Sure Start Folkestone
Local Evaluation 2002
Summary

Understanding Barriers to
Service Inclusion faced
by Local Parents

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Introduction

Central to the success of any Sure Start programme is the participation of parents within the locality that it serves. Not only in using Sure Start services, but in their evaluation and consequent construction of new services. This continual involvement ensures that the needs of parents are the driving force behind services. However, these needs are not all similar. Indeed, our designated area consists of very diverse families in terms of composition and need. To create more effective services for our parents it is essential that we understand this. Indeed, families may access Early Years Services for different reasons, i.e. to construct more parent sensitive services it is essential to understand what these different reasons are and how we can build on them.

The main aim of this evaluation is to add qualitative information to that already gained by quantitative information already gathered. Through previous evaluations and area specific knowledge it is evident that some parents are more tied in and more apt at using services. Consequently, they reap the benefits of services whilst those in need may not be having their requirements met; thus increasing the gap between those that do and do not use services. Sure Start Folkestone through this evaluation looks to explore the reasons behind this so that findings can inform service development to ensure they are more sensitive to those not accessing services and have an impact upon their inclusion.

Understanding Diversity

To get an understanding of the diversity within the SS Folkestone area and use of support services it is key to come to grips with these barriers so that they can be facilitated.

Use of Services – It is firstly important to identify which groups are using services and whether there are any common characteristics. This will allow us to differentiate between different groups and allow us a generic platform to understand common themes behind their usage.

Awareness of Services - If services exist but families are unaware of them they will have very little impact. Some families may become informed through less reliable sources or have difficulty piecing together information. Hence, it is important to investigate the processes concerning awareness to see how information can be strengthened amongst those in greater need.

Asking for Help - Families may be aware of services but still not use them due to their own pre conceptions about accepting help. Some families may not see themselves as warranting support whilst others may find receiving this support stigmatising and so remain self-supporting with little outside help. Hence, for services to have more impact it is important to understand the processes at work that prevent families from accepting external support.

Organisation – Another barrier to families asking for and accepting help is organisation. The ability to construct formal services around the family requires some mixing and matching of services and organisational ability (i.e. work around childcare
and health appointments etc). Organisational problems can lead to missed appointment affecting both parent and child well being and outcomes of services.

**Budgeting** - This is a key aspect of organisation, and one that impacts greatly upon family life. Budgeting clearly has financial implications; however, it also affects other aspects of family life. Whilst Budgeting correctly may leave some families feeling in control and able to navigate services; it may leave others lacking confidence and feeling constantly troubled which impacts upon other support systems.

**Training and Employment** – Like with Budgeting, this is another area that has benefits outside of the financial. Access to these services provides many families with an extra social outlet. However, many families may be deterred from using them, which may be detrimental. By looking at these barriers (as with those previously mentioned) it may be possible to see how to target services so they are more sensitive to parents.

**Helplessness** - Finally, it is also essential to look at how parents feel - in terms of being helpless, lonely and isolated from support networks. These feelings are heavily intertwined with daily routine and thus affect how parents interact with those around them; including their ability to become engaged with the community. It is therefore important to understand emotional barriers that parents may have so that this engagement can be facilitated.

**Support Networks** – Feelings of isolation may be closely related to access to alternative support networks (family, friends, partner etc). These networks provide important coping strategies in terms of practical and emotional help for parents. Hence, by understanding these different networks, and the amounts and types of support that parents get from them will help understand the role that Sure Start has to play.

**Kent Specific Information.**

Shepway ranks as the 102nd most deprived local authority in the UK (out of 546). Within the South East, this is only surpassed by Thanet which is ranked 60th. This indicator towards multiple deprivation takes into account several scores regarding components of deprivation (Housing, Health, Income, Employment and Education). These individual scores are then ranked individually and then combined into an overall rank.
indices of multiple deprivation: rank of average of ward ranks 2000

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rank of Average Ward</th>
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<td>Thanet</td>
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These factors are all part of a causal web, which act as barriers to themselves in accessing services and becoming engaged within the community. It is apparent that these diverse indicators and implications do not just vary Kent wide. Whilst Shepway figures highly on these indicators it is true that localities within Shepway also face different challenges to different degrees.

These diverse needs are spread across a large geographical boundary and are not centralised to specific defined areas. Indeed, when some issues affect specific hot spots there is often a ‘ripple’ effect of these issues onto surrounding areas. Moreover, they have a ripple effect concerning the family, affecting all members from children to extended members – even associated support networks such as friends.

Shepway Specific Information

However, there also lies much diversity outside our boundaries within Folkestone Harvey, as well as Hawkinge and St Mary in the Marsh. This goes to show the issue lying just outside our boundary that we cannot meet. Whilst issues of income and employment are partly separate there is clearly some degree of linkage between housing, health and other facets of well being. The notion of these being interlinked is clearly demonstrated in the following graph of multiple deprivation. It illustrates the positioning of Shepway wards in relation to the other 8,414 in the UK. The lower the score the more deprived the area in that particular facet of need.

Considering there are 8,414 wards most of those selected barely struggled to make it out of the lower quartile (bottom 25%) for income, employment, health, housing and general level of deprivation. Whilst there are some areas such as Lympne and Folkestone Morehall that score relatively highly across income employment, health and housing there are other areas that did not. Some of these low ranking areas were outside and bordering the Sure Start area. E.g. Folkestone Harvey ranked poorly with regard to employment whilst Hawkinge ranked poorly concerning general multiple deprivation and income deprivation.

1 Dataset from http:www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/Reports/eng

2 Dataset from http:www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/Reports/eng
Finally, although being further away from the Sure Start parameter St Mary in the Marsh’s ranked extremely poorly regarding employment, health and general level of multiple deprivation. However, concerning 3 of the Sure Start Folkestone wards\(^3\) deprivation across a range of indicators was high. This is not to say that it was uniform with some areas seeming to have increased health. Indeed, within the blanket of Sure Start Folkestone there is a great deal of diversity in terms of need. Dealing with diverse need is problematic; due to the diverse ways within which it is expressed. Some parents within the locality are increasingly engaged with services and have their needs fulfilled readily; on the other hand there are those who are less engaged with formal services who express their preferences less easily.

Hence, through engagement some families are more likely to have their opinions and views recognised. This is on top of reaping the particular benefits of that service. The benefits of engaging services can be far reaching concerning Health, Training and Employment, Child Development etc. This issue of engagement is central not only to having a range of needs fulfilled by services\(^4\) but in broadening informal networks and providing social support for many families impacting on self esteem, motivation etc. However, just as differences exist in health, employment and deprivation levels across Shepway so do the levels of parental engagement with formal services and Sure Start Folkestone.

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\(^3\) Data was unavailable for Folkestone Foord
\(^4\) social, educational, developmental etc
Chapter 1A. Diversity amongst Parents

Firstly there were those that were on the fringes of services. This group will be further characterised as Group 1. This group links with formal services such as GP’s, Health Visitors etc, but it was often sporadic. Furthermore, their abilities to access Early Years services, Housing, employment services tended to be limited. On the other hand there were other parents who tended to be more co-ordinated with regard to formal services and managed to navigate services to fit their needs (Group 2).

Isolation from Services. (Group 1)

Within our geographical boundary some parents/children exist that are not in contact with frontline services – i.e. Health Visitors, Midwives etc. This may be for many reasons and has several implications regarding Health, Education, Training and Employment. Primarily, it makes them ‘hard to reach’ for community services, as links with primary agencies are often sporadic. Indeed ties with formal services may exist (i.e. via GP’s, Developmental Checks etc.) but are relatively loose.

Ironically, those parents that most services are trying to include are those that it is most difficult to include and establish an impact on. This was not to say that in some situation the desire did not exist to engage with services. Other parents within Group 1 were on the threshold of services.

These parents may sporadically attend some services and thus in many ways the first steps have been made in terms of engaging these parents/children and promoting their involvement. However, problems may still be encountered regarding inclusion, as contact with services is still very much loose.
Mixing and Matching Parents (Group 2)

On the other hand there were those a little further along the line of service inclusion through their increased use of Primary and Community services. Furthermore, this is done more independently. Possibly with the mixing and matching of those within the locality. However, regarding inclusion there are still issues regarding information and awareness of services around them so that choices are fully informed. Service use tended to be more established and frequent. Alongside these parents were those that seemed to be even more included within services.

There are several characteristics demonstrating this inclusion. Firstly, there is the use of several services both relating to primary health and other front line services. Furthermore, this use is compounded by a variety of information from friends, primary health and other professional services such as social services. However regarding service use, in particular Early Years Service there seemed to be several factors influencing parents’ options of access.
Use of Services

When using services parents tended to have a range of factors that influenced their choice of services. This was especially the case concerning whether parents use early years services and if so which ones.

The least frequently mentioned factors were of size and safety. The parents reporting this as important factors had previously removed their children from settings where this seemed to raise a concern. However, these parents all noted that this was due to the amount of time they had to devote on their child’s early years experience. It was also noted that some parents who may work full time or have other pressures/concerns might either not recognise these factors as a problem, or be able to act upon them.

Parents using early years services reported mixed experiences concerning the structure and activity of sessions. Some experienced only positive experiences and believed this to be down to the research that was carried out beforehand. Other parents reported negative experiences before moving their children on to different establishments whilst others remained dissatisfied with the services they were using.

