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Introduction

Two services were ‘spotlighted’ by the Sure Start Bexhill and Sidley partnership for individual evaluation, as part of the wider Sure Start evaluation.

These are the Bexhill and Battle Under Fives Association (BBUFA) and Sidley Community Association (SCA). This report focuses on the service evaluation of Sidley Community Association, as it relates to the provision of services to Bexhill and Sidley Sure Start families.

The purpose of the evaluation is to identify the effectiveness of BBUFA and Sidley Community Association services, including:

- whether these support the achievement of Sure Start objectives and key principles
- how well these work with other agencies
- how the services promote the role of, and involvement of local parents and
- service quality
- cost effectiveness

Sidley Community Association provides three Sure Start funded services, two of which comprise this evaluation, Parent Scope & Toy Library Service. Overall the services are highly regarded by services users, achieving high levels of user satisfaction. High attendance levels indicate services meet a need in the community. However the cost for both services is relatively high, vis-à-vis comparable services. This may be attributable to the on-going development of the services within SCA and the associated staffing development.

Methodology

The evaluation of the Sidley Community Association service was conducted on a number of dimensions:

- 1) Degree of integration into the wider Sure Start partnership; including the extent to which they support the achievement of Sure Start objectives and key principles
- 2) Efficacy of partnership working with external agencies, such as associated voluntary and community bodies
- 4) Overall quality of services; including assessment of the extent to which services meet user needs and expectations.
- 5) Cost indicators for services

To gain an understanding of Sidley Community Association services on these dimensions, the evaluation involved various levels of analysis. These include background and desk-top research, qualitative and quantitative analysis of data and interviews at all levels of engagement- with service users, paid staff and service coordinators.

A variety of evaluation methodologies have been employed and include:

- Team interviews (February & April 2003) Semi-structured group interviews were held with Parent Scope and Toy Library teams.
- Parent Scope service-user questionnaires (February - March 2003) A pen-and-paper 10-minute postal survey was conducted of Parent Scope clients. This methodology was employed to retain the anonymity of clients using the service. All information remained confidential throughout the process of sending and receiving the data. Respondents were informed that information was confidential. A sample of 8 Parent Scope questionnaires was received. With 15 active parents receiving Parent Scope services this is a return rate of just over 50%.
- Toy Library service-user Interviews (February 2002 - May 2003) 10-minute face-to-face structured pen-and-paper interviews were conducted with 15 parents attending Toy Library sessions over three occasions.

In terms of 5, unit cost analysis was undertaken by using the basic unit cost model which deduces what the average cost of a contact or session by reference to the associated Sure Start contribution. To enable comparison of unit costs for the purposes of assessing cost effectiveness, the following unit costs are provided:

Parent Scope

- ❑ Parent Scope costs as funded by Sure Start Bexhill and Sidley
- ❑ Home Start service, matched on demographic profile.
- ❑ A comparable outreach service in an area with a similar profile to Sure Start Bexhill and Sidley in terms of demographic profile (applying the same costing methodology)
- ❑ Family support workers studied as part of *Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2001*¹, albeit with an inflation uplift assumption of 4% in the costs of family support workers.

Toy Library Service

- ❑ Sidley Community Association Toy Library service costs as funded by Sure Start
- ❑ Sure Start guide to service costs as specified in *Parents and Work: A guide for Sure Start Local Programmes*², from February 2003.

An overall picture

The SCA has been established for over 50 years, providing a variety of community services adapting to meet the needs of the surrounding area. The SCA is a registered charity and receives funding from Community Fund, Bexhill and Sidley Sure Start, East Sussex County Council, Bexhill & Rother PCT and various small grant funding. The association provides a range of community services, such as the UK online centre, a playgroup, children and families projects and a variety of community groups. Work is also underway to build a new childcare centre linked to the existing centre.

SCA is a membership organisation. Those using SCA services are required to register as members with £2 per year membership costs.

