



# Crèche Provision

**An Independent Evaluation of  
Crèche Provision at Sure Start  
Longhill and Bilton Grange**

**APRIL 2004**

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## **1. Introduction**

The Crèche is provided by the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA) as required by the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange programme, usually several times a week. Short child care sessions are offered free to parents, enabling them to participate in a wide range of educational activities and meetings. This report provides an independent exploration of the issues involved with the crèche provision, giving particular attention to the following points:

- The nature of the provision and the provider
- Views of parents using the provision
- Views of the Sure Start local programme
- The cost of the provision
- The overall value of the provision
- Any recommendations that may lead to an improvement

The evaluation of the crèche is part of a wider evaluation strategy adopted by Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange.

## **2. Targets and Objectives Relevant to the Crèche Provision**

In order to maintain an effective service, it is important to consider how the crèche provision relates to the Sure Start targets and objectives. The following targets and objectives are relevant to the crèche provision.

### **Objective 2: Improving health**

- **Target:** Parenting support and information available for all parents in Sure Start areas.

**Response:** The provision of a crèche enables parents to attend meetings and sessions thus securing information and parenting support.

### **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.

### **Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities**

- **Target:** Reduce the number of 0-3 year old children in Sure Start area living in households where no one is working by 10%.

**Response:** The crèche enables parents to engage in courses that will assist in improving employment prospects. From the period of April 20003 to August 20003 parents participated in basic skills.

- **Target:** All Sure Start local programmes to have representation on local programme boards.

**Response:** Parents have completed training and are members of the management board.

- **Target:** All Sure Start programmes to work with their EYCDP to help close the gap between the availability of accessible childcare for 0-3 year olds in the Sure Start areas compared with other areas.

**Response:** The provision of a crèche and the working partnership with crèche providers will help to increase the availability of accessible childcare.

## **2. The Crèche Provider – Pre-School Learning Alliance**

The Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA) is a national educational charity and umbrella body for pre-schools. The charity is committed to providing quality educational opportunities for children and also aims to enable parents to participate in education and training.

### **2.1 Views from the PLA:**

Interviews were held with staff from the PLA to explore issues and challenges involved in the provision of a crèche to Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange.

#### **The Provision:**

The PLA enable children to participate in a wide range of planned craft-based and fun activities. The children not only have learning opportunities but also the chance to mix with other children. Workers ensure that parents are fully aware of what is going to happen during the crèche time and they also feedback to parents at the end of the session. The PLA feel that have fully secured their aim of providing educational and fun sessions for children whilst also giving parents the peace of mind for them to be able to engage in training and other activities.

#### **Perceived Strengths:**

The PLA feel their primary strength resides in the fact that they are able to be flexible and provide a crèche that will accommodate the needs of local families and the Sure Start programme. The PLA is also very committed to the principles of Sure Start and has experience of working with several Sure Start programmes across the city. Another strength projected by the PLA is that the organisation is able to train parents to work in the crèche as support workers.

#### **Working in Partnership:**

The PLA feels that it has developed close working links with the Sure Start local programme. The crèche workers have been encouraged to join team

meetings with the local programme and to share experiences. The benefits have been that the crèche workers really feel part of the Sure Start team and very much enjoy their work. The crèche workers have also been able to develop their working practice by incorporating the Sure Start policies on issues such as child protection.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:**

The PLA encourages parents to give feedback on the crèche by writing on cut-out teddy bears and the suggestions given are used to shape the service. The PLA keeps monitoring data by registering each child who attends the crèche. This data is also kept on the Sure Start database.

**Administration and Management:**

Records are kept relating to accidents, incidents and confidential health information. The PLA does not currently have a service level agreement with the local programme as it is assumed that the need for flexibility over-rides the need for a contractual agreement. The PLA feel that if a Service Level Agreement were to be put in place, it should be loosely worded so as not to stifle flexible arrangements.

