

# Evaluation of service take-up and reach

Sure Start Wallasey  
Evaluation Report No. 4

Date: September, 2005  
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## Executive Summary

This report evaluates the take-up of the Sure Start Wallasey programme by families with young children living in the programme area. It utilises programme monitoring data and draws on the findings of a questionnaire survey of 150 parents as well as more detailed interviews with parents and members of the Sure Start Wallasey staff team.

### Key findings

1. 665 (54 per cent) of the estimated 1,229 families with children aged 0-4 living in the extended Sure Start area are now registered with Sure Start Wallasey. This would appear to be a satisfactory registration rate when one considers that the programme has in effect been operational for less than 18 months. (No. of families registered as of 1/09/05 is 780)
2. The survey found that 83 per cent of those already registered with the programme had used its services one or more times in the past 12 months, although some registered families were reported to be making much more use of Sure Start services than others.
3. Programme monitoring data indicates that most Sure Start services are being utilised by significant numbers of families from different parts of the catchment area. However, at least up until March 2005 many services were being underutilised by families from the area added to the Sure Start catchment area in preparation for the programme's integration into Seacombe Children's Centre. This is perhaps to be expected given that it will inevitably take time to publicise Sure Start to families from the new parts of the catchment area.
4. 296 (31 per cent) of the families currently registered with the programme live outside of the Sure Start catchment area. Programme monitoring data for 2004/5 showed that certain services (Pregnancy Yoga, PEEP and the Baby Café) attracted an especially high proportion of out of area families.
5. The survey found that the main reason why many non-registered local families had not used any Sure Start services was that information about the programme was not reaching them. 47 per cent of survey respondents who had yet to register with Sure Start Wallasey cited lack of information about Sure Start, particularly its services and eligibility criteria, as a reason why they had not used the programme. By comparison only 7 per cent of registered families surveyed gave lack of information as a reason for not using services.
6. The fact that the vast majority of Sure Start activities take place on weekday daytimes is convenient for most local families. However, the relative lack of activities at weekends may be effectively excluding from the programme those families where both parents or the only parent works full time. It is also making it difficult for many dads to get involved.
7. The survey revealed quite significant differences between parents living in different parts of the Sure Start Wallasey area in terms of which venues they perceived as convenient and suitable places to attend. Most notably, over one third of families within the Sure Start area and almost two thirds of those living in Egremont do not currently regard Seacombe Family Centre (the site of the Children's Centre) as a convenient or suitable location to attend. While the main reason for this is that the building is regarded as being too far away by many families, it is also apparent that for some parents the Centre has an image problem given its history as a social services building.
8. To date, levels of participation by dads in the programme have not been high. Sure Start Wallasey has organised a number of special activities to attract dads, but so far only 31 dads have attended.

9. By far the most used individual Sure Start service is Home Visiting, which was used by 320 families in the period from April 2004 – March 2005. The other activities that are in the highest demand from families living within the Sure Start area tend to be the more informal play and learning activities such as Messy Play, Stay and Play and Talking Tots.
10. In common with other universal services, a significant amount of the uptake of Sure Start Wallasey's services is probably from families who are less in need of the services. However, through informal play and learning activities such as Stay and Play and services such as Home Visiting and the Family Mental Health Project the programme is reaching families with high support needs.

## **Recommendations**

1. That Sure Start Wallasey's main strategy for increasing the numbers registered with the programme and actively using services is not to concentrate on one-off recruitment drives but to establish systems that identify families at antenatal stage and maintain contact with them over time. One of the best ways of making systematic contact with local families may be for Sure Start outreach workers to play a role in midwifery and health visiting clinics (see Evaluation Report Number 3). It is therefore recommended that if the current pilots of joint clinics prove successful, this approach is adopted throughout the Sure Start area.
2. That as a back-up to the above approach, Sure Start Wallasey organises occasional (perhaps annual) 'outreach weeks'. These would use the same method successfully employed by the parent questionnaire survey undertaken for this evaluation of making face to face contact with parents of children aged four and under at locations within the area that they are most likely to use. In particular it is recommended that:
  - Sure Start workers, perhaps assisted by parent volunteers, staff promotional stalls at or outside venues such as local schools, nursery classes, playgroups and pre-schools, Seacombe Family Centre, Guinea Gap Baths, Kwik-Save, Central Park as well as approaching parents in the street.
  - the week includes at least one weekend, to enable contact to be made with families in full time work and with working dads in particular.
  - 'outreach weeks' emphasise a particular theme such as launching Seacombe Children's Centre, celebrating National Sure Start Month or advertising a programme of summer activities.
  - 'outreach weeks' are linked to fun events or open days to which newly identified or newly registered parents can be invited to give them a first taste of Sure Start in a relaxed and informal setting.
3. It may be worthwhile for Sure Start Wallasey, through its Health Co-ordinator, to use contact data supplied by Birkenhead and Wallasey PCT, to write to families asking them to register with the programme. However, the constraints of the Data Protection Act, particularly the need to obtain positive consent from parents, may limit the value of this approach. If Sure Start Wallasey decides to go ahead with this course of action it is recommended that it seeks further clarification from the Information Commissioner's Office before proceeding.
4. That Sure Start Wallasey markets itself more to other local organisations working with families with young children, such as schools, playgroups and GP practices, in order to encourage these organisations to utilise Sure Start more and to promote it to their clients. The programme's recent appointment of an 'Information Link' will assist with this task.

5. That as part of its marketing and communications plan Sure Start Wallasey considers making the following improvements to publicity material aimed at non-registered families:
  - that the material makes it clear that Sure Start is a universal service open to all families with children under 5 living in the area, including those who are in work.
  - that, where feasible, material contains a map showing the Sure Start catchment area.
  - that, where feasible, posters and leaflets provide more information about what specific services and activities actually entail.
6. If the main emphasis of Sure Start Wallasey's strategy for increasing service uptake and numbers registered with the programme is to make initial contact with families at antenatal stage, it is important that the programme offers a sufficient range of activities that are likely to appeal to mums to be or families with small babies.
7. While most local parents are able to attend weekday activities, it is recommended that Sure Start Wallasey offers an expanded programme of activities on Saturdays and Sundays in order to be able to meet the needs of families in full time work and working dads in particular.
8. In terms of marketing Sure Start to dads, it is recommended that the emphasis should be on building up the number of men using Sure Start services generally, so that dads coming along to activities for the first time are more likely to encounter a mixed sex environment. To this end it is recommended that the emphasis shifts away from running 'dads' clubs' towards holding more 'family days', where dads can come along with mums and the children and participate as a family in relatively informal and fun activities.

### **Recommendations relating directly to the Children's Centre**

While this evaluation is concerned with the uptake of the Sure Start Wallasey local programme, inevitably it has given rise to a number of recommendations that are directly relevant to the development and operation of Seacombe Children's Centre.

