just for fathers. One single father commented that there was very little available to him and suggested CFM addresses this;

*'They don't do enough for Dads. Do something for single Dads'.*

Another father suggested that a group could be formed which encourages more sociable behaviour in fathers rather than drinking and becoming aggressive as he perceives other fathers to be;

*'...get Dads in a room in the evening to watch football something other than going down the pub, getting drunk and violent'.*

Parents feel that they do not have any time for themselves and activities could be provided to allow parents to have time out from their children. Suggestions were made such as art and crafts for parents and one parent suggested educational activities;

*'More educational things for parents there is plenty for kids but not parents. Single parents, things like that'.*

*'Art and craft group for mums and dads'.*

It is felt that groups for families could be better equipped to provide for older siblings, most families suggested that activities include older children so that they are kept interested;

*'More family orientated not excluding the older ones. A friend of mine took their older child to an event but they got bored'.*

Families have provided suggestions for improving services and this would need to be accompanied by improved promotion. There have been a large number of suggestions for increasing reach, mostly referring to increasing the level of advertising and using word of mouth much more. Overall it appears that doing what is already being done but increasing the number of venues advertising in, providing more information by leaflet, put relevant pictures and maps on posters and leaflets so people know how to get to an event, word of mouth and knocking on doors are seen as the ways to

reach more families. Being consistent and keeping people informed of what is happening will encourage families to access and continue to access services. Attempting to attract new faces is seen as requiring extra effort, putting leaflets through doors, trying new approaches as one mother suggested;

*'Trial and error. Fun day, different things for kids and information for groups. Would it be the same faces or new ones? Put leaflets through the door, schools, posters. Ask people to tell friends. Put things on trees and any boards going'*.

Having a specific noticeboard for Sure Start was suggested by one parent as well as thinking about a new service to attract new people;

*'Better publicity...what is available and when. Have specific Sure Start noticeboards...Produce an information booklet on which services you provide, not just events but support, etc. Reach people you don't reach at the moment, but I don't know how...it's not good to exclude people but see the same people. Try something new for new faces...'*

Information with pictures and maps will reach a higher number of families including minority groups, those with literacy or language issues and people who are new to the area. This may also serve to avoid any discomfort that may be felt by asking directions of people you don't know which a mother suggested would be easier;

*'More pictures on posters. Posters with maps, if you're not from here you won't want to ask strangers'*.

Going to people's homes and informing families of what events are on are ways to reach more people and also to present a face of CFM to new families who may be more likely to attend if they have a personal invitation. One mother suggested that a home visit would encourage her to attend more services;

*'Home visits rather than letters. That would probably get me to go more .*

This view is also felt by other parents, who suggest that encouraging families who haven't attended many services and stating the benefits to them of attending services would be productive, as one mother implied;

*'If someone came round and said there's this going you haven't gone to many groups and this service is there, we don't want to pressure you into it but they're ever so good and your kids get out and meet other kids...'*

Another mother said that if families were visited at home more it would make them feel that they mattered more and have not been forgotten;

*'Maybe there should be more home visits to see that there might be people sitting at home thinking well no-ones really bothered about me'.*

One mother suggested that other professionals need to be more aware of what CFM provides, and awareness of services will eventually increase. However, she also states that CFM needs to be aware that there are limits to how much can be done;

*'...publicising, being more in people's face. But you can't be all things to all people...be more accessible be seen to be around. It will filter through eventually. Making local health visitors, midwives, GP's and all community groups aware'.*

As far as timing is concerned, parents feel that families need to be consulted to find out when is best for them and arrange services around the responses. This way there may be a higher number of families attending services. Times need to be set based on what the majority of people say is most convenient, a mother suggests;

*'A few weeks ago a group asked which times were better for people so they went with which was the best time for most people'.*

Another way of increasing reach is considered to be for CFM to liaise with other services in the area which are duplicated at present. This may serve to build bridges to improve joined up services for families in the area in the future. One parent commented that this has not happened in the past and that CFM should support existing groups;

*'You could liaise with existing groups more effectively. Some services are duplicated...be supporting groups rather than being competitive. When asked Sure Start said no, Sure Start is in the area now...The main example is Bookstart. It is hard, everyone wants to improve things but sometimes end up bickering not improving. But it is a two way thing'.*

As far as retaining families, it is felt that offering parents more responsibility in the running of the programme will encourage families to use services more as they will gain a sense of ownership and self confidence as well as new skills. Deciding how to proceed with services by meeting and discussing options is one way of encouraging this as one parent found;

*'...with (Sure Start advisor)...we used to have brainstorming sessions'.*

## **Discussion**

While Sure Start provides a range of information for families to access, the methods used are good sources for some but not for others and do not reach as many families as they could. Families report that their attendance at events enables them to become aware of other events and that if this were not the case they would be out of sight of other events in the area. Therefore parents not using services may find that this method of exchanging information is closed to them until they actually start using services and this is a vicious circle.

The majority of service users appear to be in a relatively comfortable position, with most of them having access to transport and one or both partners working. Walking to activities is seen as the best method of transport locally even for those with transport and supporting local activities is viewed as important to them; *'I use them because locally it is important to get to events on foot'*. Families are able to attend services even with their time constraints and are able to structure their time to suit most activities. This effort which most of the families make in order to go to services together with attending even if it costs them money suggests that some families gain a lot more from Sure Start than just financial benefits. However it is acknowledged that this can also be a barrier, and perhaps parents without a factor such as self confidence would be discouraged from going to an activity.

Unfortunately the majority of service users report having low levels of informal support which when available can assist with childcare, emotional and practical issues. Most of the families report having some friends locally but few or no relatives; *'I have friends in the area but not family'*. It is documented that friends can fulfil the role of emotional support and for some this replaces family support. Some of the comments made by families indicate discomfort in the level of support they do receive from family who are local, probably hoping for more support than they receive: *'There's not much support from either family'*. This lack of informal support systems is likely to influence families asking for assistance from other sources and in this case all of these families are Sure Start service users. It is possible that from this perspective these families access services due to an unfulfilled need for support and Sure Start helps to fill this gap.

Families access services with their friends, who provide encouragement and support for each other in attending and in turn build new friendships through the activities. Families acknowledge that taking that first step into a new activity is difficult, and being able to go initially depended on their own levels of self confidence and whether they knew anyone there

already or could go with someone else; *'When I first had (child) I didn't have the confidence to come out but my mum used to come to a lot with me. I got my confidence up...'* The benefits for both children and parents are acknowledged, and using Sure Start groups, who are seen to be run by professionals who actively involve themselves with their children, are a good nurturing environment for their children and meeting other people is a bonus for the parents. However some of the parents who do not attend as frequently feel that other parents can be cliquey with each other and this can make them feel uncomfortable *'The atmosphere at the Norman Centre clinic group are cliquey there is a funny atmosphere'*. It does not prevent them from going, and they probably have a high enough level of self confidence to take advantage of and appreciate the benefits of continuing with activities. Parents who regularly attend report their level of self confidence rising and they know there will be familiar faces at the group some of whom they can confide in and this influences them returning again. Families who use services express confidence in themselves and in the services they receive.

Families report that the support they receive from Sure Start is reliable and consistent and most families feel that they can rely on their support worker. Receiving support on a one to one basis is something which most families expressed they feel that they need occasionally, some more frequently than they have actually received; *'I want someone at my house giving me attention one to one'*. Sometimes support and activities are offered at times when they are not needed or a parent feels unable to accept but may at some point in the future feel ready but parents report that it is not reoffered and the opportunity has gone: *'I don't get asked again'*. This may be linked with the comment that some families feel that their support worker can be intimidating and parents feel unable to approach them for fear of being judged or failing as a parent; *'you probably get a handful of people too embarrassed to ask their health visitor is case they appear to be failing as a parent'*. This may prevent some parents from raising issues such as needing support. Perhaps this issue needs to be addressed by being more explicit about the availability of the support worker during first contact with that family.

All of the service users expressed interest and engagement in Sure Start activities, and considered what might act as barriers to prevent families from using services. The issue of awareness is considered to be the first hurdle for families who will not be able to access services that they do not know about and this knowledge comes from attending other services. The first contact with Sure Start is often health visitors, and some families feel that they could be given more information at that point. One parent reported that this source of support was inconsistent and she was not aware of whether she had received support from Sure Start or not; *'The health visitor asked if I had had any support from Sure Start so I said I didn't know. I changed health*

*visitors four times, they changed - were moved or promoted. It was quite difficult the first health visitor knew what was happening and then I didn't get help when I had so many problems'.*

Advertising is seen as not being adequate; *'Sometimes Sure Start is on the noticeboard but it is not replaced often enough - out of date'* and information in public areas is either out of date or there isn't any, and families suggest places where information would be noticeable such as local noticeboards, increasing the number of flyers available and looking at ways to make them more eye catching. An additional problem is that of literacy, which a small number of families feel could be problematic but consider that there is usually someone in the household who is able to read and this is what usually happens; *'I think not being able to read leaflets coming through the door could put people off but there is usually someone in the house who can read'*. However, signs, pictures and maps on paper information may help to reduce the impact of this and provide added information to those with poor literacy, who do not speak English and are new to the area. Home visits rather than letters may encourage some families to attend, seeing a familiar face can help to alleviate fears and one parent reported that home visits would encourage her to attend more. Another parent said that people will be less likely to think no-one is concerned about them if an effort is made to visit people in their homes; *'Maybe there should be more home visits to see that there might be people sitting at home thinking well no-ones really bothered about me'*. There is also a lack of communication, families feel they need to be told when there are changes to service times and need to be informed of times and venues for activities when they are unable to attend on a previous occasion. Overall, the message is to be more visible and extend awareness out to external groups, surgeries and public spaces.

