



Basic Skills Course

An Evaluation of the Basic Skills
Provision at Sure Start Longhill and
Bilton Grange

This report was commissioned by Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange and was written by Consortium Solutions, a not-for-profit research and development agency.

The report aims to evaluate and make recommendations about the basic skills course by bringing together all the information gathered from local parents who have attended courses and professionals associated with the provision. The report forms an integral part of the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange evaluation strategy.

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1. Introduction

During the early stages of the Longhill and Bilton Grange Sure Start programme, Hull C.V.S. (Community Voluntary Services) delivered a course called 'Voluntary Management Committee', which was aimed at preparing local parents for involvement with the local Sure Start programme's management board. During the course, the C.V.S. course tutor identified a lack of basic skills with at least one parent, this resulted in the tutor approaching the Sure Start Manager about delivering a basic skills programme within the Longhill and Bilton Grange Sure Start area. The C.V.S. had already secured funding from the Adult and Community Learning Fund, to deliver a package of basic skills training across the city of Hull. As detailed earlier, the Adult and Community Fund was launched by the government in 1998 as part of a strategy to widen participation in learning and improve standards of basic skills. The Fund makes the important connection between learning and social regeneration. While the economic benefits of learning are acknowledged, learning also helps to promote active citizenship, to strengthen the family and the neighbourhood.

The basic skill training provision at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange started in March 2003 and is on going, with each of the terms lasting for five weeks. As part of the evaluation process, the local programme opted to undertake some investigation regarding the effectiveness of the basic skills provision. Independent evaluators were commissioned to examine the provision and report their findings.

2. Background - History of Adult Basic Skills

Over the past 25 years there have been some key developments reached in terms of how we perceive and deliver services relating to adult basic skills. In this report it is important to consider how these developments have enabled Sure Start to provide basic skills training and how Sure Start can remain a part of the wider government strategy for tackling poor adult basic skills.

The first major awareness raising and referral scheme in England, related specifically to adult basic skills, began in 1975 with the UK-wide BBC series called 'On the Move'. By 1978, 75,000 volunteers had been recruited and trained with support of paid co-ordinators and worked on a one to one basis in student's homes. During the 1980's, we saw a shift away from one to one teaching in favour of teaching in groups and engaging whole communities. By the early 1990's, basic skills provision had been divided between Local Authority Adult and Community Education Departments and Further Education Colleges.

Since then, there have been many significant milestones reached across England in terms of, research, development, publicity and strategies launched which relate to adult basic skills. This started with the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (now the Basic Skills Agency) developing family literacy demonstrations in 1993 and was followed in 1998 with the government asking Lord Moser to report on how to tackle poor adult basic skills. The report entitled 'Fresh Start', stated that 7 million adults (24%) have literacy and numeracy difficulties and made a number of recommendations on how the government should address them. As a direct response to the report in 2000, the Department for Education and Skills established the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit to implement Moser's recommendations. These recommendations also included:

- **Set national targets for improving basic skills and increase participation** – The target was set by Skills for Life which specifies that by 2004, 750,000 individual learners must improve their literacy and numeracy skills and/or language skills.
- **Create a new national curriculum, teaching standards and national tests** – The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Basic skills Agency developed these, starting in Autumn 2001.
- **Provide support for those for whom English is an additional language** – The Adult ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) core curriculum was launched in May 2002 to ensure consistent standards in English teaching for ESOL learners.¹
- **Develop intensive training programme for basic skills teachers – literacy, numeracy and ESOL** – The Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) has produced subject specifications for teachers of literacy and numeracy; these were introduced in September 2002.
- **Establish a new system of inspection** – The Adult Learning Inspectorate has been created and, along with OFSTED, has been given a clear remit by the government to separately inspect and report on adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Inspections began in January 2002.
- **Establish a research programme to support strategy** – A National Research and Development Centre for Adult Numeracy and ESOL was established in February 2002.
- **Invest in workplace skills** – Workplace Basic skills Network piloted 32 demonstrations projects, and developed a training and information network.
- **Continue and develop community literacy, and family literacy** – The Adult and Community Learning Fund was set up to promote community based learning and runs until March 2004.