Sure Start funds two key Children and Families Projects provided by SCA. These include Parent Scope and the Toy Library Sessions. In addition the Children and Families Projects also include a third service, the After Schools Club for 5 to 13 year olds, and is funded by East Sussex County Council. All projects are managed by a Family Services Manager. This report evaluates the Sure Start funded Parent Scope service and Toy Library service.

The two services are for the most part independent of each other (with the exception of overall management and team integration within SCA) and hence are evaluated as autonomous services.

¹ PSRRU, *Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2001*, p.118

² *Parents and Work: A guide for Sure Start Local Programmes*², from February 2003

Parent Scope

Service Overview

Parent Scope has been funded for Sure Start for just over a year, providing outreach support for parents. This is conducted by two part-time support workers (WTE) providing practical support, information dissemination, support and advice.

The Parent Scope service provides for a total of 52 registered parents i.e. those who have received services since Sure Start provided funding. At any one time there are approximately 35 parents actively receiving services. Support is provided on a flexible basis depending on the needs of the families and this can vary from once a month to twice a week, averaging at 1.3 visits per month.

Using the basic unit cost model which deduces the average cost of a contact by reference to the total Sure Start contribution, using average visiting rates for 2002/3 and the Sure Start grant made available in 2002/03, the average contact cost of the Parent Scope support service is £51.94. This cost-analysis includes all on-costs such as managerial costs, travel, recruitment, capital upkeep etc.

On the basis of comparisons with Home-start, a second comparable family support outreach service (in an area with a similar demographic profile) and family support workers studied as part of *Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2001*, the Parent Scope service is relatively expensive. This is the case mainly as it relates to other voluntary sector provision, whilst providing a similarly, though more expensive, costed service to statutory provision.

Table 1: Value for Money Analysis of Parent Scope Service

Parent Scope	Home-start (anon)	Family support service	FSW (Unit costs)
£51.94	£13.76	£15.07	£28.08

This high level of cost can be attributed to some extent to the 'width' of the service. As a general guideline outreach services tend to cater for 15 parents visited once a week, providing a relatively intense level of support. Parent Scope provides a wider support system with over double the amount of active clients who, in accordance receive, on average, just over one visit a month. This wider reaching aspect can account for 40% of the higher costs of Parent Scope.

Service Evaluation

Integration into Sure Start Partnership

Both Parent Scope outreach workers feel that Sure Start has '*absorbed the ethos*' of their service and has been more flexible than expected in aligning itself with the Parent Scope ways of working.

The positive impact of the Sure Start partnership has been felt by those delivering services. One notable benefit was facilitated access to other services such as speech and language therapy or social services. Networking was '*much better*' and agencies were considered to be '*working together a lot more*'.

The impact of these informal networks established by Sure Start is highlighted in the change in referral pathways; most of the referrals received by the Parent Scope workers are now from other Sure Start agencies. Referrals within the Sure Start area were made to organisations such as Tall Trees, Home-Start, Social Services and Health Visitors.

Whilst communication was perceived as improved between the agencies, it was mostly undertaken on an informal basis. This non-standardisation can create difficulties when a number of agencies are involved with a client; conflicting ideas about methods of intervention can cause confusion for the client and undermine professional status. The number of agencies intervening can also cause a 'swamping' of the client, potentially resulting in complete rejection of services.

Two key opportunities were identified to address these issues. The first of these was to develop a more strategic delivery plan of service provision for clients. This would be most effectively undertaken by those in a service co-ordination role, allowing for optimal distribution of services. On-going monitoring of client service needs could be undertaken by a health care professional, such as health visitor, to allow for flexibility in service provision and to ensure needs were continually being met. An initial contact meeting was also considered useful to increase awareness among agencies of different levels of involvement. Identifying boundaries to be taken into consideration with each client. Issues around confidentiality would need to be clarified perhaps through developing a confidentiality protocol for all agencies involved.

