



# St. Philips Healthy Eating Project Evaluation Report



*Building a community that cares*

**March 2004**



**Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15,16)**



**Sure Start: Making life better for children, parents and communities by bringing together:**

- Early education**
- Childcare**
- Health and family support**



Special thanks to the parents, volunteers and members of the St.Philips Church team who took part in the evaluation of the Healthy Eating Project



## Summary

This report describes the findings from the evaluation of the St. Philips Healthy Eating Project, which is supported by Sure Start Bournemouth. The aim was to discover how parents and carers who stay for the healthy meals after the Parent and Toddler Group at St Philips, volunteers and the co-ordinator feel about the Project. The evaluation also hoped to find out if the Project was meeting national Sure Start Objective 2: Improving Health and Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities.

Mixed methods were used in the study. These included focus groups with parents and carers, two individual interviews with volunteers and an in-depth individual interview with the co-ordinator.

Findings show:

- That the St. Philips Healthy Eating Project has moved some way towards achieving the promotion of the national ‘healthier ways of eating’ message at a local level by providing and encouraging parents and carers to help plan and cook nutritious meals. However some concern was expressed about the drop in numbers attending.
- The Project provides parents/carers and their children with a nutritious, healthy meal and the opportunity to try something different.
- The aim of promoting eating together as a family, is being achieved by providing the opportunity for parents, carers and their children to get together at the end of Toddler Group sessions to share a meal.
- The project provides an opportunity for parent/carers to talk about their children’s development.
- Volunteers value the opportunity to be creative in terms of helping to choose the meal with parents/carers and food preparation.
- Meeting Sure Start Objectives: it can be concluded from the evaluation that the Healthy Eating Project is meeting a number of the National Sure Start targets, especially within Objective 2, Improving Health and Objective 4, Strengthening Families and Communities. In addition, the provision of funding by Sure Start Bournemouth to help develop a locally-based initiative is evidence of good community-based practice.

It is clear the St. Philips Healthy Eating Project is providing at a local level an important ‘healthier ways of eating message. Promotion and support for the family, a shared philosophy of St. Philips Church and Sure Start Bournemouth, is demonstrated by the provision of the opportunity to eat together. Sharing meals has the potential to spread the ‘healthier ways of eating message’ not only to other family members and friends, but also to the wider community.

St. Philips Church and Sure Start Bournemouth in recognising the value of the Parent & Toddler Group as an important community resource and ‘feeder’ for the Healthy Eating initiative, have been pro-active in exploring ways of promoting the initiative and increasing attendance. Strategies have been agreed which include the development of a Sure Tots activity group at the church, supported by Sure Start Bournemouth, and the involvement of an Environmental Health Officer and a nutritionist in running cookery/healthy eating courses for parents.

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## **Introduction**

### **St Philips Church**

St Philips C of E church is a thriving community set right in the heart of West Howe. The church moved to its current position in the 1980s but has been established on the estate for over fifty years. The modern building comprises an area for worship, administrative offices, a reception and meeting point and facilities suitable for community use. Based at the St Philips Centre are the vicar, a curate, a Youth Worker and a Community Worker. The employed professional staff and lay congregation collaborate and support one another in offering the West Howe community a full range of religious and secular activities.

As part of its full role within the community, St Philips hosts a number of activities and services for families with young children, including:

- Contact Centre - where there is an opportunity for parents who are separated to meet their children on a weekly basis in a safe, neutral and friendly environment (partially funded by Sure Start).
- Shape Up – aerobic activities and circuit training for all.
- Toddlers Group.
- Two after school clubs for children.
- As well as the Sure Start funded Sure Tots, Coping with Kids and Healthy Eating sessions.

Plans to expand services in the direction of youth activities and men's health are also in hand.

As a community-based project St Philips Church aims to combine the practical help they give the community with the spiritual work they undertake as a church. They have a strong vision expressed within their values that underpin all of their community initiatives. These values are that:

- they are called to work to overcome poverty.
- good relationships are crucial to a fulfilled life.

- helping people achieve aims for the good of their own community is very worthwhile.
- people created by God have value and ability.
- all people are of equal value regardless of gender, belief and ethnic grouping.

The St Philips team believes it has a unique opportunity to build a community where these values are expressed. Team members aim to live their lives guided by these values and to help others do so too. Where people feel isolated or alone they try to provide, through community groups, some of the support that the wider family would otherwise give. Through their work in West Howe they aim to give encouragement, support, practical help and advice so that local people can bring positive change and renewal to their community. St Philips believes that by helping individuals recognise their own value and ability to achieve things for themselves they will also begin to create things that could eventually be owned by the whole community.

### **Sure Start**

The national Sure Start scheme is a government initiative set up to work with parents to be, parents and carers to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of young children so that they will thrive when they start at school.

Sure Start is delivered at a local level through 524 individual schemes which bring together early education, childcare, health and family support. Every individual Sure Start scheme aims to be a parent/carer friendly organisation that listens, identifies and addresses the real needs of its local community. With the finance, expertise and resources at its disposal it can reshape local provision, provide small grant assistance for relevant projects and help to secure additional services in order to deliver the national Sure Start aims:

- To improve children's social and emotional development
- To improve children's health
- To improve children's ability to learn
- To strengthen families and communities

One or more of these aims should be imbedded in all the Sure Start activities that take place at the local level.