¹ www.basic-skills.co.uk

- **Provide support to adults with learning difficulties/disabilities** – *Freedom to learn report* published May 2000. *The pre-entry Curriculum Framework* and *Access for all*, guidance on making the adult literacy and numeracy core curricula accessible were also launched in May 2000.²

² www.literacytrust.org.uk

3. Methodology

The evaluators developed a range of research tools that aimed to collect the views and experiences of parents using the provision. The evaluators also hoped to directly involve parents in the study as many of the parents have developed particular skills that could be applied to the evaluation. The methodology for this study included:

- **Face to Face interviews**

The evaluators endeavoured to speak to all stakeholders by conducting face-to-face interviews with the aim of identifying the following:

- Perceptions of the basic skills training provision
- What impact the provision has had on local parents?
- What impact the provision has had on Sure Start targets and objectives?
- What improvements if any could be made?

- **Focus Group**

We invited all the students who attended the basic skills course to participate in a focus group. The focus group was conducted one week after the final lesson of the term, as we felt that students would be more likely to attend if it was held at a time and place that they were naturally used to. A crèche was also provided for the focus group to ensure that parents who did attend were able to participate fully in the group discussion.

The aim of the focus groups was to bring together as many students as possible, to gain their opinions on the basic skills training, in particular we encouraged parents to identify the impact of the training and to examine how the impact had affected their everyday lives.

- **Questionnaires**

We felt that to enable every parent student to participate in this evaluation we would need an additional research tool that would be user-friendly and flexible enough to gain as much information as possible. We chose to design a questionnaire to ask the students to give their opinions and views of the basic skills training. We approached the basic skills tutor to request that she incorporate the completion of the questionnaires as part of a practical exercise within the class. Both the tutor and students were happy to do this.

- **Records**

The study also focused on data provided through monitoring systems, registers and financial records in order to address issues such as course take-up and the cost of provision.

- **Learning Logs**

In order to evidence the progress made by students and their thoughts and feelings about the learning process, we requested students keep a diary of their learning.

4. Monitoring Information

All Sure Start programmes are required by the Sure Start Unit to monitor the use of activities and sessions as well as evaluate activity at local level. In the case of Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange the monitoring of children and their families is initiated during Sure Start registration. Parents of 0-4 year old children are asked to complete a form giving personal and family details such as ethnicity, details of any disabilities, numbers of children and their dates of birth and contact details. Completing the form then means that families are registered to Sure Start and entitled to use Sure Start services.

The basic skills tutor is able to teach classes of up to ten students, however due to space restrictions at the Sure Start Coldstream site, the tutor and the parents feel that they can only comfortably accommodate six students. This is reflected in the monitoring figures for parents attending the provision detailed below.

The table below shows how many parents enrolled onto the basic skills course, which started on the 24th October 2003 and which sessions were attended.

Students	24-10-03	31-10-03	7-11-03	14-11-03	21-11-03
1.	Attended	Attended	Attended	Absent	Attended
2.	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended
3.	Attended	Absent	Attended	Absent	Absent
4.	Absent	Absent	Attended	Absent	Absent
5.	Absent	Absent	Absent	Attended	Absent
6.	Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled

As the table shows, 5 of the 6 places were filled. Only one of the students managed to attend every week, one student attended 4 out of 5 available sessions, one student attended 2 out of the 5 available sessions and two students attended just one of the 5 available sessions. We have calculated

that the total number of possible attended sessions to be 30, the number of actual attended sessions is 13, which is less than half of the current availability.

All of the students who attended this training provision had accessed the previous basic skills provision.

5. Objectives Relevant to the Basic Skills Provision

It is important to consider how the basic skills training provision relates to the Sure Start targets and objectives. The following objective 4 (Strengthening families and communities) is relevant to basic skills training provision. In addition, providing a crèche for the parents who attend the provision relates to other Sure Start objectives and targets so these must also be considered.

Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities

- **SDA Measure 15**

Sure Start local programmes and Children's Centres to have effective links with Jobcentres Plus, local training providers and further/higher education institutions.

Response: By providing basic skill training in the community, and a crèche, Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange hope to remove some of the barriers which have traditionally prevented parents with young children accessing any sort of training. They hope to attract parents who are maybe unaccustomed to education, some of whom could be 'hard to reach' and at risk of social exclusion into learning opportunities.

PSA target 4 – In fully operational programmes, to achieve by 2005-06 a 12 percent reduction in the proportion of young children (aged 0-4) living in households where no one is working.

Response: By providing the basic skills training in the community, Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange has provided parents with an opportunity to access training locally that not only develops their basic skills in relation to reading, writing and maths but impacts on their personal development, including their self-esteem, motivation, and

ability to think for themselves. This could result in parents embarking on a higher education course or looking for employment.

The following Sure Start target and objectives relates to the crèche provision:

Objective 3: Improving the ability to learn

- **Target:** Achieve by 2004 in the 500 Sure Start areas a reduction of five percentage points in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring specialist intervention by the age of 4.
Response: Within the crèche, children are encouraged to develop their skills and progress is monitored in children's individual folders.
- **Target:** All children in the Sure Start area to have access to good quality play and learn opportunities, helping progress towards early learning goals when they get to school.
Response: A wide range of stimulating activities is provided by the crèche.

6. The Basic Skills Training Provision

The basic skills training provision delivered in October 2003 ran for 1 term, which lasted five weeks finishing in November 2003. A new programme of basic skills training began the following January; this is ongoing, and was funded by Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange. Students are predominately recruited through the Sure Start programme activities and sessions by the Sure Start staff.

The course tutor adopts a practical based approach allowing students to learn through experience, focusing on their individual needs and ensuring the course content remains as flexible as possible. The basic skills course is currently not accredited but it enables students to set their own targets and work at their own pace.

To ensure ease of access, a crèche was provided as part of the training provision, removing potential childcare barriers that many parents with small children face when accessing training.

Course Content:

The content of the recent basic skills course has been varied and has concentrated on local themes and topics, enabling the students to use and discuss their own experiences in a relaxed atmosphere. The following elements have been an integral part of the provision:

Practical Exercises – Practical exercises were used to encourage students to use, develop and expand upon existing skills to achieve a specific goal. One example of this involved the group being asked to prepare a parent-to-parent guide to Sure Start. The students discussed Sure Start and what their experiences had been when they came into contact with Sure Start for the first time, what sessions or activities they had attended and what they had gained and achieved from the experience. Their contribution formed the basis

of a Sure Start parent's leaflet³. The students worked together to design and produce the leaflet, which involved the following:

- Preparation involving oral group work
- Writing the text to go onto the leaflet
- Using the computer to design the leaflet; using clip art, word art and utilising various fonts and colours
- Individual proof reading
- Self correction of text

The tutor laid out the front and back pages and had some input regarding spelling and grammar, where needed.

Using IT – The students were encouraged to build their confidence in practical IT skills, by performing simple tasks on a computer, these included:

- Turning on the computer
- Opening applications i.e. word documents
- Using computer hardware i.e. keyboard and mouse
- Using the Internet

Students were also urged to support each other whilst using computers, finding positive solutions together to any IT problems encountered during a class, in a relaxed and proactive way. This is aimed at building the student's confidence in using IT combined with developing already existing skills, especially when using those skills were used to support others.

Reading Writing and Spelling - Students developed their reading, writing and spelling by participating in specific tasks such as:

³ Example of Leaflet can be found in Appendices 1

- Punctuation, vowels and letter sounds, for example students were asked to write down words with a short (a) sound such as cat, bat ,fat, etc.
- Reading correspondence that they have experienced difficulty reading at home
- Taking messages from each other
- Phonics exercises
- Spelling tasks
- Sentence construction
- Preparing neat copies of written work

In addition to this, two of the students were asked to write a review of a local concert held to celebrate Black Music Month, which was sent to the local correspondent of The Hull Daily Mail.