It seemed apparent that regarding the mobilisation of needs some parents were more apt at getting their views noticed. This is especially the case concerning whether or not parent got any feedback from early years services concerning their child’s development.

Some parents were extremely assertive in getting feedback from settings regarding their child’s development. One parent that had concerns regarding their child’s eating and sleeping habits were extremely active in ensuring that their child’s needs were met.

Indeed some parents were highly mobilised in getting early years settings to work alongside them co-operatively. However, some parents did not experience this. Indeed some found their establishments as less accommodating. In these situations it was more difficult for parents to get their views recognised and to get feedback on
their child’s development. The extent to which some parents could exert an influence over early years settings was partly due to Money and Transport.

Money has been reported to affect over 26% of parents across the board regarding early years services.\(^5\) This figure is likely to be a lot higher in those areas of higher need but low income. Money was mentioned by several parents – largely that the price of sessions influenced whether or not they could use early years facilities. Secondly, it influenced whether parents were limited as to which settings they could use. It is to this extent that if families were dissatisfied with a particular setting they may be to some extent constrained as to what the alternatives were. This was partly a product of being informed of other less expensive settings, or whether and when their children were entitled to a funded nursery place.

This lack of information left some in a position of not knowing whether or not they could access these facilities, as they didn’t want to be charged the full price when they should not have been. The second factor concerning money also involves distance. Some families could not access services without the use of transport – and for these families this presented another problem regarding being able to afford it.

These financial implications may reduce the extent to which parents can find services to match their need, i.e. those which do not require high prices, long journeys and extra motivation to get to. Indeed others reported on other practical problems with using public transport

Regarding Group 1 and 2 there was a difference in the number of families reporting transport and money as a barrier to accessing service. Whilst these acted as a barrier for 2 of the 6 parents in Group 2 (those accessing services more) it presented a somewhat larger problem for the 5 of the 6 parents within Group 1.

It is in this way that money and transport combined could influence the extent to which parents have a choice over which Early Years Service they use. If dissatisfied with their current service families may not be able to afford using a different setting. Alternatively other settings may be too far away to get to everyday to fit in with their daily routines. On the other hand parents may not have enough money to afford getting public transport frequently. This issue of transport involves extra motivation\(^6\) that may not be present in some families. Alternatively they may not be able to afford to get to services they want, or (as previously highlighted) some parents may have other anxieties on their mind to cope with the upheaval of changing services. The same factors could be true of wider services such as Family Health Services, Education etc. especially if they are centralised away from those not in touch with services.

Another factor affecting whether need is recognised and the extent to which parents can shape services to meet their need concerns whether parents are aware of their availability.

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\(^6\) See Ch.4 ‘Transport’
Awareness

One key feature of whether families take up support services and benefit from the input of initiatives depends on parental awareness. If families are not aware of services there is little chance of access unless by accident. Awareness can be seen as the first link in the chain of service engagement as it has to be in place before parents decide on their involvement. Secondly, if parents do decide to take up services (such as pre-school), information must be in place so that parents are equipped with adequate knowledge to make an informed choice according to need.

By definition, those less tied in with formal services were less informed via this channel i.e. through Health Visitors, GP’s. Furthermore, they did not have the opportunity to gain this information via playgroups and other support services. Hence those parents from Group 1 were more reliant on informal sources that those in Group 2 who were more likely to mix and match their sources for information. This would give them a wider network of information and possibly give them the opportunity to access and benefit from services. Likewise the more services they used the more likely they become to hear of other services.

As well as having a greater opportunity of being informed via services, those more familiar with services (and having their needs fulfilled) will be more apt at navigating them. Ability to navigate services seemed to be influenced by a go-getter attitude on behalf of Group 2 parents who were often informed through informal networks rather than services themselves. In part this was due to motivation but also to a large extent the self-confidence to navigate services.

It was evident that those parents in Group 1 did appear to have lower levels of confidence. This was manifested in a number of ways all of which affected their awareness of services. Parents did not feel as if they had the confidence to meet new people (especially in large groups), go to new places, some struggled to have the confidence to go outside their own homes. This clearly affects the extent to which families can reach out and become aware of services.

Less confidence at navigating services led parents in Group 1 to be more dependent on fewer sources for information. Whilst this is not necessarily a problem, some parents receiving incorrect information will have less opportunity to have this clarified and may become despondent after attempting to seek support. Furthermore, those parents in Group 1 were not only more likely only to be reliant on informal networks for information, but also on fewer sources of informal support. This problem of dependence becomes even greater when considering the fragmented nature of information on services. Those dependent on fewer sources will face a lesser chance of navigating these networks.

11 out of the 12 parents interviewed mentioned having problems in receiving correct information. Firstly, there were those who said that the information given by professionals (either in person or in writing) was in a language that was either too

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7 2.5 Healthy Children and Young People NSF in National service framework for children template for the children's NSF, 2002 London, DoH
confusing or that it did not interest them. Either way this acted as a barrier for families using services before they’d even attended.

Firstly, if information was seen as not considering the emotions of the families, they will fail to be engaged and get support. Alternatively, information (written or verbal) may be worded in a technical language meaningless to some parents. This was reported to be a problem in the filling out of long-winded forms. In such circumstances motivation may already be low without having to negotiate technical jargon thus complicating the matter and decreasing the likelihood of families getting appropriate support. The same applies when information is not centralised. If families have to hunt down information for support, those with the least motivation or most barriers in their way (and possibly most in need) are the least likely to receive it thus widening the gap of need.

However, in some circumstances information is evident in the form of mail drops etc, this information is for some reason not reaching those families that do not access services. Those from Group 1 were most likely to respond negatively to mail drops. A common theme indicated by parents was that flyers and leaflets often went ignored. ‘You just assume it’s going to be credit cards, leaflets and all that sort of thing.’

Hence, there are problems with mail drops causing information over load whereby parents are bombarded with literature, resulting in parents not paying full attention to them and see them as junk mail. Information is often not read and gets put in the bin without even being read.

It must be underlined that services can be as good as they can and inform individuals as much as possible. However, there are question marks over parents’ ability to do adopt a go-getter attitude. Whilst some may not be at the correct stage to become aware it must be said that they have to have this motivation. If they do not have this motivation on awareness the motivation will not be there to ask for support.

**Awareness Recommendations**

Whilst services have their input into raising awareness part of the problem lies in parents responding to this information. This was especially the case for those less tied in with services who commented that most information was treated as junk mail and put in the bin without reading. This scenario greatly reduces any impact that support services can have, as parents are unaware of what services are on offer.

However, perhaps there are measures that can be taken to ensure that material is seen, i.e. sending out letters where possible rather than flyers so that they are opened and not so readily disposed.

Ensure that information is brief and visually striking. If information is wordy it will not be read/ understood, as it requires too much effort. If it is bland it will not grab attention to read. This is especially the case concerning posters that need to stand out from others in the same section. Furthermore, they must be placed in areas that parents frequently access i.e. supermarkets, local shops as well as Schools, Health Centres, etc
Most parents spoke of information being extremely difficult to locate support services; but when they had been located the floodgates opened and support was received from all directions. This is to suggest that services are joined up and working in partnership however navigation towards them needs to be simplified.

Channels of information need to be widened towards a centralised point. A point where parents know they can go for information – and once there get as much information as they can from a variety of sources without being fielded on to other areas where they may get lost. This will safeguard those who have less skills and confidence from becoming disenchanted when searching for support and giving up.

Partner services could also co-ordinate an explicit timetable detailing the range of services within Folkestone. This information would raise awareness of exactly what services and when, allowing parents to make an informed decision.

Services must also remain approachable so that families that are unskilled at accessing services are not afraid to go and get information. Self-confidence was a key factor in becoming aware, hence services must be sensitive to develop this and foster it in parents who are new to services. Furthermore, parents must be motivated to use services so as to adopt the go-getter attitude expressed in those more in touch with services.

There may be opportunities where individuals can have sessions on increasing motivation. Whist this may be key in raising awareness and gradual involvement with services - it is useful as the groups may stimulate social networks/ buddies so that motivation barriers do not get in the way. Another way of fostering this go-getter attitude is by addressing the low self-confidence parents this too could be aided by the provision of groups. However both motivation and self-confidence could be addressed indirectly through increasing informal support possibly through befriending schemes or community volunteers.

However, this self confidence and motivation to use support services may only come after familiarisation. Parents cannot be forced to become confident and some parents may find this harder than others – Indeed many may be so unmotivated that they are barely going out; hence they are unreachable. To this extent it is a matter of catching those parents that can be helped at a different stages. For those not accessing services it may be a case of having a community presence so that they can access when they are ready. This profile could be raised through a community presence in the forms of community consultation, newsletters, events etc establishing our identity.

Positive PR on behalf of Sure Start can only do this. Ensuring that the locality is fully aware of the services that Sure Start provides, giving community parents a full understanding of Sure Start projects so that this is then transferred onto friends. Moreover it is vital that this is reflected in a positive light as to encourage parents to use services.

It must be recognised that most families are informed through informal networks; hence it is necessary to work alongside and in the community in supplying this
information. This could be done by more active engagement i.e. high street stalls etc, which also establish a community presence.

Furthermore, it is the community that most families receive support from hence; in the provision of support (not just informational) it is essential to expand informal networks. This could be done through initiatives to increase social circles, buddy systems of parents in the area and perhaps outreach into familiarising people with services.

Through having closer links in the community correct information via word of mouth will circulate being equipped with this will not only support parent on an informational level but possibly increase a go-getter attitude that seems to be lacking.