However, it is acknowledged that there is a general awareness in the community about Sure Start even if families themselves do not know any more information than that; *'Now with nursery there everyone knows its there'*. Most of the families suggested that taking the next step is entirely the responsibility of the family and that Sure Start cannot do any more.

Duplicating services that are already in existence is seen as a barrier for some families and this can also anger local people who feel that Sure Start has ridden roughshod over existing services in the area; *'Sometimes there is dual provision from Sure Start and others and sometimes I prefer the other service'*. When setting up new services extra care could be taken to ensure an existing provision is not already in place and where possible to work with an existing service, form links or signpost to other services.

Some families feel that Sure Start focuses on younger families and this may exclude older parents and parents with older children



also feel that coming to groups depends on how to accommodate their older children and this can discourage people from attending '*...Sure Start seems to like to get the young mums in*'. Older parents by default may have older children and this double barrier may prevent them from accessing services. Perhaps structuring some services to be family oriented rather than just for younger children will enable larger families to use them.

The level at which a parents self confidence is has a major impact on use of services. This together with a fear of being judged by other parents and by staff when attending an activity does discourage those with higher levels of confidence and would probably make someone else not come at all. Some parents feel that during activities other parents criticise them when they are unable to control their children's behaviour and this has an impact on whether they attend again; '*One mum complained when my child cried as he woke hers up and I don't feel I can go again I can't stop him crying*'. Having a young child is a way of attending a group and lessening the impact of perceived judgement and being new, and some parents report being able to hide behind their children and focussing all their attention on them in order to avoid any sort of contact with others. Those who are able to do this continue to attend but have to overcome a social hurdle when their child no longer keeps still and the parent has to focus on something other than her child. In parents with low self confidence, being encouraged and assisted to attend while a child is at a very young age may increase the likelihood of retaining that family. In any case it is acknowledged that once a child is older and a parent has not had contact with other parents who have a child of a similar age child will miss the initial bonding process which happens between families at activities and this cannot be regained.

Most families are more than satisfied with the services that they access, but the way that some of the parents behave with their children is seen as disturbing to other users. Parents reported bad language being used by other mothers at some of the activities and are concerned that their children will begin to use that language; '*there were a lot of rough families effing and blinding and when I speak to other mums they know who they are as well*'. They are also concerned that the staff present do not comment when this happens and if this continues some of the families will stop attending where those particular parents are present, indeed some families have already ceased to attend some services where they feel uncomfortable.

Although the majority of parents feel that services are extremely reasonable, the fact that the provision of childcare in the area is restricted to the nursery and this is viewed as expensive and out of reach for a lot of local families and this in turn discourages them from returning to work if any financial benefits are to be lost in childcare fees. This means that those who do

return to work are probably either returning for their own personal reasons such as self confidence and identity rather than financial gain, or are earning enough money to have some left over after childcare fees; *'The nursery takes all the money - I have to work but we're no better off'*. This in turn is felt to exclude a large proportion of local families and parents feel that this service should be cheaper. This problem is exacerbated for parents who have little or no support in the area and are unable to leave their children with their parents while they return to work or attend activities.

Word of mouth is viewed as the most effective form of advertising. Most of the families consider that if one of their friends told them about an event and recommended it, then they would at least consider it; *'I would try something through word of mouth with a friend'*. Most people trust their friends and their judgement, and this is reflected in this powerful form of advertising. However, some families report that they have encouraged their friends who may not attend much anyway and on occasion have been met with resistance. If this is the case, then when the friend says it is not for them, it may be a sign that they don't feel confident enough to attend, even with the encouragement of a friend. These families are probably one of the most hard to reach groups and would probably benefit from an outreach service of some sort, where a professional could offer one to one support for a while to support them in accessing services which are appropriate for them.

The generational attitude which is apparent in the area is indicated as a barrier to using services. Parents and grandparents not having aspirations results in not having aspirations for yourself or for your offspring and this will prevent parents from using services; there is no need if previous generations have been raised and feel their lives are fine as they are. These types of attitude are extremely difficult to change and takes a long time and a lot of hard work and persistence. Even some of the parents who do access services report that if there is a service just out of the area they are comfortable to travel within then they will not bother.

Assisting others who have low confidence levels is a way in which parents themselves feel they are contributing to encouraging others to attend and often empathising with others in exactly the same situation. As most families in the area are aware of Sure Start in some form, more effective advertising and asking families who do not use services what type of thing they might like to do if they had assistance to do so may encourage more to think about it.

Isolation is a barrier for families, the most common cause for service users being during school holidays when regular contact with others completely stops until services resume afterwards.

Families report that events which used to be provided in some areas such as summer events in a community centre will enable families to continue contact and may attract families who are unable to attend other services.

Most families feel that the charges they incur to attend some of the events are more than reasonable and they are prepared to pay more, with one parent questioning the logic in charging such low or non-existent sums for services which obviously cost money to provide. If parents see a benefit in going then they will pay. But this may alienate some of the poorer families.

Suggestions for courses include self confidence but having the course running constantly so it can be accessed at any point and families are aware that it is available; *'Run courses is one, self help, confidence, that sort of thing and run them constantly'*. Asking families what they need and then keeping them informed of what is happening may encourage people to attend. One parent commented that having self confidence courses is not sufficient and the underlying cause of it needs to be addressed otherwise it will not have an impact. To do this families need to be aware of the underlying cause themselves and as previously stated most families are not comfortable with asking for help.

Finding employment which fits around family commitments is a priority for most parents and it is felt that Sure Start can help with this by support in looking for employment and by signposting. However, a strong feeling is that people should not be forced back to work but it should be their own choice; *'you can't force people to work'*. In this case, awareness of the benefits of gaining employment, how income is affected and what support is available is the first step.

Providing a service for fathers where they can meet and socialise is seen as something which is lacking in the area; *'what is there for Dads ?'*. Most facilities are used primarily by women and this may make it difficult for fathers to access existing services, particularly if they are suffering from low self confidence. Being the only male in a room full of women including staff may be daunting, and fathers may not feel that what is being offered is relevant to them. Unless fathers know each other they are unlikely to meet if they do not have a common meeting point and fathers may remain isolated. Suggestions such as facilities for parents only will encourage fathers to attend and organising fathers activities with the help of fathers in the area may increase their confidence which will have a much larger impact overall.

Involving parents in the running of Sure Start, encouraging them to take responsibility for the groups and structuring events and activities around what they feel as parents is needed will help to build confidence and new skills and a sense of ownership.

Families are less likely to be fearful about the future of their services if they are actively involved themselves, they can probably run them themselves if needs be. In order to develop the programme to reach families who do not access services, the programme may benefit from adopting a more community based approach, bottom up so the families themselves have a say in the way services are run. Families need professional support in order to become involved and staff could probably benefit from some community development training in order to achieve this and to reach more families in the area.

### **Non service users**

Non service users were questioned why they chose not to access services, what influences which services they do access and what they feel can be done to encourage non service users to engage with Sure Start.

### **Results**

#### **Why do some families not use Sure Start services ?**

The majority of non service users indicate that the biggest reason for not accessing services is that they are unaware of what is on offer. The friends that they see who have children either do not access services or do not mention them or their friends have older children who have never accessed services themselves. One father conceded that although he is not aware, families who do engage with services would be aware of what is available, although he considers that there isn't anything available for fathers that he is aware of;

*'There aren't many people there now as not many are aware of it...the people they contact I am sure are aware of what they do...but not Dads'.*

Other families report that they have heard of Sure Start but are not aware of what it means or what it could offer them. Some have said that their friends have babies but they are unaware of whether they access services either. One mother indicated that it was mentioned to her by her health visitor;

*'When I was given a health visitor I was told I was in a Sure Start area no idea what that meant. Friends had babies but haven't mentioned it'.*

Some families report that they have a health visitor but they are not given any information about Sure Start by them and remain unaware of what is available to them;

*'The health visitor hasn't given me information on Sure Start'.*

A lack of awareness of services appears to be the most recurrent reason for not accessing Sure Start groups and activities by

families. Families who are unaware of the benefits of attending services are not likely to attend until they are told what is on offer. Some families are not sure whether other groups in the area are run by Sure Start or other agencies as one mother illustrates;

*'Mile Cross group I didn't know was Sure Start. I don't use anything else. I use the toddler group at Oak Grove. Is that Sure Start?'*

A large minority of families stated that they had heard of Sure Start and some of their friends use it. However, it is possibly not seen as a priority as one mother states that she picks up leaflets at a toddler group on activities which interest her but then they stay at the bottom of her bag;

*'My friend uses it quite a bit. I don't get a newsletter, I pick up leaflets at Oak Grove then it sits in my bag and then I see it again after the date !'*

Some families gain information but don't take advantage of what is on offer. The majority of reasons for this are stated as not knowing anyone to go with and getting hold of information through leaflets in the post or on posters or leaflets but not doing anything about it. One mother indicated that she doesn't receive a lot of information but she decides not to attend because she doesn't know anyone who goes;

*'I've not heard a lot. Other than swimming. I get a newsletter every now and again. I don't really know anyone'.*

Receiving information on a regular basis from Sure Start does not encourage one mother to attend services;

*'I get letters about Sure Start things on a regular basis to be fair. It's just me'.*

### **Case study 2 Paul's experience**

Paul lives with his partner and their four children, he is father to two of them and the other two are his partners' from a previous relationship. They are all under 5. Paul has lived in the area for 7 years and his partner has all her life.

