



An Evaluation of the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange's Stay and Play Provision

April 2004

CONTENTS

	page
1. Introduction	2
2. Methodology	3
3. The Stay and Play Provision and its Relevant Targets and Objectives	5
4. Staffing of the Stay and Play provision	
5. Monitoring and Internal Evaluation	12
6. Perceptions of Stakeholders	15
7. Cost of the Stay and Play Provision	32
8. Conclusion	33
9. Recommendations	35

1. Introduction

The Stay and Play provision was established in May 2002 as an early service for the Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange programme.

Feedback from previous Sure Start programmes identified the fact that parents had to wait for a long period from their initial involvement with the planning of a programme, until services were actually ready to use. Fifth and Sixth wave Sure Start programmes were therefore required by government office to develop early services, such as the Stay and Play sessions. These early services are aimed at bridging the gap from the initial consultation period in the early stages to the full delivery of Sure Start services, maybe one year later.

Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange felt that an evaluation of their Stay and Play provision would provide information about how well the early services are working and would be a prime opportunity to gather valuable lessons that will assist in the future development of such services.

This report draws together a wide range of information drawn from monitoring data and from the views of stakeholders, in order to understand the nature of the service and to evaluate its effectiveness. The report concludes by making a number of recommendations that may help to sustain the service.

2. Methodology

Consortium Solutions have employed a variety of research methods for this evaluation study. To guide the process, we used a general community based framework for evaluation¹, which considers:

IINPUTS – what resources have been made available?

PROCESS – What has been done to achieve outputs?

OUTPUTS - Who accessed the service?

OUTCOMES - What happened as a result?

We did this by:

- **Addressing Monitoring data**

Monitoring data was used to identify both the inputs and outputs of the provision.

- **Direct Observation**

Evaluators attended the Stay and Play sessions in order to better understand some of the processes involved with the provision and to address the issue of quality.

- **Face to Face interviews**

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

- Overall perceptions of the Stay and Play provision
- What impact the provision has had on users
- What impact the provision had on Sure Start targets and objectives
- What improvements if any could be made

¹ Barr, A. and Hashagen, S. (2000) *ABCD Handbook, A Framework for Evaluating Community Development*. Community Development Foundation Publications, London.

This was achieved by attending both Stay and Play sessions, where we spoke to parents and workers individually. We also held face-to-face interviews with the Sure Start Play and Learn Co-ordinator and conducted an additional interview with the Responsible Manager from the Pre-school Learning Alliance. Although during this evaluation, the post holder from the PLA changed and perceptions of the second Responsible Manager were gained through a telephone interview due to time restrictions.

3. The Stay and Play Provision and its Relevant Targets and Objectives

The need for the Stay and Play provision is premised on the lack of structured Stay and Play sessions available for parents of 0-4 year olds in both of the Sure Start areas, along with the need to meet specific government objectives and targets through Sure Start programmes. These targets and objectives are outlined below:

Objective 1: Improving social and emotional development

- **Measure PSA 1**

In fully operational programmes, achieve by 2005-06 a percent increase in the proportion of babies and young children aged 0-5 with normal levels of personal, social and emotional development for their age.

Response: The Stay and Play provision as a whole provides parents with a range of stimulating activities that they can participate in with their children; this encourages parents to adopt similar activities at home and strengthening the bond between parent and child.

Objective 3: Improving Learning

- **Measure SDA 8:** To increase the number of children who have their needs identified in line with early years action and early years action plus of the SEN code of practice and who have either a group or individual action plan in place.

Response: The sessions focus on the various aspects of play and learning, by using physical activities, art and craft activities and stories and rhymes to encourage children to learn through experience.

- **Measure SDA 9:** To increase the use of libraries by families with young children.

Response: The provision offers a toy / book library to parents as part of the session.

- **Measure PSA 3a:** In fully operational programmes, achieve by 2005-06 a per cent increase in the proportion of children having normal levels of communication, language and literacy at the end of the Foundation Stage.

Response: The sessions focus on the various aspects of play and learning, by using physical activities, art and craft activities and stories and rhymes to encourage children to learn through experience.

Objective 4: Strengthening Families and Communities

- **SDA 14:** An increase in the proportion of families with young children reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of family support services.

Response: The Stay and Play provision provides parents with a range of stimulating activities that they can participate in with their children; this encourages parents to adopt similar activities at home and strengthening the bond between parent and child. The provision encourages parents to interact with each other, providing a provision in their local community, with a relaxed atmosphere, enabling them to make friends and support each other.

These Targets and Objectives are detailed on the Sure Start 'M' forms, which have been designed to establish what impacts individual Sure Start programmes are having. Data is collected annually to complete the forms, which can then be compared to previous years.

