

**Littlehampton Sure Start User Survey:
An initial evaluation**

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

Sure Start is a Government funded programme for 0-4 years olds which started in 1999 as key to the Government's fight against poverty. Its principle aim is:

To work with parents-to-be parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged - so that they can 'flourish' at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children. (2001-2004 Public Service Agreement)

It is a novel approach to service delivery in that it aims to reshape and improve existing local services through partnerships of local statutory, voluntary and community organisations in order to deliver specific objectives within which there are Public Services and Service Delivery Agreements.

1. Improving social and emotional development
2. Improving Health
3. Improving childrens' ability to learn
4. Strengthening Families and Communities

At the heart of Sure Start's philosophy is the ethos of parental involvement in the planning and implementation of local programmes which have been introduced since 1999 in various 'waves' in areas of disadvantage throughout the country. There are currently 525 programmes and Littlehampton Sure Start is a Fifth Wave programme having been established in 2002 with services/activities running since early 2003.

Littlehampton Sure Start developed from the Wire project, a voluntary set-up, established some 7 years ago which takes an holistic approach to working with children and families. Sure Start funding has allowed a more creative approach to working and has developed and expanded existing services/activities.

Littlehampton Sure Start encompasses three wards, Ham River and Wick. There are about 750 children under the age of 4 years currently known to be living in the Sure Start area and approximately 350 are registered with the programme. Amongst the community there is a large population of Portuguese families. Sure Start is currently located at the Dairy, close to the town centre, and activities/services are run both at the centre and from a number of venues in the area. In 2004, it will become a Childrens' Centre and there are new purpose-built premises in construction.

The programme is governed by two Management Boards. The Stakeholders Management Board has 22 members, who are representatives of various agencies, both statutory and voluntary. It also has 11 parent members. This Board has no long-term strategic role but works on service delivery. The Parents Forum, which meets once a month, nominates which parents are going to represent them on the Board.

The strategic long-term planning of the programme is the responsibility of the Partnership Board, a smaller group consisting of key partner members and politicians. There are 35 members on the Board and a third are parent members. In addition, there are various sub-groups which has an equal split of parents and

professionals. The lead body is West Sussex Sure Start Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership and the Accountable Body is Arun District Council.

The day-to-day running of the programme is the responsibility of the Programme Manager and his team of 11 full-time and 22 part-time staff who are representatives of a number of agencies (both statutory and voluntary) and who are employed either by the programme or working under Service Level Agreements. The staff are divided into 4 teams: Family Support, Health, Play and Learning and Project and Finance. The staff work in partnership in delivering a number of activities and services.

The current services/activities shown below are grouped in terms of each of the 4 Public Service Objectives:

Improving social and emotional development

Tiny Tears
Teddytots
Complementary Therapy
Summer Activities
Parenting Courses

Improving Health

Young Parents Group
Aerobics
Stop Smoking
Cookery Course
First Aid
Bumps and Babes
Behaviour Management
Home Safety Scheme

Improving childrens' ability to learn

Jiggle and Rhyme
Bookbus
Story Sessions
Shoppers Creche

Strengthening Families and Communities

Childminding Support Network Support
Sure Start Home Visits
Parents Forum
Train 2 Gain
Sure Start Drop-in
Fesitval of Wick
Pre-Board Meetings

Aims and Objectives of the User Survey

The purpose of the survey is to make an initial attempt at evaluating the level of satisfaction of users, with the current services/activities.

It addresses 3 main questions:

1. What are we doing?
2. How well are we doing it?
3. What do we need to improve

The main objectives purpose of this current piece of work:

1. To carry out a User Satisfaction survey of those accessing Sure Start services/activities
2. To identify gaps in services
3. To make an initial attempt to involve parents in the evaluation process

The specific questions it attempts to answer are:

- How satisfied are users with the services/activities with which they are involved?
- What do parents feel that they have gained from their involvement with Sure Start both in terms of parenting skills and personally?
- What do parents feel that their children have gained from their involvement with Sure Start in terms of their development?
- How do parents feel generally about their involvement with the services/activities?
- What other services/activities parents should there be for families with young children?