1. If the Children's Centre is to offer a truly universal service to all families with children under 5 living in the area, it is important that it has the level of resources necessary to provide the volume and range of services required to meet the demand from an expanded catchment area and a rapidly increasing number of registered families.
2. In order to ensure that its services are used by families living in all parts of its catchment area, it is recommended that the Children's Centre delivers some of its services from satellite venues, particularly venues located in Egremont and Poulton. If it is financially viable, it is also recommended that the Children's Centre continues to run services from the Sure Start Building in Guildford Street as this is the location that is most convenient and suitable for many families living in the area.
3. There is a need for specific marketing initiatives to be undertaken to publicise the transition from a Sure Start local programme to a Children's Centre and, in particular, to address the image problem that Seacombe Family Centre clearly has with some local parents.
4. It is recommended that Children's Centre staff contracts and job descriptions address the likely need for an increased amount of weekend working in order that the Centre can offer a service to families in full time work and working dads or, alternatively, that the Children's Centre engages sessional staff to provide weekend services.

5. That Seacombe Children's Centre develops a clear and consistent approach to allowing access to its services from families living outside its catchment area. In relation to group activities such as Stay and Play or Baby Massage the relative merits of the following options can be considered:
  - These activities could be open on a reciprocal basis to families living in other Children's Centre areas. This would enhance parental choice and would allow families who have built up a relationship with Sure Start Wallasey to continue using services they are familiar with.
  - Alternatively, access to such activities could be reserved exclusively for families living within the Seacombe Children's Centre catchment area. This could help ensure that local families were not being excluded from certain services because places had been taken by families from more affluent areas who were perhaps less in need of such services.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the staff team members who participated in this evaluation and the many parents who took part in the questionnaire survey and focus groups. Special thanks are due to Lynn Ince who prepared the service usage statistics contained in this report.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aims of the evaluation

This report evaluates the take-up of the Sure Start Wallasey programme by families with young children living in the programme area. It addresses such questions as:

1. To what extent is Sure Start Wallasey being utilised by local families both in terms of the numbers registered with the programme and the actual usage of services?
2. Is Sure Start Wallasey serving a large proportion of families living in the area or is most of the service usage accounted for by a relatively small group of families?
3. Is the programme equally serving families from all parts of its catchment area or are take-up levels from some geographical areas higher than from others?
4. What are the main reasons why some local families may not have used Sure Start as much as they could have done?
5. How effectively has Sure Start Wallasey been publicised to local families?
6. How successful has Sure Start Wallasey been at reaching local dads?
7. What individual services are in high demand and what services are being underutilised?
8. Is the programme reaching those families who most need its services?
9. What, if anything, needs to be done to improve service take-up?

Underlying everything is the fact that from April 2006, Sure Start Wallasey will be integrated into the Seacombe Children's Centre. This evaluation considers the likely implications of this development for the uptake and reach of services for families with children under 5.

It is also important to keep in mind that Sure Start Wallasey, as a sixth wave programme, is still in its infancy. For any new programme it will inevitably take time to build up service uptake to the desired levels.

## 1.2 Research methods

This evaluation has used the following methods:

- The analysis of detailed programme monitoring data on service usage.
- A questionnaire survey of 150 parents with children under the age of 5 living in the Sure Start Wallasey area. The survey was done by means of face to face interviews conducted at or outside a wide variety of locations in the area including the Sure Start Building, Seacombe Family Centre, local schools, local nurseries and play groups, Guinea-Gap baths, local GP surgeries, Kwik-Save and Central Park. Parents were also approached and interviewed on the street. The fieldwork method adopted meant that the survey was able to obtain the views of a significant number of parents who were not registered with Sure Start or who were registered but had not used Sure Start services in the past 12 months.
- Two focus groups of local parents. The first group consisted of 11 parents who were Sure Start service users. The second comprised 3 parents who were not registered with Sure Start Wallasey or were not using Sure Start services.

- Face to face interviews with 7 members of the Sure Start staff team.

## 2. Detailed evaluation findings

### 2.1 Families registered with Sure Start

Table 2.1 gives a breakdown of the families registered with Sure Start Wallasey expressed as a percentage of the estimated total number of families living in the Sure Start catchment area.

**Table 2.1 – Families registered with Sure Start Wallasey (August 2005)**

Area	Number of families registered with Sure Start Wallasey	Total families with children aged 0-4 living in area (estimate) <sup>(2)</sup>	Registered families as percentage of total families (estimate)
	No.	No.	%
Original Sure Start Wallasey Area	533	933	57
Added Area	132	296	45
<b>Extended Sure Start Area<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>665</b> <b>(780 as of 1/9/05)</b>	<b>1229</b>	<b>54</b>
Out of area	296	Not applicable	<i>Not applicable</i>
<b>Total registered families</b>	<b>961</b>	Not applicable	<i>Not applicable</i>

Notes:

(1) The extended Sure Start catchment area consists of the original Sure Start Wallasey areas of Egremont, Seacombe and Poulton together with the area added in preparation for the transformation to the Seacombe Children's Centre. The added area consists of the areas of Poulton situated either side of Oxton Rd.

(2) The estimate of total families with children aged 0-4 living in the area is derived from 2001 Census data on the number of children aged 0-4 living in the area, and data from the Sure Start Wallasey database on the average number of children aged 0-4 that registered families have (approximately 1.3). The total also includes an estimate of the number of women over 3 months pregnant who do not already have children aged 0-4.

The table shows that approximately 54 per cent of families living in the extended Sure Start area are now registered with Sure Start Wallasey. This would appear to be a satisfactory registration rate when one considers that the programme has in effect been operational for less than 18 months. The registration percentage for the added area is understandably lower than for the original Sure Start area, given that this area only became part of the programme's catchment area in January 2005.

296 (31 per cent) of the families registered with Sure Start Wallasey do not live in either the original or extended programme area. The reasons for this and the issues to which it gives rise are discussed later in this chapter.