It must be underlined that services can be as good as they can and inform individuals as much as possible. However, there are question marks over parents ability to do this whilst some may not be at the correct stage may be anxious about leaving it must be said that they have to have this motivation. If they do not have this motivation on awareness the motivation will not be there to ask for support
**Asking For Support**

Whilst there are differences around processes in awareness within the area\(^8\), this is further compounded by whether parents feel comfortable asking for support. Asking for support is vital in accessing services. Parents may well be in need and aware of services but if they are unable to ask for support then they are likely to be left isolated.

The onus rests on the individual to ask for it. People cannot be forced to ask for or accept support, but barriers are evident. If barriers make this process difficult, awareness is of little relevance, as there is no action or enquiry for support. Thus, limited support will be given. Similarly, effectiveness of services is circumstantial, as parents are not using them to gain any benefits. Indeed, the gap of need may be widened as those with lesser need are getting the support that should be concentrated on those not asking for support.

Some parents reported that the organisation of services made it more difficult for them to accept their support. In a recent Sure Start Survey\(^9\) 20% of respondents suggested that they could use services more if given more choice with times of services. However, it must be borne in mind that there will generally be people excluded from the times of services, as not all times suit all parents.

This theme of service times as a barrier is especially the case for families who do not have access to transport. Walking to appointments, nurseries etc. takes longer for those without cars, thus giving parents less time to accept support. Indeed, parents from Group 1 argued that they never had any personal time, much less time to think of what services may be able to help them. Hence, those without access to transport (and possibly services) may find it more difficult to accept support.

Location is also a key factor in whether families can take up support services. When dealing with location it is essential to realise that location and travelling inevitably chips away at the motivation that does exist. When dealing with groups that feel continually pushed for time and unmotivated, poor access to services may often mean that they do not seek or accept support that is needed.

However, prevalent amongst Group 1 parents was the desire to be self-supporting. This is not necessarily a problem if families had informal networks to fall back on or the capacity to do so. However, this factor was more problematic for families in Group 1 who were more likely to encounter problems regarding transport etc. and need greater support in accessing services.

This feeling of being self-supporting often involved parents saying that they were in some way failing and being a burden if they needed support from formal services. There were underlying feelings that parents should be able to raise their child without any help from external agencies. Group 1 parent tended to value ‘the harder route’ without external help. To this end parents had pre-conceived ideas around services and their involvement, which acted as a barrier to accepting support. Part of this

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\(^8\) Contributing to an inequality of accessing services  
\(^9\) Sure Start ‘End of Use Survey’ – July 03
barrier concerns the stigma that may be attached to parents who accept help from services. This stigma did not only come from peers but services too.

Avoiding this stigma and being seen as self-supporting was a concern for many parents, especially the case for those groups who may be identified as being increasingly vulnerable. In this circumstance asking for help may seem an active submission that they cannot cope on their own, and so those that may be more vulnerable are least likely to ask for support.

Parents from Group 1 were also more likely to feel scared, embarrassed or as if they were nuisancing services. Most noticeable was that parents were reporting that they felt fraudulent in accepting help as if they didn’t really need or deserve the help that was on offer. Part of this may be due to the value placed on struggling through without support, making families less likely to accept support and access services in the future.

On the other hand those parents from Group 2 did not see accessing support services as an indication that they could not cope. Parents were more likely to view it as an extension of informal support and that it was there to be taken and thus more likely to ask for and accept support.

Parents who were more linked in found it easier to assert themselves over services. Furthermore, they were less likely to attach a stigma to their use. This made them more likely to access services and get their needs recognised. Furthermore, this frequent use made them more apt and confident at navigating services making them more likely to be informed and able to access other services in the future. Hence, there is a catch 22 situation whereby those not accessing services and possibly most in need are unconfident and so do not access them. This not only leaves them out of the information loop, but isolated parents lacking confidences are less likely to access services in the future and be supported.

Linked to this notion of confidence is the extent to which Group 1 parents felt that services were uninviting. Parents lacking confidence are less likely to attend services on their own. Especially concerning their lesser number of informal networks to attend services with. Parents from Group 2, despite feeling similarly daunted at attending services were more likely to put their own feelings of fear and anxiety on hold to attend services. Whilst there was the desire for Group 1 parents to attend the lack of confidence, support and time tended to make prioritisation difficult. Regarding prioritisation, some families faced organisational barriers to accepting support and taking up services.

**Asking for Help Recommendations**

Those less in touch with services faced several barriers in asking for help, this was even after they had become aware of service thus making them far less likely to receive support. In order to ensure access on a more level playing field these barriers need to be reduced. Indeed even those more tied in with services experienced these barriers. The first barrier relates to the organisation of services.
Times of services – Parents found that timings of services were often problematic. Having to phone at times not suitable for some parents prevented them from enquiring. Likewise, timing services alongside previous commitments around school, childcare, work etc also meant that some parents were unable to benefit. This may require more frequent parent consultation on projects to assess what times best suit so that a maximum number of parents can benefit.

Similarly, running different services at the same time may mean that parents cannot benefit fully from services providing in Folkestone. Whilst some overlap is inevitable increased communication amongst partner organisation will help to keep this overlap to a minimum allowing parents to benefit fully.

Furthermore, parents could be facilitated in asking for help with channels of information being made clearer as detailed above. Part of this was through providing centralised one-stop shops. This ties in to the barrier of location.

Through the provision of localised services families without transport will find them more accessibly and be more likely to take up support. Furthermore, for those services that are not accessibly to everyone an option of transport could be provided for those without transport (especially in winter/ bad weather). This may increase motivation to attend.

Yet again motivation is not something that can be enforced. Services can only have an impact if the individual is motivated enough to use them. However, barriers (such as transport that stand in the way of motivation) can be reduced making access more likely.

One barrier standing in the way of those isolated from services was the need to be seen as being self-supporting. This reduces the extent to which support will be sought and any impact will be had. This self-supporting attitude prevented those with limited support from accessing services, whilst those with an abundance of support reaped the benefits as they saw them as add-ons rather than signs that they could not cope alone. Hence, this stigma has to be broken down.

Perceptions may exist regarding Sure Start being ‘charity’ thus deterring families from using our services. This could be broken down with effective communication and PR with parents and locality.

Token charges could be applied for services, letting parents give something back may increase the parents’ feelings of ownership over projects. Furthermore, any suspicion surrounding freebies will be reduced. This is in addition to prolonging the sustainability of projects, trips etc.

Increased PR and community presence would also alter the extent to which families thought they were undeserving of services and could feel more comfortable and confident to use services. However, this would only reach those who were reachable. Those with little self-confidence of using services would struggle to gain this, as they were not accessing services in the first place. With sustained outreach contact could
be increased including parents step by step. However, this is still subject to being at a stage ready to be included.10

Part of this barrier to accessing was due to parents feeling uncomfortable with strangers, especially if attending a service on their own. To some extent this could be done via increased informal support. I.e. introducing parents to other parents or assigning volunteers to ‘buddy up’ with parents to attend services. This could provide a vital link to other parents and increase social networks. Furthermore services and service providers could ensure services were sensitive to this giving extra attention to new parents ho were ion their own and introducing them to others. Any negative experience could make parents less likely to use others services especially when it’s taken them so much to get there in the first place.

Amongst those parents reporting barriers in asking for help there were some who experienced more than others. Perhaps extra attention needs to be given to those mothers who are young or single and maybe having difficulties in the transition from being in a couple or young (possibly both) then being alone solely responsible for your child. Special efforts could be made around increasing informal networks, confidence and organisation to ensure that they had more potential to access both informal and formal support networks.

10 Concerning some parents being so isolated that they were not going outside etc
**Organisation**

Organisation of time may impact upon how much time parents feel they have for themselves. If parents have problems doing this they may get little respite and feel as if they have little control and that work is endless. Furthermore, organisation is key to making and sticking to appointments and is thus central to family issues such as health, education and child development. Hence, if organisation is poor, there will be a negative impact in that families will not gain the benefits of services.

Failure to attend services through cancellation or otherwise is expressed by services as ‘Abortive Contacts’. This problem is not equally distributed across our Sure Start area. Indeed, taking Speech and Language appointments as an example, it is particularly a problem in terms of sheer number and proportion within the ‘East Ward’. 30% of those contacts within the East Ward were aborted between May 2002 and April 2004. This is compared to around 10% for Foord and Harbour wards.

![Abortive Contacts (AC) as a % of Total Contacts (TC)](image)

Whilst this is a problem in itself in terms of service outcomes, Do Not Attends (DNA’s) and poor organisation are part of a complex web of influencing factors. Factors underlying poor attendance and organisation include having access to adequate transport and the location of services.

‘Poor transport contributes to social exclusion. It can be an important factor in restricting access to opportunity. For those who rely on public transport, getting to hospitals is particularly difficult, and can lead to missed health appointments.’

Likewise this is an issue within Sure Start Folkestone in relation to the East Ward, which is far away from central services on a gradient that makes navigation extremely difficult (especially with children and pushchairs).

Access to services (predominantly located in the Central Ward) is often more problematic for all families without access to a car. Families are often discouraged

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1. Figures taken from ‘ComCare’ statistics on Speech and Language Service Attendance within the Shepway District
2. 50% were aborted within the Central Ward – However, this is statistically less significant as it concerns only 2 appointments
from using bus services\textsuperscript{15}. Furthermore, walking for an estimated 45 minutes is unfeasible in bad weather. Even in decent weather parents may be discouraged due to steep stairways and inclines leading up to East Ward apartments that still have to be negotiated after using the bus service.

