

**Crawley (Broadfield) Sure Start User Survey:  
An initial evaluation**

**FINAL REPORT**

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
Aims and Objectives	3
<b>Methodology</b>	3
<b>Results</b>	3
The Monitoring Data	4
The User Survey	4
<b>Analysis of Results</b>	4
<i>Who were the respondents?</i>	5
<i>How many were registered with Sure Start?</i>	6
<i>How had parents heard about Sure Start?</i>	6
<i>How did parents view the services/activities?</i>	6
<i>What did parents feel they had gained?</i>	7
<i>How did parents rate aspects of Sure Start services/activities?</i>	8
<i>What did parents feel their children had gained?</i>	9
<i>What suggestions do parents have for other services/activities?</i>	10
<i>What did parents enjoy most about Sure Start?</i>	10
<b>Conclusion</b>	11

## **Appendix (the questionnaire)**

### *Figures:*

1. <i>Children and families seen during September 2002-November 2003</i>	3
2. <i>Number people attending activities</i>	4
3. <i>The services/activities being accessed</i>	5
4. <i>Parental rating of Sure Start Activities/Services</i>	6
5. <i>Parental gains from involvement with Sure Start</i>	7
6. <i>Parental views of Sure Start activities/services</i>	8
7. <i>Parental views of children's' gains</i>	9

## 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 Crawley Sure Start is a Fifth Wave programme having been established in 2002 with services/activities running since March 2003. Initially it was located at the Broadfield Community Centre but because of rapid staff expansion, it was re-located in August 2003, in temporary accommodation at Broadfield House. New purpose built accommodation is to be completed during 2004. The current premises are situated on the edge of the Broadfield Estate, which is within walking distance of the estate and accessible by car and public transport. A Sure Start minibus is service is planned.

There are 633 children under the age of 4 years currently known to be living in the Broadfield Estate area, ( families). At the time of writing, 396 families are registered with Sure Start (376 children).

The programme is governed by a Joint Partnership/Management Board on which stakeholders, including parents, are represented. There are currently 6 parents representatives.

The day to day running of the programme is the responsibility of the Programme Manager and her team who represent a number of agencies (both statutory and voluntary). The lead body is Crawley Borough Council and the accountable body is West Sussex County Council.

The current team consists of 12 staff contracted by Sure Start with a further 13 working for the programme under Service Level Agreements. The staff are divided into 4 teams: the Primary and Community Healthcare Team, the Family Support Team, the Play, Learning and Childcare Team and the Project and Finance Team. Between them, the staff run a number of activities and services.

The current services/activities are:

Broadfield Teddies  
Library Drop in  
Infant Massage  
Kindermusic

Sure Starters  
HUGGEES  
Get Out  
Citizens Advice Bureau  
IT  
Parents Group  
Breastfeeding Supporters Training  
Breast Start  
Homestart Drop-in  
Drop-in (Family Centre)  
Crawley Dads  
Home Visits  
Summer Activities  
Partnership/Management Board

### **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.

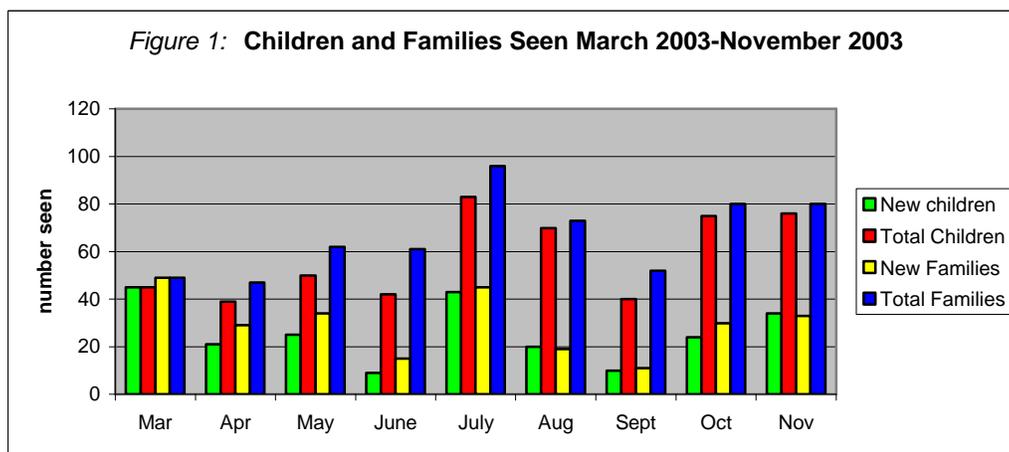
A user survey was devised which was designed to give both quantitative and qualitative data concerning parental views of their involvement with Sure Start services and activities. The questionnaire was designed to assess the degree of satisfaction parents have with services/activities with which they and their children are involved. Questions were also designed with the Sure Start Public Service Agreement targets in mind to measure parents' views of their progress towards these targets. The questionnaire was taken to the Joint Partnership/Management 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 and therefore total anonymity was assured. After revising the questionnaire to remove all personal questions, it was piloted by two of the parents who sit on the Board.