Paul found out about Sure Start through his partner using the Sure Start health visitor. She sees her health visitor but other than that has no contact with Sure Start. Paul feels that as a father there is little for him in the area and would like to get involved;

*Get information to people in pubs for dads.*

Some families feel that there is enough information available for families in the area and then it is the choice of the family whether to engage with a service or not, Sure Start has done enough to gain their attention. Another mother indicates that she sees information regularly on school noticeboards and at clinics and local groups;

*'Letters are sent out regularly. Bulletin boards Sure Start stuff is on the school boards. Mother and toddler and clinics are always leaflets about you've got to be blind to miss them really'.*

One father suggests that families see the information locally through posters and leaflets but become oblivious to it and it blends in with all the other information available, becoming 'white noise';

*'People ignore noticeboards they are white noise'.*

The possibility that organisation plays a part in engaging with services is apparent for some families, the majority of whom indicate that they are extremely busy and Sure Start activities are low on the list of priorities. One mother commented that there aren't enough hours in the day and in order to attend a service it would have to be for a long period of time and structured in order for her to drop off and pick up her four children from school, otherwise she would question whether it is worth the effort;

*'I need more hours in the day. It's working around 4 kids, the 9-3 school hours and picking up, dropping off...Apart from school I have the kids for hours. It is hard enough to find time for myself. It hinders being able to go to groups. I think things should last longer like 2 hours - I think what is the point of going'.*

Other families indicate that they are able to organise themselves to attend services and structure their time according to priorities. One mother indicates that it is easy to organise her time as her children are small and she is at home;

*'Yes I can organise myself. I just get up and go. Time is pretty easy at the moment while the kids are little I stay at home. I can rearrange things during the day I can put the shopping off'.*

One reason for not engaging with Sure Start services is a perceived lack of self confidence. Some families are aware of services and what benefits they could give them and their children but do not attend. One mother states that she doesn't have much to look forward to and is becoming unhappy with not doing anything other than visiting her mother who lives locally;

*'Sometimes I get to a point where I'm going to do something but when it comes to it I don't. I don't really have that much to look forward to I stay at home all day. I go round my mums one day a week when she's off work. That's about it really. It's just starting to get to me but I've got to go out and do something'.*

Other reasons for non attendance are family commitments outside of looking after young children such as looking after sick relatives and a lack of interest in services which are on offer from Sure Start. If a family are interested in a service then it appears that they will make efforts to attend however other services being provided are of more interest to some families, as one mother pointed out;

*'...I could if I really wanted to. But I find it hard to look after my Dad too. If I was interested I would go. It depends on my priorities. Tumble Tots is good for kids so it's a priority'.*

The perception that some families have of other parts of the area provide a barrier to accessing services. Families in one area who perceive that another area has a bad reputation will not attend a service in that area even if it may be beneficial to them. One mother was very specific about the areas which she will not access;

*'...I'm not going to places like Jewson Road, Catton Grove Community Centre or Catton Grove Clinic. The events in the Norman Centre in Mile Cross I won't go to. Fiddlewood has a bad reputation but I don't know why I've been here since I was 8 and I've had no problems'.*

The majority of families stated that they would pay for services if they felt they wanted to use them. Some families felt that as they could afford to pay for things they would be depriving others of services if they attended free activities and groups and this prevents them from accessing the majority of Sure Start services. Some perceive that Sure Start services are for deprived people and therefore not for them and they don't want to prevent a family in need from going by attending themselves. One mother indicated that she would feel 'bad' if she took the place of someone who was in need;

*' A lot of people think like me that it is more for the under privileged. I don't want to take something that someone else might need. I don't take advantage as I don't need it'.*

Other families feel that they will pay a certain amount for services but if a similar service is available in the area for less money they will access that instead. One family said that going to an activity or group depends on how much is charged and

they attend the Norman Centre toddler group occasionally due to the fee being higher than at Oak Grove Chapel. They also state how much they would be willing to pay for their family;

*'It depends how much. Oak Grove chapel charge 50p per family and the Norman Centre toddler group charges £1 per family. It is a lot different...I will only go to the Norman Centre a few times because of this. If it is £1 per family then that's OK'.*

Regarding literacy and language, there was a mixed response with some families suggesting that there isn't a language or literacy problem in the area and other families stating that there should be someone to help with language and that people should learn to speak English as one father suggested;

*'Provide language classes. If they are over here they should speak our language'.*

Other parents did not see that there is a problem in the area as one mother commented;

*'Language and literacy I don't see as a problem personally'.*

### **What are the barriers which prevent families from accessing services ?**

The most frequent response regarding barriers to access is a lack of self confidence. It features across all of the families who were interviewed and is a factor for many families in their lack of use of services. It has far reaching consequences for families, leaving them feeling unable to attempt new things, access new services and meet new people, often for fear of being judged or criticised. Some families state that this is typical of the area in which they live, where they perceive people do not bother to do different things or want to learn to read or write more effectively and this in turn also has an impact on their self confidence, thus creating a vicious circle. One father confesses his own level of self confidence and his suggestions for accessing other families who have family members with low self confidence;

*'Self confidence. I haven't really got any. I don't pick up the phone it frightens me. I couldn't knock on people's doors. But no-one has pride in their life in this area. They are always down and out. Get more people out there to speak to people to build their confidence, so they are more relaxed and know who they can talk to. Go round to see if they still want to come if they don't turn up to things. Ask for a few minutes to chat, see if they want to do anything. Then leave it up to them to decide. When you leave they will feel better about themselves'.*

Some families report that parents who attend groups all know each other and if they went they wouldn't know anyone, and this can



feel exclusive to them and may discourage them from going. Parents feel that some families will not attend an activity even if it is within walking distance because they have not got the motivation to do so, and this is probably linked to self confidence. One mother expressed her opinion of existing services and reasons for non attendance;

*Self confidence...Catton Grove Clinic is cliquy. The ones who go all the time know each other well and group off. That might put people off. My friend won't go if I won't...Norman Centre and Catton Grove Clinic are not in such a huge area that people can't walk. But some people don't have the get up and go to get up and go.*

The feeling that parents may not be able to control their children's behaviour at a group prevents some parents from attending services as they are worried that they could be lose control and be embarrassed, and this could add to their feeling that they are being watched and judged by others in the group. This possibility together with an existing lack of self confidence means that some parents do not attempt to go, even though they feel that they really want to. These families need a familiar face in order to attempt a new activity, either by going with a friend or by being familiar with a member of staff beforehand. One mother recognises her own hesitation in accessing services and begins to talk herself into attending;

*'... I wouldn't like doing it on my own. If had someone to come with then I'd be all right. I've always been like it. I'd go to activities with my health visitor and project worker because I know them. But my youngest has the terrible twos bad, so I don't feel I can go anywhere at the moment I wouldn't want to be embarrassed that I can't control them and they play up...I really want to do it...I probably would do it on my own because I need to get out there and not be shy. Do something without worrying that I have no-one to talk to or go with'.*

Having a difficult pregnancy or struggling with new motherhood is an issue for some families. Mothers who suffer with post natal depression appear to stay away from groups and situations where contact with new people is needed. Those who have little local support are less likely to attend services and this coupled with a lack of awareness may contribute.