### 2.2 Service usage

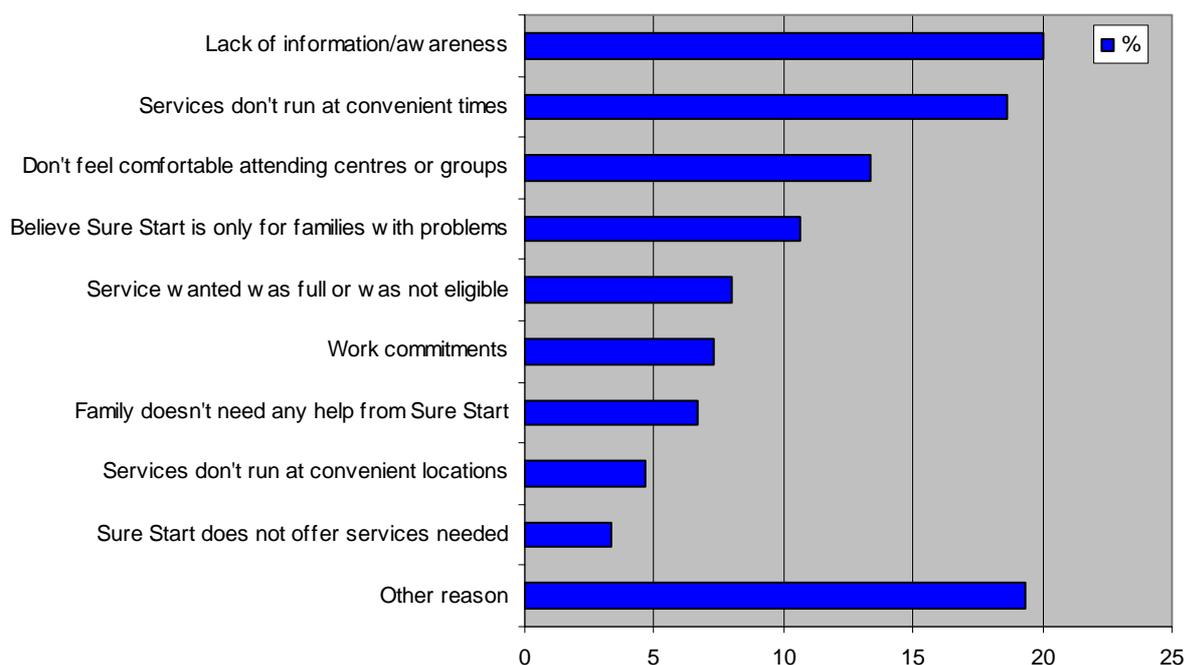
41 per cent of respondents to the parent survey had not used any Sure Start services in the past 12 months. Most of these were non-registered families. The survey found that 83 per cent of those already registered with the programme had used its services one or more times in the past 12 months, although it was reported by programme staff that some registered families were making much more use of Sure Start services than others.

Programme monitoring data can be used to show the number of times different families have used Sure Start in a 12 month period. Unfortunately, the information was not ready in time for inclusion in this report. The data will be submitted to the Board at a later date.

## 2.3 Reasons for not using Sure Start

As the previous section demonstrated, significant numbers of families in the Sure Start Wallasey area are not using Sure Start services. Respondents to the questionnaire survey were asked to give reasons why they may not have used Sure Start services as much as they could have done. The results are shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 – Reasons why families may not have used Sure Start as much as they could have done



Note: Respondents could give several reasons or none, so percentages do not sum to 100 per cent.

The chart shows that the biggest reason given for not using Sure Start Wallasey more was lack of information or awareness about Sure Start services, cited by 20 per cent of survey respondents. Additionally, 11 per cent of respondents said they believed that Sure Start was only for families with problems or families on benefits. The other most frequently cited reason for not using Sure Start more was that services did not run at convenient times of the day or week. This was given as a reason by 19 per cent of those surveyed. Issues concerning information and the times of activities will be explored later in this chapter.

13 per cent of respondents said that they did not always feel comfortable attending centres or groups. While this had put off some parents from using Sure Start, others valued the fact that when they did not feel ready to come to events they had received support in their own homes from the Home Visiting Service or Family Mental Health Project.

*When I don't feel up to it, the worker will come to me and encourage me to do things. (Parent)*

A number of parents also stressed the importance of being made to feel welcome when coming along to events for the first time. It was generally felt that Sure Start was very successful at achieving this.

*I think this is the only place that I've come to where it hasn't felt cliquy. At other nurseries there might be a couple of mums talking and I won't feel like saying anything. Whereas here, if you are sitting on your own a staff member will come up and say 'are you okay'. You never feel you are on your own. (Parent)*

While a number of parents surveyed said that they had been unable to get on to activities such as Messy Play, Stay and Play and Baby Massage on certain days because they were full, very few had reported it as a major problem. In most cases they had been able to access the service in subsequent weeks.

Only 3 per cent of survey respondents said that Sure Start Wallasey did not offer the kinds of services their family needed. Some parents mentioned the need for more services for families with babies under 1. Activities like Messy Play and Stay and Play were not felt to be suitable for very young children. One member of staff commented that it is quite difficult marketing Sure Start to new mums and pregnant women because she felt there were insufficient activities on offer for this group, particularly as the Baby Café was for breastfeeding mums only.

A few survey respondents specifically mentioned the need for more services for children approaching school age, while a couple of parents felt that the programme could cater more for children with disabilities or special needs. One of these parents argued that there was a need for more activities in the local area for children with disabilities as well as more information for parents of children with disabilities.

The 'other reasons' given by respondents for not using Sure Start services included apathy, being too busy, being unable to take older children along and the fact that Sure Start services sometimes clashed with other activities such as playgroups or nursery classes.

## **2.4 Awareness and information about Sure Start**

Lack of awareness or information about Sure Start was the most frequently cited reason given by survey respondents for not using Sure Start services as much as they might have done. However, closer scrutiny of the data revealed that only 7 per cent of those registered with the programme cited lack of information as a reason for not using services. All families living within the Sure Start area who have registered with the programme are sent regular newsletters and leaflets keeping them informed of events. A check made at the focus group for Sure Start service users found that 9 of the 11 parents present were receiving regular newsletters and leaflets. The two parents who were not receiving information both lived outside the Sure Start catchment area. It is the programme's policy not to market proactively to families living outside the Sure Start area.

However, lack of information was a significant issue for those families not registered with Sure Start Wallasey. 47 per cent of non-registered parents in the survey cited lack of information or awareness about Sure Start as a reason why they had not used Sure Start services.

The problem did not appear to be a lack of knowledge of the existence of Sure Start Wallasey. Only 3 per cent of survey respondents had not heard of Sure Start at all. Rather, many non-registered families were unsure of what Sure Start did and who it was for. Consultations with the parent focus groups highlighted the following issues in particular:

- the need to get more information about Sure Start and the services it provides to non-registered parents
- that publicity needs to be more specific about what activities such as Stay and Play and Messy Play actually entail
- the need to clarify that Sure Start is a universal service, open to all

- that publicity material makes it clear which addresses fall within the Sure Start catchment area

Sure Start Wallasey has engaged a marketing consultant who has helped the programme develop a marketing and communications plan. This plan contains a number of strategies for marketing Sure Start to local parents, providers/partner agencies and other key stakeholders such as councillors, MPs and government. The aim is to implement the plan in accordance with a clear timetable.

In terms of marketing to parents, the marketing strategy has two main objectives:

1. to market services and increase service uptake generally
2. to support the transition to the Seacombe Children's Centre

The aim is to reinforce the Sure Start message by using leaflets, posters and either an enhanced family newsletter containing an events page or a separate events booklet. It is also planned to invite the media to Sure Start Wallasey for a briefing session about the programme and then to produce subsequent press releases.

A key theme of the marketing strategy is the use of case studies to enable parents to identify with other people who have already used the service. The strategy also appears to place a heavy emphasis on the use of written or visual information. One member of staff queried the impact of written information alone given that Sure Start Wallasey has to compete with high budget commercial advertising for parents' attention.

With this in mind the programme also uses other methods to promote Sure Start. It has organised a number of fun events, such as the Christmas Party, the Teddy Bears Picnic in Central Park and the Dads' Fun Day to attract new parents. While such events often require the input of a large number of staff members, because they are 'one-offs' they are not seen as being too draining on resources. The events are often extremely well attended, although mainly by families already using the programme. Nevertheless a number of new families have been registered directly as a result of such events.

