

Sure Start Kettering Four Wards

Survey Report 2003/ 2004

Executive Summary

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1.0 Introduction

- As part of our evaluation strategy for the year 2003/2004, Sure Start Kettering made the decision to conduct a short quantitative questionnaire among parents living within their target area.
- Having chosen to conduct this survey without the assistance of a large research company, it was decided that the opportunity should be grasped to involve local parents in the administration of the questionnaire itself.
- It was hoped that parents could be recruited and trained to take the questionnaire out to a variety of toddler groups, in order to maximise the number of interviews which were conducted. This training itself ran according to schedule, with eight parents completing the course.
- In total, ninety-two questionnaires were completed and returned to the Sure Start team in time to be analysed.

2.0 Information about respondents and their families

- 84% of respondents were mothers living in the Sure Start area, while 5% were local fathers. The remaining respondents were childminders or other relatives.
- Almost a third of respondents were aged between 18 and 27, while almost three-fifths of respondents were aged between 28 and 37. Nine respondents were aged 38 or over. (Of these, five were childminders of carers rather than parents.) No respondents were under the age of 18
- More than nine-tenths of respondents (91%) were white, which is directly proportionate to the 91% of the population stating that they are 'White British' in the 2002 census data for the area.
- Most other ethnic groups are also well represented within our survey, with the proportion of Black and Asian respondents corresponding correctly to the census data. The Chinese population within our local area is not represented within this study. Respondents from Mixed ethnic backgrounds are over-represented within this research.
- 15% of respondents stated that they considered themselves to be a lone parent. Rather than working to a prescribed definition, respondents themselves were left to use their own definition of the term 'lone parent'.
- 6% of respondents defined themselves as having special needs. Once again, respondents were left to use their own definition of special needs. From comments annotating the questionnaires, it is clear that parents used this term to define both physical disabilities, and those relating to their family circumstance, such as having multiple births.
- Almost three quarters of families contained only one pre school age child, with one quarter containing two pre school age children. A further two families contained three pre school age children.
- Six of the pre school age children were described as having special needs.
- Overall, 36% of families contained only one child, while in total approximately two-thirds of households contained one or two children. A further 30% of households contained either three or four children, while a small minority of families contained larger numbers of children.
- 15% of respondents had lived in the Sure Start area for less than one year, and over half of respondents had lived within the Sure Start area for three years or less. Over two-thirds of respondents had lived in the area for five years or less.
- Among mothers responding to the questionnaire, 64% were at home full time with their children. One fifth of mothers were working part time and one mother was working full time.

3.0 Use of local services

- Almost four-fifths of respondents have used local toddler groups in recent years. Over four-fifths of this question's respondents stated that at least one local toddler group was 'very good'.
- Just over two-fifths of respondents currently use or have used local pre-schools or nursery schools. Almost three-fifths of respondents stated that local pre-schools or nursery schools are 'very good'.
- Only 8% of respondents currently use or have used private nursery care for their children. Among these six respondents, everybody was satisfied with the quality of these services, with two-thirds stating that nursery care was 'very good'.
- A similarly small percentage of respondents state that they use, or have used, a local childminder. Almost nine-tenths of these respondents felt that the service provided by local childminders was 'very good'.
- When asked for suggestions regarding the improvement of such services, respondents provided a variety of answers.
 - Almost one-third of responses could be classified as requests for information. Specific requests were for information about toddler groups (Not simply their location, but more detailed information), local childminders, and enrolling at pre-school.
 - A number of suggestions were made in relation to specific groups, but the sentiments expressed may still be generalised to provide examples of the qualities which respondents would look for in an ideal childcare/play setting. Some of their suggestions follow:
 - Toddler groups should have no religious connections.
 - Messy play activities are viewed positively.
 - Stability and continuity in staffing is also viewed positively.
 - Modern buildings and facilities are welcomed.
 - A high quantity and variety of toys is viewed positively.
 - Good food should be offered at groups.
 - Places at groups should be limited, to avoid overcrowding.
 - Several general suggestions were made, which can also enrich our understanding of the factors which encourage local parents and carers to use services:
 - The quantity of services provided should be adequate.
 - Staff favouritism (of parents and children) should be minimised.
 - Staff must be friendly to parents and carers.
 - Interpretation services would be useful, or if this is not possible then extra effort should be made to ensure that those who do not speak much English are welcomed and made to feel included.
 - Assistance should be provided for parents wishing to return to work.
 - Services should keep charges to a minimum, especially for families on low incomes.