Currently there are two Stay and Play sessions operating in the areas, each session is available for two hours per week. One situated at the Wansbeck Primary School in the Bilton Grange area and one situated at the Mountbatten Primary School in the Longhill area. These two venues were chosen due to their locations in relation to the local programme area and the space they have available to deliver the sessions.

The main aims of the Stay and Play sessions are:

- To encourage social and emotional development of parents and children who attend the individual sessions
- To encourage children and parents to play together
- To give parents an opportunity to socialise and make new friends
- To encourage the parents who attend these sessions regularly to take ownership of the sessions

The sessions work towards these aims by providing a range of activities that parents can actively engage their children in, such as:

- Theme based art and crafts – An example of this would be, at Halloween parents and children will make specific things relating to Halloween such as witches hats or masks from various materials such as paper, card and sticky shapes. These materials are prepared by the Stay and Play workers in planning sessions, before the session takes place.
- Free Play – Children are encouraged to participate in a range of age and stage appropriate activities of their own choosing.
- Physical Play – Children are stimulated through play by using parachutes or beanbags.
- Story Time – Children and parents listen to a story, which is read by one of the Sure Start workers.

- Messy Activity - Children are encouraged to get involve in activities which are stimulating to touch and improve hand eye co-ordination, these activities include playing with water, play dough, and corn flour.

The above is structured into a plan as follows:

08.30	Set up room with a variety of age and stage appropriate equipment
09.15	Welcome parents / carers and children to the session Free Play Art and Craft activity related to the theme Messy Activity i.e. play dough, corn flour Physical Activity promoting gross motor skills e.g. gym
10.30	Tidy time with help from parents / carers and children
10.35	Snack time
10.50	Toy Library is offered to parents / carers
10.55	Music and movement – physical activities i.e. parachute, bean bags and sticks
11.10	Rhymes, songs and story time
11.15	Parents and carers and children collect pictures and say goodbye

The Stay and Play provision also works towards other objectives and targets set out by government office. (See section Government Objectives relevant to the Stay and Play provision)

There is a charge for using the Stay and Play provision, of 50p per family; this subsidises the cost of refreshments and materials used in the sessions, and is inline with Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange’s ‘charging policy’(see Appendix 1).

4. Staffing of the Stay and Play provision

The Stay and Play workers

The Stay and Play workers, a leader and an assistant, were the first Sure Start appointees, forming part of the Sure Start early services. The Stay and Play workers have been instrumental in developing the Stay and Play sessions at both sites in the Longhill and Bilton Grange area. They are employed on a part time basis, 9 hours per week through the Pre School Learning Alliance. Of this time, 3 hours is spent at each of the Stay and Play sessions, 2 hours for delivering the session and 1 hour spent setting up and tidying away. The other 3 hours is scheduled to cover activities such as team meetings, report writing, supervision and appraisal and the planning of sessions.

The roles and responsibilities of the workers include the following:

- Organising the sessions
- Preparing activities for the sessions in advance
- Setting out the equipment before the session has started
- Clearing up after a session has finished
- Facilitating the toy library
- Supporting parents by inviting other agencies in to meet with and talk to the parents
- Offering advice and information as appropriate and eventually encouraging and enabling parents to take responsibility for the sessions themselves.

Although employed by the PLA, the workers have monthly supervision with the Sure Start Play and Learn Team Co-ordinator.

Responsible Manager

The responsible manager is employed by the Pre-School Learning Alliance and is the Stay and Play provisions clinical and professional supervisor. Their roles and responsibilities in relation to the Stay and Play provision includes the following:

- Leading on complaints, along with staff disciplinary action in liaison with Sure Start
- Identifying and facilitating professional updates
- Implementing child protection responsibilities within partner organisation
- Establishing supervision contact with workers (between 2 and 4 times a year)
- Authorising timesheets including flexitime, Time off in lieu, annual leave, training, returns and expenses. This is done in liaison with the Play and Learn Co-ordinator to ensure minimum discrepancies.
- Ensuring systems for the collation and monitoring of output and milestones data.
- Providing SLA review reports and attending reviews.

Team Co-ordinator

The Play and Learn Co-ordinator is the team co-ordinator for the Stay and Play provision, and their role and responsibilities in relation to the provision include:

- Monitoring activities of weekly schedules and identifying gaps to programme including monitoring TOIL, holiday and training arrangements
- Facilitating and networking between team members
- Supporting strategies relating to the Stay and Play provision
- Maintaining communication between workers, responsible manager, other team co-ordinators and the accountable manager

- Developing the provisions workers and identifying training requirements
- Implementing Child protection protocol

The workers have supervision meetings with the Sure Start Play and Learn Co-ordinator on a monthly basis.