Collaboration between locally based community initiatives such as Healthy Eating at St Philips Church fits easily into Sure Start aims of improving Children's Health, Strengthening Families and supporting activities provided by other local agencies with financial support.

### **What is the Healthy Eating Project?**

For well over ten years St Philip's Church has run a weekly Toddler Group. In the year 2000 the group had a meal together after one session each term. Initially the vision for this had been simply to enjoy building relationships and to increase social skills. However with 'Healthy Eating' coming onto the national agenda and Sure Start coming to the local area the possibility of expanding the project in terms of frequency and adding a health agenda were recognised. A bid was put in for Sure Start funding and with the success of this it was possible significantly to increase what was offered in three main ways:

- 1 The meals became monthly rather than termly.
- 2 They took on a healthy eating menu.
- 3 A new termly initiative was started of encouraging parents to be involved in cooking the meal themselves and in suggesting and sharing recipes .

Sure Start funding started in Autumn 2000. At the end of one session a month parents and children are invited to join in a meal, with one of the meals every term being specifically targeted as a 'healthy' meal.

"The aim of this project is to help families develop healthy eating habits. This is done by offering healthy food to eat and encouraging parents in the sometimes-awkward task of educating young taste buds in the direction of healthy food. With parents sharing recipes and skills, confidence in cooking is built up so that families can benefit from fresh food as well as ready-made meals." *Annual Report 2001 Feb 2002*

*p4*

## **Background**

The issue of access to inexpensive and healthy food for those living on low incomes is now part of the social and health agenda of the United Kingdom. Since the election of the present government in 1997 there have been a number of initiatives designed to support children and families, especially those in greatest need. These initiatives are directed at addressing the Government's standing commitment, made in 1999 by Gordon Brown, to halve child poverty in a decade and to totally eradicate it within 20 years.

To support this, one of the major aims within the National Sure Start scheme is Objective 2 - Improving Health. In order to satisfy this fundamental objective the concept of Healthy Eating is a key element within many Sure Start activities and, as with the Healthy Eating meal at St Philips Church West Howe, features in activities that Sure Start would expect to support with resources, staff or finance.

It could be argued that in general children's health should be better now in 2004 than it has ever been. This is indeed the case in areas of infant mortality, illness and death through infections and problems associated with low birth weight. However, taking diet as an example, children brought up on low incomes are less likely to be breast-fed, are more likely to be weaned early and are less likely to eat fresh fruit and vegetables. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey of Young People 4-18 years of age (1997) commissioned by the Department of Health found that one in five children were eating no fruit at all in a week. Also children in low-income groups are 50% less likely to eat fruit and vegetables than those in the highest income groups.

Though the positive message on healthy eating may be accepted, the actual practicalities of making the 'lifestyle' changes can be harder to achieve. For parents on a limited income buying food that may subsequently be left and wasted by their children can be a problem. Evidence suggests that talks, leaflets and recipes on healthy eating are not generally effective (Roberts 2001). However Helen Roberts, Professor of Child Health at City University London also found that food projects which target good food and ideas directly to those who need it can be very effective in helping to improve the general health of young children in a very short time. She also states that the most effective way in which we can bring about changes in the early years is through large scale programmes aimed at everyone. This links in well with

the current National School Fruit Scheme. This is part of the 5 A DAY programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for all four to six year old children in state schools. Each child under the scheme will be entitled to a free piece of fruit or vegetable each school day. This will eventually entail distributing 440 million pieces of fruit to over 2 million children in 18,000 schools across England every year. The Department of Health sees this initiative as working in partnership with other healthy eating projects. “Alongside new nutritional standards for school meals, and community projects to improve access to healthy food, this is a vital step towards improving all children’s health and tackling health inequalities across the country”. (See Appendix 1 for further background information)

## **Purpose of the Evaluation**

The aim of this evaluation was to discover how parents and carers who stay for the healthy meals after the Toddler Group at St. Philips, Volunteers and the Co-ordinator feel about the Project.

The evaluation also hoped to find out if the group was reaching the following national Sure Start objectives:

- Objective 2: Improving Health
- Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities

## **Methods used**

A plan for the evaluation was developed by the Bournemouth University Research Team in consultation with the management team at St. Philips Church, Sure Start Bournemouth and the Evaluation Working Group. Information was collected using a variety of methods, as follows:

- Three Focus Group interviews were conducted with 9 parents and carers who had been attending the healthy eating meals.
- An in-depth individual interview was undertaken with the Co-ordinator of the Project

- Two individual interviews took place with volunteers

**Copies of the interview guides are shown at the end of the report.**

## **Ethical Issues**

Information letter and consent forms were given to parents, carers and volunteers who agreed to take part in the study. Everyone had the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation and could withdraw at any time. Interviews were taped, with permission, and participants assured of confidentiality and that data would be reported anonymously in the evaluation report.