Sure Start is clearly perceived to have impacted on Parent Scope service provision. Expansion of services has resulted from Sure Start support alongside developing protocols and ways of working. Whilst inclusive policies are generally perceived as increasing accessibility, this has meant a demand for greater capacity on services, resulting in some parents '*missing out*'. This may result in feelings of exclusion.

A key concern of Parent Scope workers was identified as the exclusion felt by those parents outside the geographical Sure Start boundaries. Outreach workers stated that a significant number of parents had obtained literature on Sure Start services and were unaware that they were not eligible to receive the services. To avoid misunderstanding Parent Scope workers suggested that the eligibility criterion were clarified on all the literature produced by Sure Start. Sidley Community Association are able to address

this need through support from the East Sussex County Council, who fund the service outside Sure Start boundaries, ensuring an inclusive service for families in need.

Training has been identified as more accessible since Sure Start involvement, such as mini-bus evacuation, Webster-Stratton training and a range of core training provision (e.g. health, first-aid etc). Training was considered an extremely important aspect of Sure Start involvement, and opportunities to maximise this were suggested. These included increasing advertising and promotion of training events, alongside adapting work schedules to incorporate training into current workloads. As part-time employees those conducting outreach work have difficulty fitting training into their work hours. Suggestions such as setting aside one day a month for training or providing overtime for training were highlighted.

Parental Involvement in service design and delivery

Whilst parents were not asked directly about their opportunities for feedback and perceived impact on service delivery, 100% of parents felt listened to and treated with respect, indicating open communication with clients. These high levels of satisfaction indicate a high level of responsiveness to parents needs, with only one parent stating that *'Sure Start has failed to deliver what we asked of them – by we- the parents'*, specifying failure to provide a friendly and flexible service. With no standardised procedure in place for feedback on the Parent Scope service there is currently no opportunity to recognise and explore these issues.

As an integral aspect of Sure Start services, it is important for clients to be involved in the on-going shaping of services. With respect to this, an opportunity exists to create standardised procedures that will encourage feedback and allow for on-going tailoring of services to meet client needs.

These processes could take the form of:

- sending standard questionnaires to clients (this would allow for anonymity)
- providing information on who to contact in the case of a complaint or suggestions for improvements to services
- having a service development forum that brings together service users with programme management to evaluate programme outcomes and feed into programme planning processes.

Whilst the majority of the sample was extremely satisfied with the service, there were some suggestions for improvements to the service, focussing on providing suitable and timely information about other agencies. Whilst the small sample size magnifies both negative and positive comments and can not be considered fully representative of the service, these can provide pointers to opportunities for improvement. One parent felt that their needs were not identified and hence not met effectively, stating;

'perhaps as well as just listening to any problems I had with my children and me, they could have put me in touch with other organisations that could help, or at least who to contact...perhaps some training in recognising when someone is about to break under stress'.

However these comments must be considered within the context of the high overall levels of satisfaction with the service, and should be perceived as an opportunity to expand service quality by providing feedback mechanisms.

Service Quality

Meeting Demand

User Profile

The response rate of the survey was fairly low resulting in total sample size of 8 questionnaires. This may be as a result of difficulties in completing the questionnaires due to higher levels of special needs amongst users or that many of the parents surveyed were not actively receiving the Parent Scope service. This small sample size needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting results.

All respondents were female over 24 years old, with three quarters falling between 25 & 44 years. No respondents had literacy problems. Three quarters of the sample had only one child, 2 parents took care of 2 or more children and the sample included one expectant mother. This demographic profile can be considered representative of the Sure Start population; however the sample size is too small to highlight any demographic differences within the sample of service users.

Service Requirements

Whilst there are a number of outreach services within the Bexhill and Sidley area, such as Home-Start, social services and health visitors, Parent Scope provides a unique service in the supportive nature of the service directly for parents. The support is directed across a range of interventions, with the three key aspects of service provision identified as

- promoting good parenting
- providing support
- increasing access to other services.