With regard to management, the PLA charges a management fee. This fee is designed to cover:

- Training
- Supervision
- Finance and Payroll
- Holiday Pay
- Pension Scheme
- National Insurance Contributions
- Special Needs support if needed

## **2.2. Benefits of using PLA as an external crèche provider:**

The PLA feel that there are a significant number of benefits that they can provide to a partner organisation. These are:

- A pool of qualified crèche workers
- Crèche workers who are recruited based on their commitment to Sure Start aims and objectives
- Established policies and procedures to ensure high standards of safety and quality
- Flexibility due to availability of crèche workers - A crèche can be provided with as little as 24 hours notice
- Availability of additional one-to-one support, where needed
- Monitoring and administration
- Committed to training parents to become support workers

## 4. The Parent's View

The evaluators asked parents with children who regularly access the crèche, to attend a focus group. In the focus group we generated a discussion around the crèche provision and how parents felt about it. Four parents came to the focus group held at the Longhill and Bilton Grange Sure Start.

### What is good about the crèche?



The evaluators started by asking the parents what it was about the crèche that they particularly liked. All the parents said that they liked the friendly crèche workers and the Sure Start staff who are involved with the crèche. Two of the parents mentioned that they liked the way that their children's development is recorded. The crèche workers keep records of the children's achievements in a folder, along with examples of activities that the children have participated in. The parents can have these folders for their own use. The parents particularly wanted the folders to inform future childcare providers of their child's development and also as a keepsake for themselves. Parents also stated that their children liked the varied play equipment that is available in the crèche and that the equipment is frequently changed and updated.

### Views on crèche workers and benefits to the children



The evaluators then asked the parents to discuss their relationships with the crèche workers. All the parents responded by stating that they had a good relationship with the crèche workers and were happy with the care and activities provided by the workers. One parent described how the

crèche workers had supported her with her child's behavioural problem. The crèche workers organised for one of their colleagues to come to the crèche and give her child one-to-one support for the whole session. They also gave her advice on how to support her own child in the home.



Parents were encouraged to consider any changes they had noticed in their children since they had been attending the crèche. All the parents commented that had noticed a change in their child's development. One parent, whose child was a very quiet prior to using the crèche, noticed that after just a couple of weeks that her child 'really came out of herself' and began to mix better with the other children. Another parent's child who had never been away from their mum took a little while to settle whenever mum was out of sight, but after a few weeks of attending the crèche, they gained enough confidence to settle straight away. Another parent noticed that over a 6 week period her child could communicate much better than before they attended the crèche. The last parent had noticed improvements in her child's hand and eye co-ordination as her child had begun colouring within the lines of pictures.

Parents then discussed what they thought their children had gained from accessing the crèche; their responses include:

- Play with other children more easily
- Improved speech
- Have the chance to play with other children their own age
- Learn to be apart from their mother
- Have access to quality books and play equipment
- One-to-one play

The evaluators asked the parents to talk about the sorts of feedback they receive from the crèche workers and if they have the opportunity to feedback on the session. The sorts of feedback the parents receive at the end of a session includes:

- What activities the children have participated in
- What the children have eaten
- Any time-outs given to support children to modify unacceptable behaviour
- Any accidents/or behavioural problems
- When the child settled

The parents have the opportunity and feel confident to approach the crèche workers with any suggestions for future sessions and are encouraged by the crèche staff to be involved with the planning of sessions, for example bringing in leaves for an autumn display.

### **Benefits to parents as a result of the crèche**



The evaluators asked the parents to discuss what they felt they had gained from having a free crèche provided for them. All of the parents had the opportunity to attend training courses and meetings due to having a crèche provided for them. As a result of attending the training courses they agreed they had all gained some qualifications and an increase in confidence. Some of the training they have accessed includes:

- First Aid (child and adult)
- Peer support (breast feeding)
- Baby massage
- Family nurturing

- Participatory Appraisal training course
- Face painting
- Adult craft

The parents felt that the crèche offered them a break; even though they were attending training or a meeting, and that they had peace of mind that their children were just down the hall, resulting in the parents wanting to attend more training or activities.