The Family Social Work Coordinator agreed to take the questionnaire to members of the Crawley Sure Start Parents Forum who were invited to take responsibility for distributing the questionnaires to members of the various groups and ensuring that they were completed and returned. The data collection period was agreed to take place during a period of 3 weeks in the Autumn 2003. Crawley Sure Start Parents Forum operates a Volunteer Parent Adviser Reward Scheme in which parents who volunteer to be involved are rewarded on a point scheme which ultimately results in payment by means of Gift Vouchers. It was agreed that the questionnaire should be interpreted, when necessary by the Ethnic Minorities Worker.

## 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 March 2—3, in order to assess Crawley's progress in terms of involvement by children and families in Sure Start.



One can see from (*Figure 1*) that during the summer months, there was an increase in the number of children and families taking part, probably because of the summer activities which were running during the school holidays. During September, whilst the new premises at Broadfield House were being set up, numbers fell a little because many of the services/activities were not running.. During October and November there has been approximately 75 children and 80 families just under half of which were new families and children, which shows steady progress in the number accessing Sure Start. There are slightly more families involved than children which, would confirm other findings that the current emphasis of the programme is on support for families rather than on play and learning facilities for children.

### The User Survey

Questionnaires were taken out to the various groups by the parents who volunteered but the number returned was disappointingly low. There could have been a number of reasons of the low response rate. One of the reasons was that many of the groups had only just started and in many cases, parents felt it was too early to carry out an evaluation. In addition, several of the parents only attend one Sure Start service/activity and therefore did not consider they were knowledgeable enough about Sure Start to answer the survey. In addition, besides renovation work taking place during the autumn, one of the weeks in the data collection period was Half-Term both of which prevented a number of activities taking place. There was also some reluctance, possibly because of the low reported level of literacy in the area, both on the part of the parent volunteers to push the questionnaires on people and for the participants to respond. Finally, no training regarding evaluation has yet taken place and parents are not yet engaged in the process.

### Analysis of Results

The 29 returned questionnaires were from 3 separate groups: Eighteen were received from the Sure Starters group, ten from the Infant Massage group and one was received from the Breastfeeding Peer Supporters Training group. Despite the low response rate, a number of these parents attend multiple activities/services and so it was possible to collect limited data in respect of these.

*Figure 2* below, shows the number of services/activities each of the 29 respondents are involved in. Although the majority (13) only attend one activity/service, two are involved in as many as nine.