This variety in service provision is reflected in variability of duration of receipt of the Parent Scope service, ranging from a few months to '*a couple of years*'. This supportive aspect was felt by 7/8 of respondents and this is highlighted by comments in Box 1 over page.

Box 1: Aspects of the service that have worked well

Even if my support worker is away, someone will ring me and check if I'm okay.

I only have to make a phone call and I know that someone will come and see me about any problems or worries that I have

If I have any problems as a parent, Parent Scope always reassures me and makes me feel that I am normal

Parent Scope provide an unbiased outside opinion – you are able to discuss your problems

Knowing that there is help and support out there. Someone to turn to and talk to, and somewhere for my children to go

If this scheme wasn't available I would be totally isolated

All but one of the respondents felt that the amount of support they received met their needs within the remit of the Parent Scope service (*'everybody has limitations to what they can actually "do"'*) and 87% that they had a long enough time to explore issues. To this extent service provision is meeting service demand.

Meeting Expectations

The Parent Scope service is highly regarded and has a strong impact on client's well-being. All but one parent was satisfied with the Parent Scope service, finding it 'helpful' and 'supportive'. 100% of parents felt listened to and treated with respect. One parent commented, *'I have noticed that every parent no matter what their background is treated with the same respect'*.

All but one parent felt that the Parent Scope service had helped them. This was mostly through providing support and reassurance. The support was felt more strongly by the parents, however 71% of respondents also felt the support had helped their children, through providing independent advice and assessment on children's needs. These comments are highlighted in Box 2 below.

Box 2: Impact on child's health and well-being

If there are any problems with my child, they will refer me to the appropriate person for help. They have also taken time to play with my child and observe his behaviour

Because of Parent Scope I can now manage my children's behaviour

I have made new friends and my children have made new friends too. My daughter's speech has improved and I am beginning to join in conversations with other mothers that I never would have before.

Toy Library Service

Service Overview

The Toy Library service has been running for over 10 years and has been receiving Sure Start funding since April 2002. Currently the toy library is held for two sessions each week (including holidays) and provides a range of services for parents and children. Whilst a key aspect is allowing the children easier access to a wide range of toys, the library service also focuses on developing parent's and children's well-being through inter-active play work (helping parents to relax and enjoy spending time with children), providing fruit and healthy snacks for the children and allowing access to information on a range of health and childcare issues.

The sessions are held for 3 hours (10am to 1pm) on a Tuesday and Wednesday morning, and are supervised by a play-worker whose role is to organise the range of toys available at a session, the catering and oversee the children attending. A Toy Library Leader is also part of the team, who manages the hiring of Toys and oversees the maintenance of the toy collection (such as ensuring there are a range of special needs toys).

An annual subscription is charged for those using the Toy Library service, £2 per year. There is no hire charge for toys loaned for one week, however late returns are charged, and full replacement costs required if over 6 weeks late. A video library is also planned for the near future, but is not yet up and running.

The Toy Library has an average attendance of 9 parents per session and 11 children, but is variable depending on holidays, weather etc. Attendance has reached a maximum of 15 parents and 24 children.

Using the basic unit cost model which deduces the average cost of Toy Library sessional provision by reference to the total Sure Start contribution, using average attendance of parents at groups and the grant made available in 2002/03 as it relates to crèche provision, the average contact cost of one Sidley Community Association Toy Library 3 hours session is £33.80.

On the basis of comparisons with pre-school play-group session costs studied as part of *Sure Start Parents and Work: A guide for Sure Start Local Programmes*, comparable level parent-and-toddler services and the national average nursery costs³ the SCA Toy Library costs provide a value-for-money service, in consideration of duration, frequency & content of service.