Methodology

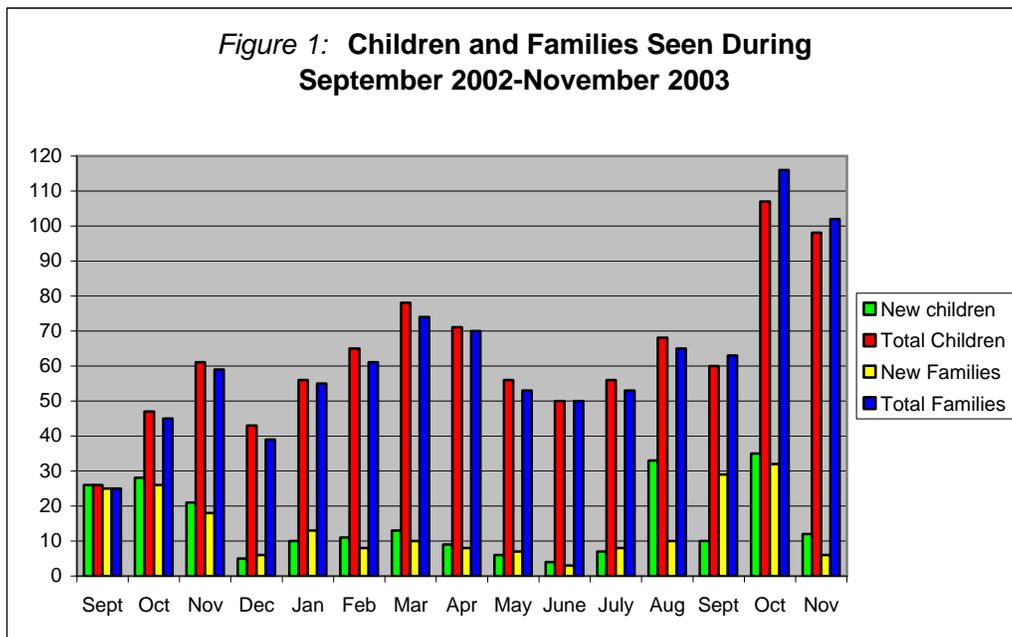
The monthly attendance figures were taken from the monitoring data in order to give quantitative data concerning whether or not there has been an increase in children and families accessing Sure Start.

In addition, a user survey was devised which was designed to give both quantitative and qualitative data concerning parents views of their involvement with Sure Start services and activities. The questionnaire was taken to the parents involved on the Partnership Board for constructive criticism and the views of parents regarding the content sought. Some parents felt a better response would be elicited if the questionnaire was depersonalised thereby assuring total anonymity. After revising the questionnaire and removing all questions concerning personal data, it was piloted by three of the parents. Consultation then took place between the Programme Manager, Parents Forum and Health Team (who have taken a lead on evaluation) regarding distribution of the questionnaires. It was agreed that members of the Littlehampton Sure Start Parents Group would take responsibility for taking the questionnaires out into the various groups over a period of 3 weeks, ensuring that they were completed and returning them.

Analysis of Results

The Monitoring Data

Before looking at the results of the evaluation, it is interesting to look at the monitoring data regarding attendance since the programme started running services/activities in September 2002 in order to assess Littlehampton's progress in terms of involvement by children and families in Sure Start.



One can see from the above, that, apart from a dip during the summer holidays, there has been a steady increase, especially in the last two months. It is also noticeable that the increase in recent months has been in the families, rather than in children, which would suggest that the current emphasis of the programme is on families rather than on children.

The Questionnaire

In the event, 53 questionnaires were returned. Parents were only asked to complete one questionnaire, regardless of how many activities/services with which they are involved. However, as a number of parents are attending multiple activities/services, it was possible to collect limited data in respect of these from the one questionnaire.

The table below shows that the majority of the questionnaires, were returned from three groups: Bumps and Babes (32%), Aerobics (21%) and Teddytots (19%).

Table 1:

Group	Number returned
Bumbs & Babes	17
Aerobics	11
Teddytots	10
Tiny Tears	5
Parents Forum	4
Shoppers Creche	3
Child Minding Network	2
Bookbus	1
Total	53

Figure 2 below, shows the number of services/activities (including summer activities and the Festival of Wick), which each of the 53 respondents are involved in. Although the majority (17) are only involved in only 1 activity/service, a few, as can be seen, are involved in multiple-activities, one person being involved in as many as 15.