The programme also uses its links with partner agencies to promote Sure Start to their clients. For example, following Evaluation Report Number 3 on the Home Visiting Service, the programme began a pilot linking two outreach workers with an antenatal clinic run by midwives at a local GP surgery. One of the key aims of this initiative is to help Sure Start to increase registrations of women at the antenatal stage. If the pilot is successful it will be rolled out to other antenatal clinics in the area. So far the pilot has enabled the programme to obtain an average of 4 or 5 new registrations per week from pregnant women attending the clinic.

The programme is also looking to develop closer links with local schools and nursery classes to facilitate their ability to promote Sure Start to their parents. Certainly the questionnaire survey for this evaluation revealed that there are many parents whose children are attending nursery classes in the area who are not registered with Sure Start. The original idea was for individual outreach workers each to be assigned a specific school for this purpose. However, there were doubts as to whether the outreach workers had sufficient capacity to do this given the other demands on their time. Instead, the programme has engaged someone on a temporary contract to act as an 'Information Link' to help implement the marketing strategy and develop links with local schools.

Potentially Sure Start Wallasey could obtain names and addresses of all families with children aged 0 - 4 living in the area from Birkenhead and Wallasey Primary Care Trust. The programme has considered writing to these families asking them to register with Sure Start using the principle

of negative consent. However, guidance issued by the Sure Start Unit in 2002, on the disclosure of personal information by NHS bodies to Sure Start programmes, stated that:

*If the information is to be disclosed to non-health professionals for delivering non-health care services, then explicit consent to do this is needed before information can be disclosed to the Sure Start programme. To obtain this the NHS body, or a NHS member of the Sure Start programme on their behalf, must contact all parents of young children in the Sure Start area to ask them whether they agree to their personal information being shared with the Sure Start programme, clearly explaining the reasons for this. Parents must actively respond for consent to have been granted.*

The implications of the guidance in terms of the potential for Sure Start's Wallasey using PCT contact information to register families would appear to be that:

- the PCT can pass on families' contact information to health professionals working within Sure Start Wallasey (provided that the PCT's own general literature about the use of personal information states that it will be sharing some personal information with its partners in order for them to deliver services to improve their health)
- Sure Start Wallasey can write to these families directly asking them to register, but it must be done by the Health Co-ordinator (or another health professional attached to Sure Start Wallasey)
- the principle of negative consent should not be used. Families must actively consent to register with the programme.

The constraints of the Data Protection Act, particularly the need to obtain positive consent from parents, would appear to limit the value of writing to families as a way of increasing the numbers registered with the programme. However, if Sure Start Wallasey decides to go ahead with this course of action it is recommended that it seeks further clarification from the Information Commissioner's Office before proceeding.

## **2.5 Convenient days and times**

Currently the vast majority of Sure Start activities run on weekdays. A lot of activities run from 9.30 a.m. – 11.30 a.m. and either 12.30 p.m. – 2.30 p.m. or 1.00 p.m. – 3.00 p.m. to fit in with school pick-up times.

19 per cent of respondents to the parents' survey said that Sure Start activities did not always take place at convenient times of the day or week for them. This group of parents were asked what would constitute a convenient day or time. 43 per cent said weekday afternoons and a further 25 per cent said weekday mornings. Many who gave these answers gave quite specific days or times. For example, a number of participants in the parent focus group (all of whom did not have children at school) felt that 9.30 a.m. was too early a start. A number of those who did have children at school or pre-school preferred a 1.00 p.m. afternoon start to a 12.30 p.m. start as this gave them more time to pick up their children, to give the children lunch and for the children to have a sleep.

36 per cent of those respondents who said that Sure Start activities ran at inconvenient times, nominated weekends as a convenient time for them to attend activities. This was particularly the case with families where both parents or the only parent was working full time. However, it would appear that there are relatively few families with children under 5 living in the Sure Start Wallasey area to which this applies. In most cases there is likely to be at least one parent at home for all or part of the week. However, weekend activities would appear to be necessary to involve dads, many of whom do work during the week. A number of parents interviewed at the focus group argued that there was a need to hold some activities on Sundays. Many dads worked on

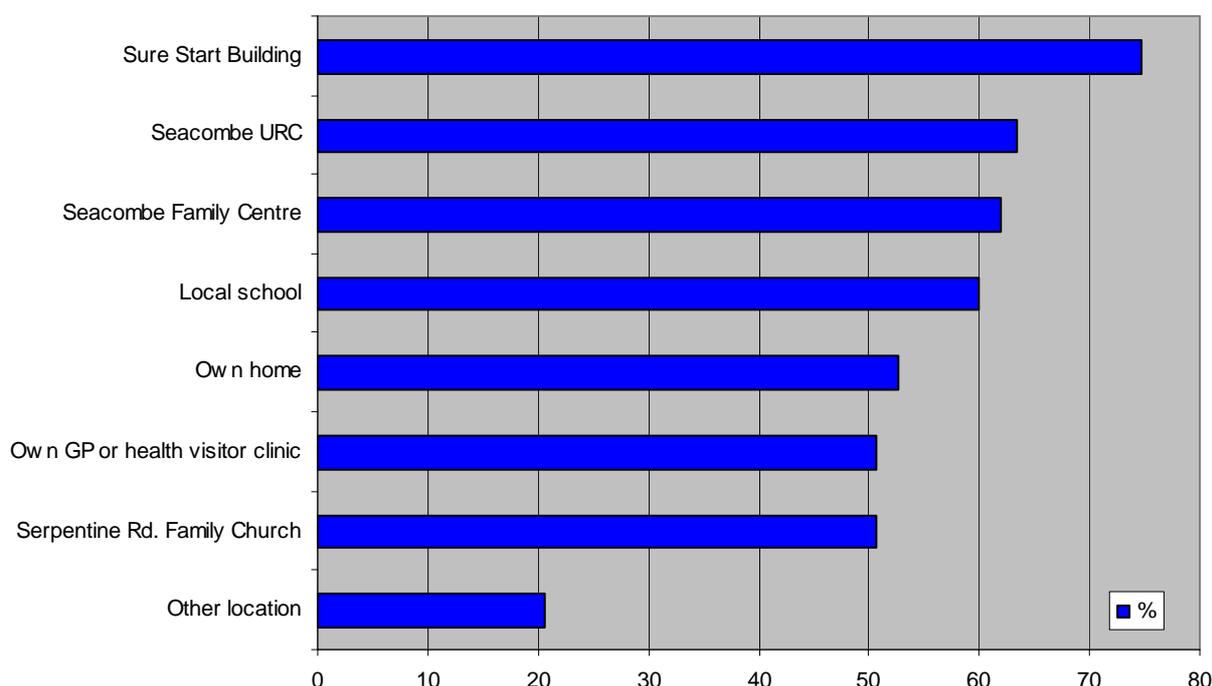
Saturdays, or Saturday was shopping day. Sunday was the day on which some families were most likely to be free to attend Sure Start activities together.