5. Monitoring and Internal Evaluation

All Sure Start programmes are required by the Sure Start Unit to monitor the use of activities and sessions as well as to evaluate Sure Start 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, when parents of 0-4 year old children are asked to complete a form that includes personal details of them and their families' background such as the families ethnicity, details of any disabilities, numbers of children and their dates of birth, and contact details. Completing the form then means that the family is registered to Sure Start and entitles them to use Sure Start services.

Sure Start regularly monitors the children who attend the Stay and Play provision by the workers completing attendance sheets at each session. The attendance sheet details the names of children attending and forwarded to the Sure Start administration team to record.

Stay and Play Attendance

The table below indicates the number of sessions attended by children at the stay and play sites. However, during the evaluation, it became evident that the monitoring of the sessions was inadequate and that a significant amount of data was missing. The table is therefore based on the registered attendance figures for the period April 2003 – December 2003 and does not include any missed registrations. The evaluators have calculated that at least 42% of the activity registers for this period are either missing or have not been collected. As a result, the evaluators would recommend that the following sections are treated as a guide only.

68 children attended at least one of the 42 registered Stay and Play sessions, occupying 381 places over the 9 month period. 31 of the children primarily

attended the Wansbeck session occupying 183 of the places and 37 of the children primarily attended the Mountbatten session occupying 198 of the places.

Number of times a child attended over the 9 month period	No. of children attending session at Mountbatten	No. of children attending session at Wansbeck	Total
Once	15	10	25
Twice	5	6	11
Three times	1		1
Four times	5	1	6
Six times		2	2
Eight times	1	2	3
Nine times	1	1	2
Ten times	2		2
Eleven times	2		2
Thirteen times	2	5	7
Fifteen times		1	1
Sixteen times	2		2
Eighteen times	1	2	3
Nineteen times		1	1
Total to have attended a session	37children 183 places	31 children 198 places	68 381 places

Based on the registers provided, the evaluators have calculated that **there is an average of ten children attending a Stay and Play session.**

A subsequent recount by the PLA, has revealed that in fact there were 72 sessions held during this period and therefore approximately 720 places were used by children.

Although having ten children at each session is adequate and comfortable, there is capacity to accommodate more children at both venues. If three more children had attended the sessions over 900 places would have been occupied.

There are a significant number of children who have attended the sessions and not returned. However, 31 children can be classed as regular attendees, having attended the sessions four times or more.

The Stay and Play workers monitor the quality of the provision within the sessions, by using questionnaires. The questionnaires ask the parents opinions about the activities currently on offer and whether there is enough variety in the activities provided. The questionnaires also ask parents to give their thoughts on things such as the toy library, the venues, and the times the sessions are run.

Evaluation is done on an *ad hoc* basis and parents have been encouraged to give feedback and their ideas for future sessions. This has been done in various ways; one creative way being in the form of a painted apple tree, where parents were asked to write, comments on painted apples, which were then placed onto the apple tree. Another way that is used by the provision is by asking parents to complete simple evaluation sheets; an example of which can be found in Appendix 2.

Parents are encouraged to feedback informally during session themselves, which helps to ensure that staff and parents work closely together. The findings from feedback, evaluation and monitoring information are used by the Sure Start programme to influence future sessions.

6. Perceptions of Stakeholders

As part of the evaluation of this provision it was important to speak to all the relevant stakeholders to identify their views of the Stay and Play provision. The stakeholders include:

:

- The Sure Start Play and Learn Co-ordinator
- The Stay and Play Workers
- The Responsible Manager
- The Parents, Carers and Children

Sure Start – Play and Learn Co-ordinator

A face to face interview was conducted with the Play and Learn Co-ordinator. The focus of the interview was to explore if there were any parts of the provision that they felt worked particularly well. The Co-ordinator stated that parents received very different things from the two individual sessions. The parents who attend the provision at the Mountbatten session, are seen to be the more confident of the two groups of parents. These parents are actively involved in the running of the Stay and Play sessions and often influence the planning of future sessions. Additionally, this group of parents have developed good dynamics by regularly organising and attending social events together. The group of parents / carers are older in age than the other group who attend the provision with children who are aged approximately 18 months and above. This was given, as a possible reason for the parents being able to participate in the sessions so successfully.

The group of parents that attend the Wansbeck session are predominately younger parents with younger children. This group appears less inclined to be involved in planning of sessions seem happy to enjoy the structured activities prepared for them. This group also enjoys the social opportunities of the

provision and overall the parents receive social and emotional support from each other, making new friends while their children receive structured play and learning development. The parents also receive other information on what Sure Start has to offer.