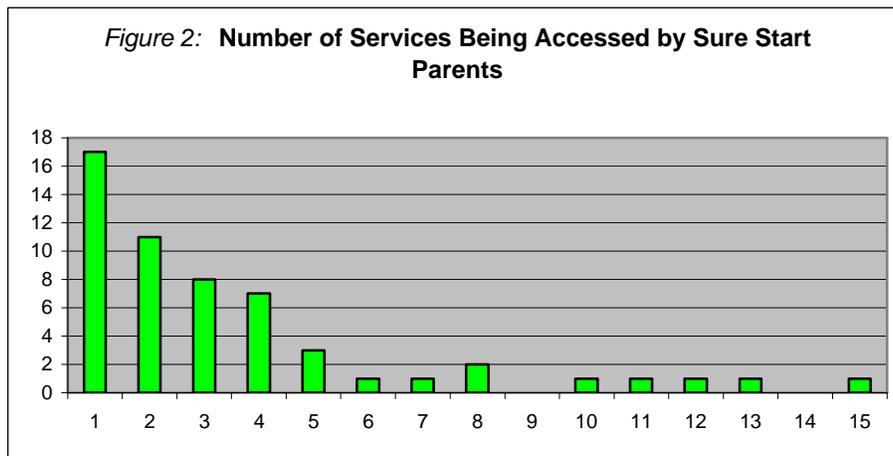
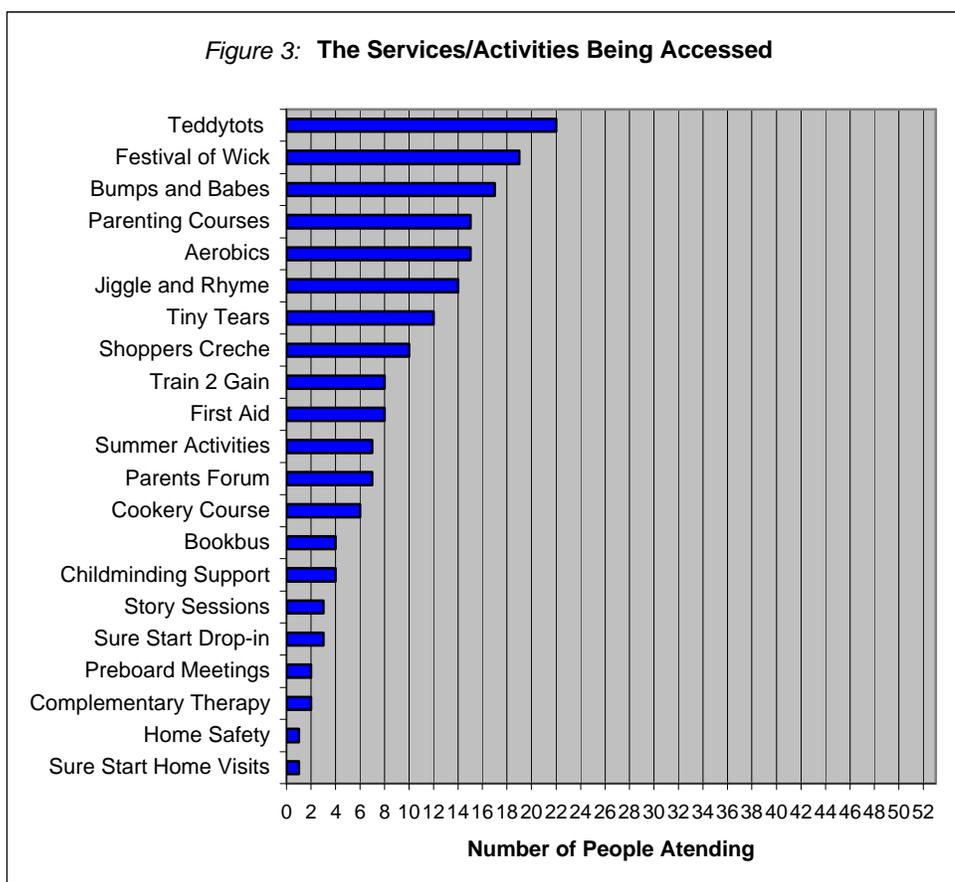


Figure 3, below, shows which activities the 53 respondents are actually involved in. It also reflects why the data collected is limited for many of the services/activities currently running.



Completing the Questionnaire

As can be seen, Teddytots is the most popular group amongst those who completed the questionnaires. However, this can be accounted for by the fact that this activity is run twice during the week at two separate venues. As it is run by the same staff in both venues with some parents attending both groups, the responses from both groups have been amalgamated for the purpose of this evaluation,.

46 (87%) of the 53 who responded to the questionnaire were mothers (or expectant mothers), 2 (4%) were fathers, 4 (8%) were carers and 1 (2%) did not specify their relationship.

Partner Involvement

9 out of 46 (20%) parents who responded indicated that they had a partner who was involved in Sure Start. When asked about activities which might encourage further involvement by partners, only 6 (11%) responded with the suggestions:

- a First Aid class for babies and children;
- singing at the library;
- more organised events so fathers can meet each other;
- family activities;
- a Saturday's dads group;
- 'anything to do with football'.