This problem of transport was largely seen as a barrier only to those parents that were not linked in with services. Outside of transport barriers to services there were other barriers affecting parents’ organisation.

Those using fewer services reported barriers to organisation at a higher frequency than those in Group 2. This may well be at the root of their decreased usage of services. Alongside transport issues those in Group 1 tended to suggest that their organisation was limited due to their own self-confidence, motivation and problems with their daily routine. Consequently, attendance of services for those less tied in seems to be more problematic having implications on their support in terms of health, child development and social and emotional needs.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}[scale=0.8]

\begin{axis}[
    title={Reported Barriers to Organisation},
    ybar stacked,
    bar width=0.8cm,
    x tick label style={rotate=45,anchor=east},
    ytick={0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7},
    yticklabels={0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7},
    xtick={transport,motivation,routine,self confidence,service organisation},
    xticklabels={transport,motivation,routine,self confidence,service organisation},
    legend style={at={(0.5,-0.2)},anchor=north},
]

% Total
\addplot+[fill=blue!30] coordinates {
(transport,6)
(motivation,4)
(routine,5)
(self confidence,3)
(service organisation,2)
};

% Group 1
\addplot+[fill=red!30] coordinates {
(transport,2)
(motivation,1)
(routine,3)
(self confidence,2)
(service organisation,1)
};

% Group 2
\addplot+[fill=yellow!30] coordinates {
(transport,1)
(motivation,0)
(routine,1)
(self confidence,1)
(service organisation,1)
};

\legend{Total, Group 1, Group 2}
\end{axis}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Whilst both groups suggested that finding a routine and maintaining one affected their organisation, there seemed to be a strict divide between the two groups on the basis of self-organisation. On the one hand those in touch with services tended be increasingly able to manage their own time and construct frameworks to do this. On the other hand those in Group 2 were less likely to use these systems, also reporting more problems with keeping up to date with chores and housework. Problems with daily routine/chores made some parents feel under motivated which can affect the extent appointments will be stuck to. Furthermore, if parents do not write down when appointments are they are less likely to remember them – especially if they are stressed or overloaded with housework\textsuperscript{16}. Hence, they are less likely stick to appointments (or arrange them), which could be detrimental to health, development and support.

\textsuperscript{13} 6.0 Summary in Making the Connections: Transport and Social Exclusion
\textsuperscript{14} which constitutes 1 in 3 families in the Sure Start Area
\textsuperscript{15} Due to limited finances and practical reasons
\textsuperscript{16} This is more likely to be amongst those in Group 1. See Organisation: Daily Routine
Parents using more services were more likely to be critical of services in terms of their organisation. Commonly mentioned was that parents could never get appointments with their GP when necessary for themselves or their children. Some noted that services operated outside of times that parents were free and available or did not have adequate child care provision running alongside them. The lack of breastfeeding facilities in town was also seen as a barrier alongside the spontaneity of babies feeding in missing appointments. The spontaneity of children in terms of being unwell, needing the toilet etc also was seen as being a barrier (albeit unchangeable) to parents missing appointments.

Families on the fringes of services were more likely to suggest that their lack of motivation was key in finding it hard to make and keep to appointments concerning family health and well-being. Many felt that they didn’t have enough time in the day often leaving them feeling tired, worn out and under motivated to keep up with household chores etc…\(^\text{17}\) This in turn had a knock on effect in regard to organisation and keeping track of important times and dates of developmental checks. Furthermore this motivation is further tested if a family does not have access to transport. Decreased motivation means that parents will be less motivated to make and stick to appointments if services are located far away and have to be walked to.

Furthermore a lack of motivation in terms of commitments both outside and inside the home may impact upon how parents feel about themselves. Parents may see themselves as not being able to cope, which will have an influence on self-esteem and self-confidence. Parents in Group 1 were in general less motivated and also less confident. Some did not attend appointments, as they did not want to approach services to arrange a mutually convenient time/ date through fear of rejection. Indeed relating to self-esteem many parents had experienced periods where they would not leave the house much less arrange and organise appointments with services.

**Organisation Recommendations**

The concept of organisation is something (like with awareness and asking for support) that is personal and concentrated within the domain of the family; hence ultimately the onus rests on the family. However, there are things that could be done to facilitate organisation and increase families’ opportunities to attend appointments and services that input into their overall well being. Indeed one factor concerning organisation is that of having support within the family concerning daily tasks etc. If this does not occur parents will be exhausted, unmotivated to attend appointments and possibly less likely to remember. Hence, to some extent organisation is an issue that concerns support networks around the parent.\(^\text{18}\) However, in terms of formal support services there are measures that can be taken to increase organisation.

Firstly, for those parents who are in touch with sure start services, sessions concerning organisation, motivation and other life skills such as self-confidence and assertiveness could be run. This would give the opportunity to give support to those having problems organising (i.e. in committing things to calendars etc), being assertive etc.

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17. See Ch. 7 ‘Respite’
18. Something that will be discussed later
with services and thus increase their ability to be more confident in organising their
time, cancelling/ re arranging appointments rather than not turning up.

Further information could be given on the importance of attending services and
routine appointments. Some parents did not attend baby weigh ins and some speech
and development checks as they felt they knew their child better than services. This
decreased the extent that they thought it would be of use to them to keep
appointments. In such situations it is important to target information on the
importance of keeping these for the well being of the family, highlighting the dangers
of missing appointments or not attending frequent follow ups.

However, this is assuming that parents do not know already. This highlights the
extent to which attending check ups / sessions etc is the choice of the family. Parents
cannot be coerced into this if unwilling but other factors can emphasised to make
attendance more likely (such as being informed on the benefits and risks). Families
could also be further informed with follow up phone calls or letters to ensure their
provide extra motivation if necessary. However, this may be expensive, time
consuming and not necessarily fruitful. It may be better to work on other
motivational factors

One such motivational barrier was location. If services are local the amount of
motivation necessary is lower as families without cars will not have to walk as far or
be so dependant on public transport that may be seen as impractical. In some cases,
It may be an idea to provide transport for some families in some circumstances to and
from services so that those who do wish to attend are not penalised for not having
their own means of transport. 19 Those mothers that were breastfeeding felt that they
were limited by the amount of facilities where they could feed their child. Some
commented that feeding times were more irregular combined with few facilities
meant that they were more likely to be late or miss appointments. If this is the case
there is a need for more facilities or more information around the facilities that
already exist

Having little informal support also prevented those not linked to services. Many
found that they were continually exhausted with little time to think ahead for
appointments and even if they did they may have been to exhausted to make the
journey. To some degree by widening the social circles of families it may be more
likely that they get at the very least emotional but also practical support. Through
increasing this support through befriending schemes or possibly home help parents
may have greater opportunities for respite. This respite, along with other attempts to
increase ability to organise may aid the extent to which families can organise
themselves around services and benefit. If attempts to increase informal support are
done through outreach it may scratch the surface towards those families that are not
asking for support but may be willing to accept it. Furthermore, increased partnership
working will improve the profile of projects and closer links will facilitate the referral
of needy, unmotivated families to become engaged.

19 See ‘Asking for Help.’
For those families that are not at the stage of accepting help, potential impact is limited. However, if a positive community link and presence is established parents will have this information if they require support later.
**Budgeting**

Organisational skills have implications on how families arrange their finances. Whilst efficiently organising time does not necessarily cause families to effectively budget, there are a number of factors that influence how parents organise their finances. The ability to budget has implications on several areas of family life.

‘Money is a key to the ability to control one’s life. The more money the greater one’s options, the more choice and the more easily most problems can be overcome.’

As well as implications on food and bills etc. difficulties budgeting has implications on accessing services. Firstly, parents maybe excluded from services where a fee is required. (Nurseries before 3yrs, play activities and other recreational activities for parents and children). Secondly, if Health, Employment, Housing Services are located away from parents there may not be the money there to access them by public transport. This is before motivational factors are taken into account; as previously discussed walking limits the extent to which families access services.

Further social isolation may occur. If families do not have access to phones, not only do they lose an integral way of communicating with services and a method of enquiring about local activities also lessened is the ability to staying contact with social support networks. This is coupled with the stress that having no money or being in debt may have as well as the self-esteem issues that go hand in hand with not being able to join in and have the same things as other families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Experiences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Facilitating Budgeting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those more isolated from services (Group 1) tended to have more negative experiences around budgeting. Feelings of not being very good at budgeting, being trapped by it or that it was an area difficult to get round to organising were more frequent. Some parents found that the task of budgeting and paying debt off so large that it stripped them of motivation to get back on track.

Debts and money worries were clearly central to other anxieties and issues that parents saw as needing sorting. However, thinking of the task necessary to pay them off and resolve problems caused parents to despair.