- The overwhelming majority of respondents claim to use local doctor's surgeries with their pre school age children. Almost three-quarters of respondents stated that the service at their local surgery was either 'quite good' or 'very good'.
- More than nine-tenths of respondents had used a local midwife in recent years. A little over half of respondents felt that their local midwife had been 'very good'. A further 23% felt that their midwife had been 'quite good'.
- The vast majority of respondents had used Kettering Hospital for childbirth, with two of the remaining three respondents having moved to the area recently. Overall, seven tenths of respondents gave a positive appraisal of the service at the hospital.
- Almost all respondents (98%) used a local health visitor in recent years. A little under half of respondents felt that their health visitor had been 'very good'. A further 34% felt that the health visitor had been 'quite good', resulting in four-fifths of respondents giving a positive answer to this question.
- Once again, parents provided a wide variety of suggestions for the improvement of the aforementioned services.
 - Of the 47 responses to this question, nineteen were related to the quality of service provided by local doctors' surgeries, while nine referred to the maternity unit at Kettering General Hospital. Four suggestions related to midwives, and a further seven concerned health visitors. The remaining eight suggestions related to a variety of other issues.
 - If we combine all of these responses together, we can gain some strong indications of improvements which could be made in many of these settings, and may also be considered to be good practice for Sure Start to adopt.
 - Many respondents suggested that staff should make more effort to be friendly and approachable to parents.
 - Respondents asked to be *listened to* by professionals, especially in matters relating to the health of their child.
 - Continuity of care from one particular member of staff was viewed as preferable to being seen by a variety of people.
 - In relation to doctors' surgeries, the strongest complaint concerned difficulties in using the current appointment systems. This criticism was directed at almost all of the surgeries used by respondents.
 - Relating to Kettering Hospital, several respondents made direct criticisms, but did not offer specific ideas for the improvement of services. Other suggestions largely related to improving the quality of support and care for individuals using the maternity unit.
 - The most common suggestion concerning midwives related to continuity of care, with respondents suggesting that they would like to see the same midwife rather than a variety.
 - Suggestions relating to health visitors were varied, although several stated that more check-ups for toddlers would be useful.

- Over one-fifth of respondents state that they use the library on a regular basis. A further 40% claim to use the library occasionally. Among those respondents stating that they use the library, four-fifths gave a positive appraisal of the service that they received.
- Three-tenths of respondents claim to use local community centres on a regular basis. Almost another quarter state that they use these services occasionally. Among those respondents that use community centres, over four-fifths gave a positive appraisal of the quality of service provided, with an equal number stating that services were 'very good' and 'quite good'.
- 13% of respondents claimed to use Kettering swimming pool regularly with their pre school age children. A further 43% stated that they use this facility occasionally. Among those stating that they use Kettering swimming pool, the most popular response was that the quality of service was 'average' (44%).
- The majority of respondents stated that they do not use Kids Kingdom (59%). Nevertheless, just over two-fifths of respondents did use the service, either sometimes (32%) or regularly (9%). Among those respondents who use Kid's Kingdom, almost two-thirds were satisfied with the quality of the service.
- Almost all respondents stated that they use Wicksteed Park, with 57% claiming that they do so regularly, with another 42% stating that they use the park occasionally. Almost nine out of every ten respondents gave a positive response regarding the service at Wicksteed Park.
- When asked about their use of local parks and play areas, half of respondents stated that they use these facilities regularly. A further 39% claimed to use these facilities occasionally. Among users of these facilities, one tenth felt that their quality was 'very good'. Almost two-fifths of respondents stated that the quality of services was 'quite good'.
- Again, a wide variety of suggestions were made in relation to these services.
 - Kettering Library received several comments, relating to the improvement of changing facilities and internet access.
 - Several respondents felt that it would be useful for community centres to provide an indoor play area.
 - A number of suggestions were made regarding the improvement of Kettering swimming pool. For example, it was suggested that a separate toddler pool would be useful, as would modifications to the existing pool to make it toddler-friendly.
 - Other facilities at the swimming pool were also criticised, and several respondents felt that it would be useful for assistance to be available for those wishing to use the pool with more than one child.
 - Many suggestions were made regarding the improvement of local parks and play areas. Many of these related to the general cleanliness of the play areas, with suggestions being made that maintenance of the playgrounds should be improved.
 - A number of respondents felt that separate facilities should be provided for pre-school age children, and there were a number of concerns about older youths misusing the playground facilities.