Registration

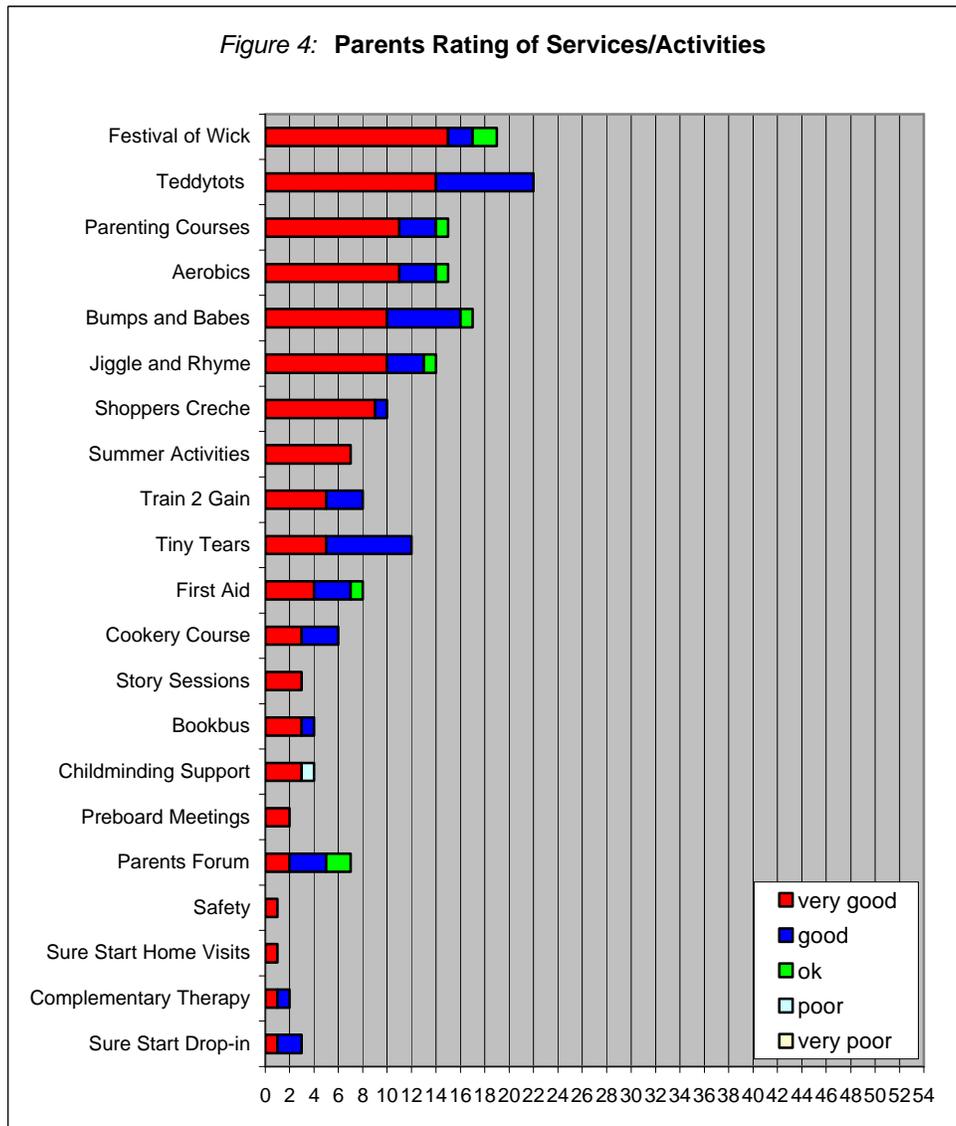
37 (79%) out of the 47 who responded indicated that they were registered with Sure Start. 6 (11%) did not answer.

How Parents Heard about Sure Start

The majority, 17 (34%) had learnt about Sure Start from a professional, mainly the Health Visitor or Midwife, and a further 17 (34%) had heard of it through attending a Sure Start event or activity (Fun Days or Open Days), (16%) had heard of Sure Start by word of mouth. Only 2 (4%) stated that they had seen any publicity material.

Parental Views of Activities/Services

The parents were asked to rate the different services/activities with which they are involved in on a scale 1-5 (1 being 'very poor' and 5 being 'very good').