Characterising Group 1 was the view that money worries and budgeting difficulties combined led to parents feeling that there was no way out, especially when considering other difficulties that parents faced. Parents reacted to this by feeling resigned to fact that it was either too bad, or in the case of some spending more money to cheer themselves up; causing a vicious circle. This in turn may have a negative impact upon finances, self-esteem and the ability to become included within

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20 Pp 182 Wilkinson, R.G ‘Unhealthy societies.’
services. Alongside this despair were other practical implications on budgeting in the future. Regarding debts and repayments

At low-income levels, repayments can seriously undermine the ability to costs (of basic necessities). Thus expenditure on debt and credit commitments has a double impact: they are a means of securing goods or services not necessarily achievable on regular income, but over the longer term cut into the resources available for daily living.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Informal Advice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning through Experience</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining professional Advice</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These experiences of budgeting were not as evident within Group 2, who on the whole tended to comment more positively. This self-reliance can increase confidence and maybe influence the way in which parents navigate services. Through being in control of a budget parents found a starting block with which to exert control over other areas. However, not only did these parents have more positive experiences of budgeting but they tended to have systems or support in place that made budgeting easier.

Some parents experienced problems in accessing important information on entitlements to benefits, credits and grants. This tended to be amongst those parents that were less informed in general and less tied in with services. This deprivation of information gave these families less money to deal with; making budgeting increasingly difficult and laying them open to related problems. Regarding awareness it is likely to be a combination of fragmented information and parents not actively looking for information. Furthermore, it resulted in bringing about increased or decreased choices for those families depending on how skilled parents were.

‘We budgeted accurately; we put money away 2 years before (the child’s) birth so we would have some money and I would not feel pressured into going back to work. If I hadn’t have had those savings then that choice would have been taken away.’

This in turn afforded some parents time to stay at home with child and concentrate fully on interaction and development, also affording the time to assess different early years settings. However, just as budgeting can afford choices, those who may not have the means or skills to do this may have choices taken away from them. Those who were not in such a strong financial position may be more likely to take low paid work, with longer hours and possibly less sociable hours. Hence there may be a greater risk of informal support networks suffering.
Clearly these situations cause great anxiety and have an immediate effect on all those involved, even close friends and family. It is vital for families to have support from those networks around\(^{22}\). Whilst networks must be there to support these situations it is likely to put increased pressure on them and disrupt them and possibly decrease networks from those who are most in need of it.

**Budgeting Recommendations**

Those more in touch with services reported more planning around their budgets, indicating the freedoms that it had given them. Hence there did not just seem to be financial gains but emotional ones around feeling confident with money rather than anxious and trapped and its implications on mental health. Poor budgeting may also have other effects; it may make some families increasingly likely to accept lower paid insecure work, it can also effect the amount of respite gained through affordable childcare. Hence, those not accessing services face other barriers concerning finances (including the ability to afford public transport etc.), barriers that may make them less likely to access services support networks – however, at the same time it was evident that this group had fewer sources to draw from to gain budgeting experience.

One barrier encountered was that of service charges. Concerning childcare and early years services there was much confusion as to what some parents were entitled to and how much services cost. This affected the ability of families to budget. This clearly calls for more transparent pricing and information around how much services cost which is vital to know when budgeting.

Secondly there was also general confusion as to what families were entitled to in terms of some benefits and grants. Some parents had realised that they could have had some grants and tax credits for a period of time. However, they had been uninformed and had missed out on money that would have made their budgets less constricted. Whilst being informed is a joint partnership between parents and services a centralised point of information already exists in the form of the job centre and other agencies. However, perhaps the issue lies in the ability of parents to become aware of services and ask for support from formal agencies. Whilst these are all dependant upon the individual there are steps that can be taken by services to make channels of access easier\(^{23}\)

The issue of accessing services in terms of transport was seen as a barrier to effective budgeting. Parents found that accessing services by public transport was costly. Whilst little may be done about fares, by provision of centralised services or transport to them the motivation of parents will be maintained, as they are not only easier to get to but also cheaper. This is also the case in the provision of a crèche alongside services to ensure that families do not have to pay for childcare whilst accessing our services. Not only would limit motivation to access our service but also the extent to which they could afford to. This is inline with accessing services at a low or reduced rate. This rate would bear in mind that families may not have much money but could

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\(^{22}\) However, those most at risk of these situations may be at amore risky position in terms of support networks (see section on ‘Support’).

\(^{23}\) See Recommendations for Awareness and Asking for Support
still contribute so as to encourage ownership of services and move away from ‘charity’, which is not necessarily conducive to accepting support.

Those not accessing services seemed to have less input from other agencies (formal or informal) on the importance of budgeting and how to budget. Whilst if already in debt a balance sheet is not going to solve a family’s worries some form of counselling, and sessions of coping with debt and debt management may be of use for those dealing with financial anxieties. Alternatively for others (especially those young parents just dealing with the transition of being a parent) sessions in budgeting etc may be of use in ensuring that their money is managed and that debt isn’t a necessity stop shop to ensure as many as possible are informed about budgetary implication. This comes in line with the raining of other skills such as organisation, assertiveness etc.

In terms of support of dealing with financial issues alongside that given by formal services there should also be an emphasis on that which can be derived informally; largely in terms of emotional support. This is in line with building informal networks amongst the community.

One way of providing parents with life skills as well as increasing informal networks is through the training of parents within the area. Furthermore, by increasing their capacities there may be an increased likelihood of employment; this has clear implications on the amount of money that parents have to budget with as well as the social networks it can bring.
Training and Employment

One way of providing parents with life skills as well as increasing informal networks is through the training of parents within the area. Furthermore, by increasing their capacities there may be an increased likelihood of employment; this has clear implications on the amount of money that parents have to budget with as well as the social networks it can bring.

Firstly there are financial benefits for both the individual and the rest of their family; this can afford parents a number of benefits regarding health, housing, diet, utilities and access to services. However, the benefits reaped through training and employment extends beyond the financial. One benefit is through investing in people to improve their own skills and abilities towards a career they desire; or even obtaining the skills they desire for their own sake impacting upon self-esteem.

When outlining their views concerning training parents did not seem to differ greatly according to whether parents were linked in with services or not. Training was seen as positive in terms of equipping parents with skills as well as providing parents with an opportunity to get out and meet new people; especially if it was geared towards employment. However, despite this perception (albeit amongst a small number of parents) the take up rate of training initiatives was relatively low in most of Sure Start Folkestone’s wards – mostly ranging from between 3 and 10%. This may have been a product of a number of barriers.

The first barrier to work concerns a lack of educational qualifications. This was unevenly distributed amongst the parents interviewed with a lower number of those from Group 1 attaining GCSE qualifications. Fewer people from this group went on to further academic or vocational qualifications, all of which failed to complete the qualification. This is not only barrier to employment in terms of skills but may indicate barriers that some parents may have in regard to learning.

Previous training had not engaged parents, or in vocational areas has not given pupils enough control over their experience, many had been treated as an extra resource to do unwanted tasks when training on the job.

Secondly, parents saw learning as very dry and classroom based, something that was far removed from the real world and how it would benefit them in their jobs. This may be especially daunting for those parents that did not enjoy schooling who may be lacking in confidence within the classroom. This was for a number of reasons. Some parents did not feel comfortable being dictated to by a teacher, others were uncomfortable being in large groups whilst some were daunted by attending sessions on their own.

It was suggested that sessions in confidence building and assertiveness could be provided to give parents a more general grounding in areas that would help them in the classroom. Perhaps it is a question of providing more fun parent friendly training.

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25 Smith R, Unemployment and Health’ OUP, 1987
prior to these types of training so that parents feel at ease within a classroom situation. I.e. Baby Massage, Basic Health and Safety etc. This may be especially in aiding those who were less tied in with service who saw their confidence around learning as a barrier to training.

Going back to learn/train takes a considerable amount of motivation, and confidence. Unfortunately, problems with arranging childcare can cause motivation to decrease; indeed consistent attendance may become a problem, resulting in missed coursework. It is this barrier of childcare that many parents touched upon. Similarly, the limited amount of job opportunities may have decreased parents’ motivation in becoming trained.

It was clear as with training, that employment was something that a lot of parents were keen to start, often for reasons that weren’t financial. Employment was seen as opening up a whole other social sphere. Often providing parents a way to go out and take control of things for themselves. However barriers still existed preventing parents from working. This was especially the case concerning the types of work that women thought they were suitable for; especially when the planning of childcare was taken into consideration.

Many parents aspirations centred on a ‘dream job’ that above all was flexible around their childcare arrangements. In many cases it is the mother who shouldered this burden of having to mix childcare with employment. Much of this work is just over minimum wage and does not necessarily require training outside of induction. Hence, necessary training may not be seen as fitting work that is needed or in some parent’s eyes even available.

One topic that concerned parents was information on training and employment. This was mentioned more frequently by those linked in with services – largely that it was fragmented and in short supply. Hence, parents felt unsupported in making informed choices about whether they would like to re skill, what they’d like to re skill in and what they would like to do after.

Another topic frequently mentioned by parents was that of transport. Transport can restrict people’s choice of job opportunities and mean that they remain unemployed longer than otherwise might be the case.

‘If you haven’t got transport it’s a nightmare... very difficult, particularly if you’re going from nought. If you haven’t done anything and then you launch yourself halfway across the county that’s not going to be easy.’

Thus making the transition into employment an even bigger problem for parents. There are issues around the transition of going to work full time and the demands that will be place on the individual and the family. This will be in relation to time spent

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29 See Ch. 2. ‘Fragmented Information Networks.
30 And the choices brought about by this information
31 1.10 Making the Connections; Transport and Social Exclusion
with family and available time to help out with household chores as well as other pressures. One thing limiting the extent to which parents can partake in training and employment, even become aware of services and ask for support is the extent to which they felt helpless or alone.