## **Findings**

### **Focus group interviews with parents/carers**

The focus group interviews were facilitated by a researcher. Interviews took place during the Toddler Group sessions at St. Philips Church community centre. Parents and carers were encouraged to take part in a discussion which explored how they became involved in the group, their expectations, good things about the group, not such good things, changes in the way parents/carers prepared food, and gains from attending the group.

### **Individual Interviews with Volunteers**

Two individual interviews were conducted with volunteers who helped to prepare the healthy meals and single choice meals. One interview took place after a Toddler Group/Healthy Meal session at St. Philips Church Community Centre and the other at West Howe Network. The interviews explored a number of issues: what the volunteers do at the Healthy Eating Project sessions, what the service offers to residents, the good things about the group, the not such good things, how residents are made aware of the group and gains from being a volunteer at the group.

### **In-depth interview with the Co-ordinator of the Project**

An in-depth interview with the St. Philips Healthy Eating Project Co-ordinator was held at the St. Philip's Community Centre. The interview explored a number of issues:

- Aims & objectives of the Healthy Eating Project
- Access
- Up-take
- What happens during a typical session
- Good things/not such good things
- Role of the volunteers
- The way forward

The following data and themes emerged from these focus groups and individual interviews. Quotes are shown anonymously.

**Aims & Objectives of the Healthy Eating Project**

**Who goes to the Healthy Eating Meals**

**The role of the Volunteers**

**A typical session**

**Successes of the Healthy Eating Project**

**Ideas for the future**

**The aims and objectives of the Healthy Eating Project**



Historically, the St. Philips' Healthy Eating Project was an opportunity for parents or carers and their children to sit down together once a term after the Toddler group and eat a meal. As previously mentioned in this evaluation, Sure Start Bournemouth has provided additional funding to enable the Project to provide a meal more frequently (once a month during term-time) at the end of Toddler Group sessions. In addition,

with the extra funding, the Healthy Eating Project offers a 'single choice' meal once a term with the aim of planning and preparing the meal with parents/carers.

Participants in the evaluation described the overall aims of the Healthy Eating Project as:

- Promoting eating together as a family
- Promoting healthier foods

More specific objectives include:

- Increased frequency of meals at the end of Toddler Group sessions
- Parents and volunteers preparing meals together
- Increased variety in 'multi-choice' meal sessions
- Talking about healthy eating and food
- Getting parents/carers to think about what meals would be prepared at the 'single choice' meal session
- Providing an opportunity for parents/carers to socialise and have some 'time out'
- Collection of ideas for a recipe book
- The opportunity for children to eat with other children

## **Who goes to the Healthy Eating Meals**

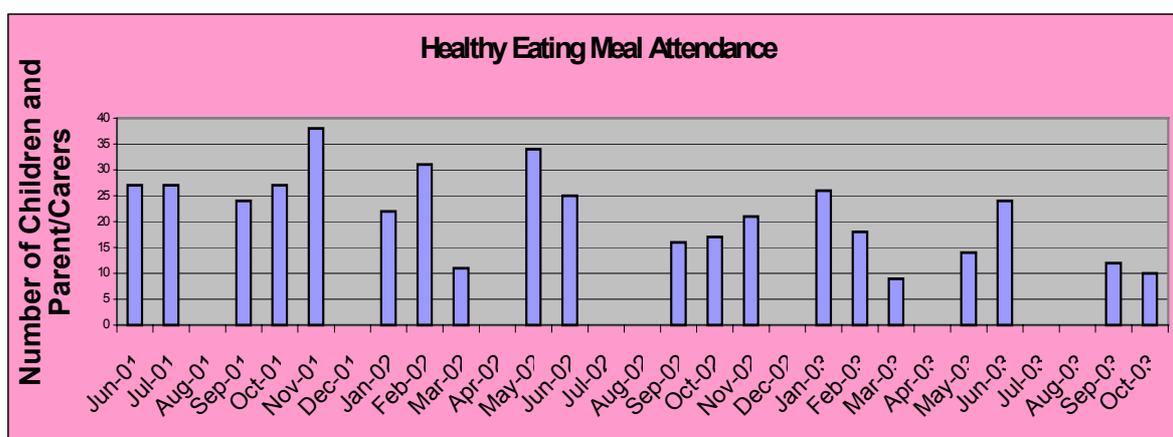


Parents/ carers and their children are encouraged to attend the Toddler Group and Healthy Eating Project sessions from all areas of the local community, not just from the Sure Start Bournemouth area. Participants in the Group and Project are generally mums, but also include dads, grandparents and carers.

Parents/carers are made aware of the Healthy Eating Project meals in a number of ways. During Toddler Group sessions they see a Diary of Events and meals on offer. Posters are put up in the Community Centre the week before the Project meal and on the day. The Healthy Eating Project meals are also ‘advertised’ by word of mouth. The Project is also advertised locally in the Community Newsletter and at the Sure Start Centre. Most of the parents/carers interviewed in this evaluation said that they had heard about the Healthy Eating Project from friends.