*'Went to summer outings last year but haven't been to anything this year. I went to Oak Grove. I would have come more if I wasn't pregnant I couldn't get out of bed I struggled'.*

Poor literacy skills are seen as a reason for not attending services. Some parents feel that others have not had the motivation to succeed from childhood and this impacts on everything they do as adults. In fact, some parents feel that

this is an excuse to not have to take responsibility for actions or for people to better themselves. One father summed up his thoughts about the reasons for not doing things;

*'Very poor literacy to be honest. Literacy and numeracy skills. All the people round here are deadenders. I'm not running them down but it's true. People are not dyslexic but thick. They use that as an excuse. They left school at 15/16 with no job. They're thick. I can't spell too well. There is no fathers group to help with my family...'*

Some groups are perceived to be unwelcoming for new families, who feel they need extra support to access a service for the first time, someone to welcome them and show them around, particularly if a mother is on their own and a first time mother. Having a familiar face or someone to greet people as they enter a service is seen as a way of reducing the fears that accompany so many new service users. New parents being left to find their own way in a new group is seen as very discouraging but having a friend accompanying them relieves some of this. One mother expresses this and provides a comparison;

*'The first time I went to my health visitor she was not very welcoming, a bit intimidating. She said she would be at a group so sometimes I go and chat with her. At West Pottergate there is always someone to greet you, not so here. You walk in and feel that everyone is looking at me. The first time didn't know where put things, where to go, no-one said hello, not seen you here before where you put things, weigh in there, that sort of thing. A first time mum might be put off, it put me off and I have three. But if my friend said she wanted to go, I would be more likely to go'.*

Not knowing anyone is a factor which many of the families report. Some families have friends and family with older children or without children and therefore have no-one with children of the same age to go with for the first time to help them to overcome that first hurdle. Families suggest that if they did have someone to go with then they would make the effort and attend but not going means not meeting any new people and this becomes a difficult pattern to overcome. One mother stated that she doesn't go because she doesn't know anyone but would if she did;

*'...I don't know anything else. I don't know anyone. Some mums at toddler group go to trips. Because I don't know anyone I don't go. I would make more effort if I know someone'.*

### **What influences non service users to access services ?**

Walking into an activity or service where you haven't been before can be daunting for anybody and the majority of mothers reported that they do not possess the self confidence in order to do this.

The most common reason for not attending is not knowing anyone else at that activity and that may prevent them from attending unless they can go with a friend or someone they know in which case they feel more comfortable, as one mother revealed;

*'Sometimes I wouldn't go unless I'm with a friend. I feel more confident if I'm with someone I knew than on my own'.*

The fear of being looked at, or judged is in a lot of people's minds when deciding whether to access a service or not. The thought of themselves being stared at as they enter a room prevents some people from going at all, because of that first and very important perceived barrier. One mother summed up this feeling;

*'Because I'm too shy. I hate walking into places where I don't know anyone. I just feel everyone's going to stare at me. I would like to use them, but...I wouldn't like doing it on my own'.*

The majority of families do have access to their own transport, and are therefore able to access services if and when they feel it necessary. These families appear to rely heavily on their cars and seem not to see transport as an issue as one mother indicates;

*'I've mostly had transport so I don't really notice'.*

However, it is apparent that these families do not access Sure Start services but may access services out of the area or not at all. There is also the opinion that services are for those who are not able to reach other services as one mother stated;

*'I have a car but those who don't are who it's great for.'*

'For those who do not have transport getting somewhere can be a major issue and not knowing whether a service will benefit them may prevent them from going the first time if it is a lot of effort for them as a mother explained;

*'If I had transport I would be more keen to go. If I had to walk I may not like it once I get there !'*

There is support from family for most of the families in the area, with most of them revealing that they can call on support locally if it is needed. These families report that they don't ask for extra support from outside their family network and have never needed it as they know who they can ask, as one mother indicates;

*'I'd rather ask my mum. I have good family support so I've never needed it. Some go straight to their health visitor and I've never needed to. I never really had problems touch wood and then I would go to family and friends. Or sort it out myself'.*

A smaller number of parents indicated that they do have family locally and can access them whenever they want to but most report that their families do not offer them very good support or they need pushing to provide it. One mother reports her struggle to gain support from her own mother;

*'We have a lot of family in the area. I suppose they are supportive if they have to be. I have a long term history of depression which I have help with. My mum needs a bit of pushing she likes to play ignorant 'you're OK''.*

Most of these families report accessing an alternative source of support when it is needed, with some stating that now they access extra support through health visiting when they need it as one mother reports;

*'...my health visitor came every two weeks to make sure I was OK. This is something I never had before'.*

Parents access friends as a source of support, particularly when their family provides little or no support or they do not live locally. For families who do not use Sure Start services, their friends network appears to be a very important source of support and some families report feeling too afraid to ask for support, and not knowing who to turn to outside their usual circle;

*'I have never asked, I'd be too scared to ask. It would be a yes though I think. I would need to know who through more involvement so I would know who to ask so I can't really comment'.*

Not having good family support does not necessarily mean families will turn to Sure Start for assistance. Some families indicate that they consider their friends to be just as good as family to them when they are needed;

*'My friend is really good support, she is like my mum'.*

One father summed up his feelings about revealing his emotions to his family, his friends and his opinion of the value of Sure Start both for himself and for others;

*'Yes. I talk first to my mates my family would just laugh at me. Sure Start is nice to have if you need it'.*

The vast majority of families are aware of the Sure Start summer trips and some use them once a year just for this purpose. The perception that the trips are extremely good value and children can be taken to places where their parents may not be able to take them through lack of transport or money, provides the motivation to attend that one time. Some parents report that they are very easy to access with three pick up points throughout the area, they go with their family or friends and don't really speak to anyone else at any other time as one mother remarked;

*'Trip pick ups are well positioned I don't have to walk far. I never really speak to people much, except trips which are well worth it'.*

Location and transport are closely linked. Families without a car report that they will consider attending an activity which is within walking distance but most will only consider it as long as they are with a friend and one mother reports the journey can take longer if she is on her own;

*'...I wont go if it's far away further than half an hour walk. I will go with my friend I won't go if she doesn't. We can push one buggy each if she doesn't go it takes an hour'.*

### **How can awareness and attendance be increased ?**

When asked how can families be encouraged to attend Sure Start services, most families suggested better advertising as a method of making more families in the area aware of what services are on offer. As these families do not use services they are more likely to be aware of what would make them reconsider and think about attending something new and most of them indicated that handouts and flyers and door to door would be good ways of gaining more families as one father suggests;

*'...Encourage people to bring someone on the leaflet, for a competition...Door to door to talk to families would be good. Put the basics on a leaflet and have someone come to explain it'.*

Most of the families report not being aware of a lot of services which Sure Start offers and some provide suggestions as to what sort of activities would be beneficial for families. One mother suggests offering a regular activity where children can learn about touch;

*'...make something...in Mile Cross nursery they do nice things with pasta. I've not heard of anything elsewhere for toddlers. So they can learn about touching things. A regular group. I've not heard of anything before..'*

Some of the families feel that Sure Start is doing enough to encourage people to attend their services and the rest is up to the families. Advertising is seen in a lot of places in the area and if people do not wish to take advantage of what is on offer then that is their choice. People are also individuals and one father indicates that it is not possible to tailor services to everyone's needs as everyone is different and this would require assessing each person seen and relying upon them to reveal what they need;

*'It's hard to know each individual case really, I don't know if you can. Until you have met someone you don't have a feel for the scenario. Unless they tell you, you can't help them'.*

Some families consider that posting information to families is not the best way to inform them of services as they are an annoyance and are immediately put in the bin. In offering alternative methods, one father considered that posters need replacing more frequently so they are up to date and offered the suggestion that leaflets need to be handed out at school gates when parents are waiting for their children and they are not going anywhere;

*'...Put up notices. But change them more regularly. Leaflets to schools to hand out to children or teachers to hand out to children to take home. Flyers in schools. Leaflets for kids to bring home eg when people leave a club it is hard to hand out leaflets, between 2.30-3pm people are at school waiting that's when to get them. Posted information gets on peoples nerves'.*

Being visible is seen as very important in improving awareness, so families in the area can physically see what Sure Start is, who is representing it. Actually see someone and not just receive a leaflet or look at a poster, this means there is a familiar face and they may be more likely to access a service if they feel they already know someone there. One father suggested;

*'...if all the people went to different places like you did and encourage people. Tell them what sort of things they are doing. That might make you feel better about going as they are talking to you instead of you looking at a leaflet. You are meeting the person who is doing the activities so people like me might feel better rather than just walking in there to strangers. For people like me who don't go to things like that'.*

Persistence is a key to promoting Sure Start activities. Some families feel that placing information in local shops and post offices where families go regularly are important sources for people as long as information is updated frequently. Other ideas like using methods which will appeal to children such as handing out balloons with flyers at supermarket entrances and interacting with local families, will keep reminding them about Sure Start and their children will let their parents know that they want a balloon when they enter ! This type of constant marketing will make sure that Sure Start is in people's minds and they will remember and this will encourage them to use services. One father suggested asking Radio Broadland for their assistance;

*'...ASDA is in the area...get the Black Thunder girls to put Sure Start on their stickers. Kids love stickers and balloons. They will hassle parents when they go past...have a flyer...interact a bit. Keep reminding people...If people hear about Sure Start every day they will think, oh yeah I'll go in a minute'.*

Another father suggested using mobile phones to contact people;

*'...text people...there isn't enough information on what you do'.*

Attracting more fathers to the programme is an issue for all of the fathers. Although they do not currently access services they are all interested in becoming involved but acknowledge that at present there is little or nothing offered which appeals to them. Fathers suggest generating some advertising which is aimed specifically at fathers, forming a fathers group and offering their services. One father suggests inviting single fathers to use Sure Start and having a male on the Sure Start team to attract fathers;

*'Get single fathers together. A lot of single fathers would like to do something. Have a male health visitor or worker...'*

Some fathers indicate that they will use services from now on and suggest applying for sponsorship to gain extra funding. One father is prepared to talk to others to encourage them to get involved;

*'No I never use you really. Apart from the father thing. I will use you now. Start a fathers group. So we can help others out. I can walk into anywhere and speak. I used to be a taxi driver. You could get sponsorship'.*

Another father provided suggestions to instigate fathers' interest in attending services;

*'Do you have events at the weekend at Fiddlewood ? Get information to people in pubs dads organise something in pubs. Organise events. Same as during the school holidays. Point out that dads are welcome on leaflets'.*

There appears to be a negative attitude in general in the area towards change and also towards Sure Start with some families in the area. The feeling that Sure Start can do everything possible and this will still not encourage some families from accessing services is apparent with most of the non service users. Families consider that there is a high level of apathy in the area and Sure Start should not bother with families who feel like that.