**Training and Employment Recommendations**

As with the previous chapters there is a partnership between the individual and formal services in taking up training, seeking and securing employment there are steps that can be taken to tackle barriers that may stand in the way.

The first barrier to be tackled relates to self-confidence. Going back to a learning environment is going to be daunting; especially for those who did gain qualifications first time round and may feel uncomfortable going back to his environment. A range of factors could be put in place to ensure confidence is boosted before entering the classroom.

Firstly parent friendly classes could be provided. The aim of this would be to familiarise parents with the learning environment again without placing too much emphasis on theory. Courses could have practical/ everyday usage i.e. Baby Massage, Craft Activities etc. Training courses could be focused on both Parent and Child this has several benefits. The focus is not just on the parent but the child too. The presence of children is an icebreaker and it is increasingly likely that parents will build up social contacts within the group. Finally, attending with child also ensures that parents do not have to arrange childcare or use of a crèche.

Furthermore, it may prove useful if the parent knew someone else that was attending; this could be done by inviting them to bring a friend etc. Or it may entail that class sizes are small so that parents feel less intimidated by a large group.

The classroom scenario also intimidated parents. This may be an issue helped by teaching style; it would be favourable to get away from old perceptions of the classroom. This may mean that the classroom/ learning environment should be informal, relaxed with a shared balance of power.

Secondly, courses could be done on equipping parents with skills to learn, be assertive or focusing on confidence boosting. These would have the benefit of easing parents into learning as well as being able to apply the skills in their interactions with services- hence, they would be able to get more out. Furthermore, it would prepare them for learning in future situations.

On top of this confidence will need to be built upon whilst they are attending the course. Firstly, this could be done by introductory lessons or taster sessions so that parents could get to grips before they enrolled – especially regarding more technical subjects such as IT etc.

Parents must be provided with an adequate level of support before, during and after the course. This support is crucial in giving parents the confidence that they can complete courses (especially if daunted at first). Support and contact will help ensure
that they are using what they’ve learned. It will also link them to other training courses ensuring that learning is continuous.

Central to this support may be rewarding parents at the end of their courses with certificates etc. This acknowledgement will go a long way in giving parent something to be proud of and boost their confidence, especially if they were daunted in the beginning.

Childcare must be provided along duration of sessions not involving children. Whilst learning form home would be an option it may be more difficult to concentrate outside of the home and would not involve a change of scenery. 32 Provision of a crèche alongside training opportunities carries other advantages of respite, and allowing those without informal support, or the money to pay for childcare to join in. Furthermore, providing transport for those who need it may also improve accessibility.

Effective means of informing parents have to be discovered. Many parents do not take notice of leaflets and posters. Parents seemed to pay more attention to posters in places such as supermarkets. This may be alongside other venues where parents are likely to spend their time such as GP’s etc. 33 This will be supported by advertisements in newsletters of training opportunities and also through partnership with other training agencies.

Increased partnership with training agencies will ensure that courses provided compliment each other. Indeed central to this should be the preference of parents who should have considerable input into what courses are of use to them and should be provided.

However, these courses should also be geared towards employment. Hence partnerships should also include local employers and the Job Centre to ensure that hose trained can be fielded on towards employment if they wish. However concerning employment here are a considerable number of barriers that are relatively fixed. Parents seemed disenchanted with the limited opportunities in Folkestone.

Childcare still remains a large barrier to employment. Few jobs come with a crèche or indeed parent friendly hours. Those that do may well be low paid and insecure. To this extent childcare may still have to be paid for in the hours that wrap around employment. This is often an expensive option and thus detracts from the motivation to work. Indeed many parents see employment as a positive option, just something that requires a lot of mixing and matching informal support. Those that do not have this appear excluded from employment before they have looked – at least before the child starts school. To this extent it seems as if little headway can be made. However, those that do have support from informal and indeed formal services seem more able to access employment, thus the financial and social benefits it brings.

As with access to services transport also seems to be an inevitable barrier to becoming employed. With parents seeing few opportunities for employment within Folkestone

32 Which parents viewed as important in having time for themselves.
33 However, this will still not reach those who are infrequently using services
ravelling may be an alternative. However, this may be especially daunting for those
who have been out of work for a while. Alternatively it may prove impractical in
fitting travelling time around the family. Indeed, travelling costs money; after
travelling expenses are taken out34 the incentive to work may be decreased,
especially if relying on public transport. Hence, those with training and transport
issues may face extra barriers in becoming employed and included.

34 Especially if the job is circa minimum wage
Helplessness

Feeling lonely, unable to cope and lacking confidence clearly has an impact on how parents relate to both informal and formal support networks around them. Indeed, if those feeling isolated and unsupported are unconfident at dealing with services then there is a reduced chance that they will get the help and support needed. In understanding whether families feel isolated it is important to see in what ways they are affected by related feelings.

This feeling of loneliness and anxiety has been widely documented by many researchers such as Gavron (1966)\(^{35}\), Oakley (1974)\(^{36}\) Ginsberg (1976)\(^{37}\) etc. There are clear implications on self-esteem, daily routine, motivation and relationships with informal networks. These themes were mentioned with similar frequency across the two groups showing that these feelings still can exist if tied in with services. However, it was only parents that were on the fringes of services that mentioned that they often felt there was no way out.

By feeling supported parents in Group 2 were less likely to feel as if they have no control over their lives. Those parents that were less tied in with services, and less supported by formal (and as we shall see informal) agencies were more likely to feel overwhelmed with childcare and their daily routine. These parents often felt stretched for personal time and as if they had no control over the situation. Opportunities of respite were relatively low which impacted upon family life, sometimes between the quality of relationship between child and mother. Some parents retreated further into the house, completely cutting off ties with the outside world. Whilst decreasing chances of getting support the amount of pressure placed on the family becomes much greater as other members must assume larger roles.

Feelings of isolation and loneliness become acute characteristics of those who have the least amount of support to deal with it. Whilst being more pronounced amongst those least supported by services, feelings of loneliness and isolation were common themes expressed by parents. This was especially the case for those who were young, single or indeed both. Whilst being single made it more difficult for parents to arrange child care in order to socialise with friends; being young made it less likely for parents to have stepped back from the social arena. Young parents tended to feel excluded from their friends who didn’t have children and had a more active and spontaneous social life; something that often has to be adjusted in becoming a parent.

This feeling of isolation and loneliness meant that parents felt they were often physically trapped and devoting all their mental energy to their child but receiving very little mental stimulation in return. This was more often the case for those less tied to formal services and receiving less informal support. This was not beneficial to parent, child and wider family. Furthermore, this physical isolation meant that parents had fewer outputs to voice worries and anxieties. Often overburdening themselves, some parents’ anxieties meant they became more isolated and found going outside increasingly difficult. With ‘the home’ becoming an entirety for some, parents found it increasingly problematic when chores/ housework went unfulfilled.

\(^{37}\) Ginsberg, N. ‘Women, Wok and Conflict’, Uxbridge, Brunel University. 1976
This left some parents feeling unmotivated to catch up. Those that fell behind with housework, found that they weren’t doing enough in the day to feel tired at night. Parents reported that this caused trouble sleeping and tiredness in the morning. This in turn negatively impacted upon the motivation, doing housework, and getting to sleep the next day and so the vicious circle was perpetuated.

**Helplessness Recommendations.**

The issue of feeling isolated and helpless is to a large degree at the root of whether parents access services. There were differences in the extent to which parents felt. Feeling unmotivated, exhausted with little respite and lacking in confidence left some parents feeling that they had little control over their lives and unable to cope. This in turn has an impact upon how parents see themselves and may involve a drop in confidence and esteem, affecting how parents relate the services and support systems around them. Indeed possibly leading to those feeling most isolated not getting sufficient support from formal services and informal services. Those parents feeling as if they had no control found it more difficult to organise their time and stick to appointments – thus decreasing the affect formal services can have. Indeed, in some situations confidence was so low that support would not be sought in the first place. It is to this extent that feeling helpless limits the extent to which services can have an impact upon parents’ lives. However, perhaps through a wider community presence and stronger partnership links there will be knowledge of the support that exists and where to go when parents are ready to accept it.38 It is at this point recommendations are based around improving awareness and improving channels for parents to accept support. However, for an effect to had the onus is still on the ability of parents to use these channels. Similarly whilst channels to improve organisation can be made to improve service usage for those facing more barriers, individual responsibility has to be taken and a partnership has to be constructed alongside services.

Failing this partnership informal network must be wholly relied upon. However, not all parents have the same amount of informal networks, indeed the amounts and forms of support are varied. A situation may come about where those not accessing formal support services are not gaining support from informal sources either – and are thus receiving little support at all. It is this topic of support that we now turn.

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38 See point on One Stop Shop
Informal Support

‘Various forms of social support and social contact are now generally accepted as having an important beneficial effect on health. It seems likely that social support may be important in changing the way people respond to stressful events and circumstances.’

Indeed, it is not only health that is influenced by support. Informal support networks are often the first port of call for families when they have concerns regarding childcare, emotional, practical and informational support. These support networks can be heavily concentrated across localities giving people close ties amongst family, friends and partners. The health and well being of people is widely documents as being tied to the ethos of the community.

Informal support can often be used to promote the use of formal services through helping in the awareness and the organisation of the family. Informal networks can also influence the likelihood of families asking for help, providing help with budgeting and finances to access formal services. Furthermore, they can help with informal childcare, which may allow parents to take up training or start working.