Table 2: Value for Money Analysis of Toy Library Service

Toy Library Service (per 3 hr session)	Pre-school Play groups (Per session)
£33.80	£15.00 - £20.00

³ The Guardian Thursday January 30, 2003

Service Evaluation

Integration into Sure Start Partnership

The Family Services Manager oversees the range of Sure Start funded services and provides a strategic link in to the Sure Start programme. For those staff involved in direct service provision, the high community awareness of Sure Start in the area creates a high level of awareness amongst the team workers who are familiar with the objectives and aims of Sure Start and the partnership working model with the Toy Library.

Sure Start objectives are strongly contributed to by the Toy Library services, specifically with a focus on safe play, healthy eating, speech and language, information on health and services (including Sure Start funded books e.g. parent problems, coping strategies, health).

Direct impact of Sure Start on working practice was felt to a lesser extent by the team. Some core training had been received (prior training outside of Sure Start pre-empted any additional training requirements), however team members felt that they would like training to be better promoted through Sure Start.

Parental Involvement in service design and delivery

The Toy Library has very well established mechanisms that successfully engage parents in the design and delivery of service provision. An integral part of this is the termly meeting held with parents for the purposes of receiving feedback on the current service. The average attendance is around 10 parents. In addition to this there is a 'comments book' continually available for comments or feedback throughout the time the Toy Library is open. A number of parents also mentioned that the staff was very open and amenable to comments or complaints, showing a determination to understand and meet parent's needs.

These commendable efforts to fully engage parents have been extremely effective and produced a robust level of involvement of parents. 100% of those who had provided feedback were satisfied with the procedure and thought it was good. This is highlighted by user comments in Box 3 below.

Box 3: Feedback or Complaints procedure

90% of the parent's feedback is implemented

There can be conflicts between staff and parents, but the feedback procedures are good

You can always talk to the staff

The suggestion book and parent's meeting are good, and staff are always present to talk to

The variety of procedures available to parents ensures that parents remain central to the on-going development of service provision. A number of parents stated they were unaware of a feedback of complaints procedure (40%); however these parents tended to attend less frequently and had been attending for a short period of time.

Staff are also perceived as very friendly (93%), helpful (80%) and flexible (67%). Not one respondent scored staff negatively on these attributes. This is also indicative of a user-oriented service, attentive to parents needs and willing to adapt to meet them.

Service Quality

Meeting Demand

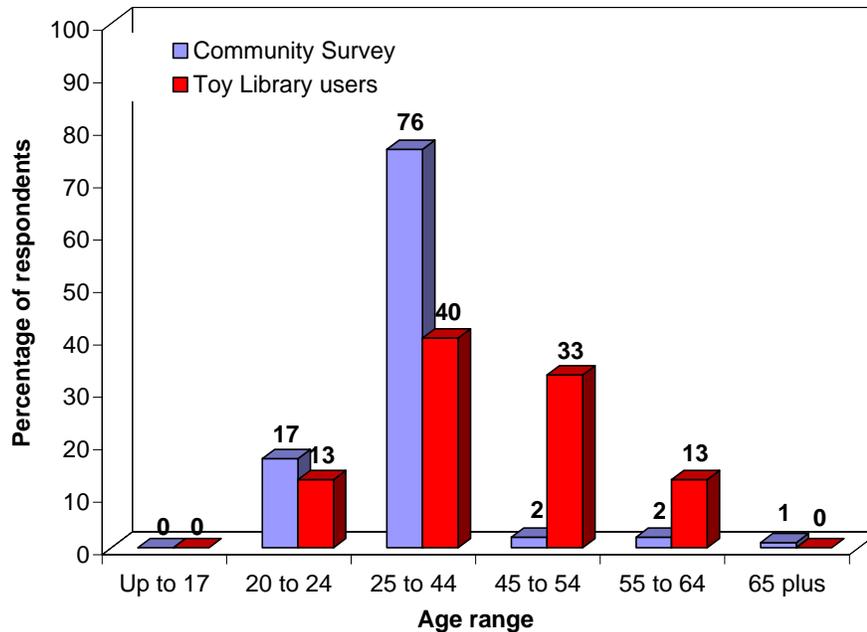
User Profile

The sample was 100% female. This is aligned to the Sure Start population (10:1 female:male⁴) and is expected with a small sample size. The sample was almost 100% white British ethnicity, again matched to the Sure Start population demographic profile.