*'You are fighting a losing battle. You can't drag people out of their house'.*

One father indicated that some families are anti Sure Start since they were viewed to take over the local community centre, but also commented that Sure Start has actually increased the number of services available to families;

*'...up yours attitude in Mile Cross as they took over the Norman Centre. The community centre has been taken away from them. How can they still say that when there are all these things on?'*

Other parents suggest that local opinion is changing, but that this depends on where you live. Feeling in Fiddlewood is positive or indifferent as many families do not access services, Catton Grove is seen to be positive possibly due to there being two service delivery points in the area, and Mile Cross has been negative due to their perception of Sure Start but this is becoming more positive as people are becoming aware of the benefits that Sure Start is bringing to the community.

*'Yeah. There used to be a bad attitude towards Sure Start in Mile Cross. Where I lived before on Bullard Road, I never heard anyone say a bad word. It is needed in the area. Not even a mile away there is a different opinion. About a year ago, people's opinion has changed. It wasn't Sure Start'.*

Increasing awareness is something which some families feel they can encourage themselves providing they are given information in the first instance. The most effective form of transferring information is seen to be through word of mouth on the local estates, and this can be used to spread the word. One mother suggested that Sure Start staff encourage their service users to talk to their friends to let them know about the services they have attended and to increase attendance that way;

*'If you think a service is good, tell others and hopefully it will make people use services more. I only knew about trips through a friend. A couple of friends from school said 'we go up there' and said it was 'all right' on the Thursday and Monday for clinic'.*

Some parents said that they are influenced by what other people say to them and a positive word about a Sure Start service may motivate them to attend;

*'You could advertise services better than you do at the moment. In Health Centres, Drs surgeries, chemists, always go for things for babies. You see adverts for Calpol etc, you could put Sure Start ads too, something with children in the community. A general one so people know the name'.*

Other parents shared the view that Sure Start staff should present themselves more readily into the community, attending groups and talking to individual families as one parent stated;

*'There should be more 1-1 interaction'.*

Suggestions for services which would be relevant to local families are suggested by most of the families, with exercise and physical activities being suggested by several mothers and fathers. One



father suggested having a race on one of the school fields, and a picnic in the park, commenting that their local school does not provide enough of this type of activity. Sure Start would be providing a service for local families which is not currently available;

*'...Kids need exercise...Have races on the school fields...at community events. Have picnics down the park. Do races for all ages. There isn't enough to do at the Catton Grove school do'.*

## **Discussion**

Findings from the non service user transcripts fall into three main categories, reasons why they do not attend, what are the barriers for families and what they feel Sure Start can do to encourage families to attend.

The majority of non services users feel that lack of use is due to lack of awareness of Sure Start and what it means; *'There aren't many people there now as not many are aware of it'*. The majority feel that those who use services are aware of what happens but if you do not access any services then you will not know what is available to you. Some of the families also report not being given information by their health visitor; *'The health visitor hasn't given me information on Sure Start and their friends are not aware either. Other families asked whether other groups in the area are run by Sure Start. This lack of awareness about services may be the one and only barrier for some families in the area to accessing services, and this can be remedied purely by contacting families directly and talking to them about what is available. However, some families report that they are aware, but what is on offer is not a priority for them and they may attend if they have the time but often they forget and the leaflet is thrown out of found once it is out of date 'I pick up leaflets at Oak Grove then it sits in my bag and then I see it again after the date !'*. A lot of information is gained through accessing other local groups in the area such as toddler groups. One father suggested using noticeboards to attract attention is 'white noise' and is therefore ignored.

Other parents say that a lack of self confidence prevents them from accessing services. One parent reports that she wants to get out of the house and do something but when it comes down to it she doesn't do anything; *'Sometimes I get to a point where I'm going to do something but when it comes to it I don't'*. Parents like her will stay at home unless they are encouraged by someone with more self confidence and probably accompanied to activities, and there is often no-one available to do this. Going to people's houses and chatting to people, building their confidence so they

feel able to come to groups is suggested by many of the families; *'Door to door to talk to families would be good'*. It appears that without confidence most of the families will not begin to access services and therefore need assistance in order to do so.

Some parents feel that people who do go to services all know each other, and therefore they would be excluded if they went; *'Catton Grove Clinic is cliquy'*. In order to overcome this, some said that they would go if they had a friend to go with although one mother began to express a need to begin to go out without worrying about feeling self conscious and was considering going on her own in order to overcome this. One mother reported that going with someone else that she knows gives her more confidence than if she were on her own'.

Another issue for parents is the feeling that in addition to not knowing anyone they feel they will be stared at and judged when they enter the room. This feeling is so powerful that it prevents people from accessing services at all; *'I just feel everyone's going to stare at me'*. One mother commented that she was too shy to be able to do this even though she wants to.

Mothers who are pregnant or have new babies are less likely to attend services if they are tired, stressed with coping with a new baby or suffering from post natal depression. One mother said that she couldn't even get out of bed when she was pregnant but would have come if she wasn't struggling so much.

Feelings about other areas influence some families in which services to access. The geographical boundaries between Fiddlewood, Catton Grove and Mile Cross represent barriers which families will not cross, and there is bad feeling between these areas, with some families saying they will not cross the boundaries to another area which is rougher than their own or where they perceive there are certain types of people; *'...I'm not going to places like Jewson Road, Catton Grove Community Centre or Catton Grove Clinic'*. Some families reported that these services are for deprived people and therefore not for them and that they would feel bad if they used them themselves.

Families indicate that they will access a service depending on how much it costs them and if one service is less then they will go to that. If they enjoy the more expensive service then they will use that on occasion.

Literacy and language are not seen as a problem by most families; *'there isn't a problem from what I can see'*. If there are any issues regarding language, then they feel that if an individual is experiencing problems due to not speaking English, then they should simply learn the language. This reflects the feeling that some parents have that effort should be made to speak the language and integrate into the society in which you live. As far as literacy is concerned, the majority of families stated that there

is a very poor level of literacy in the area and one parent suggested that this is due to people not bothering at school and calling themselves dyslexic as an excuse in order to not find a job; *'it's just an excuse'*. This could be due to generational issues, if parents and grandparents did not have aspirations then it may not be seen as important to aspire to better things themselves.

Physically getting to local services is not a problem for most families who have access to a car and do not consider that this could be an issue for some; *'I've mostly had transport so I don't really notice'*. Others however without transport hesitate and say that if they make an effort to go to something and don't like it then it is a waste of time. Even with transport some parents state that they will not go to an activity without a friend. One mother suggests that as she has a car she is able to go wherever she wishes and local services like Sure Start are great for families who don't have transport. This indicates that Sure Start services are not for her.

Most families indicate that they have support locally from their families and they are available whenever they are needed. This means that they feel they do not need external support as they have all they need; *'I'd rather ask my mum. I have good family support so I've never needed it'*. This will probably have an impact on use of services, as if support is not needed then perhaps they feel this is all that Sure Start offers. Families who have little or no local support, of which there are a few, report a struggle in gaining support and give the general impression that they tend to look after themselves if there is a problem and don't ask for help. This self sufficiency probably stems from the generational attitude of not needing any support which prevents being vulnerable.

Families who do access extra support indicate that they feel very supported by their health visitor, who provided assistance which had not been experienced before. Friends are also a source of support for most families and one parent even stated that her friend is like her mother to her. One father expressed that he prefers to talk to his friends rather than his family as he feels that they would laugh at him. Some of the family support systems in the area appear to be lacking and expecting family members to take care of themselves rather than ask for support, this could be seen as a sign of weakness.

Most families are aware of the existence of Sure Start summer trips and also take advantage of the offer once a year, even if other services are not accessed the rest of the time. This suggests that these trips are a fantastic public relations exercise and encourage people to access services. However, Sure Start needs to retain these parents.