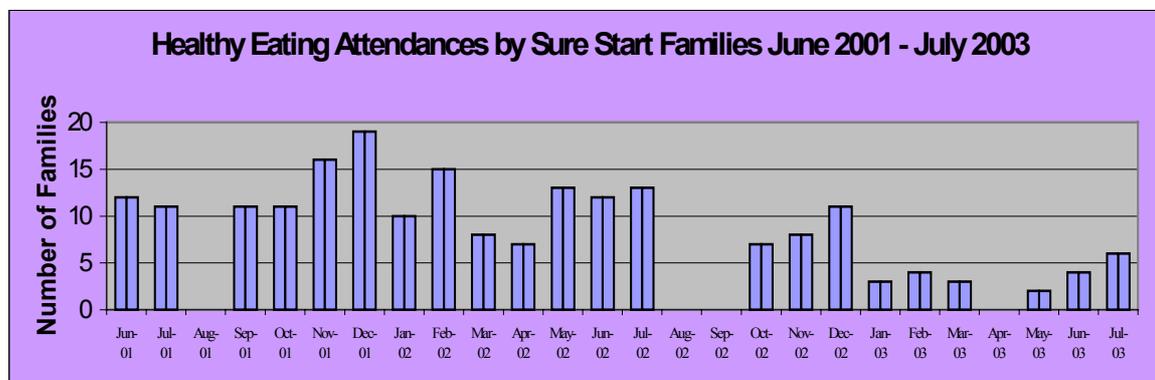
Volunteers described attendance at the Toddler Group and Healthy Eating Project as occurring in ‘waves and troughs’. However, as shown in Table 1, overall, the numbers are down.

Table 1: Numbers of parents/carers who have attended the Project after Sure Start Bournemouth funding:



Similarly, at the start, the Project had approximately 15 parents/carers with approximately the same number of, or slightly more, children from the Sure Start area. Figures have now dropped to approximately six parents/carers and eight to nine children (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of parents/carers and children who have attended and are from the Sure Start area (including Paddington Grove):



As the Healthy Eating meals are served at the end of Toddler Group sessions, falling numbers at these sessions has had a direct effect on attendance for the meals. There may be a number of reasons why this has happened including duplication of activities within the local community and children starting school. There have also been a number of major developments with a community focus within the area in recent years. Perhaps one of the major impact on the Toddler Group and the Healthy Eating Project is the success of Sure Start Bournemouth itself.

*It's in part due to the success of Sure Start which inevitably does draw people from the Sure Start area to its work (Volunteer)*

There are numerous activities for children and parents at the Sure Start Centre which may have had some impact on the number of parents/carers attending the Toddler Group and Healthy Eating Project.

## The Role of the Volunteers



Volunteers interviewed described how they had first become involved with the Healthy Project. Whilst one volunteer was a member of the ‘Church team’ and had been involved with running the Toddler Group and providing meals for a number of years, other volunteers had become involved because they were church members or had a long history of community service. They have undertaken various food preparation courses, with one having completed a hygiene/food preparation training course.

The Volunteers described their role as being both creative and rewarding.

*[I have] got more involved in the church and got to know quite a few people (Volunteer)*

*It’s sort of being creative isn’t it really. (Volunteer)*

Volunteers were involved in the purchasing of food prior to the Toddler sessions. Food is prepared during the session:

*We prepare everything during the morning, I put the jacket potatoes in as soon as I come in. (Volunteer)*

*I start preparing the salads and make sandwiches (Volunteer)*

Toddler Group sessions were described as busy. Volunteers serve tea and coffee during the morning as well as preparing food for the meal. Generally, therefore, there is little opportunity to chat. Being able to sit down and share the meal and socialise with parents/carers and the children was, therefore, particularly appreciated.

*We sit and have lunch together and it's really good because [parents/carers] talk, ... the vicar comes in and talks with [parents/carers] as well and then we have lunch all of us and it's a really good atmosphere (Volunteer)*

Volunteers feel that there is a need to make the meals sound attractive to parents and to get the children's interest. Recipes that are tried out for the 'single-choice' meal also need to be fairly easy and quick given the demands on parents with busy lives.



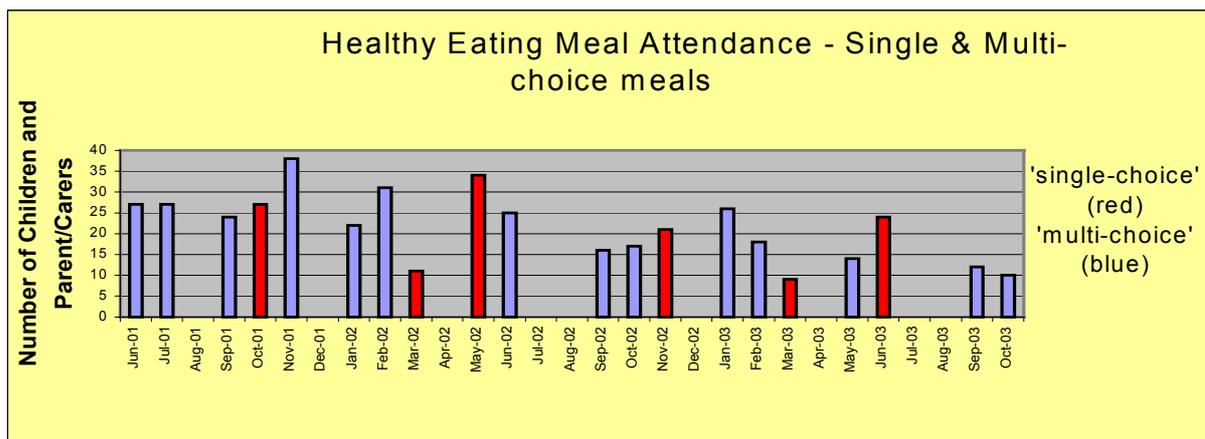
### **What happens during a typical session**