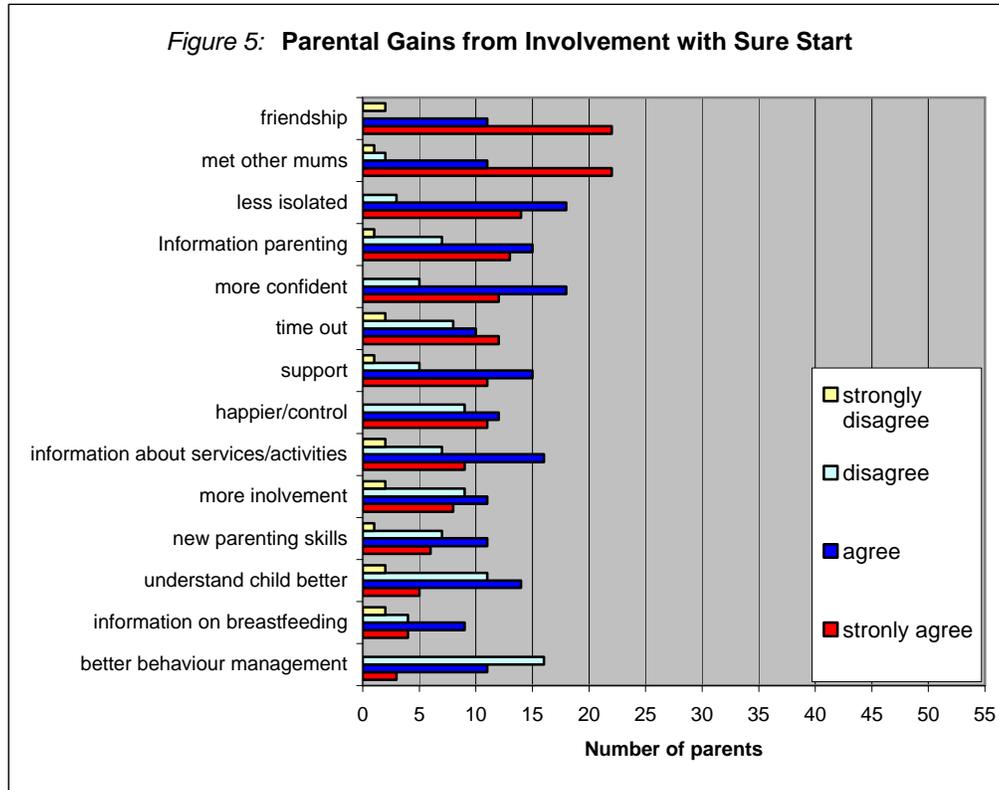


As already stated, the data collected was mainly from the Aerobics, Bumps and Babes and Teddy Tots groups. As shown, however, the response to all services/activities is very positive with the majority rating the groups which they attend/services they

receive, as 'very good' or 'good', and a few rating them as 'ok'. Only 1 member of the Childminding Group rated it as 'poor'.

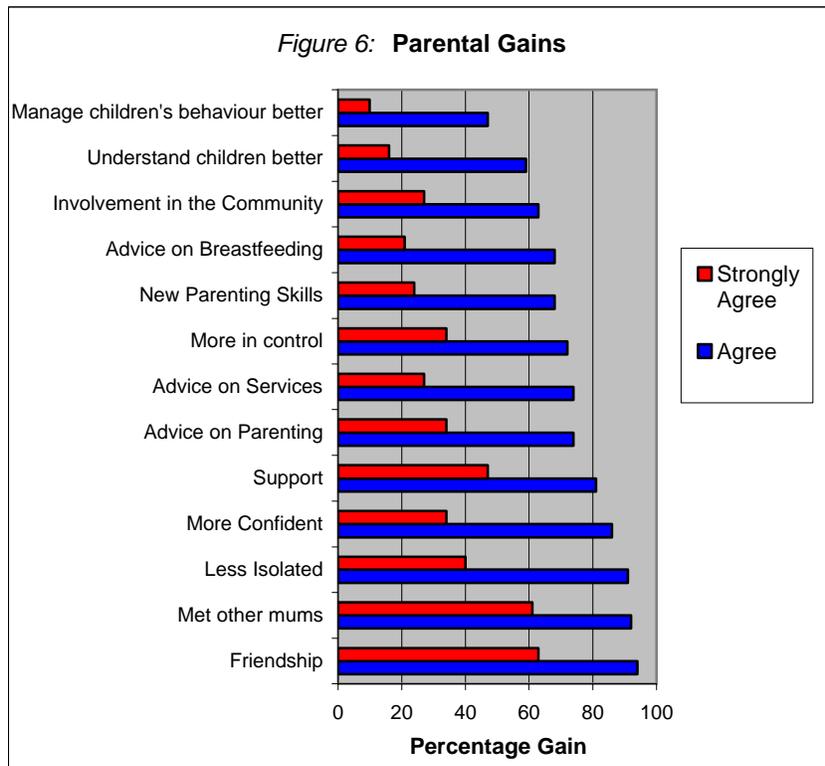
Parental Gains from Involvement with Sure Start

As shown in Figure 5, the parents were asked to rate what they felt they had gained most from their involvement with Sure Start. The percentage gain is shown in Figure 5. The numbers who responded to each question varied, as can be seen. However, the greatest gains were in terms of social inclusion:



The largest perceived gain was in terms of social inclusion. 33 out of 36 respondents (94%) found that their contact with Sure Start had allowed them to make new friends. 33 out of the 36 (92%) appreciated the fact they had been given the opportunity to meet with other mothers with children of similar age and which had been valuable in allowing them to share parenting experiences. This had led to 33 out of 35 (91%) feeling less isolated and 30 out of 35 (86%) felt more confident in themselves.