Family Support

Families can be an invaluable resource for support. This support can be in a number of areas i.e. financial (buying grandchildren, nieces/nephews clothes etc), emotional (lending parents someone to talk to), informational (giving advice in the way of services and parenting) or practical support (i.e. DIY, providing respite for parents). The support of parents, brothers and sisters etc is not only varied but can be continuous and constant.

‘The family operates as a network in which a range of services are exchanged between the individual members... such relationships are crucial in one form or another to its functioning.’

![Family Support Chart]

Regarding support from family those who are not in touch with formal services were less likely to not only be in close contact with family members but also less likely to receive support from them.

In many ways this creates a double inequality with regard to need. Those getting support from formal services are also getting more help from family members who they tend to remain in close contact with. Those more isolated from formal services also seem to have a gap in having their needs fulfilled by family members. This creates a range of difficulties for these parents in regard to accessing services.

Through not being in close contact with families some parents felt a little resentful. This lack of contact could on its own decrease parental self esteem and make them feel as if they had less to offer, and less likely to approach services for help.

On top of this there are other implications for those families who are less in touch with services and receive less support from families. Those families receiving support from formal services were more likely to use their families for a range of support. One such type was support regarding respite. If those not using formal services are not using their families for respite then there is little chance that they will get a break away from their children. This may mean that their identity becomes centred on their child and their own needs do not get met through informal contacts. Getting less respite may mean that they have less opportunity to see their friends, which can provide a social release and increase motivation. If parents feel trapped within the same environment with little social stimulation this is likely to impact upon their daily routine. Parents then become tired easily and this may result in a decrease in motivation to do things within the house, this makes accessing services and organisation of appointments more difficult. Hence, there is less chance of gaining formal support.

Alongside less support in terms of respite, families were less likely to get practical support from families. This practical support could come in the form of lifts into town to get shopping etc. This could also impact upon the extent they could get access to town in general to attend services. This practical support could also have been in the form of DIY. This may mean that living environments could be in more disrepair. If more time was spent in the home for this group, parents may find themselves feeling even more low if things needed fixing which impacts yet again on motivation to get things done both inside and outside the home. Practical support also took the shape of help with budgeting. If families needed support with this but did not get it there are several implications previously discussed with regard to accessing services (due to fees and being able to afford transport). There are also implications on utilities and buying food for the month. In general having little money also impacts upon motivation and this could impact upon motivation even more. Hence those less isolated from services face more barriers regarding finances and motivation.

This is further increased if those less in touch with services receive less support in terms of being informed of services by their relatives. Furthermore, in having less contact with relatives in the area there is also less opportunity to have a ‘buddy’ to go a long to services with (something which many parents said prevented them from accessing service for the first time).
Finally, those less in touch with services reported receiving less emotional support from family members. Having this lack of support may cause parents to feel even more as if they are on their own as their problems have decreased outlets to be aired and solved. This may lead to an increase in anxiety, which in turn can influence motivation and also those networks that parents do have around them; thus affecting the support that parents do already have around them. This is in addition to the barriers that may be created in becoming aware, organised and asking for support.

However, whilst these needs were not obtained through the family, this does not mean that these needs were not fulfilled at all. Indeed, for many having a comprehensive network of friends may well be able to fill the gap of a family in terms of the types of support they could provide. For example, emotional support may be preferred to be obtained by friends as they may be more impartial than family. It is in this way that a great deal of support informally can fill gaps in formal and family networks.
Support from friends

Alongside formal networks and family are friends as a source of social support. The support of friends may well come into play when parents do not wish to seek the help of formal services, or for various reasons do not want/ have the help of family. Furthermore, friends may be more readily available and at hand to provide support more often.

Those that are less tied in with services not only received less support from family but also received less support from friends. In comparison with those that that were more involved with formal services, those on the fringes seemed to have a lower amount of what they labelled ‘close’ friends and also kept in looser contact with them. This decreases the amount of informal support that is available to them. When family support is taken into account those that are isolated from services do not seem to be having their needs recognised informally. Furthermore, there seems to be a huge gulf between the support received by those using formal services and those receiving very little.

If friends are an informal link towards accessing services, by having fewer sources those that are not in touch with services are less likely to find out or be put in touch with services through friends. Furthermore, in the case of attending services there are less informal links to attend services with. Parents are unlikely to attend services on their own (especially if lacking confidence in the first place) and so those less in touch with services face an extra barrier to becoming included.

Most parents commented that these ties were necessary for parents to have their own identity, as a social release from being a full time parent. It was frequently commented that this provided stimulation for the parents rather than spending all time stimulating the child. For those parents that do not get this there are implications on feeling that they have little external worth and can offer very little for themselves or others. This decrease in confidence as previously stated acts as a barrier for parents in becoming aware, accepting the support of and accessing services. In some circumstances having informal networks can improve access to employment etc. One parent commented

‘It did involve somebody picking him up and having him for an hour or two until I finished. That’s all very well if you’ve got a good friend that will do that for you like I did, but if you haven’t I would imagine it’s a problem.’

However, there is less chance of this opportunity if informal networks are limited. Furthermore, it may leave parents feeling lonely and isolated, shouldering their own problems by themselves, and possibly causing both physical and mental health problems. This increased pressure with no support is likely to leave parents feeling trapped in the mundanity of housework with little stimulation. Thus, it is likely to have a negative impact upon motivation and organisation around services too. One way of safeguarding parents against this in providing a network of community links was in the engagement of a faith organisation. Those that were in religious organisations commented upon the networks it had brought about in addition to the security brought about by having a stake in a collective organisation. This principle
may well be applied to belonging to a community organisations\textsuperscript{41}. This involvement in community is seen as a key way of fighting social exclusion.

‘Improve the poorest neighbourhoods and encourage local people and agencies to work together to overcome the problems of multiple deprivation.’\textsuperscript{42}

However those not accessing formal services reported a number of barriers to using friends as informal support thus decreasing the extent to which they can become included amongst the wider community. Main concerns were around not having enough money to socialise, being too busy; and also that the very nature of being a parent decreased spontaneity and the extent you could meet up with friends. Young and Lone parents seemed to be affected by these barriers more than others. Both were limited in terms of finding childcare, whilst young parents found they were being left out of their group’s spontaneous plans. It was commented there could be tensions with younger parents in stepping back from their busy social lives they had before becoming a parent. These feelings of being left out may have further consequences of young parents’ motivation and feelings of isolation making it harder to access services.

Those with less support from friends, on top of facing these motivational barriers also reported that tasks within the home became increasingly difficult to get done. This in turn sometimes led to tensions within the family around people’s roles and what they were expected to do. Consequently, support from services, family and friends impacts upon relationships within the home. In many ways relationships with partners’ are the most vital form of support in terms of finances, emotional support and practical support. Hence, if those not accessing services are not having their needs fulfilled through families and friends this link is vital.

\textsuperscript{41} Farnell, R. ‘Faith in urban regeneration? Engaging faith communities in urban regeneration’ London. Policy Press. 2001

\textsuperscript{42} 4.36 ‘Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation’
Partner Support

Alongside support from formal services, family and friends is that derived from partners. Partners are often the last people seen at night and the first people seen in the morning, combined with children and other responsibilities within the family unit the issue of receiving support is crucial. Partners are expected to fulfill a number of needs from physical, emotional, practical, financial etc. If stable support is given parents may be equipped with confidence and motivation and self security to deal with a variety of demands. Alternatively, if left unsupported by a partner parents may feel anxious, unconfident and even more isolated not knowing where else to turn. Indeed, there are many facets to partner support that cannot be replicated by other agencies such as friend’s families of formal services.

‘It’s the sharing. Nobody else can experience that, so a lot of the time what we are feeling, what our anxieties are individually they’re often joint.’

Hence, there are benefits in sorting through anxieties with someone else that close. Without this parents may feel as if they are dealing with all of their problems on their own – especially if unsupported by friends, families and formal services.

Those parents who were not in touch who received less support from formal services, family and friends also reported that they had less support from their partners. In general parents were least likely to receive emotional support from their partner’s than financial and practical support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
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All of these types of support put extra demands on those parents who are not receiving it, whether it be emotional, budgetary or in terms of time parents get to themselves. Whilst, support by a partner is beneficial those mums that were single commented several times on feeling liberated in terms of controlling their own budgets and doing things for themselves. However, relationships can also be a form of great support in terms of a possible extra income, housework, parenting and a range of other daily supports. Support from partners can in many ways increase the extent to which parents can access services i.e. through increasing income and time to partake in services, increasing confidence and providing an extra person to go to services with. Furthermore through the provision of support, relationships can decrease the extent to which services may be needed (i.e. emotional support, having someone to talk to) However this is not always the case, some mothers did comment that they felt unsupported in one way or another. Furthermore, this was against a backdrop of receiving limited support from formal services, friends and family. This limited amount of support is does have the potential to impact upon whether families can draw on other areas of support – for example the amount of time parents have to access services or even meet up with friends.
Those families receiving less support from other agencies were less likely to receive support practical support from their partners. This could take on several forms. Half of those parents from Group 1 reported that they received little practical help in the form of shopping, childcare and housework. As support was rarely divided these parents (all mothers) found themselves being exhausted with little time for themselves. Hence, this impacted upon the extent to which they could see friends, which in turn may impact upon their own self-esteem and motivation to access services. Some parents also received transport to and from appointments, which is directly linked to accessing services as well as relying on their partner for informational support. To this extent if this support is not given accessing services will be increasingly difficult. Other parents were more likely to access services due to the informational support given by partners i.e. having someone to fill in forms and attend services with if they wanted.