The most prominent methods of increasing awareness and attendance for local families are going door to door, handing out leaflets with an explanation, and going to school gates and public places to hand out leaflets and explain what is on them. One father explained that he felt that people are more likely to come to an event as they have seen someone rather than just looked at another leaflet; *'That might make you feel better about going as they are talking to you instead of you looking at a leaflet. You are meeting the person who is doing the activities so people like me might feel better rather than just walking in there to strangers. For people like me who don't go to things like that'*. It will help to build the confidence for that family to come to a service. Visiting supermarkets with balloons for children and arranging publicity with local radio, leaving leaflets and posters in surgeries and chemists are seen as ways to ensure that Sure Start is constantly on people's minds and then they will be more likely to attend events if they are constantly aware. Personal contact with families is seen as the best way to promote activities and encourage people to attend, a sheet of paper will just go into the bin with all the other 'junk' mail. However some families feel that without being aware about every family's circumstances it is not possible to reach and retain everyone. Some families will not want to access services even if they are aware of the benefits and the local attitude towards Sure Start in some areas which is still there to some degree, is seen to still have an impact. One father commented that he didn't understand why this was still the case when there is so much good happening at one local community centre due to Sure Start's intervention.

Fathers feel that there is no provision for them in the area, and what is on offer in general does not appeal to them. Starting a group for fathers, encouraging them to attend and arrange events for themselves together with stating that fathers are welcome at events on posters and leaflets in general are suggested ways of gaining attendance and interest from fathers.

Word of mouth is seen as an important method of spreading information. Going to an event because a friend recommended it would influence some of the families. This makes it a really powerful method.

Suggestions for activities which could attract more children and families are things like drama groups, which one father feels will teach children about interaction, speech and movement and another option is exercise for children, by holding sports or open days.

### **Professionals**

The final categories for the professional transcripts are (1) 'barriers', (2) 'current reach' and (3) 'community development'. These categories were formed by repeated analysis of the transcripts which revealed consistent references to how local families are (1) perceived to be included in services currently,

(2) aspects which prevent access to services, and also (3) ideas and tried and tested methods to consider integrating into CFM.

Within these top level codes are sub themes coded as second level, third and fourth level themes, dependent on what subjects are related to one another, as listed below;

### **Current reach**

Perceptions of current reach varied quite considerably, however themes reflect the fact that a small number of families consistently access services, and some families still do not access Sure Start services at all. Families who do access services are motivated to continue attendance by familiarity with the Sure Start staff involved, and some services are seen as being accessed by a core group of people;

*'...people can just drop in...you don't have to let them know you are coming, don't have to speak to anyone, know there will be the same old faces.'*

Three key themes arose regarding communication, with some professionals regarding reaching families as currently happening but problematic, and others suggesting that more needs to be done in order to gain a good overall awareness of the needs in the community;

*'We need tangible targets but the most important thing is...people communicate...it is a positive relationship built.'*

*'You have been around a long time but people don't understand if it's not in their face they don't recognise it'.*

It is important that the programme considers developing a better understanding overall of the needs of the community in order to plan more effective services. This was also perceived at different levels, with some professionals indicating that this process is already underway;

*'the people I have worked with have been very enthusiastic and eager to learn...they are also sensitive to prejudice which is vital ...you can't work with this group unless there is sensitivity there.'*

*'People don't want to relate on that level to too many people. If they have told you their story you know they are happy to talk to you'.*

Others indicated that more work needs to be done, and indeed not everyone will be included in services. There is also the need to be realistic and accept that not everyone will attend services;

*'...children are easier to reach than some groups...but you will never reach everyone'.*

*'...the Board meetings will scare people stiff...they won't understand what people are saying.'*

Views about how accessible services currently are indicated that services are accessible to some. This can be dependent on the area that families live in, and Fiddlewood, where Greenfields Community Centre is located, is particularly remote;

*'...look at the buildings...Greenfields is isolated...'*

Access for Travellers is another issue. While the programme might perceive that Travellers do not access services and would benefit from attending, Travellers themselves feel uncomfortable about leaving their child with 'settlers';

*'the idea of leaving your child with those people (settlers) has the issue that you might be a bad Traveller mum...'*

Professionals feel that although Sure Start can offer services to families, ultimately it is the client's choice. Although services are not reached by all families in the area, it is perceived that we must not forget that it is ultimately the client's choice whether to attend services or not;

*'Go, if you don't like it, fair enough, it's their choice'.*

It is acknowledged that a lot of progress has been made within the area between the community and Sure Start and a large number of families are being reached successfully and Sure Start has a lot to offer families. Two professionals indicate how this is happening;

*'...it has been a very successful partnership we meet termly and work out a rota for each person to work with the under 4's'.*

*'...a project worker and respite are things they haven't had before. I feel we have something to offer'.*

This was also linked with expectations that professionals feel that CFM has of the community. The programme is meant for local families but they are expected to come to services without much encouragement, as one professional explained;

*'CFM is set up to talk to people but expect people to come to them'.*

Methods that are used to promote services were commented on by all professionals. The posters that are used, although they are clear and colourful they are not seen as a sufficient method of

advertising in an area where posters are not seen to work, especially for families who experience literacy problems;

*'CFM did no work other than put a poster up. Posters never work'.*

*'...literacy problems...mailshots go to people who may not understand what you are offering'.*

Personal contact is perceived to be a vital element of inclusion, and professionals indicate that visiting families in their homes is a very successful way of reaching more people;

*home visiting is excellent, face to face'.*

, and that existing methods are not necessarily effective, with one professional quoting an occasion where she witnessed a Sure Start staff member handing out leaflets;

*'Lady who handed out leaflets didn't stop to talk to anyone, seemed nervous, just handed leaflets and ran...it is about having the time...not just giving out leaflets'.*

Professionals also indicated their views on the overall method of inclusion which CFM operates and consider that while this is effective as far as providing excellent care for children it is not enough to effectively reach families in the area and a different approach is suggested;

*'CFM doesn't understand community dynamics'.*

*'CFM is not a community development team but a childcare team'.*

*'Community development isn't really about community development where Sure Start is steering'.*

### **What are the barriers which prevent families from using services ?**

Professionals felt that accessing services presented a considerable number of barriers for local families. Major themes were exclusion, anger, suspicion, community politics, loyalty, prejudice, confidence level, coping, fear, apathy, parental involvement, transport, transience, geographical barriers, boundaries, physical, location, literacy and language, time, perception of area.

Professionals feel that there is a lack of awareness in the area although the name Sure Start appears to be known but what this actually means to families is not;

*'when you talk to someone at the school gates and say 'go to Sure Start' people say 'why, what do they do ?'*

*'Families don't understand what is on offer. There is lots to take in, all the people on the site, health visitors, Traveller Education Service, project workers, Sure who ?'*

*'A mum a couple of weeks ago said 'is the nursery open yet ? ...and she lives a couple of yards from the Norman Centre'.*

Exclusion is seen as a barrier for access to services. This is accompanied by trust issues about services provided in the community and one reason for this is viewed as services being provided in the past, being used and then being taken away;

*'Families look after themselves...they don't trust anyone for instance schools, social services'.*

*'...(community café) was funded by the Lottery Fund, it was very successful, but funding came to an end. People got wary of things'.*

Another key theme was that involvement with services has often led to a feeling of disappointment for families in the early days of the programme. Professionals report that families felt that they were consulted but in time realised that their opinion and experience was actually being discounted and the programme was actually being developed without their input;

*'People put everything into it, hours and hours, and found they weren't being listened to...I knew full well things were not going to happen'.*

*'CFM should have pulled in as much help as possible but they worked in isolation not using the skills available. It has faltered as a result'.*

The view that some families are subjected to prejudice by others in various ways is seen as a barrier for these families and this happens on a regular basis for some;

*'Families suffer a lot of day to day prejudice. Dirty gippo stuff go home have a bath...'*

*'Mothers, in their own little groups...some will talk to others in brand names...but lower won't talk to others...you see it all'.*

Confidence level was suggested as a barrier for families and upon analysis appeared to be a major barrier. Professionals felt that families with low levels of self confidence would be unlikely to access services and parents will not encourage their children if they do not feel they are able to achieve anything, and some parents do not even vote;



*'For those families who know what's on offer and have the confidence then access is really easy. From experience many families don't have the confidence to go'.*

*'Kids, they don't encourage them, not because it's Sure Start. They're not sure they can do anything'.*

*'Some people don't vote, don't take part in any services. They can't be bothered'.*

This lack of confidence is seen to be a generational issue which cannot be changed over night and presents a barrier for parents to accessing services within their own families;

*'You are fighting a hard battle if you haven't seen family members doing it'.*

*'If your grandparents were Travellers who didn't access...and you are four years old the reason may be that there is a history of community exclusion in your family'.*

Being seen to not cope on your own is viewed as a fear that some families in the area have. Attending services provided by Sure Start can be seen as not coping and asking for help and people feel they will be judged and it will only be themselves that feel like this;

*'By registering and being seen at an event means you are not coping'.*

*'Young parents think they'll be judged if they are not coping they think it's only them'.*

Accessing services is seen as fearful in itself. Some communities feel that they cannot access a service which could be uncomfortable for them and from another perspective actually entering the Sure Start main office is seen to be daunting for families;

*'Fear is a big, big one... an anecdote is 'would you be interested in sending your child to playgroup ?' and that mum replied 'would you have your child on this site for the day ?''*

*'...going into the Norman Centre...is daunting'.*

The issue of transience is seen as a reason for some families not accessing services, the opinion is that if people are only in the area for a short time then they will not gain anything from attending and therefore it is best not to go;

*'They might not want access if they know they are going away, is it worth it ?'*

*'There's a high level of transience, people chose not to...'*

This also raises the fact that Sure Start is split over three areas, and the problems that this produces. It is felt that families do not cross the boundaries between the three areas, and this is viewed as a barrier. It also means that if a service is provided in one area then families in another will probably not access it and that with this knowledge Sure Start should not expect it to happen;

*'...there are three different areas...people won't cross the boundaries'*.