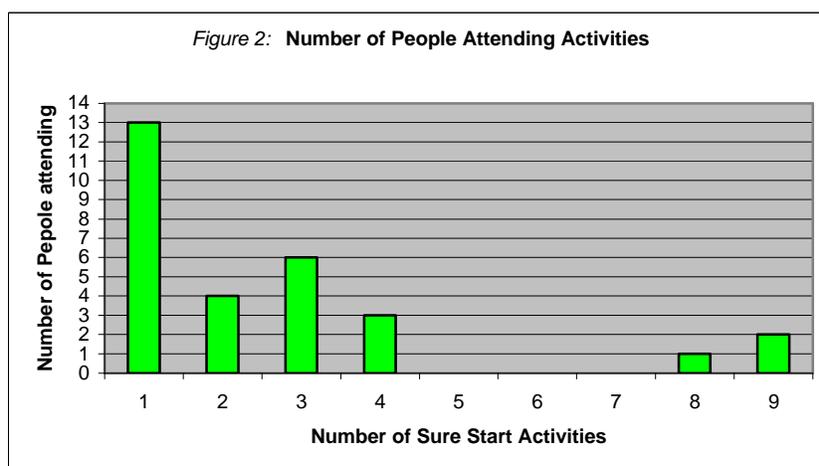
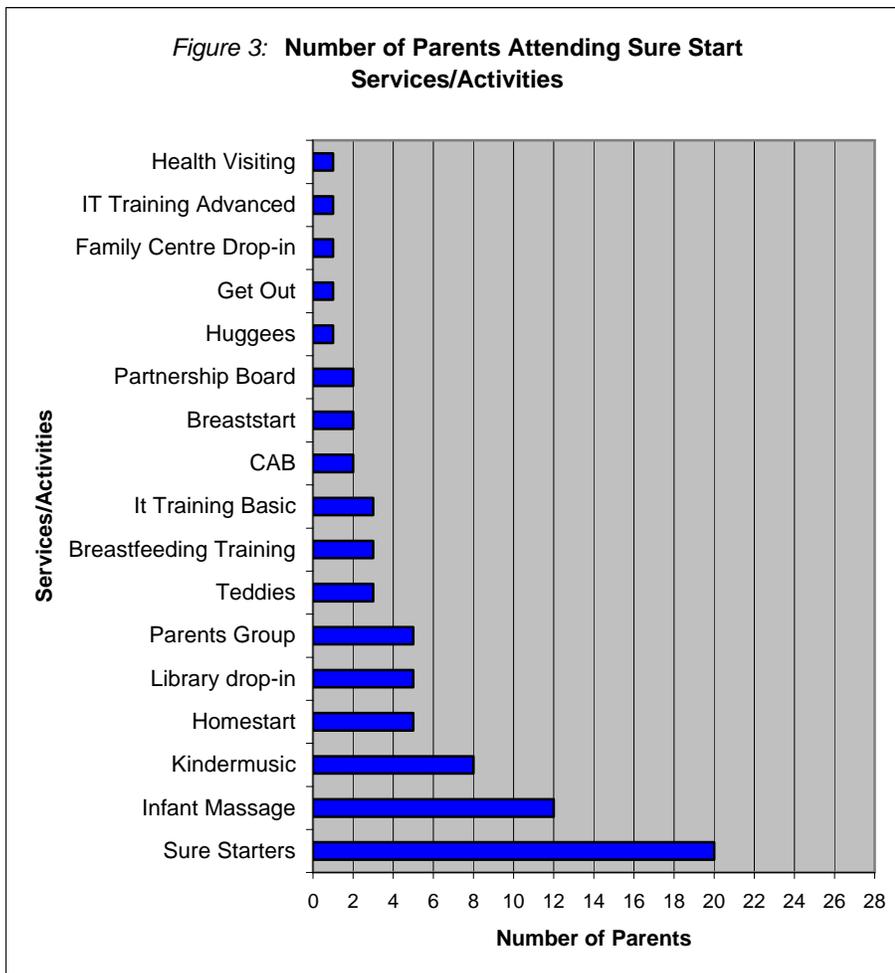


Figure 3 shows which services/activities the 29 respondents are actually involved in. It also reflects why the data is limited in the majority of services/activities. As can be seen, the most responses were from the three main groups, Sure Starters, Infant Massage and Kindermusic.



**Who were the respondents?**

All but one of the respondents were mothers of the children, one respondent was the child’s grandmother. Only two parents indicated that they had a partner who was involved in Sure Start. Another had tried to involve her partner: *‘I have told him about the Dad’s group but I can’t persuade him’*. When asked about what activities might encourage partners to be involved, only three responded positively suggesting a massage class, more family fun days and a Saturday’s family group. Many who had partners stated that they were *‘too busy’* to get involved or that groups are not held at the right time: *‘He’s up for anything - it’s just that most of it’s Monday-Friday, and he works full-time’*. However, for one partner who was able to take part in the summer activities, it had been an enjoyable experience: *‘it makes for a lovely family day out’*.