As part of the evaluation of this provision we also asked in the interview if there were any parts of the provision that didn't work particularly well. The Co-ordinator stated that maintaining effective communication between the Stay and Play provision and Sure Start had been their biggest frustration.

The communication between the two has been identified by the Play and Learn co-ordinator, as being instrumental to the success of the sessions as maintaining communication between the two will enable Sure Start to:

- Ensure the quality of the sessions being delivered to parents is of a high standard
- To identify and deal with issues raised by parents and staff quickly
- Provide additional professional support to workers when needed in terms of child protection, dealing with health issues, strategies, identifying training and referring parents onto other Sure Start services
- To be able to build on individual workers strengths and expertise with cross fertilisation of ideas and joint training

The Play and Learn co-ordinator feels that the lack of communication between the various stakeholders of the Stay and Play provision has evolved through the Stay and Play provision being an early service and initially operating in relative isolation. The workers sought all of their support from the PLA, until the Sure Start programme had grown enough to be able to support the provision itself.

The challenge for Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange has been to successfully integrate the Stay and Play provision into their Sure Start team. The Sure Start

programme has addressed this by offering each Stay and Play worker three hours of planning and meeting time based at the Sure Start office and moving the Sure Start team meetings to a more accessible time. This has resulted in the Stay and Play workers being able to have a physical presence within the staff team and to attend the team meetings. This has ultimately led to the Stay and Play Workers not only feeling more like team members but it has also provided the opportunity for the workers to make links with other professionals and have a more comprehensive understanding of Sure Start.

The toy library was also identified in the interview as a being an area of concern for Sure Start due to the lack of take up of the scheme. The toy library was initially integrated into the Stay and Play sessions, with the provision being an early service. The toy library has had to be moved into other Sure Start sessions to ensure that it is more accessible to local parents. Some of the reasons stated for the lack of take up in the toy library include:

- Perceived lack of age-appropriate toys available to borrow
- Lack of marketing and publicity of the scheme

Stay and Play workers

We gained access to the Stay and Play workers through the sessions where we talked to them individually. As part of the interview we asked what they felt worked particularly well for the provision. The workers stated that the art/craft and movement activities were enthusiastically participated in by both sets of parents and children. The workers also felt that the parents enjoyed and benefited from the social aspect of the sessions.

We then asked the workers what they felt was not working so well. The workers mentioned that the limited amount of space available at Wansbeck was sometimes a problem, especially when having story time as they found that

retaining the children's attention and encouraging them to stay seated was often difficult.

In terms of positive and negative things about being a Stay and Play worker, the workers stated that the most positive aspect was the actual running of the session and seeing the children develop and grow, which they both enjoyed. The workers felt the most negative thing was the way in which they are managed. The Stay and Play workers are line managed by a Responsible Manger at the PLA, and have supervisory contact every 3-4 months usually over the phone. They are also managed by the Sure Start Play and Learn Co-ordinator, who they have monthly supervision with. The workers feel that this arrangement could cause problems at times, for example with arranging holidays, as they are under a different holiday system to other Sure Start staff. They felt unclear as to who had authority and found that having effectively two line managers meant that they often had to do things twice. An additional complication arose during the period of the evaluation resulting from staff changes at the PLA. The Stay and Play workers were left without any management support from the PLA for quite some time and no alternative arrangements for support was communicated to them.

The Stay and Play workers also cited the volume of paperwork, and the lack of time in which to do it, as a particularly difficult aspect of their role. The three hours that each worker spends in the Sure Start office is easily filled with things like team meetings and supervision, leaving little time for report writing and planning of sessions. This is compounded by the lack of space at the Coldstream site and the workers having to 'hot-desk' and share computer facilities with other staff. The workers had partially addressed these problems previously by working from home, but have been requested by Sure Start to complete their work either at the session venue or at the Sure Start offices. The workers feel that it would not be appropriate to complete paper work at the venue as this may mean that the length of the session will be affected.

Additionally both of the workers explained that although they only spend a limited time at the Sure Start office that they do now feel a part of the Sure Start team. Initially they did feel quiet isolated as Sure Start was not equipped to support them, but through the efforts of the Play and Learn Co-ordinator they felt much more involved. A physical presence at the office has also helped the workers to link with other professionals, meet parents who are interested in the Stay and Play, and roll out the toy library to other Sure Start services.