The parent's felt they had also gained a great deal from attending the various Sure Start meetings, these include:

- Knowledge of what is going on within Sure Start and being able to influence it
- New Friendships with other parents and Sure Start staff
- Opportunity to have a little freedom to get out of the house and excises the brain
- Increase in self-esteem

All of the parents have included their Sure Start activities and training on their C.V. with the aim of strengthening their access to work opportunities in the future. One parent has accessed a NVQ childcare course and is currently at stage two. She is starting her work placement in the New Year in the Sure Start crèche.

All of the parents stated that they would not have been able to access the training without the crèche.

We asked the parents to make any comments or recommendations on what could improve the crèche. The size of the room was the only comment; the crèche workers are able to take up to eight children but the room only comfortably takes five. The parents realised that this issue will be resolved when the programme moves to the new building.

### **An independent assessment to support the parent's views**

A member of the evaluation team was able to support the parent's views by also visiting the crèche. During their time at the crèche, they observed that the crèche workers seemed to interact very well with the children and there was a wide range of stimulating and modern toys for the children to play with. Children were offered the opportunity of having one-to-one attention from crèche workers. Both the children and the crèche workers appeared to be enjoying the session. The evaluator echoed the issue raised by the parents of the room being very small. At the time of the visit, the room accommodated two crèche workers and four children and it was felt that the crèche would certainly be compromising the comfort of the children and staff if it were to operate at full capacity.

An additional unannounced visit was made to the crèche. Again the crèche workers were seen to be interacting well with the one child who was using the crèche at the time. The workers talked about the range of toys and equipment they used and showed the evaluator how they keep a record of what each child has enjoyed doing at the crèche.

## **5. Views of the Sure Start local Programme**

Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange identified the need for a crèche provision at the early stages of the programme. The objectives and targets set out by government also influenced their decision to provide local crèche facilities. Based on the positive experience of the working arrangements between Sure Start and the PLA, it was natural to engage the PLA with Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange.

As part of the evaluation, evaluators liaise with the Sure Start programme manager and also conducted an interview with the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange Childcare Care Co-ordinator, who is responsible for ensuring the quality and smooth running of the crèche provision. During the interview, the Co-ordinator highlighted some of the issues that had arisen with regard to the crèche provision. The first issue was the fact that the local programme had now become involved in the daily management of the staffing of the crèche provision, which is essentially the role of the PLA. There had been several instances of confusion amongst crèche staff as to who was covering the crèche and to avoid any further complications, the Co-ordinator began to book staff directly and relay the bookings to the PLA on a fortnightly basis. The PLA were also experiencing internal staffing issues and were not always able to provide sufficient managerial and supervisory support to crèche workers. This role was also overseen by the Co-ordinator. In light of this shift of responsibility and as the local programme pay a management fee to the PLA, discussions have commenced in order to ensure this fee is now reduced.

An additional issue that has been flagged up is the shortage of level three qualified crèche workers. As staff working for the PLA do not have guaranteed hours, more qualified staff are often inclined to seek more permanent job roles elsewhere, thus limiting the number of high level qualified staff that are available to the local Sure Start programme. In instances where a level three

qualified crèche worker is not available, the crèche must be covered by an equivalent member of staff from the Longhill and Bilton Grange team.

## **6. Staffing, Uptake and costs of the crèche**

### **Staffing**

The table below shows the number of crèches held between September 2003 and January 2004.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of crèches held</b>
September	6
October	12
November	8
December	10
January	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>

Each crèche should be staffed by one level three crèche worker and another level one or level two crèche worker. 60% of the crèches were staffed in this way, however additional staff support had to be secured from the Sure Start staff team for 40% of the crèches, due to the fact that no level three worker was available or only one worker was available to cover the crèche. When this situation arises, the crèche is usually covered by the Sure Start Childcare Co-ordinator and this has obvious cost implications.