*'An event in Mile Cross will not be attended if you live in Catton Grove. You can't lump it together and expect it to work'*.

Language and literacy is viewed as an issue for families from both the perspective of bad language spoken by other parents which can discourage people from attending an activity and poor literacy which hinders the ability to read and understand the written information which Sure Start provides;

*'The few mums who were interested because of the very nature of who they are and where they were from were put off by the tone and the language used'*.

*'I'm not talking about foreign languages but an understanding of the English Language, confidence, the ability to read leaflets, and understand exactly what is on offer and having the confidence to join in'*.

Minority groups are viewed to not access services easily due to not them not representing a large group of people in the area and there may be several families representing one culture and one language rather than a group of families which means that providing specific services is very problematic;

*Minorities are difficult as they are a real minority they tend to be one family not whole communities'*.

### **Enabling factors - what will enable families to use services ?**

Community development is an issue which occurred frequently within the analysis of the transcripts. Professionals felt that in order to include more families in Sure Start services, the programme needs to be more aware of community needs and respond to these needs accordingly. Analysis suggested a gap between services currently given and what the community actually needs and how information should be presented so it is useful.

Increase parental involvement in the programme, encourage responsibility in services to enable parents to continue services locally when Sure Start is no longer here. Provide a way for parents to be involved in the setting up and running of services. Encourage parents by talking to them, knock on doors, attend local groups so people get to know Sure Start staff and therefore feel more comfortable attending services.

Developing community development should in turn increase the likelihood of reaching more families, therefore families accessing services and services being able to retain families. (monitoring - shows families who attend earlier are more likely to retain ?)

The development of a community development approach is seen as a vital element in increasing inclusion in the programme. Increasing the visibility of Sure Start will promote awareness;

*'Someone said they didn't want to go to school gates but they have to'.*

*'All you can do is to be seen at places they are like school gates, clinics...(senior project worker) used to go regularly but until new one is appointed...go to mother and toddler, places like that'.*

Professionals acknowledge that effectively engaging families takes a lot of time and energy. It also requires thinking about what methods of reaching families are going to be suitable. Several professionals indicated methods which they use and recommend for encouraging families to access services;

*'For low literacy and multicultural groups CFM needs to go door to door, with a leaflet but explain what's on the leaflet and leave it with them to remind them'.*

*'Fill in slips won't do as handwriting gives away low literacy it is the same for questionnaires. Go armed with booking forms to book now always give them the way out'.*

*'It is very time consuming but it pays off. For instance the toddler group, at the Norman Centre there are always lots of attempts to encourage mums to do the toddler group, but it never really took off unless it ran alongside the clinic and someone put in extra support'.*

*'Also, families need to be taken by the hand, and lead into groups so they have supported access'.*

Increasing the amount of visible information for families which gives them a guideline for accessing services such as putting a map on a leaflet or poster so families who are new to the area and

families with poor literacy can see where they have to go. This increases the accessibility of the programme;

*'Have a map of where to do stuff...it's quite simple really'.*

*'If people knew where Sure Start workers were, it comes back to what is accessible, they know where they can find you'.*

The key element to reaching and engaging families is viewed as persistence. The belief that when very few people attend an event, rather than stopping it to try something else, encourage people to bring friends so they will not be on their own. It is perceived that on occasion in the past some programme staff have become disillusioned if there are few families at an event;

*'Keep at it, keep trying even when it doesn't appear to work. The general rule of thumb with all hard to reach is keep trying again, again, again you may only get one parent but the likelihood is that the following year you will get three.'*

*'Try and try again...the best way is to say bring a friend. They will be more persuaded. They will come because a friend is coming.'*

*'...used to run a parent involvement group not every week but got fed up if no-one came. You have to be persistent'.*

Building trust between families and the programme needs to happen if families are to be more involved. Professionals feel that if parents are listened to and their views are acted upon this enables them to feel respected, and time and patience will help to rebuild trust;

*'...involving some of the new mums if they come to clinic and have ideas and they are acted upon...if it is taken up she feels respected...'*

*'The trouble with Mile Cross is that there have been so many short term projects, we need time to build up trust but need that time and trust to involve themselves in things.'*

Communication between the programme and families is also vital. Professionals have indicated that families need to be shown how to take responsibility for their actions and for the services that they attend through parental involvement. This also links with the fear that families have that if they get involved and invest in services they will be taken away from them;

*'What will be left after Sure Start is gone ? For instance Missing Link did not run as someone was off sick, what is wrong with a parent doing it ?'*

*'CFM is not pushing parents to have some responsibility to make changes. It is a dilemma, you don't want to patronise people but actually if you have never had the experience of having responsibility...build it up alongside.'*

While the staff team are all trained in the individual fields in which they work, the theme underlying Sure Start is seen to be childcare. Professionals feel that in order to reach families effectively there needs to be some community development training for staff who are skilled in childcare but not in community development;

*'CFM needs a different approach. Sure Start gives money, sends workers, rather than asking what can be done to help, is it our group or Sure Start's ?'*

*'CFM staff need some community development training'.*

Training for families is also considered to be a rewarding method of thanking staff for their involvement with Sure Start;

*'Training is a wonderful way of rewarding and getting people involved'.*

Professionals see programme planning and development as important in promoting services, and consider that the approach needs to be viewed on a much longer term basis and with a higher level of visibility for staff;

*'I like the programme manager very much but she needs to be more visible in an understated way'.*

*'Projects have to be long term and consistent.'*

Professionals feel that there are ways of encouraging families, and we already have some of the basic tools to do this. CFM's health staff are seen to be an effective method of gaining access to families who would otherwise not be reached, as one professional simply stated;

*'Health Visitors are a way in'.*

Find out what is relevant for these families and look at ways of working with them to tackle the important issues, this may have the added impact of interesting families, gaining their confidence and encouraging them to become involved and take responsibility in their community;

*'...really got to find the issues that concern most of them and touch on them. If you can't, hit on the big issues - it will bring most of them into line'.*

Consider ways of attracting families to services which are relevant to them by using existing advertising, such as the Sure Start newsletter. Rather than just sending out leaflets, visit families and discuss what would suit them, as one professional indicates;

*'Look at the quarterly - there is a lot of writing in that - look at it before you see a family and say 'this is a good one for you' and tell them about it'.*

## **Discussion**

While access to services is increasing all the time overall, there are still many factors which provide challenges to promoting inclusion. The professionals who were interviewed provided a wide array of reasons for barriers, their perception of current reach, and finally, ideas, the majority of which are tried and tested, to promote inclusion themed as enabling factors.

Communication between Sure Start and the local community is seen to be problematic, with some professionals suggesting that people are aware of Sure Start but that more needs to be done in order to enable people to understand what it is and what it can do for them; *'...people don't understand unless it's in their face'*. In order to provide a tailor made service for local people and not just offering options to families as it suits families in other areas; *'CFM is not a community development team but a childcare team'* the programme needs to have a greater understanding of the needs of the local community, such as the feeling that people may be afraid of being involved with the Sure Start Board and staff being sensitive to parent's situations, one comment regarding this was; *'it's very time consuming but it pays off'*. The methods which are used to attract families in the area are not seen to be sufficient, the idea that families will come to an event because they have seen a piece of paper is ineffective; *'CFM did no work other than put a poster up. Posters never work'* and it is suggested that Sure Start then sits back and waits for people to appear *'CFM is set up to talk to people but expect people to come to them'*. Mailshots which are sent out are thought to be disregarded with the other 'junk' mail and will not reach some families who have literacy or language problems; *'mailshots go to people who may not understand what you are offering'*. Professionals feel that the programme needs to have a physical presence at places where they can talk to families, like school gates which are seen as an important way of becoming familiar with local people, and this will help to overcome some of the issues such as language and literacy. One professional reported that there is resistance within the team to do this; *someone said they didn't want to go to school gates but they have to'*.