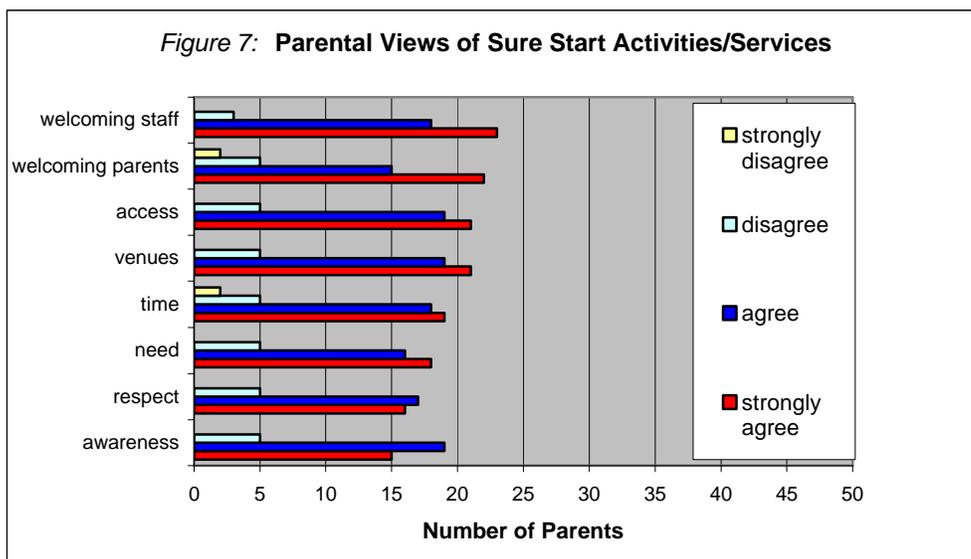
Figure 6 below, shows these gain in terms of percentages.



The least gains had been in terms of their 'parenting', although 59% felt that they understood their children better and 47% said that they were better able to manage their child's behaviour. These percentage gains however, may be lower because a large majority of those who responded were from Aerobics and Bumps and Babes both of which had either first time or expectant mothers who may not have had the opportunity to use these particular skills.

Parental Views of Aspects of the Services/Activities

Parents were also asked to rate certain aspects of the Sure Start services/activities

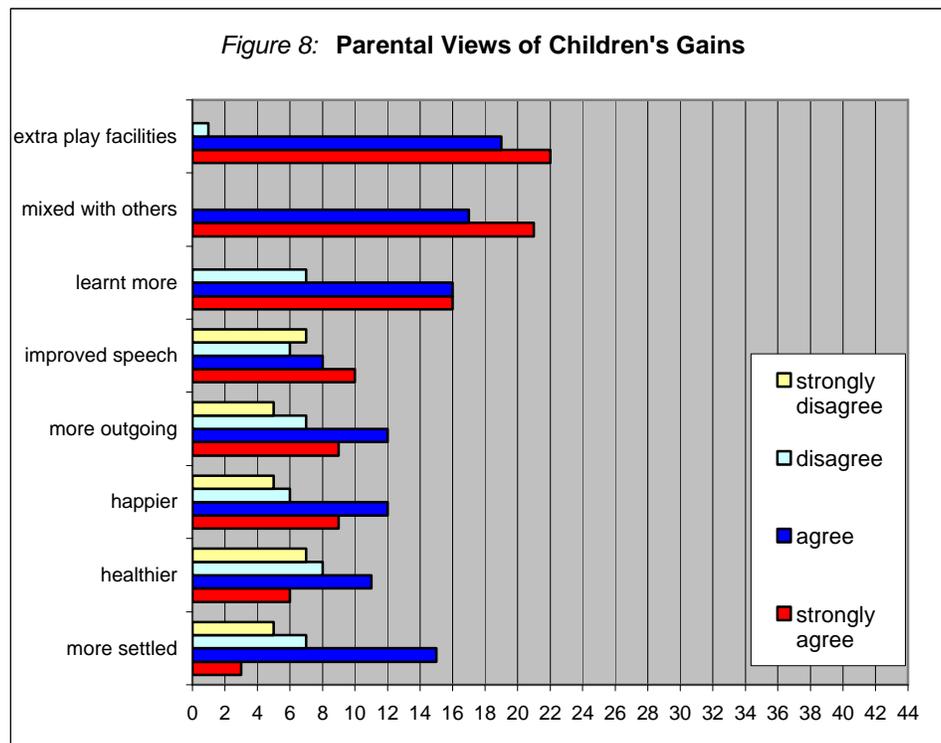


34 out of 39 (87%) respondents agreed that what Sure Start is providing is what they 'need'. 93% of respondents perceived the staff as 'welcoming'; 87% agreed with the statement 'The staff show good awareness of individual needs' and 87% agreed with the statement 'The staff respect my privacy'. 84% of other parents in the group were perceived as welcoming but this was not always the initial reaction: 'When I started some groups, I felt that the mothers were 'clicky' and not friendly'.

(89%) agreed that venues in which the sessions were held, were fine with 86% agreeing that access was easy. 84% felt that the time at which sessions were held was appropriate for them. Not everyone agreed that the timing of the sessions are convenient.