Toddler group sessions take place as normal before both the 'multi-choice' and 'single-choice' meals. Both types of meals are served at the end of the Toddler Groups at 11.30 a.m. Preparation takes place during the Toddler Group but is served only at the end of the session so as not to take time from the Toddler session.

Table 3 shows the number of parents, carers and children who have attended the 'multi-choice' and 'single-choice' meals.

Table 3: Number of parents/carers and children who have attended the 'multi-choice' and 'single-choice' sessions



### Multi-choice meals

The Health Eating Project 'multi-choice' meals are provided once a month, during school term-time, at the end of the Toddler Group sessions.

Food is purchased by the volunteers. There is an element of guesswork, as numbers attending are not known beforehand. The volunteers prepare the food fresh on the morning of the Toddlers session. An ordering system has recently been developed where parents/carers fill in their orders and work out the cost of their meals at the beginning of the Toddler Group session and hand these in to the volunteers. Parents and volunteers described the atmosphere at the Healthy Eating Meals as easy going and laid back:

*Relaxing I find – other people aren't stressing out as well (Parent)*

*My kids love staying here for lunch. I always cancel going to my Mum's on a Wednesday (Parent)*

The opportunity to share a meal with others and their children was really appreciated by the parents/carers interviewed. Participants were also very positive about the food and particularly enjoyed the ‘multi-choice’ meals where they felt there was always something that their children liked to eat.

Meal choices for the ‘multi-choice’ sessions include:

Jacket potatoes
Pizzas
Sandwiches
Salad
Fresh fruit
Yoghurts

A small charge is made to cover the cost of purchasing the food, e.g. jacket potato 80p, pizza 65p, yoghurt 30p and fruit 12p. Volunteers stressed that the aim of the Healthy Eating Project was not to make a profit from the meals provided, but rather to cover costs and provide the opportunity for parents to eat and socialise together.



### Single-choice meals

Volunteers chat with parents/carers at the Toddler Group sessions before a 'single-choice' meal date, ask for recipe ideas and encourage participation. There have been one or two suggestions from parents/carers:

*They bring in a recipe and they cook it – so they do involve the parents (Parent)*

*Sometimes it is a suggestion from a parent, often it is [the volunteers] thoughts (Parent)*

Either the volunteers or a parent/carer buys the food the day before. Again quantities are estimated on the number of parents attending during the preceding weeks. After talking through the recipe with parents and carers, the meal is prepared during the Toddler Group session and ready to serve by about 11.30a.m.

Types of meal for the 'single-choice' have included:

- Spaghetti bolognese
- Corned beef hash with vegetables
- Pasta dishes
- Tuna Bake

Parents/carers were encouraged, particularly in the beginning, to get involved in preparing the food. The information collected during this evaluation indicates though that whilst parents and carers were involved with the food preparation occasionally, this hasn't happened on a regular basis. The volunteers have, in the main, suggested the menus, prepared the food and served it.

There are a number of reasons for this. One of the problems which has arisen when parents have assisted with the preparation of the food is that the children came into the kitchen area which presents a health and safety problem. Volunteers also commented on the time pressure to produce the meal during the course of a Toddler Group session.

*It's very difficult to keep the children out of the kitchen when Mum's here (Volunteer)*

The children are not always happy to be left alone in the Toddler Group and to date, it has not been possible to provide child care for those parents helping with the preparation of the 'single-choice' meal. One of the ways forward might be to provide crèche worker support during the session.

The ideas that volunteers and the Co-ordinator have come up with for the 'single choice' meal have mostly been well received and appreciated by the parents/carers. However, the volunteers were aware that there was a need not to make the 'single choice' meal repetitive, particularly once something has been found that parents/carers really enjoy.

There have been occasions when parents/carers have not attended because they didn't like what was on offer:

*If we've only got one thing on offer, if parents don't like it they won't stay (Volunteer)*

Others, on occasion, have stayed despite not liking the look of what was on offer. It was particularly rewarding for the volunteers when those parents/carers have said they had enjoyed the meal. Overall, Volunteers felt that perhaps parents and carers preferred the monthly 'multi-choice' meals at the end of Toddler Sessions, as they were sometimes less enthusiastic about the new ideas and suggestions for the 'single-choice meals'.

One of the other aims of the Healthy Eating Project 'single-choice meal' was that the menus tried out would be put together in a Recipe Book. Although, the participants in the evaluation generally thought this was a good idea, the idea hadn't really been taken up yet. However, parents said that when the Project does produce a special meal, they often take the recipes home.