Although 29 questionnaires were returned it should be noted in reading the following analysis, that the number of replies received for each question varied considerably.

**How many were registered with Sure Start?**

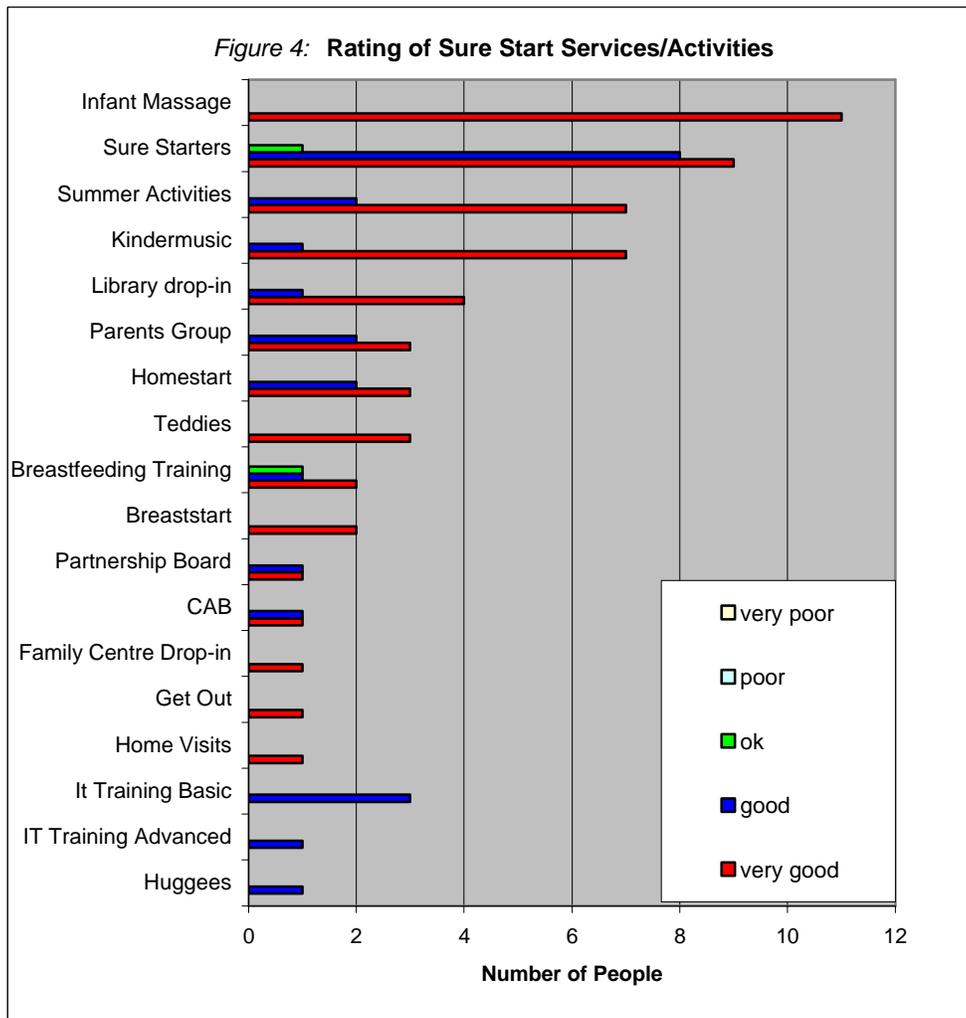
Only seventeen (58%) of the 25 of those who responded said that they were registered with Sure Start. Four (14%) did not specify either way.

**How had parents heard about Sure Start?**

Nine (43%) had learnt about Sure Start from a professional, mainly the Health Visitor or Midwife. Eight (38%) had mainly heard through attending other Sure Start services/activities or special events, such as the Fun Days or Open Days. Four (19%) stated that they had learnt of it by word of mouth. None mentioned having learnt of it through any publicity material.