Other parents received DIY support from their partners, which could improve the extent to which they feel unmotivated and depressed within the home as well as possibly saving money through avoiding costly professional repairs. Indeed, having their partner to help fill in forms and being aware of benefits etc those parents were supported in their budgeting, which in turn may make accessing services easier with regard to fees and transport.

Related to this is the extent to which parents received financial support from their partners. Those less tied in with services also reported less financial support affecting not only access to services but also diet, gas electric etc. On top of this budgetary support those families more linked in with services are less likely to have the stresses that come with. If parents are supporting with their budgets there may be a greater likelihood that finances are and anxieties are shared. Alternatively some parents may feel as if the anxieties of having little money and possibly debt may fall on one parent. This may create increased anxiety, which may cause tension in one of the only areas that parents receive support in, thus placing more stress on informal networks. As previously indicated single parents may be more likely to experience problems regarding finances as were young parents with less experience of budgeting. However, one single parent reported feeling liberated as she could now control her now budget which was empowering. More support from partners regarding budgeting was also linked to parents in Group 2, not only being able to access more services but also make more choices with regard to employment and childcare, both of which acted as a barrier for Group 1. Another barrier to parents accessing facilities was that of received emotional support from partners. This form of support seemed to be where there was the biggest difference between those families that were and were not accessing services.

This may have been partly due to communication problems; with some parents from Group 1 not feeling as if they could communicate their worries with their partners. These parents felt they were receiving their partner’s anxieties but getting little support in return. This combined with the decreased amount of emotional support that Group 1 parents received from families and friends would highlight that emotionally they had far fewer sources to receive emotional support from. This may have several effects on parents’ own sense of self-esteem and motivation to access formal services. Furthermore, having fewer outputs of anxieties may be detrimental to physical and mental health parents may feel helpless with nowhere to turn. This
helplessness in turn affects parents abilities to access formal and informal networks and seems to be central in creating problems regarding confidence, motivation and self-esteem. When tackling motivation, and self esteem we may also be dealing with why some families are accessing services and have supportive informal networks and why others that do not have these in place are not using support services.

**Initiatives to increase support**

In terms of the diverse forms of support given by informal networks they are primary in meeting the needs of parents and families. These networks were used in partnership by some parents, dipping in and out of formal and informal networks meet their diverse range of needs. However, this is not so for some parents. An inequality exists whereby those missing out on formal services are also more likely to receive less support from families, friends and partners. This has a range of consequences on parents; often on their time, feelings of motivation and esteem, ability to feel supported and access formal services43. If families are not given this primary support accessing services will be increasingly difficult as parents may be less likely to hear about services, less confident in attending and dealing with services and possibly less likely to be able to organise time as there may be less practical support.

Parents also faced differences concerning motivation and confidence too. These problems clearly affect an impact that services can have on parents lives’. Support clearly cannot be given if parents do not want it. Similarly, those parents who may well be in most need but completely lacking in self-esteem and motivation may not feel in a situation where they are able to ask for/ accept support from formal services. In such a situation informal networks of family, friends and partners are crucial in providing alternative support.

Indeed, there is a great responsibility on families to become aware of what services are in the area, feel able to accept support and organise themselves around services the reap the benefits. However, differences in families abilities to do this have resulted in differences in support for parents and differences in parents having their needs recognised and met by services. Whilst this is a problem in itself, it may not only mean that services will be constructed around engaged parents interests but that unengaged parents become increasingly unconfident with services and less likely to use them and have their needs recognised.

However, it is vital that considerable effort is made to engage those with few sources of support through not only increasing awareness, access, ability to receive support, organisation etc but also by strengthening ties within the community.

Due to the interlinked nature of families receiving support informally and formally, it is vital that ties with the community and partnerships are strengthened. This will allow those relying on informal support to benefit from formal services. Furthermore, it may also strengthen informal networks so those with limited informal ties receive extra support through meeting new friends etc. Some parents commented that

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43 As discussed in previous summaries
becoming more included with formal and informal networks became easier as soon as the ball started rolling.

‘The analogy I use is like a wagon with horses, the hardest part is to get it started, once you get it started then you’re on your way and then you just do your utmost not to let it stop because then you’ve got to do it again.’

In strengthening this partnership the emphasis should be on increasing the accessibility for families who are in the critical stages of engagement and strengthening the informal networks of those families that have few forms of informal. Through strengthening informal networks these families may benefit in terms of motivation, confidence etc, making the introduction to formal services more likely\textsuperscript{44}. In addition to those recommendation already outlined there are a number of recommendations that that could be made to strengthen existing ties with the community.

\textbf{Increased PR}

Increased awareness of Sure Start will ensure that parents know we are there if and when they are ready from support. This blanket awareness will ensure that if parents do want support then there is the opportunity to increase their informal networks by attending sessions.

Increasing knowledge must not only be done in formal ways through our own and other services but via informal networks. This is to be done through including parents in the formation of projects and positive links with parents throughout their involvement

Inevitably those with few networks run a greater risk of not being aware, however through a wider community presence and increased PR with partner agencies both formal and informal services will be better placed to inform parents of possible sources of support

Indeed when talking of those isolated from services it is rare that parents will be isolated from all formal services such as health visors, doctors, dentists etc as well as informal networks such as friends. Hence, alongside this positive promotion within the community there has to be positive promotion of links across partner organisations to ensure referral. This way those who have smaller informal network can be encouraged to attend group and increase their circles. This calls for increased partnerships across agencies

\textbf{Joint Working}

Partner organisations can work together in the fielding on of parents to ensure that those more isolated or dependent on one service can be shared with others. Greater ties could be emphasised with GP’s, Nurseries, and Dentists etc so that more opportunities to engage parents are taken increasing the extent to which they can participate in formal services and increase their informal networks.

\textsuperscript{44} As outlined in ‘Recommendations’ of previous chapters
Co-ordination of services must also be in place to ensure that organisations can work together to do this and that parents can attend a range of activities. This will increase the extent to which parents can mix and match facilities and meet different parents using different services thus expanding networks. The co-ordination of joint activities will also increase the extent to which Sure Start can engage with parents of other organisation as well as raising its independent profile.

However, alongside this partnership commitment have to be made to work together and ensure there are positive relationships between representatives. One such problem regarding this partnership may be that whilst there are diverse needs within the designated boundary this is also the case just outside. Frictions may be created amongst universal services regarding unmet need outside of the locality. This is not conducive to partnership working and must be recognised and diffused to ensure the priority of addressing parent’s needs.

**De-Centralisation**

The issue of accessing services in terms or how reachable they were and in terms of being informed is something that parents often relied on informal networks for. If these links were not there parents find it increasingly difficult to reach services and find out about them.

To some extent whilst transport cannot be provided for all parents using services it may be possibly to do some circumstances. Provision of transport for those families with no other option is a way of including those who wanted to be included but could not. Whilst some families may not be motivated to attend services it is essential to try to target those who are unmotivated due to transport problems.

Consequently another way of reducing this problem is through relocating to areas that are accessible to family members. Indeed, engagement of services when motivation is low is increasingly difficult without any transport. Whilst services will never be central to everyone in the area perhaps services should be evenly distributed towards areas that face more problems accessing services due to their location. A compromise could be reached between the two whereby transportation would be given outside a certain radius of services thus giving increased motivation for some families to attend services.

This distribution of services could also be applied with information. If information was centralised within the locality then parents could have equal physical access to information. Likewise it is essential to pull as much information on child and parent services together. In this case parents are not passed around from Point A to B to C, thus increasing their likelihood of falling through the gaps of services. If information and services were more equally distributed there would be less of a necessity for parents to be reliant on informal networks, leaving those with fewer sources at less of a disadvantage.

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45 Or meeting need
The provision of these services must be approachable; a key factor preventing those
with few informal sources from accessing services was that they did not want to
attend alone. Whilst informal networks cannot just be provide initiatives can be put in
place to widen the likelihood of families building up these networks.

One such measure is through focusing on awareness so that parents know that the
service is there should they feel they want to improve their network of support.

**Improve Direct Informal Support**

Alternatively, this can be done through maintaining emphasis on activities for parents
with their children (as they often act as an ice breaker with other parents) but also
without. This ensures that [parents are given the opportunity to meet other parents
and maintain links within the community that may go on to provide emotional support
– in having other adults to talk to at the very least. Emotional support can also be
provided in other ways.

Those with little emotional support and indeed practical support from informal
networks found they had little time for themselves with impacted upon their own
sense of worth and the amount of time they had to access services. The provision of
this support is vital and must be filled. Indeed, this could be filled either by formal
services or through a volunteer community service.

Some families without (or even with) informal support may require increased home
help. This could be something that is focused upon in giving parents some practical
or emotional relief within the home, which many do not get. At the same time there
would be the possibility to increase awareness that they may also lack through
decreased informal support.

Alternatively there may be problems in asking for this formal support46, in which
case it may be useful to develop a base of community volunteers. Within this co-
operative members can trade support and carry out outreach to involve other parents
within the locality. In this case there may not be the same stigma attached to formal
services and the emphasis could solely be on providing parents with someone to talk
to, practical support or just someone to go to services with if they wanted. This may
go to increasing informal networks of parents, confidence and their involvement with
the community.

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46 As highlighted Ch. 3 ‘Asking for Support’