Parental Views of Children's Gains

As shown below, parents rated what they felt their children had gained from being involved in Sure Start services or activities.



Not all parents responded to this question as some may not have had children using any of the activities/services: some were first-time mothers, some had children too young to be involved and some were attending services/activities which did not involve children. However, Figure 8 shows that parents viewed their children's biggest gains were in terms of access to new toys and experiences (80%); opportunities to mix with other children of similar age (75%); and extra stimulation and learning (63%). There had been some gains in terms of their children's social/emotional development: 41% thought their children were *more outgoing and happier* although only 35% of parents perceived them as '*more settled*'. There had been some improvement in terms of children's language development (35%) and 33% agreed that their children were *physically healthier*.

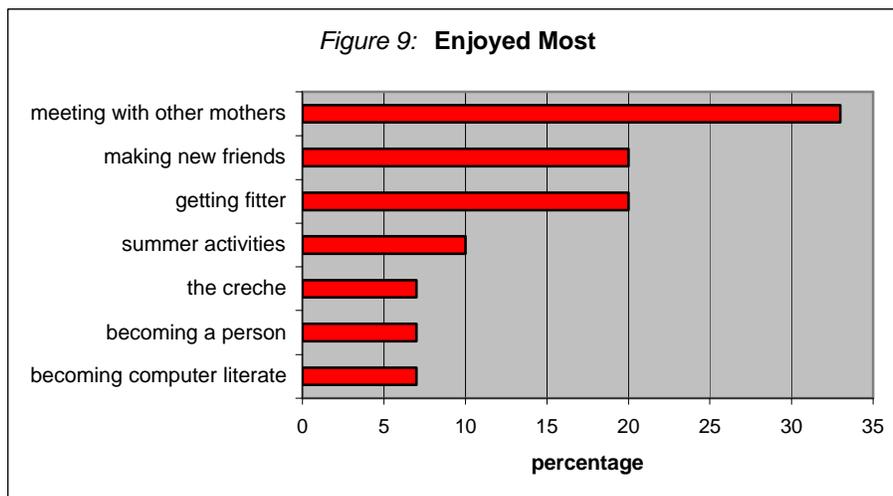
Parents suggestions for other services/activities

14 parents responded regarding suggestions for other services or activities they would like to see for families with young children in the area. These included:

- More babysitting facilities;
- Easy access to childminders;
- Tumble Tot sessions;
- Art & Craft Sessions;
- Computer groups shared with children;
- More Learning classes;
- More advice on weaning;
- More Day trips;
- More facilities e.g. nappy changing;

Most enjoyable aspects of Sure Start

The parents were asked what they most enjoy about their contact with Sure Start.



As shown, the most enjoyment has been from having the opportunity to meet with other mums with children of similar age to their own. This has given them support, allowed them to share problems/ experiences and to make new friends. It has also given the opportunity to develop themselves and relax from parenting responsibilities. The following are a selection of quotations from parents which demonstrates this.

'The interaction with parents has been good, you can talk about problems'.

'I have enjoyed meeting other parents to discuss experiences and have a laugh'.

'It has given me support from other mothers and I've made new friends'.

'I have enjoyed time out without worrying about childcare and really enjoyed becoming computer literate'.

'I have enjoyed becoming a person and not just a mum or wife'.

For some mums to be, it has also given them an opportunity to make contact with people living in their area. It has also fostered enthusiasm for Sure Start:

'I am looking forward to using more of the available services when my baby is born.'

Parents have also enjoyed the fact that their children have been given the opportunity to make friends and socialise with other young children:

'I enjoy the fact that daughter interacts with other children'.

Parents have also enjoyed the support they have received from staff:

'The support from staff is brilliant.'

'It's a nice atmosphere and people are always friendly'.

There was only one negative comment which was not about Sure Start itself but about a particular venue.

Conclusion

This has been an initial attempt to evaluate what Littlehampton Sure Start is doing, how well it is doing it, and to improve, from the users' perspective. It is somewhat limited in its findings as the use of questionnaires as an evaluation tool reduces the amount of qualitative data and therefore does not necessarily convey the full story. This questionnaire was designed to give a brief overview of users experience Littlehampton Sure Start, it does not attempt to describe in detail how each of the services/activities are doing.

In addition, the programme has not yet had the opportunity to fully embed itself because it is still very early days and all new initiatives take time to establish themselves. Because the premises at the Dairy had to be refurbished during the summer, many services/activities have been running for only a short space of time and, in many cases, it was too early to evaluate them. The programme has expanded rapidly in the last three months both in terms of staffing and in what it now offers.

The user survey is limited as there has been no attempt at this stage to compare the views of users with non-users. It is likely too, that the findings are biased since it was not possible to ensure that the sample was truly representative in terms of including minority opinions. In addition, those completing the questionnaires were those that were most likely to view their involvement, favourably. Despite these limitations, however, the user survey is valuable in that it confirms that those who are accessing activities/services are generally happy/very happy with what is happening and feel that they and their children have benefited from their involvement with Sure Start in terms of feeling greater social inclusion.