During the interview we asked how the sessions were planned and if parents planned or influenced any of the sessions themselves. The workers explained that the sessions were planned by themselves rather than directly involving the parents. However they do encourage parents to give ideas for topics and themes for sessions to work around. The workers felt that the parents at the Mountbatten sessions had taken over the organisation of snack time, putting up displays and organised the Christmas party. The workers explained that it could be difficult to encourage the parents at the Wansbeck session to get involved and take responsibility. They felt that the fact that there is much less space available then at Mountbatten is probably a contributory factor.

During the interview we asked the workers what they felt the children and their parents gain from attending the Stay and Play provision. The workers feel that both of the groups gained a lot. For the children the opportunity for socialisation, developing language skills and having fun were all positive aspects of attendance and they believed that the children really enjoyed the interaction they had with their parents. The workers have noticed changes in children over time in terms of there confidence to interact with other children and that the Stay and Play sessions were often the children's first contact with other children. For the parents, the workers see the provision as a confidence building service as well as providing them with the opportunity to socialise. Two of the parents who

attend the Mountbatten session have decided to embark on a childcare course after discussions with the two Stay and Play workers.

When asked if the workers had any additional comments regarding their work or the Stay and Play provision, the workers explained that due to the location of the sessions within local primary schools the workers have been able to make links with the school's nurseries. By visiting the school nursery the children have the opportunity to become familiarised with the environment and hopefully this will smooth over the transition between the Stay and Play sessions and nursery school. These links also enable parents to have a look at nurseries, thus helping them to choose which nursery they would like their child to attend.

Responsible Manager

During the six months in which we have been evaluating the Stay and Play provision the role of responsible manager has changed hands. As part of the evaluation, we interviewed both managers to gain their perspectives of the provision. We conducted a face to face interview with the first manager (whom we are going to call manager A for the purpose of this report) and conducted a telephone interview with the second (whom we are going to call manager B for the purpose of this report), who had only been in post for two months when interviewed.

Both of the Responsible Managers were asked what they felt their roles were in relation to the Stay and Play provision. Both of them stated that their role was a management one as the workers are employed through their organisation the PLA. They stated that their main responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that the workers know what the PLA employment policies are in terms of annual leave, holiday entitlement, time sheets, professional

development, training and appraisals and ensuring these policies are implemented.

- Providing moral and professional support to the workers
- To hold supervision meetings with the workers, which are held between 2-4 times yearly

Manager A also feels that her role includes maintaining strong communication links with Sure Start, especially in terms of the joint management strategy. She felt on the whole the joint management of the provision worked well and believed that she was able to address any issues or concerns diplomatically and that both sides had to remain flexible enough to find common ground on their approaches to the running of the service and the employment of the workers.

We asked the managers what they felt are the main aims of the Stay and Play provision. Manager A believed that the main aims of the provision are to:

- Involve parents in Sure Start
- To encourage parents to take ownership of the session
- To give parents and children the opportunity to socialise

Manager B also mentioned the aims included:

- To provide a safe environment for parents and children to play together
- To provide opportunities that the children probably would not have elsewhere
- Drop-ins from health professionals etc.

We asked the managers what they felt the strengths of the provision are.

Manager A

stated that the relationships between the workers and the parents is one of the provisions' key strengths. The manager felt that the workers provided the parents

with a great deal of support and reassurance. Additionally they described the workers as being very approachable and able to help parents to deal with a range of problems. For example, when a child with hearing difficulties was accessing the Stay and Play provision, as well as reassuring the parents about their concerns the workers obtained dolls with hearing aids for the session to help the child to become more accepting of the idea of wearing a hearing aid himself.

Manager B felt the strengths of the provision are:

- To provide opportunities for parents and their children to interact together – there are not many other groups in the area
- To be able to generate a friendly atmosphere for parents and children

We then asked the managers what they felt the weaknesses of the provision were. Manager A felt the hours that the workers were contracted to work, is the main weakness, as they are only employed to work nine hours each a week; 6 of which are taken up with actual delivery of the Stay and Play provision, which leaves a very limited amount of time in which activities such as planning, appraisals, training, and staff meetings can be undertaken. The manager also feels that the lack of space available at the Wansbeck site is a weakness. They are limited to the number of parents and children who can comfortably access the provision there and are also limitations to the activities which they can comfortably provide there.

Manager B felt that the main challenge to the provision was the ability and the flexibility to be able to encourage new parents to use the Stay and Play as original children become too old and move on from the service. They stated this issue could be tackled through advertising, word of mouth, promotion by other Sure Start staff, and general marketing at the right level.