**How did parents view the services/activities?**

The parents were asked to rate the different services/activities with which they are involved on a scale 1-4, (1 being 'very poor' and 4 being 'very good'.) As already stated, the data collected was mainly from the Sure Starters Group and the Infant Massage Group.

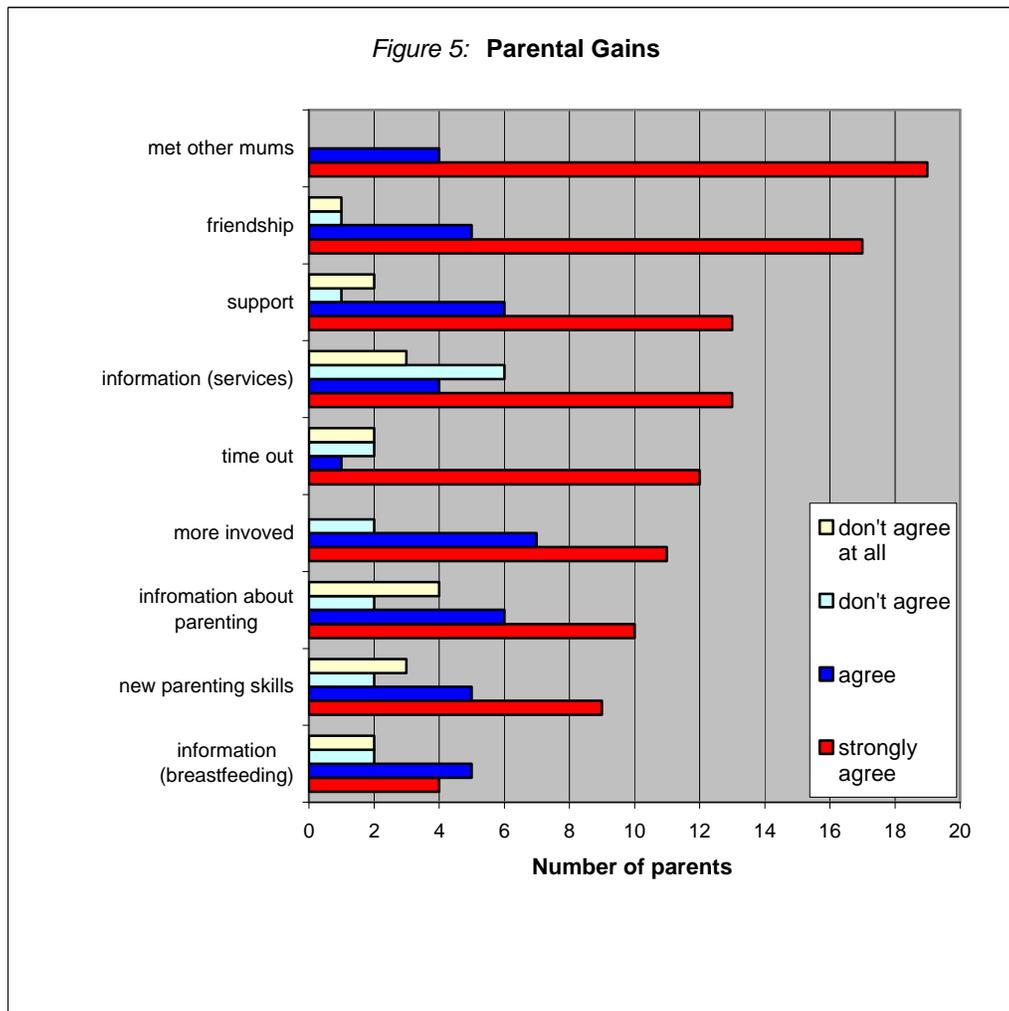


As already stated, the rating for the other groups was done by those who happened to be attending these groups as well as the Infant Massage and Sure Starters

groups, so they are not representative of each services/activity as a whole. However, all eleven (100%) who rated the Infant Massage group, rated it as *very good*. Seventeen (94%) of the Sure Starters group rated it either as *very good*, or *good*, with 1 person rating it as *ok*. None rated any service/activity as *poor* or *very poor*. As shown, parents rated all the other services/ activities which they were attending positively.