There did not appear to be a significant demand for Sure Start Wallasey to hold activities on weekday evenings.

## 2.6 Convenient and suitable venues

The parent survey attempted to establish whether the venues either currently used by Sure Start Wallasey or where Sure Start activities could potentially be held, were accessible for families living within the area. The results are summarised in Figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3 – Venues regarded by parents as convenient and suitable**

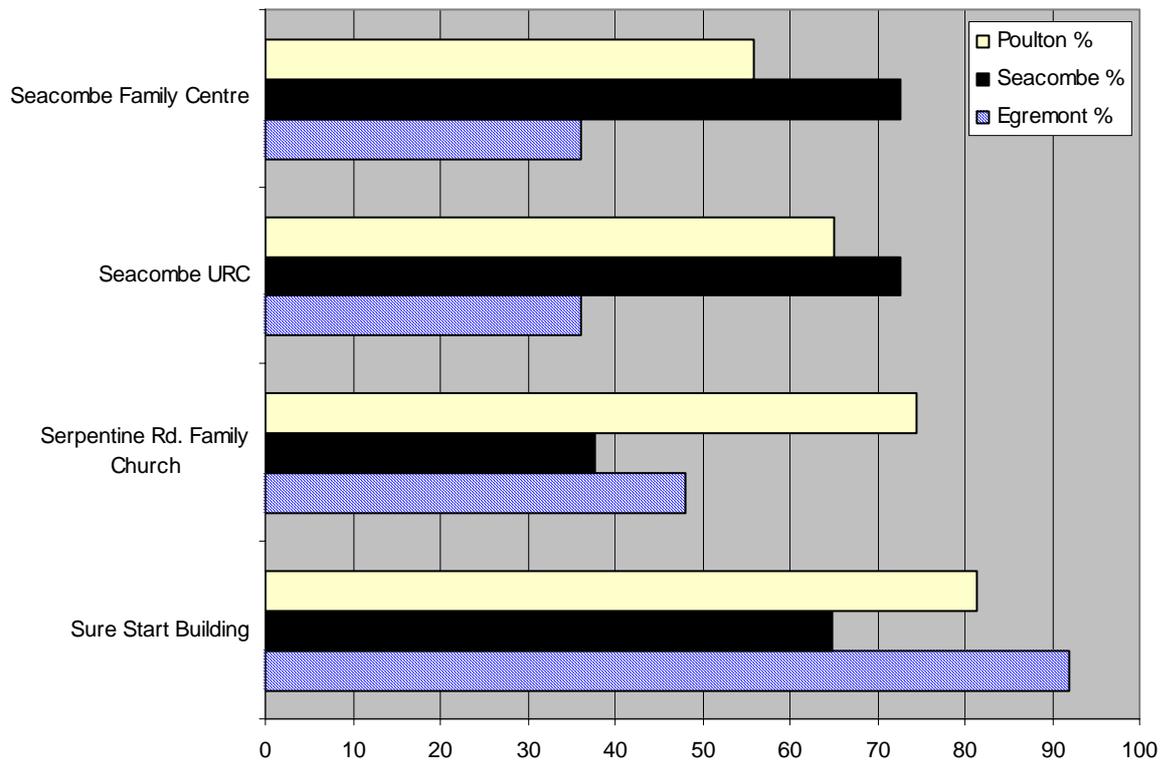


*Note: The fact that a venue is regarded as convenient and suitable by a respondent does not necessarily mean that the respondent has used that venue.*

The chart reveals that all the venues specifically listed in the survey questionnaire were regarded as convenient and suitable to attend by at least half of the parents surveyed. The most accessible venue was the Sure Start Building in Guildford Street which was regarded as convenient and suitable by 75 per cent of respondents. The next most ‘popular’ venue was Seacombe United Reform Church in Brougham Road, probably owing to its central location within the Sure Start area. Many families were also willing to access services at their local school, at their own GP surgery or health visitor clinic or in their own homes. The most frequently mentioned ‘other locations’ were Central Park and the Salvation Army Building in Poulton Road.

What the above chart does not show is whether or not the perceived accessibility of a venue varies depending on the location of a respondent’s home address. Figure 2.4 provides this information in respect of four specific venues. The chart reveals quite significant differences between parents living in different parts of the Sure Start Wallasey area regarding which venues are perceived as convenient and suitable places to attend.

**Figure 2.4 – Venues regarded as convenient and suitable by parents living in different parts of the Sure Start area**



**Notes:**

The fact that a venue is regarded as convenient and suitable by a respondent does not necessarily mean that the respondent has used that venue.

Poulton refers to the original Sure Start Wallasey area of Poulton plus the added Children's Centre area.

The findings of Figures 2.3 and 2.4 are particularly significant for Seacombe Children's Centre which is being developed on the site of Seacombe Family Centre. Over one third of families within the Sure Start area and almost two thirds of those living in Egremont do not currently regard this as a convenient and suitable location to attend. While the main reason for this is that the building is regarded as being too far away by many families, it is also apparent that for some parents the Centre has an image problem given its history as a social services building. For example, one parent who had previously received social services' support said:

*Sometimes I felt that I couldn't go there because of what had happened. I felt they were all watching me. The fact that Sure Start is merging with the Seacombe Family Centre, I don't like the prospect of going back down there. (Parent)*

A number of parents interviewed in the focus groups talked of having had previous bad experiences in the building. In some cases they had been unhappy with the way they were treated by particular members of staff or by the behaviour of other service users. In other cases there were complaints over the standard of care and facilities on offer.

*I never set foot in the place again. I think when you've had a bad experience there, they can give it as big a facelift as they want, I won't go back there. (Parent)*

## 2.7 Reaching families living in different areas

### 2.7.1 Out of area families

As was mentioned at the start of this chapter, there are a significant number of families who are registered with the programme and who use Sure Start services that do not live within either the original or extended Sure Start Wallasey area. Many of these families come from the more affluent area to the north of Egremont, although a few are said to come from much further away.

Sure Start Wallasey does not directly advertise its services to families living outside its boundaries. However, there are a number of reasons why some of these families are, nevertheless, using Sure Start activities:

- Parents within the Sure Start area sometimes bring friends from outside the area along to activities.
- Summer activities and open events, such as those held in Central Park, often attract families from outside the area.
- Some activities are held in venues, such as Seacombe Library, with a wider catchment area than Sure Start Wallasey.
- There has sometimes been pressure from other professionals for Sure Start Wallasey to accept families from outside its catchment area.
- There is currently often a lack of provision for families with young children in the areas surrounding Sure Start Wallasey.