## Successes of the Healthy Eating Project



### **What is working well:**

#### *For parents/carers/grandparents*

- Support of other parents/carers/grandparents
- Sitting and eating together
- Relaxed environment
- Time out for parents/carers
- Opportunity to socialise
- Potential for queries to be answered about bringing up children by talking to someone else

#### *For children*

- Children can see what other children are eating
- Children enjoy the meal
- Learning to eat with others/table manners

#### *For the family*

- Eating together at home
- Trying out new recipes
- New ideas for healthier eating
- Parents socialise together away from the project
- Opportunity to attend a short church service at Christmas and Easter

Mothers talked about the social benefits they received by sitting down and eating with others. Some of the parents have formed a social network that includes going out together at other times of the day.

*It is nice to sit there and have a conversation with other mums (Parent)*

*I think it gives the mum a break as well ... talking to other mums' and people do have queries about bringing children up and they can talk to somebody else (Volunteer)*

*They have a social as well, they go out together at the end ... they go out on trips as well and they have a service at Christmas & Easter ... in the church*  
(Volunteer)

Parents felt that the Project was brilliant for children too in that a hot meal was provided for them at lunch-time and it was also an opportunity for them to learn social skills during the mealtime sessions in the company of both adults and other young children.

*When the other children sit down, they sit down* (Parent)

*Getting used to eating in a group* (Parent)

One parent spoke about the impact that attending the Healthy Eating Project had had at home:

*Actually I do find that he eats a lot better if we are all sat round together – my other half works so even if we wait for him to come home it works better if we eat together* (Parent)

Most parents and carers said they appreciated the opportunity to try out new ideas for healthy meals and being able to take the recipes home to try out with the family.

## **Ideas for the Future**



There were a number of issues raised and ideas put forward by participants during the course of the evaluation:

### **Advertising & attendance**

One of the challenges for the Project was encouraging people to come along on a regular basis. Concern was expressed about the drop in numbers:

*I would just like to see more people stay (Volunteer)*

A number of the participants felt that the Healthy Eating Project should be advertised more widely and effectively.

### **The format of the Healthy Eating Project**

There was agreement amongst the Co-ordinator and Volunteers and, after consultation with Sure Start Bournemouth, that the Healthy Eating Project would need to develop with a slightly different format.

Various suggestions have been put forward. One of the options is that a course being delivered in schools and local projects to promote health and healthy eating by the Environmental Health Department might be included as part of the Healthy Eating Project. There would be an opportunity too for parents to be involved in food preparation. As highlighted previously, there would be a need for crèche support for those parents/carers involved in food preparation during courses. The 'multi-choice' meals could continue within the Toddler Group, but the 'single-choice' meals and healthy eating course would be separate.

One of the difficulties is to find a format which would both attract funding for the Project and be attractive to parents and carers and which they would attend on a regular basis. St. Philips are particularly keen that the Project should not just be seen as another course in nutrition by parents and carers which they have to attend in order to access the Toddler Group.

### **The Recipe Book**

One of the aims of the Healthy Eating Project was to encourage parents and carers to bring in ideas for the 'single-choice' meal. These recipes would then eventually be gathered together and incorporated into a healthy eating recipe book.

Whilst a number of recipes had been provided by parents and used, more latterly the volunteers had been putting forward ideas. It was suggested by a number of participants that perhaps advice could be sought from the Primary Health Care Team's Nutritionist for different recipe ideas to try out. An alternative to producing a

recipe book would be for laminated sheets to be prepared and distributed to parents and carers.

### **The cost of eating healthily**

Participants were aware that the Healthy Eating Project was part of the ‘larger picture’ of healthy eating initiatives both in the community and in schools, which included those at Sure Start. However, the point was made by a number of parents and carers interviewed that to eat healthily was more expensive and time consuming:

*It is costing me a fortune in shopping (Parent)*

*It is a lot more money for the light stuff than it is for a bag of chips and a bag of chicken nuggets (Parent)*

It was agreed by all that this was a valid point. A number of participants felt that although it was not necessary to buy organic food, which is expensive, it was necessary to shop around. This was time consuming. For many people, including parents with young children, with busy lives and small budgets, this made ‘eating healthily’ harder to sustain.



## Conclusions



### **The achievements of the Healthy Eating Project**

In recent years, a move towards ‘healthier ways of eating’ has been promoted at a national level in the UK for all age groups in the community, and, in particular, for schoolchildren and families living in poverty. The St. Philips Community Centre Healthy Eating Project is part of this initiative at a local level. The information gathered during this evaluation has indicated that the Healthy Eating Project has moved some way towards achieving this aim by providing and encouraging parents and carers to help plan and cook nutritious meals. In addition, a keystone of the philosophy of St. Philips Church, as with Sure Start, is promotion of and support for the family. The aim of promoting eating together as a family is being achieved by providing the opportunity for parents, carers and their children to eat together at the end of Toddler Group sessions and is an important feature of this project.