- Many of the comments relating to parks were general, although a number of respondents did identify Mill Road park as being in particular need of improvement.
- Eight suggestions were made regarding the improvement of Kids Kingdom. However, these did not appear to follow any particular theme.
- Similarly, six comments were made regarding Wicksteed Park, but these did not follow any pattern.

4.0 Access, information and support

- The vast majority of respondents stated that they sometimes walk to local services with their child. Just over half of respondents stated that they themselves drive to these services. Over a third of respondents stated that they are driven to local services by their partner.
- 17% of respondents stated that they sometimes receive a lift from friends. Precisely the same percentage stated that they sometimes use a bus. 8% of respondents use a taxi to travel to local services.
- Over three-fifths of respondents stated that they most regularly walk to services that they use with their children. Almost three-tenths of respondents stated that they most regularly drive themselves to local services.
- ‘Finding out about toddler groups’ was the subject which most respondents felt they would have initially liked to have received information about. This was also a subject which many respondents stated that they would have liked to have received *more* information about.
- Other issues relating to toddlers also scored highly in both of these areas: Potty training and tantrums/ behaviour problems were both prominent issues.
- Finding out about local support groups was another issue which many respondents would have liked to have received information about, or to have received *more* information about.
- None of the aforementioned issues were among the top ten subjects which respondents remembered receiving information about.
- Instead, respondents remember receiving information about subjects relating to pregnancy and childbirth itself, and to the issues which arise shortly after the birth of their baby such as breastfeeding and applying for Tax credits.
- Three other issues were raised in response to this question, with one parent stating that they would have liked information about each of the following:
 - Support for my partner (my child’s father) who found parenting difficult to adjust to.
 - Miscarriages
 - Advice on children’s illnesses
- Almost four-fifths of respondents turned to their health visitor for support with the issues mentioned above. Just under three-quarters of respondents turned to a friend for support. A similar percentage turned to their partner, husband or wife for support.
- Two thirds of respondents turned to their mother for support, while three-fifths of respondents sought support from their G.P.
- Over half of all respondents placed their mother within their three most valuable sources of support. Almost as many respondents placed their partner within their

three choices. Just under half of all respondents placed a friend within their top three choices.

- Health Visitors appeared in the top three choices of 37% of respondents.
- In terms of practical support, respondents were asked if they received any support from friends and family to allow them time off from their parenting responsibilities.
- Of the small number of respondents to this question, 14% stated that their parents (or their partner's parents) help to look after their children while they go to work. 4% of respondents stated that their brothers or sisters help with childcare, and 6% state that other relatives also assist with childcare. 4% also stated that friends help with childcare while they go out to work.
- Over one-fifth of respondents to this question regularly receive 'time off' from their parents, or their partner's parents. 5% receive regular 'time off' from brothers and sisters, while other relatives help out with 6% of respondents. Friends help by giving 'time off' to 3% of respondents.
- In the case of over half of respondents to this question, parents were used to give 'time off' occasionally. Three tenths of respondents also called upon their siblings to provide this kind of support. One quarter of respondents stated that they received occasional 'time off' from other relatives. More than two-fifths of respondents were able to make use of their friends to support them in this fashion.