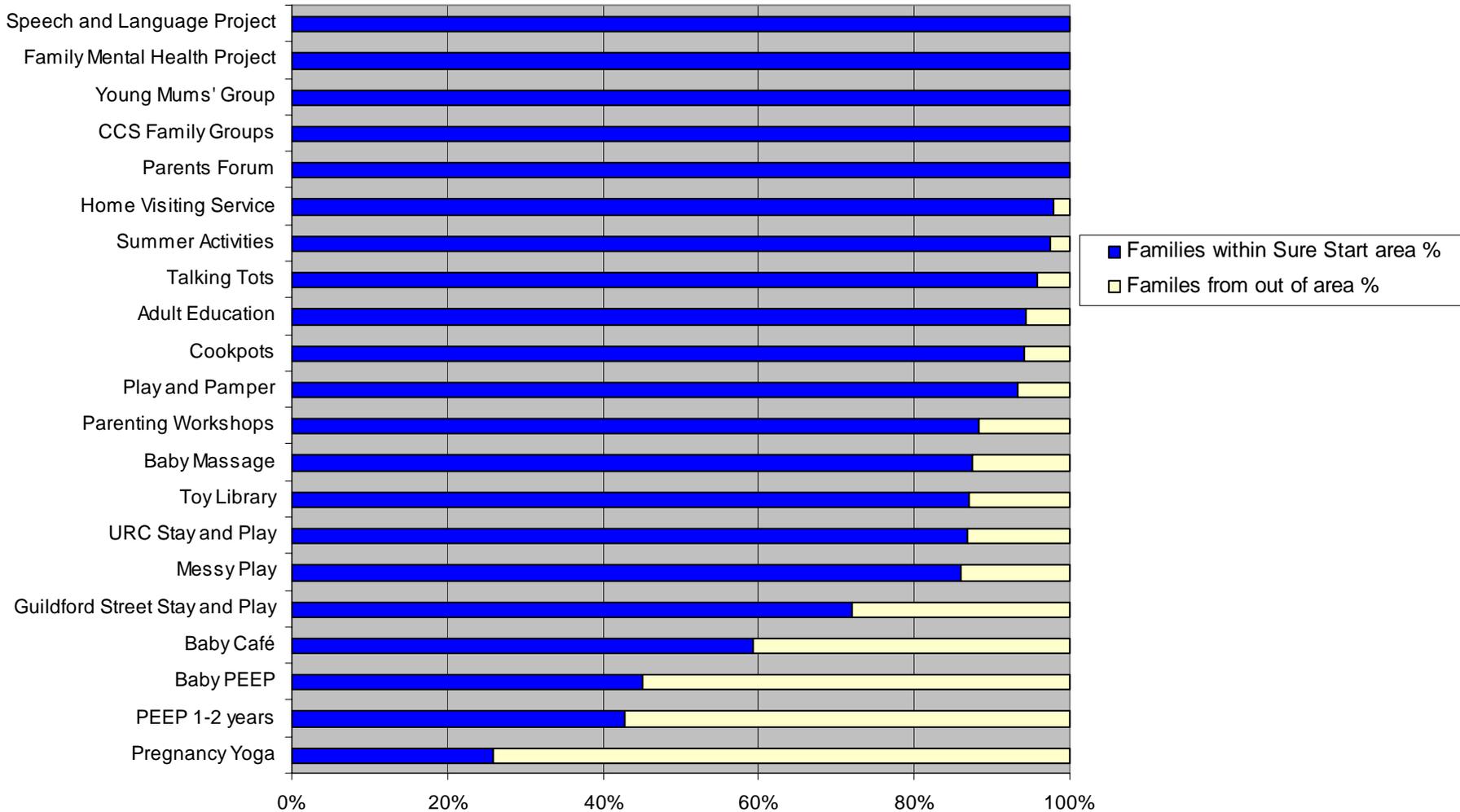
Sure Start Wallasey's policy is to reserve certain activities, such as Home Visiting, Family Mental Health Support, Speech and Language Therapy, and Home Safety Checks exclusively for families within the Sure Start area. For other group based activities the programme will aim to achieve a 70% - 30% or 80% - 20% mix in favour of families living within the area.

Figure 2.5, on the next page, shows the relative incidence of in-area and out of area families using individual services. The chart shows that for four services (Pregnancy Yoga, PEEP for 1-2 year olds, Baby PEEP and the Baby Café) it has been hard to attract sufficient families from within the area and the percentage of families from outside the area has in effect been significantly higher than the target percentage. A particular issue arose with PEEP groups running from Serpentine Road Family Church which is right on the boundary of the Sure Start catchment area. As these groups were full with families living outside the area it was decided that all families using the Baby PEEP could no longer move up to the PEEP for 1 – 2 year olds if they lived out of the area. This decision caused a great deal of disappointment among the families affected. Since May 2005, the PEEP sessions have been moved to the Sure Start Building in an effort to attract more families from within the area.

One reason that the programme has been able to provide services to outside families is that, to date, many of its activities have not been running to capacity. However, with the programme's catchment area having been extended and the number of families registered with the programme rising, this is less likely to be the case as time progresses.

At present, the programme does not wish systematically to deny external families access to its activities but prefers to monitor the situation on a service by service basis. It is also anticipated that the new Children's Centres planned for New Brighton and Liscard will provide an alternative source of services for many of these 'out of area' service users.

Figure 2.5 – Percentage of families using individual Sure Start services living within and outside the Sure Start area (April 2004 – March 2005)



## 2.7.2 Reaching families from different parts of the catchment area

To what extent is Sure Start Wallasey serving families from all parts of its catchment area? Table 2.6 shows where users of individual services are coming from.

**Table 2.6 – Breakdown of users of services by location of home address (April 2004 – March 2005)**

Service	Egremont	Seacombe	Poulton	Outside Area	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Adult Education	22	50	22	6	100
Baby Café	15	11	33	41	100
Baby Massage	25	50	13	13	100
Baby PEEP	6	13	26	55	100
CCS Family Groups	24	24	53	0	100
Cookpots	24	53	18	6	100
Family Mental Health Project	29	43	29	0	100
Guildford Street Stay and Play	24	30	18	28	100
Home Visiting Service	23	47	28	2	100
Messy Play	26	31	29	14	100
Parenting Workshops	24	29	35	12	100
Parents' Forum	18	73	9	0	100
PEEP 1-2 years	19	10	14	57	100
Play and Pamper	11	33	49	7	100
Pregnancy Yoga	3	6	16	74	100
Speech and Language Project	22	56	22	0	100
Summer Activities	18	59	21	3	100
Talking Tots	23	57	15	4	100
Toy Library	26	29	32	13	100
URC Stay and Play	15	51	21	13	100
Young Mums' Group	25	25	50	0	100
<b>Approximate geographical breakdown of families with children aged 0-4 in Sure Start Area (see note)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>100</b>

Notes: Poulton refers to the original Sure Start Wallasey area of Poulton plus the added Children's Centre area.

*The geographical breakdown of families living in the area is an estimate based on the approximate geographical breakdown of children aged 0-4 living within the area as derived from the Census 2001.*

The table shows that, with the partial exception of the services that have a high proportion of users from out of area, Sure Start services are being taken up by significant numbers of families from each of the three main segments of the catchment area. The table shows that families from Poulton are under-represented at many activities. However, this is likely to be mainly due to the fact that the Poulton area contains the area that was added to Sure Start Wallasey in January 2005 in preparation for the programme's integration into the Children's Centre.