Professionals feel that we already have the tools to be able to do this, and one source is health visitors; *'Health visitors are a*

way in'. The nursery provides a service which is becoming well known in the area and offers care to families who could be seen to be hard to reach, and project workers are available to offer support to families and this is recognised by professionals; *'a project worker and respite are things they haven't had before. I feel we have something to offer.'*

Ultimately it is recognised that whatever is done to reach families it is their decision whether to access services and some families will chose not to; *'...go, if you don't like it, fair enough, it's their choice'*. As far as accessing services, it is suggested that the Traveller community may not want to leave their children with any service which is not on their site for fear of being viewed as a bad parent; *'the idea of leaving your child with those people has the issue that you might be a bad traveller mum'*. Other barriers are the general suspicion which professionals indicate that local families feel towards any public services set up in the area and they suggest that families prefer to not rely on anyone other than themselves; *'families look after themselves...they don't trust anyone...'*. One example which highlights this is the community café - it is suggested that this was very successful and it was taken away due to funding ending and this fed local people's wariness of anything new being provided for them, preferring not to rely on these services perhaps to ensure that they are prepared for when they are removed; *'funding came to an end. People got wary of things'*.

When Sure Start began in the area, professionals report that families were consulted about what was needed and were involved in discussions, some giving many hours of their time, but then found their input had been disregarded; *'people put everything into it, hours and hours, and found they weren't being listened to...'*. Professionals believe that the programme has faltered due to the local community not being actively involved and Sure Start setting up services by themselves; *'CFM should have pulled in as much help as possible but they worked in isolation not using the skills available. It has faltered as a result'*. In order to ensure that services in the future are provided for the local community, it's needs have to be taken into account and for professionals that means consulting them, involving them and giving them some responsibility in running services so they gain skills, ownership and confidence.

Gaining confidence is seen as one of the most important factors in increasing reach for professionals. They acknowledge that some local families do not take part in anything, they do not encourage their children; *'you are fighting a hard battle if you haven't seen a family member doing it'*, and do not even vote, as they *'can't be bothered'*. Accessing Sure Start services, where most of the people are strangers, is probably something which is not feasible for a lot of people who simply do not have the confidence to attend; *'...they think they can't do anything'*. Professionals

report that another aspect of confidence is the feeling that accessing a service means that you are not coping as a mother or father and that parent will think they are the only one feeling like that. They will then be in a position to be judged by others and by staff if they are seen to be not coping and this is not worth them going; *'...think they'll be judged if they are not coping they think it's only them'*. Transience is another issue which prevents families from attending, if people are only in the area for a short time then it is not perceived to be worth going, although professionals suggest that it is worth going even once, as it is a *'bridge built'*. Minority groups are seen as a problematic issue as there are small pockets of families from different ethnic backgrounds, some are only one family, and this represents many different cultures and languages spoken, but possibly not enough to warrant facilities for one specific language such as leaflets or posters if there is only one or two families who may access this. The suggestion for diminishing problems with leaflets and posters is to go to people's houses and talk the families through an activity - there is usually someone in the household who speaks a little English - and then leave the leaflet with them to remind them. This is also thought to be helpful for those with low literacy levels, in which case an additional suggestion is to take booking forms for staff to complete there and then and this will eliminate any discomfort about literacy as the parents will not have to complete anything; *'...go armed with booking forms to book now always give them the way out'*.

Giving families responsibility to be actively involved in services will encourage them to make changes; *'CFM is not pushing parents to have some responsibility to make changes'*, some families have not had that experience and building it into services will increase confidence and ownership too as previously mentioned, but this approach will take more time and effort. Families may not feel so vulnerable if they have more control over what is happening and may become more involved as their fear is diminished. When they are not involved, they do not have any control, and professionals feel that this should change and parents should be offered the chance to be given an active role in running services; *'Missing Link did not run as someone was off sick, what is wrong with a parent doing it ?'*

Supporting access to services is seen as an important method of increasing attendance and reaching more families. This is seen as going to people's homes and talking to the family and offering them services which are relevant to them. Then going to the activity with them, offering to collect the family to take them directly to the event and staying with them, supporting them as necessary. As mentioned previously this is acknowledged to be time consuming but professionals comment that extra support is known to work. The accessibility of a service is also an important element, and making things easier for a family such as



putting maps on posters and leaflets, being explicit about where things are and how to find members of staff means that families will know where to look; *'they know where they can find you...it's quite simple really'*.

Patience and persistence will be needed in order to gain the trust of hard to reach families, as some professionals indicate, and this means keep on trying even if a service is only attended by one or two people for several weeks; *'keep trying again, again, again, you may only get one parent but the likelihood is that the following year you will get three'*. This suggests that this may take a long time, and trust does take time to build, or rebuild. Encouraging people to bring a friend - they will be more persuaded if they have someone with them, making it explicit that people can bring friends to events will encourage more to come.

### **Overall discussion**

The overall position of the three areas as high on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation probably contributes to a lack of inclusion by some families coupled with the diverse and widespread area. The size of the overall area is also linked to the lack of integration for services which are set up to cover all areas.

Some families may feel unable to use services due to varying issues, predominantly confidence and awareness of what is on offer. Access to services can be an issue for families, whether it is physical or otherwise. Learning more about how families themselves feel about access and suggestions as to how this can be improved will provide Sure Start with the knowledge to improve access in the future. By understanding the issues, Sure Start can consider offering support and services which can help to reduce these barriers.

Patterns of service use shows that although there are a high number of families who are registered and access services, there is a higher number of families who are registered initially but then do not access services. The majority of these registrations are probably through health visiting which is viewed as the first or only contact with Sure Start for a lot of families. Therefore, even with this first contact, the possibility of a lack of confidence or subsequent awareness preventing further engagement is likely. Once a family is no longer seen by a health visitor or their visits are few, a family could be isolated and sending leaflets through the post may have no impact other than to be placed straight in the bin. Reaching such families to offer further services and support so they are able to make an informed choice about engagement will increase their awareness and possibly their levels of confidence.

Lack of attendance may be linked with the level of support which families experience. By understanding levels of support, Sure

Start can consider their role in supporting families in the area. For families who do need support and feel able to accept it, a family support service or links to an existing service may provide an important method of support for a family struggling through a difficult time.

Family perceptions of whether improvements can be made to the services and how form a vital element of investigating inclusion levels in the area and how to move services forward. This way we will be more able to tailor our future services to suit local needs.

## **Conclusion**

In order to increase the reach of the programme it is apparent that two main themes arise from this research, one being the issue of self confidence and the other being awareness. The programme has made enormous progress in the last three years and the reach of new families is increasing all the time. However, low self confidence is evident through the interviews with all three groups, and this has a far reaching impact on what services families will access. Once accessed, the majority of families report an increase in self confidence since engaging with services, and most parents access services initially with someone else, usually a friend. For parents who have little or no family or friends in the area and have low self confidence this may present an additional difficulty - not having someone to go with initially to provide encouragement and support. This is where the suggestion of increasing personal contact with families is most relevant. Methods such as increasing visibility in the community, home visits and assisted access are clearly seen as methods of increasing confidence and encouraging attendance. Although it is acknowledged to be time consuming it does appear that it is the best way to approach families who will not attend services if they are lacking confidence, whether by using posters or leaflets which seem to be the most common form of receiving information. The other, perhaps most important element of increasing inclusion is time, patience and persistence on the part of programme staff when implementing changes, which is seen to be needed in order to gain trust and ultimately inclusion and retention of all families in the area.

Awareness of Sure Start is at quite a high level, although it may be just the name that is familiar and not anything which Sure Start actually offers. Current methods used mean that CFM are reaching some families and have a core group of families who access services regularly but there are not as many families as there could be, particularly in hard to reach groups. This is possibly due to a lack of persistence and poor visibility in the community whether by leaflet, poster or in person outside the usual venues where groups and activities are held, together with

the possibility that having existing groups of families who are familiar with each other actually excludes others and prevents them from attending. Awareness of what Sure Start services offer is the first step in families deciding whether to access or not. If awareness can be increased by improving the visibility of the programme and staff in the area and what services can offer families then the next step of deciding whether to engage or not will be better informed and their engagement could be supported. Families themselves and professionals have provided a wide range of suggestions and tried and tested methods for increasing inclusion and these techniques should be given serious consideration.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations are made to assist with embedding inclusion within the local community.

- Form links with existing services in the area
- Organise more effective methods of advertising
  - Word of Mouth
  - School Gates
  - Home Visits
  - Community Groups/Events
  - Chemist/Surgery/Post Office
  - Texting
  - Pictures & Maps
  - Radio Broadland - Black Thunder
- Form a support group for older parents
- Consider ways to link with or provide facilities for older children
- Encourage parents and staff to welcome new people and include them
- Group facilitators to 'police' events, provide a behaviour protocol
- Provide an outreach service for families using one to one support and home visits
- Use community development techniques to reach families through personal visits to events, public spaces and homes.
- Consider staff training in community development.
- Set aside specific time for outreach in the community, at groups and knocking on doors
- Endeavour to set up services in each area where possible or provide easy access for families having to travel
- Suggest a re-visit/diarised system to go back & invite initial refusals to offers of services
- Form a fathers group and encourage fathers to assist with running it

- Reinstate parental involvement, start a parents involvement group again and feed their knowledge and opinions into the running of the programme
- Reconsider services to increase self confidence, assisted attendance and home visits, link with other professionals