**What did parents feel they had gained from their involvement with Sure Start?**

As the next graph shows, the parents were asked to rate what they felt they had gained most from their involvement with Sure Start on a scale 1-4 (1 being 'I do not agree at all' and 4 being 'I strongly agree'.)



As can be seen, the number responding to each question varied. The largest gain was in terms of social inclusion: All 26 (100%) parents who responded felt that they had had the opportunity to meet with other mothers with children of similar age and this had been valuable in allowing them to share parenting experiences. Most of the 26 who responded (92%) had gained new friendships, 21 of the 23 (91%) respondents felt they were more confident, 20 of 23 respondents (87%) felt less

isolated, and 18 out of 20 (90%) felt more involved in the community than previously. This had led to 18 out of 23 (72%) feeling a greater sense of control over their lives.

19 of the 22 (86%) who responded agreed that they had gained practical support and professional help. 17 out of 20 (85%) respondents had found Sure Start to be a useful source of information about other services/ activities which are available.

There had also been increased gains in terms of their parenting: 16 out of 22 respondents (73%) agreed that they had received information and advice about parenting, and 14 out of 19 respondents (74%) agreed that they learnt new parenting skills. 18 out of 24 respondents (75%) felt that they understood their children better, and 18 out of 25 respondents (72%) felt that they were able to manage their children's behaviour more appropriately. 13 of the 19 respondents (76%) parents felt that their involvement with Sure Start had given them the opportunity for 'time out' from parenting responsibilities which was valued. The lowest area of gain was concerning information and advice about breastfeeding where 9 out of 13 parents (69%) agreed with this statement.

**How did parents view certain aspects of the Services/Activities?**

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

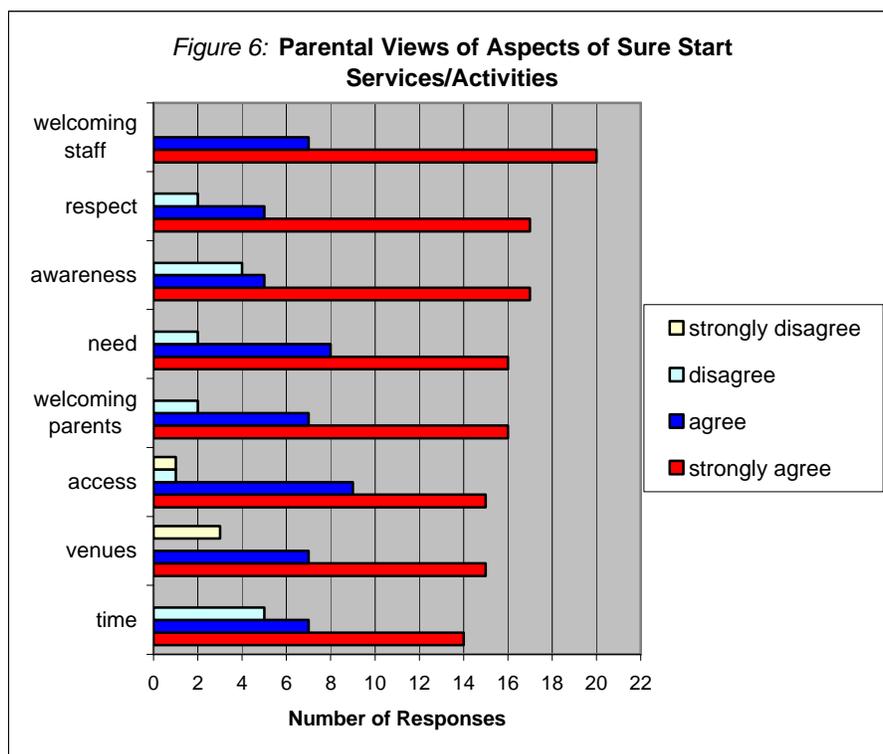


Figure 6 shows that 24 out of 26 parents (92%) agree with the statement: 'Sure Start is just what I need'.