### **Uptake of the Crèche**

Parents are offered a place at the crèche to allow them to attend meetings and training courses. A total of 45 crèches were held during the period of September 2003 to January 2004. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for the evaluators to determine the exact number of children and parents benefiting from the crèche due to the lack of accurate monitoring data. The evaluators have also encountered numerous discrepancies with the

monitoring data and have established that in several incidences monitoring data is missing. It is also difficult to relate various pieces of monitoring data to periods in time as dates are often missing from the data sheets.

The evaluators were in receipt of 34 registers for the period of September 2003 to January 2004. A total of 127 children attended the crèche during this period as noted in the registers. This means that there is an average of four children attending each of the crèche sessions.

A total of 90 hours were made available for parents to benefit from training and other activities. 22 different parents benefited from a minimum of at least two hours and half of the parents benefited from four or more sessions.

### **Costs of the crèche**

For the period of September 2003 to January 2004 the total cost of the crèche workers was invoiced to the local programme at £2142.01. The total number of crèches provided during this period was 45. Therefore the direct cost in terms of salary for each crèche is approximately £47.60. However, it is imperative to remember that 40% of the crèches were not adequately staffed, therefore this figure would be somewhat higher if staffing levels were at the right capacity and in reality there were additional staff costs resulting from the cover provided from staff at the local programme.

There are also a number of other costs associated with the crèche such as the cost of planning time, administration costs, the cost of equipment, the aforementioned increased cost of staff cover should the Co-ordinator cover the crèche, the cost of rental, heating and lighting, and the cost of refreshments. All these costs must be taken into consideration if a full cost analysis is to be undertaken. As these figures were not available within the timescale of this study, the reader must consider this cost analysis as purely providing an insight into the associated costs and not a full prescriptive analysis.

Using the approximate calculation based on the registers provided of an average of four children attending a crèche, it is possible to conclude that the cost per child, per crèche, is £11.90, not taking into account the additional unmentioned costs as outlined in the paragraph above. The salary cost of the crèche per child, per hour, is therefore £5.95.

Where a parent is benefiting from the crèche, it would be reasonable to calculate that the average actual cost per child and parent couple, per hour, for the September 2003 to January 2004 time period is as follows:

Salary cost per child and parent	£2.98
Increased salary costs as a result of Sure Start staff covering the crèche which is applicable to 40% of crèches	£X
Heating, lighting, room rental	£X
Administration costs	£X
Equipment costs	£X
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£2.98 + 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the sum of X</b>

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The crèche provision is clearly supporting Sure Start targets geared towards securing benefits for both parents and children. The main emphasis of the crèche provision is to enable parents to engage in beneficial activities by ensuring that they can time out from direct childcare. The children also benefit from the wide range of stimulating activities provided within the crèche. These activities are also structured towards achieving Sure Start targets such as developing speech and language.

The provision at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange is part of a partnership arrangement with the PLA. This approach is highly supportive of a government wide agenda to promote partnership working and to ensure the effectiveness of a multi-agency strategy for protection and care of children. The arrangement with the PLA has the potential to bring specific benefits to the local programme, in particular the flexibility to move with the needs of parents and the local programme. However, it is evident to the evaluators that this flexibility is often compromised and the boundaries that define the roles of the PLA and the local programme, with regard to the crèche provision, often become blurred. It is inevitable from time to time that organisations such as the PLA will find themselves facing some degree of crisis with regard to staffing. The Sure Start local programme have stepped in to help support the PLA by taking on a significant amount of direct crèche, managerial, and supervisory work. Although discussions have commenced in order to reduce the fee paid to the PLA, this does not tackle the fact that the local programme are taking responsibility for work that would normally be covered by the PLA. The evaluators feel that there is now a high degree of reliance on the local programme to overcome any shortfalls themselves. Although there are some benefits to the local programme as a result of this, such as a stronger and supportive bond between the main Sure Start staff team and the crèche workers, it appears that the PLA are now reliant on the local programme to continue co-ordinating the staff cover for the crèche. It also seems that because the local programme are so quick to step in with solutions, the PLA