5.0 About Sure Start

- Almost all respondents had heard of Sure Start prior to the day that they were interviewed (97%).
- When asked how they first heard about Sure Start, a tremendous variety of responses were provided. Among the most popular responses were:
 - Health Visitor (16 responses)
 - A friend (14 responses)
 - Crescents Walk In (7 responses)
 - Letter from sure start (5 responses)
 - Leaflet (4 responses)
 - From my partner (4 responses)
 - Library (4 responses)
- Almost two-thirds of respondents were already members of Sure Start. A further 4% were friends of Sure Start. 28% of respondents were not members of Sure Start, and the remaining 4% were not sure if they were members.
- When asked what had encouraged them to get involved with Sure Start, respondents provided a variety of responses.
 - The activities and groups on offer encouraged 28% of respondents to get involved with Sure Start.
 - 23% of respondents were encouraged to join Sure Start by other people, including friends and health professionals.
 - 17% of respondents became involved with Sure Start as a means of making friends for themselves
 - 13% were encouraged to become involved as a means of gaining support, help or advice.
 - 11% became involved in order for their child to make new friends.
 - A further 16% got involved as they felt that it would benefit their child in other ways.
 - 12% of respondents wished to gain information, and this encouraged their involvement with Sure Start.
- Among those who were not involved in Sure Start, almost one third of respondents stated that they did not have sufficient information about the programme. Precisely the same proportion stated that they did not have time to attend sessions.
- Several respondents were not sure if they were allowed to attend Sure Start groups, or assumed that they would not be allowed.
- Several respondents stated that they did not wish to join at the moment, and would prefer to do so in their own time. Another felt that other local families had more need of the services.

- Three quarters of respondents stated that the quality of Sure Start's services to date was 'very good'. A further 24% felt that services were 'quite good', meaning that a total of 99% of respondents gave a positive appraisal of Sure Start's services to date.
- When asked what they had gained as a result of their involvement with the programme, respondents provided a variety of responses.
 - More than four-fifths of respondents stated that they had had fun as a result of their involvement with Sure Start. Almost three-quarters of respondents felt that Sure Start had helped them to gain information. Two-thirds of respondents had made new friends as a result of the programme.
 - Just under half of respondents had gained support from Sure Start. The same percentage had gained new ideas for playing with their child.
 - Just under a third of respondents had gained confidence as a result of their involvement with Sure Start. The same percentage had been to new places.
 - Just under three tenths had gained new skills or knowledge as a result of their involvement.
 - Three respondents added that Sure Start had given them "time out of the house".
- A full list of testimonials can be found within the full version of this report.
- When asked about the benefits of their children's involvement, respondents also provided a range of responses.
 - More than nine out of every ten respondents felt that their child had had fun at Sure Start events. Three quarters of respondents stated that their child had done new things as a result of their involvement with the programme.
 - Over two-thirds of respondents felt that their child had made new friends through involvement with Sure Start.
 - More than three-fifths of respondents stated that their child had gained confidence as a result of the programme. Almost two-thirds said that their child had been to new places as a result of Sure Start.
 - A similar proportion stated that Sure Start had helped their child to gain new skills. Six respondents added that their child had gained social skills as a result of attending Sure Start services.
- Once again, a full list of testimonials can be found within the full report.
- When asked what they liked best about Sure Start, a number of different responses were offered.
 - Praise for Sure Start staff accounted for 25% of responses to this question.
 - Almost of quarter of respondents mentioned the social element of the programme as a benefit.
 - The same proportion of respondents appreciated the support offered by Sure Start.
 - 5% of responses referred to the information which Sure Start provides.
 - Specific events were also praised by a number of respondents.

- When asked what they liked least, respondents offered a number of suggestions for improvement.
 - Over one third of respondents to this question disagreed with the catchment area system, or the specific details of Kettering's catchment area.
 - Several respondents complained about irregularity of service.
 - A number of respondents were unhappy with the image of Sure Start as being a service for deprived families.
 - Several respondents did not like having to book in advance for places at groups.

- When asked if there were any extra services which they would like Sure Start to provide, respondents offered a number of suggestions.
 - The most popular response was from parents requesting more Stay 'n' Plays: more than one tenth of respondents offered this suggestion. Other groups were also mentioned, such as a swimming group, a dance class and another rhyme time.
 - Six responses related to support for working families, whether this be through careers or childcare advice, or provision of extra services at the weekend.
 - Several respondents stated that a shopper's crèche would be of use to them.
 - Improved transport to services was suggested by three respondents.