During this basic skills provision the tutor used various resources in her classes, these included:

- BBC Skillswise literacy materials, paper based and online
- Computers and computer based applications
- ‘Travel Through Time’ a booklet based on the Hull Transport Museum, using exercises linked to the Adult National Curriculum elements
- Local newspapers
- Worksheets from other sources

The course tutor also identified one of the students as having Dyslexia and attended the Dyslexia Institute with the student to discuss strategies which might help them. The student was also given an application form to apply for a bursary which might possibly pay for her to have one-to-one special tuition.

During the period of this evaluation the course had enrolled two students who do not speak English as a first language. Both students were from Turkey and to support their integration into the class the tutor found information on their

nationality and encouraged the class to discuss this together in a group. In addition to this, the tutor found some basic Turkish phrases for the class to learn, helping all members of the class to communicate better together.

7. Cost of Basic Skills Training Provision

As with all provision, the basic skills course has attracted costs and therefore, may warrant investigation into the value that can be attribute to these costs.

It is important to remember that such provision will generate a number of outcomes for which it is not possible to attach a value or cost to them and that the overall costs outlined below should not be approached in isolation.

This cost analysis has been based on the basic information received from the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange programme and is designed to give a basic cost indication only, which should be used in conjunction with the analysis of the overall outcomes and perceived value of the provision.

Resources	Cost
Tutor time and materials per session	£46.00
Crèche per session	£50.00
Room hire/heating/lighting per session	£5.00
Transport per session	£0.00
Total per session	£101.00
Cost per 5 week course	£505.00
Total cost per student per session (on the basis that all six of the available places are filled and all students attend each week)	£16.83

The cost per student rises when some of the available places are unfilled and the students do not attend each week. The table over leaf shows the actual cost per student, who attended the basic skills provision during the period of this evaluation.

Students	24-10-03	31-10-03	7-11-03	14-11-03	21-11-03	Total
1.	£33.67	£50.50	£25.25	Absent	£50.50	£159.92
2.	£33.67	£50.50	£25.25	£50.50	£50.50	£210.42
3.	£33.67	Absent	£25.25	Absent	Absent	£58.92
4.	Absent	Absent	£25.25	Absent	Absent	£25.25
5.	Absent	Absent	Absent	£50.50	Absent	£50.50
6.	Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled	Unfilled	0.00
	£101.00	£101.00	£101.00	£101.00	£101.00	£505.00

The **average cost per student based on actual attendance is £38.85**, which is more than double the cost per student if all 6 students attend.

8. Views from Students, the Tutor and the Sure Start Local Programme

The Students:

We gained the views of students in two ways; firstly we asked them to complete questionnaires as part of the course content with assistance from the course tutor and secondly we held a focus group at the end of November. We had also requested that students keep a learning log to record their thoughts and feelings and to detail their learning throughout the course. Some students had recorded comments about what they had been working on and what they had achieved. However general attendance of the course had been sporadic for most students and there was insufficient information to draw any particular conclusions from the logs. Two out of the five students completed the questionnaires and four students attended the focus group. We asked the students to give comment to the following questions:

How long have you been attending the basic skills course?

All of the students stated that they had been on the course longer than five weeks, which indicates that this is not the first basic skills training they have attended at the local programme.

Why do you want to attend the basic skills course again?

The students stated that the course is different every time, that they enjoyed it so much and have learnt simple things that have made a big difference.

What skills is the course helping you to develop?

Three students stated that the course helped them with their writing, listening, and computer skills. Two student stated that the course also helped them develop their reading and general confidence.

Have you noticed any improvements in reading, writing, speaking, listening, computers, maths and general confidence?

Three of the students had noticed a lot of improvement in their reading, writing, speaking, listening, computers and general confidence and one student stated that they had noticed a little improvement in their reading, writing, speaking, listening and computers.

Describe how easy you find the course tutor to understand?

All of the students stated that they found the course tutor very easy to understand. They enjoyed the way the tutor related learning to everyday life and thought that the way she had included students from Turkey to be both thoughtful and fun.

Have you received much one-to-one support from the course tutor?