We asked what the Managers what they feel that the parents and children get out of using the provision. Both Responsible Managers gave similar responses as to their views on what parents and children gain from attending the provision, these include:

- For some parents accessing the sessions is their only opportunity to get out of the house
- Parents have a chance to socialise with other parents with children of a similar age.
- An environment that parents can interact with their children and other parents as well as with professionals without any pressure.
- The biggest thing that children get from using the service is fun. They can take part in activities they might not be able to do at home such as painting, play-dough and water play.
- Children have the opportunity to develop social skills.

We finally asked if the responsible manager had any issues or concerns regarding the stay and Play provision. Manager A reiterated her earlier comment in terms of the limitations with the workers contracted hours. She believed that in addition to this the workers also have difficulty accessing the computer at the Sure Start head office, which they have to share with others and that this has caused difficulties especially when writing reports. It has been suggested by the Play and Learn co-ordinator that the Sure Start administration team could assist with any typing. The workers feel that the admin support would be effective in terms of producing marketing materials such as flyers or leaflets, but less so for reports, which can not be handed to admin simply in note form.

Manager B has some concerns around the viability of the service; the numbers can fluctuate from week to week and as the current wave of children grows too old for the service Manager B feels it will be difficult to attract new parents to use the provision.

The Views of Parents and Carers

We accessed the parents/carers who use the Stay and Play provision, by attending the sessions individually and speaking to any parents and carers on a one to one basis where possible.

Mountbatten Session

The Mountbatten Stay and Play sessions are held once a week at Mountbatten Primary School in the Bilton Grange area. When we visited there were 6 parents and 2 grandparents present. All of the parents and grandparents were female and all attended the sessions either once a week, or nearly once a week.

When asked the general question ‘why do you attend the play and stay sessions?’ most parents or grandparents stated the benefits to both the child and themselves.

One grandparent stated that she attended other similar sessions as well; Tots Spot and St Margaret’s Church were stated as examples.

The main reasons why the parents attended were:

- To allow the child to get used to playing with and interacting with others
- To enable parents/grandparents to have conversations with other adults
- For educational activities
- Improve the child’s social skills

Some parents stated that the sessions were of particular benefit to families with an only child, as play with other children is limited.

The things that parents liked about the Stay and Play sessions included:

- It's a very friendly atmosphere
- You get to talk to other mothers and grandmothers
- There are lots of things for the children to do
- Lots of different toys to play with
- I like the library
- The outings are nice
- The Stay and Play workers are excellent
- The children get more interaction
- It's informal and the activities are fun

The parent described their relationship with the Stay and Play workers as:

- Friendly
- Excellent
- Very good
- Like a friendship
- Very informal
- Good, they use our ideas
- Approachable
- Good rapport with the children
- They involve everyone

The Stay and Play worker was also mentioned specifically for having a lot of energy.

The main changes that parents have noticed in their child since attending the Stay and Play sessions are:

- My child is more open
- They understand sharing more
- Interacts more with others
- Not as clingy
- Gained in confidence
- Plays with children more

Some parents stated that it was hard to say if there had been any changes since their child is so young, but they believed that changes would become more apparent over the long-term.

The things that the parents felt they had gained personally from attending the sessions were:

- More socialising with other parents/grandparents
- An increase in confidence in parenting skills and abilities
- Some time to relax
- The ability to discipline a child more effectively
- More quality time with my child
- More friends
- Learned tips from other parents
- Parents share ideas and help each other

The things that the parents felt their child had gained from attending the sessions were:

- More confidence
- Learning how to play with other children
- Better relationship with mum

When asked if they were involved in the planning and running of the Stay and Play sessions most parents felt that the words 'planning' and 'running' were not appropriate.

Generally parents and grandparents do not feel that they are involved in the planning and running literally, however some comments included:

- I get the bread and milk
- I always make suggestions and delegate jobs
- I make suggestions and ideas for trips
- I do put ideas forward

The responses when asked 'what would encourage you to be more involved with the planning and running of the Stay and Play sessions?' were:

- I'm too old, I've done my time
- I prefer to support the current workers
- Some people are more involved than others; I don't really have much time
- I'd be more involved if I had more time, I have two jobs

Evidence of parental involvement in the delivery of the sessions is apparent, though most parents and grandparents wish to take a 'back seat' and allow the

Stay and Play workers to actually plan and run the sessions. Though they do want their ideas and suggestions to be heard and acted upon if necessary.

The main points raised by the parents about how the Stay and Play sessions could be improved included were:

- The kitchen area needs to be more friendly and comfortable
- The kitchen area needs some basic stacking stools
- More activities for the older kids in the Summer Holidays

Other more general comments included the idea that individual sessions should have more freedom and independence to make changes quite separately from the main Sure Start office. This is because every location is different, with different age groups and needs and sometimes the blanket rules do not suit everyone.