This is borne out by Table 2.7 on the next page which shows the uptake of services from families living in the added area. Approximately 24 per cent of all families living in the expanded Sure Start catchment area live in the added area. This percentage can then be compared to the actual percentage of families using each service who come from the added area. This comparison indicates that, at least up until the end of the financial year, families from the added area were under-represented amongst the users of most services. This is perhaps to be expected given that it will inevitably take time to publicise Sure Start to families from the new parts of the catchment area.

The location of the venues chosen for different activities would appear to have a bearing on which families attend. For instance, Table 2.6 indicates that families from Seacombe are under-represented at some of the activities held at the Sure Start Building, such as the Messy Play and Guildford Street Stay and Play, and over-represented at the URC Stay and Play and Talking Tots which are both held at venues in Seacombe.

**Table 2.7 – Uptake of individual services from families from the added Sure Start area  
(April 2004 – March 2005)**

Service	Families from added area using service	
	No.	% of total users of service
Adult Education	1	6
Baby Café	8	30
Baby Massage	2	13
Baby PEEP	7	23
CCS Family Groups	3	17
Cookpots	1	6
Family Mental Health Project	0	0
Guildford Street Stay and Play	5	10
Home Visiting Service	31	10
Messy Play	11	15
Parenting Workshops	3	18
Parents' Forum	1	9
PEEP 1-2 years	3	14
Play and Pamper	8	18
Pregnancy Yoga	3	10
Speech and Language Project	1	11
Summer Activities	6	15
Talking Tots	6	13
Toy Library	7	23
URC Stay and Play	10	15
Young Mums' Group	3	38
<b>Approximate percentage of families with children aged 0-4 who live in the added area (see note)</b>	–	<b>24</b>

*Note: The estimate of the percentage of families living in the added area is based on the approximate geographical breakdown of children aged 0-4 living within the Sure Start area as derived from the Census 2001.*

## 2.8 Reaching dads

### 2.8.1 Challenges in engaging dads in the programme

Programme monitoring data shows only 41 dads as having used Sure Start Wallasey services in the past 12 months. This figure underestimates the true total as it only records dads who are registered with the programme. In some two parent families only the mum's details are held by Sure Start Wallasey, and in these cases participation by the dad will not show up in the service usage statistics. Nevertheless, it is clear that, to date, participation by dads in Sure Start Wallasey activities has not been high.

In common with other Sure Start programmes, Sure Start Wallasey has to overcome a number of challenges if the programme is to engage with a significant number of dads. Discussions with parents and Sure Start Wallasey staff members identified several of the key challenges.

#### ***Traditional gender roles***

For many households within the Sure Start area, childcare and activities that are linked to childcare are seen as primarily being the mum's responsibility.

*A lot of dads are still in the stereotype of they go to work and they provide. They still tend to avoid anything that they think is mothers' territory. (Parent)*

#### ***Family breakdown***

Staff members suspected that there may be a significant number of families where mums and dads don't live together. In some cases the involvement of dads in their children's upbringing may be further complicated by a history of domestic violence.

#### ***Working hours***

Many dads work during the week. This makes it difficult to attend Sure Start activities, almost all of which take place during weekday daytimes. Sure Start also runs a few activities on Saturdays, but it was reported that a number of local dads work at weekends too. At the same time, Sure Start staff reported that unemployed dads could be particularly hard to engage.

#### ***Dads are less attracted to group activities***

It was argued that in general, men network less readily than women and that, as a consequence, the idea of attending group activities is less appealing. It was also argued that dads were less likely to wish to take part in formal or structured sessions, particularly if they had been working all week.

*I think a man likes to look after his child in his own environment doing his own thing, not sitting in a room with other people. (Mum)*

If Sure Start is to appeal more to dads, parents felt that it should offer activities that are informal and relaxed and provide opportunities for the dads to be 'hands-on' with their children. Sports and physical activities were thought to be particularly attractive to dads, although it was recognised that the age group of the children served by Sure Start did limit the scope for this.

*My husband probably wouldn't mind coming into a building with stuff to do and just wander round with the kids. (Mum)*

### **Dads are less likely to seek help**

It was argued that, in general, men were less likely to seek help than women and consequently were less likely to engage with an agency such as Sure Start. It was also reported that dads were generally more reluctant to talk openly to the Sure Start staff than mums were.

*The average dad will say that a dads' group is a good idea, but in practice they don't come for help...If they do open up once, the next time you see them they are often reluctant to talk again. (Sure Start worker)*

### **Dads feel uncomfortable in a predominately female environment**

In practice the overwhelming majority of parents using Sure Start services are women, as are almost all of the Sure Start staff team. A number of mums interviewed in the focus groups stated that dads often felt uncomfortable about coming along to activities where they may well be the only man. Several said that dads would be unlikely to attend unless their partner came along too.

*It is about building his confidence to come here. (Mum)*

## **2.8.2 Initiatives to attract dads**

Sure Start Wallasey appointed a Dads' Worker in October 2004. The post is shared with Sure Start Ferries. The following are among the key elements of the worker's role:

- to promote Sure Start to men and encourage men to come into Sure Start
- to run specific events for men at times that are accessible to men
- to develop publicity that is targeted on dads
- to carry out home visiting to dads

The worker has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at involving more dads in the programme, including the following:

- A Dads' Fun Day was organised at the Sure Start Building. Its aim was to promote Sure Start to dads and to enable dads to engage in fun activities with their children. Mums were allowed to accompany their partners.
- A Dads' Club has been set up to run from the Sure Start Building on a Saturday morning. The idea is to encourage dads to play with their children. Originally the sessions were for dads and their children, but on the basis of the lessons learned from the Dads' Fun Day, mums are now allowed to accompany their partners.
- A Stay and Play for dads runs from the Sure Start Building on Thursday mornings. Originally the sessions were for dads and their children, but mums are now allowed to accompany their partners.
- Other outreach activities have included leafleting dads in the street, and conducting a questionnaire survey of dads who had previously been in touch with the programme to ask them what they wanted from Sure Start.
- A 'Fathers Day' trip was organised to Gulliver's World. The whole family was allowed to come but dads went for free.

Despite these initiatives, attracting dads to the programme has proved difficult. In total, only 31 men have come along to the dads events provided. Attracting dads to men only activities has proved particularly difficult as has getting dads to attend groups on a regular basis.

Activities where mums have been allowed to accompany dads have tended to be more successful. For example, 17 dads attended the Dads' Fun Day. It was felt that such one-off events may be more appealing to dads as they take away the idea of a regular commitment. A number of parents interviewed in the focus groups suggested it might be better to brand such events as 'family days' rather than 'dads' days'.

*I think to get dads here it has got to be a family thing. Dads are more willing to go to something that is for all of you. (Mum)*

## **2.9 Uptake of individual services**

Table 2.8 on the next page provides data on the total number of different families using each Sure Start service in the year April 2004 – March 2005. The table reveals that by far the most used service was the Home Visiting Service which was accessed by 320 families over the year. As Evaluation Report Number 3 indicated, around half of these families received only a single visit. The other most used services were the Stay and Plays and Messy Play.