All of the students said that they had received lots of one-to-one support. One parent stated that you received as much one-one support as you needed or wanted.

Do you spent much time helping your classmates, do your classmates support you?

All of the students stated that they had received some support and given some support. One student stated that they supported each other not only in completing tasks as part of the training, but also by offering each other encouragement and highlighting achievements. For example, two of the students have become good friends by attending Sure Start activities and sessions and one student had noticed a big improvement in the others writing ability and offered them praise and encouragement which motivated them continue their training.

How useful did you find the course materials are to you?

Two of the students thought the course materials were very useful and two felt the course materials were fairly useful.

How useful do you find the group activities and practical exercises?

All of the students stated they found group activities and practical exercises to be OK.

How difficult do you find the course?

The students explained that the course was about right, as each of them could progress at their own pace and no-one was made to feel pressurised or made to feel better or worse than anyone else.

How has the basic skills course made a difference?

All of the students stated that the course had made a difference in their lives and gave the following explanations as to how it had made a difference:

- The course had increased all of the student's confidence, not only in reading, writing, spelling and computers but also generally in everyday life. One student explained that they used to feel nervous about speaking in front of people they didn't know and now they hardly ever felt nervous.
- One student was diagnosed as having dyslexia whilst attending the basic skills course. This has really impacted on their everyday life as now they realise that they were not 'stupid' and that there is help and support available to enable them to tackle and overcome their disability.

- One of the students is Turkish and although they can understand written and spoken English quite well, they have further developed their written and language skills whilst attending the course. This student is a graduate and was a chemistry teacher in her own country; the course has helped to build her confidence to enrol in GCSE English classes at Hull College.
- One student explained how they are able to understand their correspondence much easier now and is no longer afraid to open letters, in fact they look forward to the postman coming to the door.
- One student has combated their fear of computers and now is confident enough to sit with their children and do computer work with them.
- Another student explained that she felt much more confident when taking messages on the telephone and she found this very useful in everyday life.
- All of the students felt that the social aspect of the course had really made a difference to their lives as now they had built some strong friendships and support each other outside of the Sure Start building.
- Two of the students explained that being given the opportunity to take part in training that is close to where they live and that their children are taken care of in the crèche, has made a difference to their lives.

How has the course made a difference to your child's life?

All of the students stated that they felt that the course had made a difference to their children's lives. One student explained that they felt that the basic skills course had a knock-on effect for their children; if they are feeling more

confident then this confidence is passed on to the children. Another student explained that they felt more comfortable reading stories and drawing pictures with their child. Two students stated that the children attending a crèche had impacted on their lives, by the children being stimulated with the range of play and activities. They also felt the children were happier and more settled.

Can you think of anything that would improve the course?

All the students felt the course was just right and couldn't think of anything that would improve it.

What are your plans when you finish the basic skills course?

One student explained that they were planning to do the course again, whilst another two explained that they were not sure.

Perceptions of the Tutor:

We asked the course tutor a range of questions in a face to face interview to gain their perceptions of the basic skills training provision.

We started by asking them what they felt were the main aims of the basic skills course. The tutor explained that the course aimed to improve the basic skills of individual students in a needs led and flexible way. The tutor expanded on this by explaining that the sessions are planned beforehand, but the plan is often not used when students want to go through something else that they feel would assist them more effectively in developing their basic skills. Students are encouraged to re-live situations experienced during the week and these experiences are worked through as part of the course. For example one student recalled being asked to read something aloud, so the group spent some time reading articles out of the newspaper to each other.

We asked the tutor what they felt the students had gained from attending the basic skill training provision. She stated that she felt the student's main gain was an increase in confidence. She also felt that the students gained by having the opportunity to build upon skills they already had, learning new skills and using their skills to support others. The tutor explained that she felt the course provided some long-term benefits for both students and their children by supporting students in planning for their future, therefore affecting the quality of life of the children. In addition, the tutor felt that in particular the children benefited from the social activity provided by attending the crèche on a regular basis.