All 27 parents who responded were unanimous (100%) in perceiving the staff as welcoming and 23 out of 25 parents (92%) agreed that other parents are welcoming

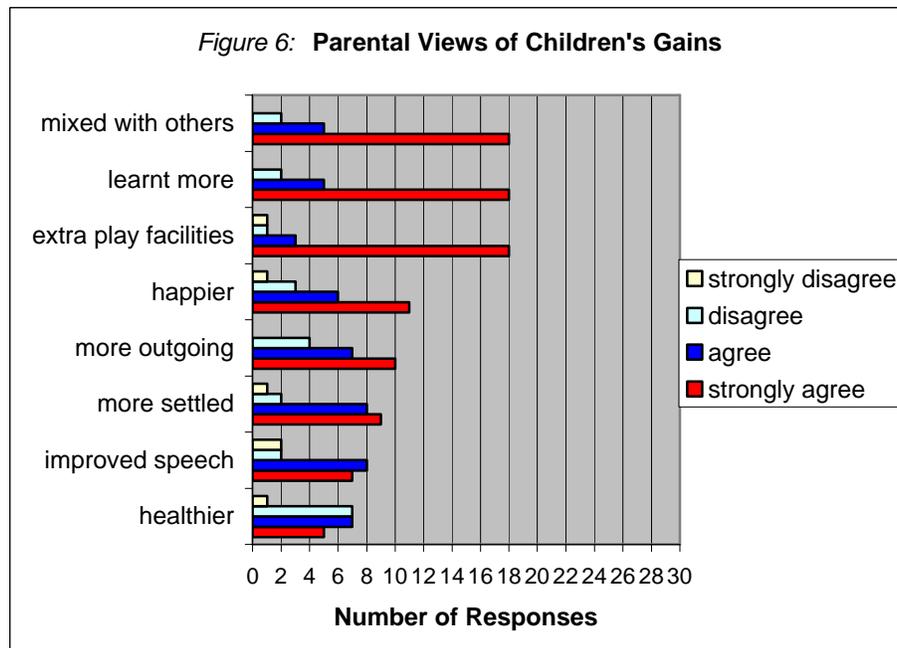
but this was not always the case: *'When I started some groups, I felt that the mothers were clicky and not friendly'*.

22 out of 24 parents (92%) agreed that *'The staff respect my privacy'* and 22 out of 26 parents (85%) agreed with the statement *'The staff show good awareness of individual needs'*.

24 out of 26 (92%) agreed that the venues were easily accessible and 22 out of 25 (88%) felt the venues in which the sessions were held were good and accessible. 21 out of 26 respondents (81%) agreed that the timing of the sessions are convenient.

**What did parents feel their children had gained?**

Parents also rated the gains which they felt their children had received from their involvement with Sure Start.



A number of parents were unable to answer this question as they were first-time mothers or attending with newborn babies. However, those that did respond did so, rated their children's gains, again, in terms of social inclusion; 23 out of 25 parents (92%) agreed that their children had had the opportunity to mix with other children of similar age and that they had had extra stimulation and learnt more. 21 out of 23 (91%) agreed that their children and had had access to new toys and experiences. 17 out of 20 parents (85%) agreed that their children are more settled in their behaviour, 17 out of 24 (81%) agreed that their children had become more outgoing and 17 out of 21 (81%) agreed that their child was happier. The gains in terms of health targets were not as quite as high: 15 out of 19 (79%) agreed that their child's speech had developed but only 12 out of 20 (60%) agreed that their child was physically healthier.