Interestingly, the sample demographic profile does demonstrate some key differences with the Sure Start population, and can be considered indicative of the needs the Toy Library service best meets. The age profile of the service users tends towards the older age range, indicating a preference of older mothers towards the service. The differences are shown in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Chart to show comparative age profile of service users

⁴ Sure Start Bexhill and Sidley Community Survey Report, June 2003



In addition there was also a slightly higher proportion of service users that were lone parents 33% at the Toy Library compared to 21% in the population¹. Other key variables show that 20% of the respondents considered themselves to have special needs, whereas only 6% of children had special needs. 13% of respondents had some difficulty understanding English. The majority of parents (87%) had one or two children between 1 and 3 years old.

Service Requirements

There are a wide range of play and learning services provided by Sure Start within the Bexhill and Sidley area, and a large number provide supervised play sessions for parents and children. All services are highly regarded by recipients⁵. The Toy Library service indicated lower levels of awareness amongst the population, but showed comparable levels of satisfaction, ranking about half-way relative to other services in the area.

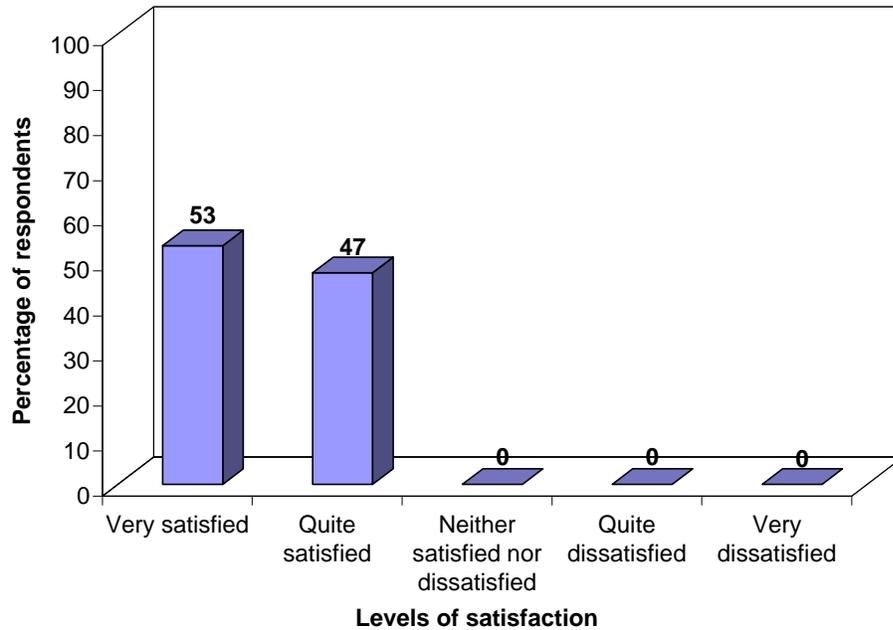
This level of service provision allows for development and targeting of services, and this targeting demonstrated to some extent in the user profile. In general the service is meeting user needs, providing a well-regarded play and learning service. A number of opportunities were suggested to meet user needs, including putting up a board to display children's work or catering more towards working parents by expanding service provision outside working hours.

Meeting Expectations

Overall the Toy Library service provides users with a highly satisfactory service. Not one parent stated that the service was either 'very unsatisfactory' or 'quite unsatisfactory'. The levels of satisfaction are shown in Chart 2 below.