We asked the tutor how she ensured the quality of the course. She responded by stating that the success and quality of the course could be measured by the increase in confidence experienced by the students who attend the course and by students going onto further education.

We asked the tutor what she felt were the main strengths of the provision. She stated that she felt the main strength was that the training is student-led and very flexible, giving the opportunity for students to realise and build upon their own strengths.

We finished the interview by talking about any challenges facing the provision of basic skills courses. The tutor felt that the lack of space at the venue could be a problem, particularly if any of the students wanted to discuss anything in private as there is nowhere else to go. Also, the lack of space resulted in the tutor only being able to teach six students as opposed ten.

Perceptions of the Sure Start Local Programme:

The initial view from the local programme is that the basic skills training is a worthwhile provision that offers a multitude of benefits for the parents attending the courses. Although the Programme Manager is aware of the small numbers of parents attending the courses, she is keen to see the

provision continuing. She is also reportedly pleased with the way in which the local programme has worked with the C.V.S. to facilitate this type of provision within the community.

As part of the evaluation, we also talked to the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange Community Development Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator was previously employed as a basic skills tutor and is well placed to support parents with their learning. The Co-ordinator does this by:

- Identifying parents who may need support with their basic skills
- Supporting staff by providing training that will enable staff to identify parents who have a lack of basic skills
- Striving to influence the production of easy to read literature

We asked the Community Development Co-ordinator, why they had chosen C.V.S. to deliver the training provision. She stated that they felt that C.V.S. was well placed to deliver such training due to their ability to tutor small groups and their experience in providing basic skills training across Hull.

9. A Summary of the Strengths, Challenges and Issues for the Basic Skills Provision

Strengths	Challenges and Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local community based provision • Supporting a government wide agenda • Working towards achieving Sure Start targets • Good example of positive partnership working between Sure Start and Voluntary Sector • Open to all and highly inclusive • Opportunity to gain knowledge and personal skills • The flexibility of the course content incorporating a needs-led approach • Practical and imaginative sessions • Student focused and small groups • A free crèche provision and additional benefits for children • A worthwhile social opportunity for local parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of space in which to deliver the course • The course not running at full capacity • Inconsistency of attendance • Some students unsure of the post-course options • A possible need for more robust systems to monitor student progress and to evidence the value of the course • Certification or Accreditation

10. Conclusion

It is clearly evident from the table above that the basic skills provision displays a good number of strengths. Primarily it is helping to support parents with their personal and learning development whilst also achieving other significant targets relating to the Sure Start service delivery agreements.

The evaluation has found that the basic skills provision has had the greatest impact on the student's personal development in terms of increasing their self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, ability to think for themselves and the development of social and interpersonal skills. Students report feelings of being able to communicate better and operate more effectively at home and in the community. It is these types of skills that will bring about valuable outcomes particularly in the long term. One such outcome for the local programme will possibly be an increase in parent participation in the design, delivery and management of the services. Throughout the course, parents are learning skills that help them with the opportunities and decisions facing their families. It has become apparent to the evaluators that several parents who have attended the course are using their skills and experiences to help shape the delivery of services for other local families.

Students reported that there had been improvements made in relation to their basic skills in literacy and I.T., with the majority of students gaining skills in both. Examples of this are, an increase of reading in general and improvements in spelling. The students really valued the relaxed flexible approach of the provision, as they felt less pressurised and more able to learn at their own pace.

It is possible to conclude that the basic skills course is operating with the aim of achieving the Sure Start targets and objectives and that it is also operating in line with the government's strategy to improve basic skills. However, there does not appear to be structured means of presenting options for students once they have completed the course and this may account for the fact that

the majority of students have not identified future plans, and the relevant Sure Start targets and objectives are not being evidenced. Two of the students had not made any decisions at all as to their futures and two students were planning on attending the course again. It is worth noting that some students feel that they still have a way to go in gaining sufficient confidence to plan for the future or move onto other higher education courses. The basic skills training provision is flexible enough to continue supporting these students, as students are welcome to attend the course again the following term if they feel like they would benefit from doing so.