The findings stress the social value parents (and children) have gained from their involvement particularly in terms of forging new friendships, meeting other parents with whom they can share their experiences and gain support. The evaluation has also demonstrated that it is mainly mothers rather than carers or partners who are involved in the programme. The main means by which people have come to hear about the programme is through a professional, which pre-supposes that they have made contact

with the professional. This emphasises the fact that the hard to reach, who are not so likely to engage with professionals, may not yet be engaged. The other source of engagement was through attending fun days or activities such as the Festival of Wick.

In looking at the provision of services/activities in terms of the PSA objectives, as described on page 1, the emphasis to date has mainly been on the provision of support to families and communities and on improving health. The areas which could now be developed further, perhaps are those concerned with improving childrens' ability to learn.

The monitoring data is encouraging in that it shows that since the beginning of Autumn, there has been a steady increase in attendance which means that the word is being spreading and more people are coming on board. However, the monitoring data which is currently available, does not easily allow for tracking individual attendance for families or children over time and further scrutinising of this data needs to be carried out to look at the extent to which families/children involved and who exactly is accessing the programme.

APPENDIX

LITTLEHAMPTON SURE START

USER SATISFACTION SURVEY

Please help us by providing some feedback about our services and activities so that we can plan for the future. The questionnaire is anonymous so please feel free to express your views.

This survey is about getting the views of those who are accessing Sure Start services/activities with children 0-4 years old. Please could you tick whether you are:

the mother of the child	
the father of the child	
the grandparent of the child	
the carer of the child	
any other relationship (please state)	

If you have a partner, are they involved in Sure Start services or activities? *YES/NO
(*please delete)

What sort of services/activities would your partner like to come to?

How did you hear about Sure Start? (please tick)

Poster	
Leaflet	
Newspaper/TV/Radio	
Professional (e.g. GP, Health Visitor)	
Neighbour/Friend/Relation	
Attended Sure Start Event/Funday	
Playgroup/Nursery/Drop-in etc	
Can't Remember	
Other (please specify)	

Are you registered with Sure Start? (*please delete)

*YES/NO

About your contact with Sure Start ... Have you been involved in any of the following?

Activity	Used	How did you hear about it?	How would you rate it?				Will you continue going?
			Poor	OK	Good	Very Good	
Tiny Tears							
Childminding Support							
Bumps & Babes (Baptist Church)							
Bumps & Babes (Chilgrove)							
Teddytots (Westway)							
Teddytots (Chilgrove)							
Young Parents							
Aerobics							
Parenting Courses							
Sure Start Home Visits							
Train 2 Gain							
Jiggle & Rhyme							
Parents Forum							
Stop Smoking							
Cookery Course							
First Aid							
Behaviour Management							
Home Safety Scheme							
Bookbus							
Story Sessions							
Shoppers Crèche							
Sure Start Drop-In							
Complementary Therapy							
Summer Activities							
Festival of Wick							

Could you rate what you feel you have gained from Sure Start? (1 = I do not agree at a all, 5 = strongly agree,)

	1	2	3	4	5
Information and advice about parenting					
Information and advice about breastfeeding					
Information about other services/activities					
Practical support/Professional help					
New parenting skills					
Time out/relaxation from parenting					
Opportunity to meet other parents and share parenting experiences					
Friendship					
More involvement in the community					
Any other (please specify)					

Which of these statements is true for you? (1 = I do not agree at a all, 5 = strongly agree,)

	1	2	3	4	5
I feel less isolated					
I feel I understand my child better					
I feel I am better at managing my child's behaviour					
I feel more confident					
I feel happier and more in control of my life					

Could you rate what you think your child(ren) has/have gained from Sure Start? (1= I do not agree at a all, 5 = strongly agree,)

	1	2	3	4	5
Has had access to extra play facilities					
Has had extra stimulation and learnt more					
Has had the chance to meet and share with other children					
My child talks more than before					
My child is more outgoing					
My child is more settled in his/her behaviour					
My child is physically healthier					
My child seems happier in him/herself					
Anything else? (please specify)					

How would you rate Sure Start overall? (1= I do not agree at a all, 5 = strongly agree,)

	1	2	3	4	5
The services/activities are just what I need					
Other parents are welcoming					
Staff are welcoming					
The activities are held at a good time for me					
The staff show good awareness of individual needs					
The staff respect my privacy					
The activities/services are easy to get to					
The venue is good					

Are there any other 'activities' or 'services' you would like to see for families with young children in this area? (please specify)

What have you enjoyed most about your contact with Sure Start?

Is there anything which you have not enjoyed about your contact with Sure Start?

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.