⁵ Sure Start Bexhill and Sidley Community Report, June 2003

Chart 2: Chart to show overall levels of satisfaction with Toy Library Service

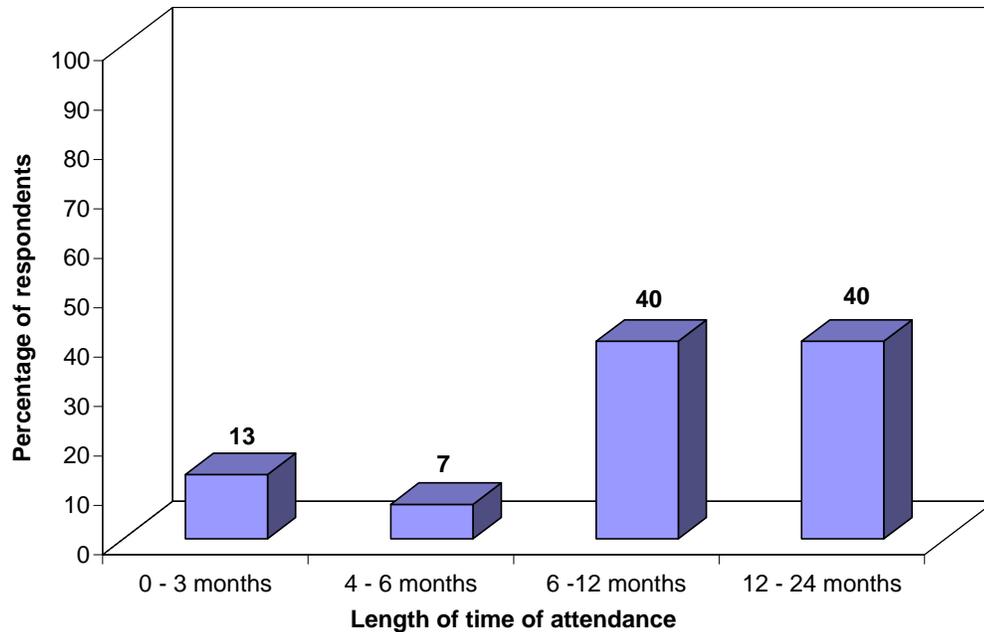


This level of satisfaction can be attributed to meeting service user expectations in terms of providing a social venue for children and parents, for children to have access to a variety of toys and activities, and to take place in a relaxed supportive environment. As one parent stated *'it serves its purpose and works well'*.

Service Delivery

The Toy Library service is generally attended on a longer-term basis, with the majority of parents attending for between 6 months and 2 years. This breakdown is shown in Chart 3 below.

Chart 3: Chart to show average length of attendance



In addition to the long-term attendance of service users, over 73% of users attend at least one of the two library sessions each week. These high levels of frequency and duration reflect the high levels of satisfaction with the service. Parents were particularly appreciative of the service being *'open throughout the year'* providing *'somewhere to go during the holidays'*.

With regards to suitability of opening times and duration of the Toy Library, these were considered suitable by the vast majority of respondents (87% and 73% respectively). These aspects were reflected in comments about what has worked well, such as *'flexible hours'*, *'accessible'* and *'open during school hours'*.

All the respondents thought that it was an easy process to become members of the Toy Library and that the cost of membership at £2 per year was either *'the right price'* (73%) or *'cheap'* (53%).

Toy hire is available for one week and this length of time was considered *'about right'* by 87% of respondents, with children *'getting bored of the toys'* by the end of that time. The remaining 13% of respondents felt this time was too short; however this percentage is low compared to average levels of satisfaction and again can be considered to show high levels of satisfaction. To encourage play and interaction the toys are rotated to ensure that they retain their novelty value and activities are organised by the playgroup worker. This detailed management of service provision is well-regarded by service – users as shown in Box 4 over page.