The evaluators have concluded that the most desired outcomes for students of the basic skills training provision would include students moving on to further education or possible employment, particularly as the local programme is working towards the target of reducing the proportion of young children (aged 0-4 yrs) living in households where no-one is working. Although there is certainly the intention, there is scant evidence to show that the basic skills provision is really impacting on such targets. At the time of the evaluation none of the students had indicated that they were planning to enter employment.

The issue of lack of space available at the Coldstream site will hopefully be alleviated once the local programme relocates to a new base. This leaves this provision with three main challenges that are interlinked. The first challenge is the need to secure funding streams to continue the provision, the second challenge is to ensure good levels of attendance at the course enabling the maximum number of students to benefit from the money that has been invested in the provision, and the third challenge is to ensure that students have a variety of options once they finish the course.

11. Recommendations

The feedback received from all stakeholders regarding the basic skills training provision was very positive, especially the feedback from the students who have benefited from the course. Given that the provision is community based and can be a springboard for people's futures, our primary recommendation is simply to continue the high level of support to parents that the basic skills course provides. In response to the challenges outlined in the conclusion of this report, the evaluators would like to make the following recommendations with the aim of ensuring the future efficiency and effectiveness of the provision:

- To endeavor to reduce the amount of missed sessions, by increasing the level of student participation. This could be done by offering an incentive for those who complete a full term or by awarding students certificates for attending each week and having an award ceremony to celebrate.
- Students should be offered a small introductory session to the provision. During this session, which does not need to be formal, students should be encouraged to think about what they would like to get out of the course and should be given a clear understanding of the degree of commitment that would be required from a course participant. An explanation should be given about how the provision is funded as this too will help students to understand the importance of their attendance. If appropriate, learning contracts can be devised between the provision and the students, so that both parties have some documentation of their expectations for the course. Such documents can later be used to review the progress made by students and the overall provision.

- To investigate the possibility of securing accreditation or approval for the course by an educational body. In the interim period, there should be some in-house acknowledgement of the curriculum covered by the course and perhaps a certificate could be provided by the C.V.S. This may help to motivate students to maintain a good level of attendance by providing them with a sense that they are working towards a useful qualification.
- Additional monitoring should be carried out, in particular when students are absent. Reasons for not attending should be recorded and addressed at the end of the term.
- To work towards implementing a charging system that could contribute towards the cost of the crèche. This may help to provide the students with a sense of ownership over the provision; as fee-payers they may be more inclined to keep up their attendance and to help shape the provision.
- To work with partner organisations, such as C.V.S. to identify and secure funding to deliver future basic skills training at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange.
- To provide a larger venue from which to deliver the provision. This will help to ensure that the tutor time that is paid for is used to maximum effect, enabling ten students to participate on the course and thus reducing the cost per student. When the programme moves to the new building, it would be helpful to consult the tutor and students about the location and timing of the course in order to ensure that the new provision is concurrent with their needs.
- Some additional marketing of the provision should be carried out to encourage take-up of the course. As the course will be re-locating to a new building, this may provide a good opportunity to actively promote

the course and the benefits it provides. The course has also clearly demonstrated a commitment to inclusion; this should also be reflected in publicity materials.

- Clear post course routes need to be identified and a system set up to help students explore their options following the course. This could be informal, for example, one-to-one time with the tutor who can advise on follow-on courses. Additional support could be offered by the local programme in terms of co-ordinating visits to educational establishments and having easy access to the relevant information. Support could be given by the local programme to assist students to set up a club or to become a basic skills volunteer. This may be particularly useful where students have achieved competency in basic skills and are repeating the course simply because they enjoy it and do not wish to explore other options.
- During the evaluation, it became apparent that there was a lack of monitoring information available that could be used to evidence the full impact of the basic skills course. In particular there was little means, other than anecdotal evidence, to prove that students had actually progressed with their basic skills. More robust evidence may be required if the local programme is to persuade future funders to maintain this type of provision. It may be a valuable exercise to work with the tutor and students to develop a system for recording the assessment and advancement of individual basic skills which can then be used as part of a portfolio to strengthen the case for continuation of the provision.