One parent believed that different Sure Start areas compete against each other unnecessarily. She believed that more emphasis should be placed on working together towards a common goal, rather than trying to outdo other areas.

Another comment related to the Sure Start boundaries. The vast majority of parents and grandparents feel that Sure Start facilities should be open to all regardless of where you live. The boundaries need to be made more flexible; just because you live in a certain postcode area doesn't mean you are less likely to suffer from exclusion or more likely to be financially deprived. There was also a discussion regarding the boundaries of Bilton Grange. One parent believed the Sure Start's boundaries were incorrect.

Wansbeck Session

The Mountbatten Stay and Play sessions are held once a week at Wansbeck Primary School in the Longhill area. When we visited the session it was seen to be a fairly quiet week and so there were only four parents present. All of the parents were female and all attended the sessions either once a week, or nearly once a week. One of the parents stated that she attended the Mountbatten session in addition to the Wansbeck session.

The main reasons why the parents attended were:

- To allow her child to interact with other children
- To have access to age relevant toys and activities
- To give their children an opportunity to learn something new
- So that their children had something to do, which kept them happy for a couple of hours

One parent stated that the sessions had activities for all children not just toddlers; babies were catered for as well.

The things that parents liked about the Stay and Play sessions included:

- The dancing and singing towards the end of the session
- The children are occupied with lots of different things to do
- Lots of different toys to play with

The parent described their relationship with the Stay and Play workers as:

- Friendly
- Fair/Alright
- More like friends

- Very good

The main changes that parents have noticed in their child since attending the Stay and Play sessions are:

- My child sleeps after a session
- Talks more than before
- Become better at sharing with other children
- Become more comfortable with playing on their own

Some parents stated that it was hard to say if there had been any changes since their child is so young.

The things that the parents felt they had gained personally from attending the sessions were:

- Made new friends
- Met other parents with young children

The things that the parents felt their child had gained from attending the sessions were:

- An increase in confidence to interact with other children
- Learning how to play with other children
- Ability to share
- Not really gained anything (too young to tell)

When asked if they were involved in the planning and running of the Stay and Play sessions all of the parents stated that they were not. Two of the parents were happy with this and preferred to leave this side of things to the workers.

The responses when asked ‘what would encourage you to be more involved with the planning and running of the Stay and Play sessions?’ were:

- There is nothing that would encourage me to be more involved - ‘too shy’
- I wouldn’t need any encouragement, I would like to be more involved
- I would need other parents to be involved maybe on a rota, I wouldn’t want to be the only one who did it every week.
- Would like to be more involved, but would still like the workers to pop into the session to make sure we are getting on OK.

The main points raised by the parents about how the Stay and Play sessions could be improved included:

- Outdoor Play Equipment for Summertime
- More activities that involve singing, dancing and nursery rhymes
- More story reading

Two parents couldn’t think of anything that would improve the Stay and Play sessions.

7. Cost of the Stay and Play Provision

Over a nine month period the PLA invoiced Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange a total of £8570. Unfortunately, it has not been possible, due to a lack of available information, for the evaluators to fully determine the breakdown of these costs and the reader is therefore requested to treat any cost indications purely as estimates. The evaluators believe that this given figure consists mainly of gross salary costs, staff costs, expenses, some equipment and a management fee. Parents also contribute 50p to each session.

Based on registers provided, the evaluators have calculated that there is an average of 10 children at each session. During the period there were 72 sessions held, equalling 720 places. The estimated cost per child, per hour, minus the 50p contribution, per hour is therefore £5.70. As the Stay and Play session is for both the parent and child, the cost can also be allocated to parents. Therefore the joint cost per parent and child couple, per hour is £2.85. This cost would of course be reduced if the sessions were operating at full capacity.

8. Conclusion

The Stay and Play provision is located at the heart of the community and was one of the first established sessions provided by Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange. The provision is consistent with the aims and objectives of Sure Start, as it provides a range of stimulating activities which help to strengthen the bond between parent and child and interaction with the local community. In addition, the local programme was successful in establishing a provision in an area that had previously had little or no services.

The sessions are generally well attended as there is a core of parents and children who attend on a regular basis. The Stay and Play Workers regularly obtain feedback about the sessions and have employed some creative methods to do this. Parents feel that that the sessions are really enjoyable and that they both parents and children get a lot out of it. The parents particularly like the informal friendly atmosphere and the fact that they can see their children interacting with other children and developing new confidence and skills.