### **What suggestions did parents make about other services/activities?**

14 of the 29 (48%) 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 crèches
- more parenting services
- more mother and toddlers groups including an afternoon group
- more arts based activities for children – music, painting, dance
- re-installing the Jumping Jacks group
- better play facilities including a soft play area for babies
- a Crawley Mums group
- advice regarding preschools and schools
- swimming facilities

### **What did parents enjoy most about Sure Start?**

The parents were asked what they had enjoyed most about their contact with Sure Start. 28 out of the 29 parents responded and the majority of mothers (50%) had most valued the fact that it had given them the opportunity get out of the house, to meet other parents with children of similar age with whom they could share parenting experiences and make friends:

*'It gave me something to look forward to everyday'.*

*'I enjoyed getting out and meeting other mums'.*

*'I enjoyed meeting new people and making some really good friends'.*

The parents also enjoyed the fact that their children were having the opportunity to mix with other children which had made them more confident: *'I've enjoyed seeing my child mixing with other children, playing with different toys and activities, watching her confidence grow'.*

Some of the mothers in the baby massage group found that it enabled them to have quality time with their babies which had increased their feelings of closeness with their babies and given them increased confidence as mothers:

*'I enjoyed meeting other parents, learning massage and feeling close to my baby'.*

*'I enjoyed spending time with my baby on his own with the older child in nursery'.*

Generally, parents valued the fact that the staff were supportive and friendly: *'The staff are all very nice and offer good support and advice when I need it'.*

Some mothers enjoyed the fact that Sure Start had enabled them to develop their own interests and enhance their skills: *'I got to go to IT courses'.* Whilst another mother enjoyed *'having my say'* at Partnership Board meetings.

Asked what they had not enjoyed about Sure Start, only two comments were received which concerned the early start times of some of the group and problems regarding poor communication: *'I had no contact about rips and no newsletters and there was not much done about it when mentioned. I feel there is poor administration and poor communication'.*

## **Conclusion**

This evaluation was an initial attempt at evaluating the services and activities provided by Broadfield (Crawley) Sure Start since March 2003. Because of limited staff and accommodation, most of the services/activities had not, in fact, been running longer than two or three months at the time of the evaluation (October/November 2003). In addition, the premises at Broadfield House was undergoing remedial work and, therefore, some of the services/activities were cancelled at that time. Despite this, an attempt was made to involve parents in the evaluation (a requirement of the programme) both at the planning stage and in the collection of data. It is expected that further evaluation work will attempt to be more inclusive once parents and staff are better engaged in the process. An evaluation sub-group will be set up in the New Year and an evaluation workshop is planned during February 2004 in conjunction with the National Children's Bureau.

With regard to the current evaluation, there was a disappointingly low response from the questionnaires, for reasons already stated. There is also concern as to how representative the sample was in terms of 'hard to reach' service users especially those from ethnic minorities. This evaluation concentrated solely on service users i.e. those already engaged with Sure Start, and any further work would need to ensure that the views of service provision generally in the Broadfield community were included in order to gain a better sense of the impact Sure Start has made on the lives of those living in the area.

Despite the limited response, this evaluation has enabled the Sure Start program to learn certain valuable lessons:

### **Access**

1. The majority of those accessing services/activities have learnt of Sure Start through Health professionals and, once engaged, have passed the message on to others. Very few seemed to have seen any literature about the programme. Some parents felt that, although registered, they had not been informed of activities which were taking place.
2. It is not clear at present whether those defined as 'hard to reach' are accessing Sure Start. This evaluation has shown that although there is some interest, very few 'dads' are currently involved.

### ***The View of Users of Services/Activities***

Generally, those accessing services/activities were very positive about what is being offered with the main finding being that Broadfield Sure Start's main contribution is in terms of providing a means of social inclusion: parents feel better supported both by others living in their community and by professionals. This has made them feel less isolated and more empowered. To a slightly lesser degree, there have been perceived gains in terms of increased parenting skills.

The children accessing services/activities have also gained in terms of social inclusion. They have been given the opportunity mix with other children, have better play facilities and learn more. There is also some evidence in terms of emotional and health gains.

The emphasis of the services/activities currently offered is mainly on family support and, to a lesser extent, health.

All in all, this initial attempt to answer the evaluation questions: *What are we doing?* and *How well are we doing it?* demonstrates that a good start has been made by the program, under difficult circumstances, in terms of setting up the program. The physical location of the building and its facilities which have required improvement have been a hindrance as has the fact that many of the staff are newly appointed and are having to adjust to new ways of working professionally. The program therefore needs time to become embedded.