Box 4: Aspects of the service that have worked well

Style of service provision

Having set activities to do is good e.g. craft activities are more productive

It is well-run and managed

Rotation provides different toys

Rules are very good, such as no drinks / food/ swearing

Change of toys and activities

Toys

Toys are clean and good value

This gives access to toys that we can't afford

Specific Services

The introduction of drinks and food has worked well; encouraging good behaviour

Sitting down for drinks and fruit

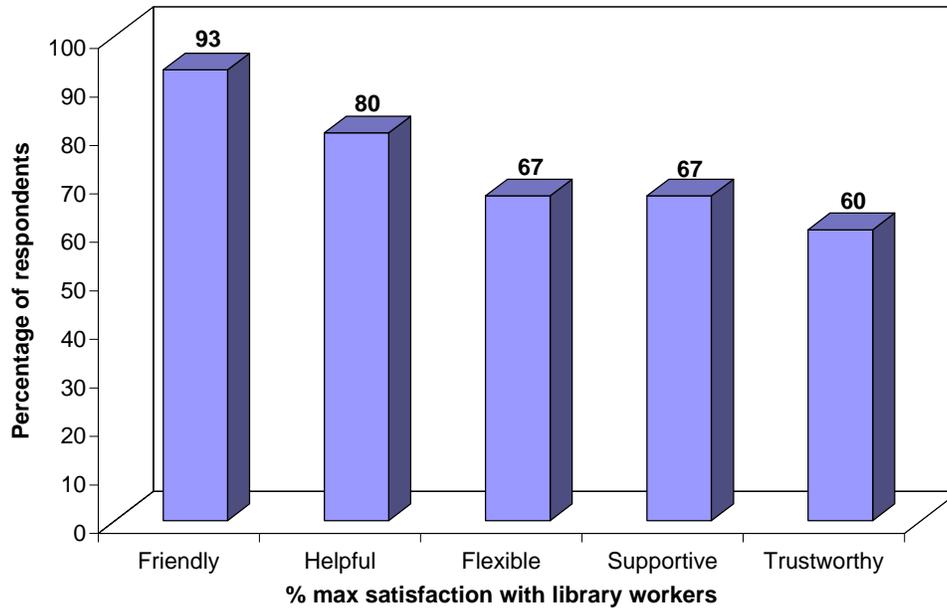
Though the video library is not yet up and running, the proposed costs of 50 pence per week for one video were considered either 'about right' (73%) or 'cheap' (27%) by all respondents.

Service Quality

The quality of the service provided is considered very high with regards to equipment and staff attributes. 80% of respondents considered the toys available for hire as in 'good condition' compared to 7% who thought that they were in 'bad' condition. The range of toys available was also considered to be 'good' by 90% of respondents. The toys are regularly reviewed by the team to ensure a high standard of quality is maintained.

The staff team for the Toy Library is also highly regarded, and considered friendly, helpful and supportive. Attributes such as supportive & trustworthy scored less well as they were considered less applicable to the library service. This is shown in Chart 4 over page.

Chart 4: Chart to show percentage of maximum score achieved for staff attributes



Impact of Service

The overall efficacy of a service can be assessed by the impact that it makes on clients. 80% of respondents felt that the service had a positive impact on their health and well-being and 93% felt that the service had a positive impact on their children.

The main aspect of improving health and well-being for parents was the social opportunity afforded by the Toy Library. A more detailed breakdown is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Parent's aspects of health and well-being impacted by the Toy Library

Aspect of health/ well-being (No of respondents = 15)	Percentage
Reduced isolation	47%
Reduced levels of stress	40%
Increased confidence as a parent	33%
Improved general mood/ feel happier	33%
Improved my relationship with my child/children	33%
Improved parenting skills	20%
Increased self-esteem	7%
None	20%

The key aspects of children's health and well-being that were impacted upon were developing learning, increasing confidence and improving the general mood/ feeling happier. The detailed breakdown is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Children's aspects of health and well-being impacted by the Toy Library

Aspect of health/ well-being (No of respondents = 15)	Percentage
Developed learning	60%
Increased confidence	53%
Improved general mood/ feel happier	53%
Reduced isolation	47%
Improved behaviour	20%
None	7%