The healthy ‘multi-choice’ meals, provided on a monthly basis, were well attended and popular with the parents and carers interviewed. The termly ‘single-choice’ meals were also enjoyed. However, numbers attending for these meals were more dependent on how parents and carers felt about the meal choice. Parents and carers have been encouraged by the volunteers to bring ideas for healthy meals for the ‘single-choice’ meals and to be involved in both shopping and preparing the meal. Parental involvement in cooking the ‘single-choice’ meals has been limited, however, by potential safety issues for their children and the lack of crèche support to date.

Participants particularly enjoyed the opportunity to share a meal with others, to socialise and have some time out in a relaxed environment. The Project provided an opportunity for parents/carers to talk about their children’s development with other parents/carers and the volunteers and to chat about healthier ways of eating. They felt their children benefited not only from a nutritious meal but also from the opportunity

to learn social skills. Volunteers valued the opportunity to be creative in terms of helping to choose the meal with parents/carers and food preparation. They, also, enjoyed being able to sit down with parents/carers and their children and socialise at the end of the Toddler sessions.

Some suggestions emerged from the evaluation about how the Healthy Eating project might develop and in what format. Successful local initiatives, including Sure Start Bournemouth itself, had impacted on attendance at Toddler Group sessions and, therefore, at the Healthy Eating Project. Ways of developing the project were being explored which would encourage more local families to participate in the Project.

Regular annual reviews of the service provision agreement between St. Philips and Sure Start have been held, which has provided the opportunity to explore ways of promoting the Healthy Eating initiative and increasing attendance. Recognising the importance of the St. Philips Parent and Toddler Group as a valuable community resource and feeder for the Healthy Eating Group, strategies were agreed in March 2003 to try to boost numbers attending. These included the development of a 'Sure Tots' activity group at the church with funding for training and equipment provided through Sure Start and also the potential involvement of one of Bournemouth Council's Environmental Health Officers and a nutritionist in running cookery/healthy eating courses for parents.



## **Meeting Sure Start Objectives**

Sure Start Bournemouth's Vision Statement states that its 'purpose is to work together to make the Sure Start area in Bournemouth a more positive place to bring up our children' (September 2000). One of the ways that Sure Start Bournemouth aims to improve the quality and level of service provision for young children and their families is by supporting existing community-based projects, like the Healthy Eating Project, to respond to the needs of the community they serve.

**Objective 1 Improving social and emotional development**

**Objective 2 Improving health**

**Objective 3 Improving the ability to learn**

**Objective 4 Strengthening families and communities**

Sure Start Bournemouth acknowledges St. Philips Community Centre as a 'strength' within the local community, particularly mentioning the good quality church hall, with its attached community worker and groups (Final Plan 2000). The Healthy Eating Project has received financial support from Sure Start Bournemouth since Autumn 2000. This additional funding has been provided with the aim of developing the project in terms of increasing the frequency of the 'multi-choice' meals to once a month during term-time and providing a 'single-choice' meal where parents and carers can help to plan and prepare the meal once a term.

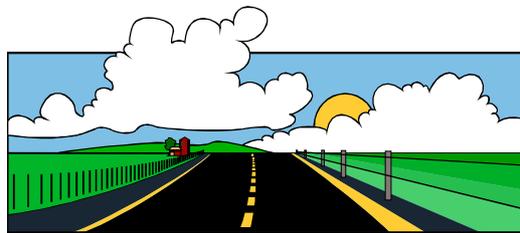
It can be concluded from this evaluation that the Healthy Eating Project is meeting a number of the National Sure Start targets, especially within Objective 2: Improving Health and Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities. In addition, providing additional funding to help develop a locally-based initiative targeting families with children under school age is evidence of good community-based practice.

The Project provides parents/carers and their children with a nutritious, healthy meal and the opportunity to try something different. They are able to talk not only about

healthier ways of eating with the volunteers and other parents/carers, but also about the development of their children.

The evaluation has also shown that parents and carers really value the chance to sit down as a family and with friends to share a meal and socialise. Children enjoy the meals, see what others are eating and gain social skills. Parents and carers also socialise away from the Project. Sharing meals together in this way has the potential to spread ‘the healthier ways of eating message’ not only to other family members and friends, but also to the wider community.

## **Up-date**



The issue of developing the Healthy Eating Project with a different format was highlighted earlier in the evaluation. A Healthy Eating on a Budget course was planned for Autumn, 2003. Sessions were due to place at the end of the Toddler Group and operate with crèche support.

These sessions in fact took place during the Toddler’s Group and operated with crèche support. Three people attended. The course was well received and generated interest amongst other parents at Toddlers as they were able to taste what was being made. As a result of this a further four people have booked in for the next course which is planned for January 2004 and there is optimism that still more may sign up before the course starts.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1 – Further background information**

At the time of writing there are many examples of projects and initiatives, both locally and nationally, targeting families and young children with information and good practice on Healthy Eating. For example The National School Fruit Scheme, which is a country wide project, implemented at a very local level. However there is little evidence in the literature that these initiatives have been reported on.