**Table 2.8 – Number of families using individual services (April 2004 – March 2005)**

Service	Commencement date	No. of families using service Apr 04 – Mar 05
Home Visiting Service	May 2004	320
Messy Play	October 2004	72
URC Stay and Play	2003	68
Guildford St Stay and Play	November 2004	50
Talking Tots	June 2004	47
Play and Pamper	September 2004	45
Summer Activities	August 2004	39
Baby PEEP	2003	31
Pregnancy Yoga	September 2004	31
Toy Library	January 2005	31
Baby Café	November 2004	27
PEEP 1-2 years	2003	21
Adult Education	November 2004	18
CCS Family Groups	April 2004	18
Cookpots	October 2004	17
Parenting Workshops	January 2005	17
Baby Massage	November 2004	16
Parents' Forum	February 2004	11
Young Mums' Group	January 2005	8
Family Mental Health Project	October 2004	Not known
Speech and Language Project	June 2004	Not known

Notes:

Totals are not shown for Guildford Street Crèche as this was used to support the children of families attending other activities.

The totals include families from outside the Sure Start catchment area (see Figure 2.5)

Straightforward figures on service uptake do not necessarily reflect the relative demand for services. As Table 2.8 shows, some services commenced half or three quarters way through the year. Also, different services have different capacities, depending on factors such as the venue, crèche provision and staffing levels. In addition, relatively informal activities like Stay and Plays and Messy Play are likely to be able to cater for more families per session than more structured activities such as PEEP.

Table 2.9 provides more detail information on the uptake of group activities provided by Sure Start by looking at service utilisation in relation to service capacity. The table gives an indication of the relative demand for different services and also shows which services are nearly full and which have spare places.

**Table 2.9 – Quarterly service utilisation rates for group activities  
(April – June 2004 to January – March 2005)**

Service	Approximate capacity per session (family places)	Apr 04 - June 04	July 04 - Sep 04	Oct 04 - Dec 04	Jan 05 - Mar 05
	No.	%	%	%	%
Adult Education	10	NA	NA	67	93
Baby Café	8	NA	NA	79	100+
Baby Massage	8	NA	NA	38	34
Baby PEEP	10	86	52	38	24
CCS Family Groups	10	35	49	42	57
Cookpots	10	NA	NA	53	65
Guildford Street Stay and Play	17	NA	NA	44	84
Messy Play	17	NA	NA	57	100+
Parenting Workshops	14	NA	NA	NA	48
PEEP 1-2 years	10	64	52	51	35
Play and Pamper	10	NA	60	83	62
Pregnancy Yoga	8	NA	63	55	100+
Talking Tots	10	78	58	65	83
Toy Library	17	NA	NA	NA	61
URC Stay and Play	20	31	51	64	61
Young Mums' Group	10	NA	NA	NA	48

Notes:

Service capacity is shown as the maximum number of families that can be supported in any given session. It can be determined by the factors such as crèche capacity, staffing numbers and room size. The capacities shown are approximate and may vary from week to week.

NA (Not applicable) is shown for those quarters in which a service had not commenced.

The table shows that by the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2005, three services – Messy Play, the Baby Café, and Pregnancy Yoga – were running at or over capacity. Adult Education, Guildford Street Stay and Play and Talking Tots were running at over 80 per cent of capacity. Messy Play had become so popular that families were being turned away. To remedy this, families now have to book in

advance and what was originally a two hour session has been split into two one hour sessions to enable 34 families instead of 17 to access the session.

The service utilisation figures disguise the fact that many of the families using the Baby Café and the majority of those using Pregnancy Yoga come from outside the area.

While by the end of March most services still had spare capacity, it is important to remember that many of these had been running for 6 months or less. It is reasonable to expect that uptake of these services will rise as they become more widely known to parents and the number of registrations with the programme increases. For example, demand for Baby Massage has risen since April and there is now a waiting list to join the sessions. Parenting Courses and Adult Education Courses are now reportedly over-subscribed, although there is generally a (to be expected) fall-off in attendance over the period for which the courses run.

The general consensus among staff members is that the activities that are in the highest demand from families living within the Sure Start Area tend to be the more informal play and learning activities such as Messy Play, Stay and Play and Talking Tots. By contrast, activities where the demand is lower or tends to come from families out of the area include:

- PEEP – a structured activity that requires a lot of parent participation in a group setting
- Baby Café – requires mothers to be breastfeeding
- Pregnancy Yoga – does not appear to appeal to many working class mums
- Young Mum's Group – it is hard to interest 17-21 year olds to come to group activities. (Membership of this group has increased over the last five months. For three weeks of a month it is a post-natal group and for one week an ante-natal group.)
- Dads' Groups and activities – it is often difficult to engage men in Sure Start programmes for a variety of reasons (see previous section)

## **2.10 Is Sure Start Wallasey reaching the families most in need of support?**

Are Sure Start Wallasey's services being accessed by those families that most need them? Having been in operation for less than 18 months it has already registered 54 per cent of the families in its extended catchment area. 83 per cent of registered families have used Sure Start services one or more times in the last year. The indications are that, resources permitting, both the number of registered families and active service users are likely to expand rapidly.

At the same time, it is clear that some families are making a lot more use of Sure Start services than others. For example, the focus groups for this evaluation included some parents who accessed a different Sure Start activity almost every day of the week. As one member of staff stated, the fact that parents are using the services could be taken as an indication that they need them. Nevertheless, many staff members believed that the more regular users of Sure Start services were often those less in need of support. This was particularly the case with more structured group based activities such as PEEP, Baby Massage and Pregnancy Yoga which were characterised as appealing more to middle class families, a number of whom lived outside the catchment area. The Sure Start team was looking at ways of making such activities more appealing to a broader range of families. For example, the PEEP has been moved to a different venue and one member of staff has proposed adapting the PEEP programme to make the sessions less structured. Also, as the number of families registered with Sure Start rises there will be a bigger pool of potential service users to offer any activity to. Consequently, there will be a

greater likelihood of achieving the numbers of interested families required to make running an activity viable.

It could be argued that Sure Start Wallasey, by aiming to offer a universal service to the local population of families with children under 5 as a whole, will in the course of providing this universal service come into contact with a number of families with high levels of need who may well not be known to other services. Sure Start staff members believed that this was the case with the more informal early learning and childcare activities, notably the URC Stay and Play. The Home Visiting and Family Mental Health services were also working with isolated families with high levels of need, many of whom were not ready to engage in groups.

As with all universal services, there inevitably will be some people who will make more use of Sure Start than others. These will not always be the families with the greatest need for Sure Start services. Moreover, there are likely to be a number of families who could benefit greatly from the services Sure Start provides, who will persistently decline to engage with Sure Start irrespective of whatever attempts are made to encourage them to do so. However, the indicators from the parent survey are that for most families who are not currently registered with Sure Start Wallasey, the issue is more one of a lack of awareness of the services Sure Start has to offer them rather than unwillingness on their part to get involved with the programme.