are not working towards tackling the issues that gave rise to this situation in the first place. It is also evident that the PLA are not able to offer a guarantee of adequately qualified staff to supervise the crèche. It has been recommended that the PLA address this issue internally by tackling the job insecurity experienced by PLA level three crèche workers, thus promoting the retention of such qualified staff within the organisation. Until the PLA undertakes a more vigorous approach to ensuring that all crèches are adequately staffed with consistency and that communication channels are improved, Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange will retain the sense that the service provided is not of the standard and quality that it should be. The evaluators would therefore strongly recommend that the local programme provide the PLA with the monitoring evidence that highlights the outlined concerns in order for the PLA to take a more strategic approach to improvement of service delivery.

The PLA has a commitment to supporting parents to gain experience and qualifications in childcare and this is concurrent with the Sure Start desire to present opportunity and training to parents. Although not evident as part of the crèche provision, it may be something that would be welcomed by the parents at the local Sure Start programme. The evaluators would recommend addressing the issue of structuring a service level agreement with the PLA that includes a responsibility to offer experience and training to parents.

Despite some of the shortcomings with regard to the staffing of the crèche provision, the parents using the crèche appear to be extremely satisfied with the service. Parents are able to identify specific gains for their children and several parents have received one-to-one support with particular issues such as behaviour management. Crèche workers always give feedback to parents about what their child has been doing and parents are appreciative of this. The main factor of the crèche provision is the peace of mind that it gives parents; knowing their children are in a safe environment with people they trust enables the parents to get on with other activities.

In terms of the cost and value of the crèche, it is not possible at this stage to make a valid calculation. The evaluators have attempted to identify some of the costs associated with the provision, but as data is limited, this is something that will need to be revisited at a time when cost-benefit analysis systems are in operation within the local programme. With regard to the true value of the crèche, this can not really be measured until the worth of all the activities undertaken by parents as a direct result of having access to the crèche provision can be identified and combined with the direct benefits arising for children. The evaluators would therefore recommend that the local programme establish an effective means to monitor all the arising benefits as part of a wider system to monitor the costs.

Throughout the evaluation, the evaluators were faced with the complexity of securing adequate monitoring data for the crèche. It was easy to obtain the anecdotal evidence that indicated on the one hand that parents were generally happy with the crèche and that on the other there were some concerns arising from the reduction of the management and co-ordinational responsibilities of the PLA. However, the evidence required to present a fully detailed and structured evaluation of the crèche was either missing or inaccurate. The evaluators would like to make the following recommendations that will assist in data collection for future evaluations:

- Each crèche register is completed and signed as correct by the senior crèche worker
- Each child's name should be recorded on a separate line
- The register must be dated and the purpose of the crèche recorded i.e. if it was to cover a meeting or course this should be clearly recorded
- All crèche registers must be treated as important documents and must therefore be handed into administrative staff as a matter of urgency
- If possible a monthly analysis should be undertaken to record the number of crèches taking place for the month and the number of children/parents benefiting

- All costs should be calculated monthly or quarterly – It would be helpful if the PLA invoiced on a regular monthly or quarterly basis so that financial data can be more easily analysed in conjunction with other data

In addition, the local programme should consider the continued evaluation of the crèche as part of its commitment to an overall evaluation strategy. The evaluators envisage there will be some changes required to maintain the smooth running and quality of the crèche and it is vital that these changes are monitored and potential lessons learned. The evaluators would also like to recommend that parents become involved in the future evaluation of the crèche provision, particularly parents who are trained in evaluation techniques.