Schools have, traditionally, had a great influence in developing a culture of healthy eating and advocating the advantages of a healthy life style to children. Using a project based approach they examined good diet and exercise as part of the everyday curriculum. This now formally features in the science element of the National Curriculum and is addressed around Year 5 of the primary school and Year 9 in the secondary phase. Schools are also encouraged to have policies and show good practice in the food they permit to be sold in tuck shops and allow to be brought onto their premises and eaten at break-times and over the lunch-time period. These policies and attitudes are important. Information and understanding gained from the taught curriculum can be reinforced, supported or completely undermined by what happens outside the classroom. Health education, with its healthy eating element, needs to be an integral part of the whole ethos and hidden curriculum of the school and not merely addressed as the content of one particular lesson or theme.

One of the traditional methods of ensuring children have the option of a healthy meal is through the provision of school meals. This particularly targets children from economically deprived areas because of the entitlement to a free school meal. Free School meal provision in Bournemouth involves a packed lunch in primary schools and an entitlement to a hot meal in secondary education. Heathlands Primary School, a primary school on the West Howe estate was reported in their Ofsted Report of June 2001 to have “Over 50% of pupils entitled to free school meals” while Elmrise Primary in their Ofsted Report of January 2002 to have “Approximately one quarter of the pupil eligible for free school meals, close to the average”.

Schools, particularly the primary phase, seem to have been quite successful in getting the message of healthy eating across as a theoretical concept. Children appear to be well informed about healthy eating and can recite the accepted view concerning what they should and should not eat. However research suggests that despite children's awareness of foods that might be termed healthy, or should be eaten in moderation, a gap exists between knowledge and actual eating habits. Evidence shows that a relationship exists between dietary behaviours, attitudes and socio-economic groups. Children from disadvantaged areas appear to consume more convenience foods and high fat, sugar snacks and fizzy drinks than other children. (O'Brien 2002)

As health education is a shared responsibility to be undertaken by parents, teachers, children, governors, health professionals and other relevant members of the community co-operation and community involvement are central to a successful healthy eating initiative. With this in mind there has been an expansion in the provision of Breakfast, After School and Healthy Grub Clubs. However, there is evidence to suggest that people are going to make their own decisions concerning healthy eating regardless of the consequences but these type of locally based activities can be successful as a community initiative. (Dines 1994)

More recently, there are a number of examples where community-based initiatives have targeted families. For instance, in Cleveland, Teeside a number of Healthy Eating Clubs were set up as it was felt that the healthy eating message was only reaching the converted. Professionals within the area believed that local people had a limited knowledge of what makes a healthy diet. Meeting once a week the clubs were run by local people who set the agenda and menus with the support of professionals. The food was prepared and cooked by mothers with assistance and advice from health professionals. Crèche facilities were available and it was soon found that mothers wanted more recipes, exercise sessions and lists of food to help keep their weight down. They also wanted help on the type of food to feed their children. As the groups developed relevant training about healthy eating and food handling and preparation was obtained. The project was advertised on local radio and in the community via the schools and groups. It was sold as an initiative focusing on cheap, easy family meals, and healthy food for the family and getting fit. The message was soon learnt that the group needed the right publicity and to get across the right messages. These 'good grub clubs' changed women's eating habits and diets. They

also had other successes. Groups produced cook books, catered for outside buffets, gained certificates in food handling and some carers went on to study for qualifications in child care. As with many 'self-help' groups set up by parents and carers, peer support was a very positive element of the activity.

## **Appendix 2 – Interview Guides**

### **Interview Guide - Co-ordinator**

- 1. Can you tell me something about the aims & objectives of the Healthy Eating Project?**
  - What is this project trying to do?
  - What are the activities and structures involved in developing and maintaining this service?
  - Funding
  
- 2. How do members of the community access the project?**
  - How do members of the community get to hear about the project?
  - Referrals?
  - Where do they come from?
  - Are they residents of the Sure Start area?
  - Are they Mums, Dads, extended family members?
  
- 3. How many members of the community use it?**
  
- 4. Can you tell me what happens during a typical session?**
  - Parental involvement?
  - Preparation by parents?
  - Recipe book?
  
- 5. Can you tell me something about what participants get/don't get from the project?**
  - Parents
  - Children
  - Feedback from participants?
  
- 6. Can you tell me something about the role of the volunteers?**
  
- 7. Is there anything that is working well/not so well?**
  
- 8. Is the service changing in any way?**
  
- 9. Is the service beginning to have the desired effect?**
  
- 10. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

## Healthy Eating Project: Volunteers Interview Guide

- Can you tell me what you do at the group?
  - Interaction with residents?
  - Supervision?
  - Training?
- What do you think the service offers residents?
- What are the good things about the group
- What are the not so good things?
- How are residents made aware of the group?
- Have you gained anything from being a volunteer at the group?
- Anything else?

## Healthy Eating Project: Group Members Interview Guide

- How did you get involved in the group?
- What were your expectations?
- Good things
- Not so good things
- Have you changed the way in which you prepare/eat food
  - Yourself
  - Partner
  - Children
- What other things apart from cooking skills have you gained from coming to the group?
  - Confidence
  - Social network
- What do you think your child has gained from the group?
- Anything else?