One of the priority aims of the Stay and Play provision was to generate sufficient parent participation to make the sessions sustainable. It was envisaged that parents would take over the running of the sessions, allowing the Stay and Play Workers to move on and set up other Stay and Play groups elsewhere. Although parents have become involved in some aspects of the provision, overall ownership still resides firmly with Sure Start.

At an operational level, the provision initially encountered some difficulties due to the complexities of maintaining adequate levels of communication between the two partners. In addition, the workers did not feel they had sufficient time to be able to be able to undertake planning and other tasks associated with the provision. The challenge for the Sure Start programme was to ensure that the workers, who are employed by the PLA, were integrated into the larger Sure

Start staff team and supported effectively. Both staff were given some additional hours each week to help them accommodate the administrative and planning demands of the provision and this means that staff now spend more time at the Coldstream site. The staff report that they now feel less isolated and much more a part of the Sure Start Staff team.

The Stay and Play provision requires a number of resources and there are obvious cost implications associated with the provision. The Stay and Play groups initially had access to a toy library although this was later removed as it was not being fully utilised. Due to a lack of sufficient information, the evaluators were not able to give a proper indication of the cost of the provision but were able to make some estimation based on what was available. The evaluators estimate that the cost of the session is £2.85, per person, per hour. This cost could be dramatically reduced by increasing the numbers of attendees and groups in the area. This would assist the Stay and Play provision in remaining sustainable.

9. Recommendations

Monitoring Attendance

The Stay and Play Workers may wish to consider investigating the reasons behind why a significant number of children only attend the session once or twice. The monitoring data shows that 50% of the total number of children appearing on the registers attended one or two sessions and then did not return. Parents who chose not to return to the session could be requested to complete a form to give their comments. The form could include a tick box section with several options to choose from e.g. not returning due to transport problems, due to personal reasons, did not like the activities etc. The form could be administered over the telephone or via the post. Analysis of the data would be useful in addressing issues of access and attendance.

The Toy Library

The evaluators discussed the issue of the withdrawal of the toy library with staff at the local programme. Staff stated that the service will be mobile going round all the groups, probably on a monthly basis. The local programme has not established exactly how the toy library will operate, therefore the evaluators would like to make a suggestion to consider investigating the feasibility of establishing a cataloguing system for the toy library. All the available toys could be photographed and a description written about the toy. The catalogue could be distributed to the various groups. This would enable parents to see the full compliment of toys available and book any toys they particularly want. In addition, the catalogue would be an effective way of evidencing the scale of the service.

Sustainability

Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange is already addressing the issue of sustaining and mainstreaming the services it provides. As the Stay and Play provision is a community based service, there is great potential for the provision to be sustainable beyond the life of the local programme. For this to occur, Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange will need to consider the following:

Parent involvement

The local programme needs to be honest with the parents who attend the group as to the fact that funding for the provision is time limited. Slowly, members of the group could be encouraged to take over aspects of the Play Workers roles. Parents who have been involved with Sure Start, but whose children are now over four, could be encouraged to share their skills with Stay and Play groups. The responsibility for transferring ownership of the sessions to parents should not rest with the Stay and Play workers alone, but should be incorporated in to the wider community development agenda that is promoted by the local programme and supported by other local community development organisations. A joint approach to encouraging parents will ensure that all parents and staff involved feel they are better supported and have knowledge of, and access to, the resources needed to enable change.

Reducing costs through increased participation and widening access to sessions

If there are more Stay and Play session, there will be more children and parents benefiting and the costs per child and parent couple will be reduced. It is important that the local programme investigate the feasibility of establishing more groups in the area. If parents take over the ownership of existing sessions, this will free up some of the workers time, which could then be re-invested by

establishing new groups. The evaluators are also aware that the siting of Stay and Play sessions within schools may affect a parent's decision to attend. Parents may have pre-conceived ideas about the school or can sometimes view school based activities being aimed mainly at the children of that school and its immediate catchment area. Widening the range of venues may generate more interest and ensure greater access to the sessions.

Collecting the right data and evidence to support the case

The evaluators were aware of significant difficulties in establishing data sets for the study, and there were numerous discrepancies with the monitoring data provided by the partner agencies. It is imperative that the local programme develop accurate and easy to access monitoring data. This should certainly be easier when the local programme's new data base system is in place.

It would also be worthwhile monitoring the outcomes of the Stay and Play sessions and evidencing exactly how the sessions have achieved targets. This will enable the local programme to present a case that demonstrates the full impact of the provision. Some follow up work could be done regarding how parents engage in activities at home. The local programme could also consider evidencing the process of parent participation and how this is contributing to community development. It is this sort of information that will be needed when creating a case for the sustainability and mainstreaming of the provision.