



**monitoring & evaluation**  
**June 2004**

Report issued: **15**

## **Provision of Welfare Rights Advice in Sandwell SureStart Programmes**

### **Overview of report**

#### **Background**

The aim of this report is to evaluate the Welfare Rights Advice service provided in SureStart Rood End, Oldbury & Dartmouth Central and SureStart Smethwick Uplands & Londonderry. The programmes 'share' a welfare rights advisor. Rood End provide 60% of the funding for the post and Uplands & Londonderry provide the remaining 40%. The service has been in operation since May 2003 and the postholder is employed through Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Advice Service.

The provision of welfare rights advice addresses the implicit aim of SureStart Local Programmes to reduce poverty amongst families with young children. Six of the eight SureStart programmes in Sandwell offer welfare rights advices and there are two distinct approaches – working in partnership with the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) or in partnership with Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Advice Service.

Records of the number of families accessing additional benefits following contact with each service and the amount of additional benefit being claimed suggest that both approaches can have a significant impact on local families.

As mentioned, the aim of this report is to evaluate the Welfare Rights Advice service provided in SureStart Rood End and SureStart Uplands & Londonderry. To add context, 2 of the 3 CAB workers working in Sandwell SureStart programmes were interviewed about their experience of providing welfare rights advice within a

SureStart programme. However the purpose of this was not to compare the outputs achieved by the two service providers, simply to draw lessons to be learnt about the process of providing welfare rights advice from both.

## Results achieved at Rood End and Uplands

From May 2003 to March 2004 families in the Rood End area accessed an additional £121,699 in benefits/ grants after talking to a Welfare Rights Advisor. Families in the Uplands & Londonderry area accessed an additional £60,109.

At surface level it appears that the service is not working quite as well in Uplands & Londonderry as in Rood End. However the difference is mainly due to the fact that a small handful of families in Rood End have received very large benefit gains. When this is taken into account it is apparent that the service is working equally well for both programmes.

One issue that needs clarifying is the amount each programme is contributing to the cost of the Welfare Rights Adviser. Both the Programmes and the Welfare Rights Service are working on the assumption that the Welfare Rights Adviser is working 18.5 hours a week for each programme. However the initial Service Level Agreement shows a 60:40 split. Unfortunately it has not been possible to get to establish how much each programme is paying and how much they have allocated from this years budget. This obviously has implications for the way the service is run and how its success is determined and so should be clarified.

## Key observations:

*Unless otherwise specified, these comments apply to both the Council's Welfare Rights Service and the CAB.*

- 1 Provision of welfare rights advice has the potential to make a significant impact on the income level of a community.
- 2 SureStart Rood End and SureStart Uplands and Londonderry invested £31,750 in their Welfare Rights Service. The service generated £181,809 in additional income for local families. This is a return of 5.7 times that invested.
- 3 Welfare rights advice is available from a number of sources other than SureStart. The thing that SureStart is doing differently, is providing a proactive, local service, provided by a named individual as part of its wider family support remit. This appears to be making the service more apparent and more accessible to the target families.

- 4 Welfare Rights Workers believe that those who could gain most from Welfare Rights Advice are often those most reluctant to come forward and ask for help. Something that intuitively seems very likely. If this is the case, the most sensible approach is for the programmes to continue to promote the Welfare Rights Service widely and proactively and to portray that seeking welfare rights advice is sensible, commonplace, and certainly not something to be embarrassed about.
- 5 The approach to providing welfare rights advice differs between and within service providers. It is easier to quantify the benefit of providing welfare rights advice when workers adopt a casework approach and have clear targets to work toward and monitor progress against. That is not to say that work not adopting this approach is not benefiting the community, just that its impact is much harder to assess.
- 6 Given that provision of welfare rights advice can have very tangible outputs, it would be sensible for SureStart programme to agree appropriate targets with their service provider and use these as the basis of a service level agreement. This process has been adopted with the Council's Welfare Rights Service and is starting to be adopted with the CAB.
- 7 The relationship between the welfare rights adviser and the wider SureStart team is very important. When there is a good relationship, the welfare rights adviser understands how their work can complement the work of others in the programme and the SureStart staff are able to give appropriate advice to parents on how to access welfare rights advice. Time must be committed to nurturing this relationship.
- 8 All SureStart staff should have easy access to the contact details for the Welfare Rights Adviser working with their programme.
- 9 Both the knowledge and personal approach of welfare rights advisers seem key to the success of the service.
- 10 Drop in services have had some success but only in locations where there is a high throughput of people from the target group.

## Full Report:

### Why offer welfare rights advice?

All SureStart programmes work in deprived areas where poverty is an issue and one of the implicit aims of SureStart local programmes is to reduce such poverty. Experience shows that many people under-claim benefits and fail to access welfare grants available to them. It also shows that providing appropriate advice and support can enable people to access what they are entitled to and so increase their income/ reduce poverty. The advantages associated with a family receiving additional income are self-apparent and can almost be taken for granted. However the wider impact of such material help has also been researched. For example, a study in 1996 found that receiving additional income as a result of benefits advance had a positive impact on the health of recipients.

The Acheson Report recommends measures to increase uptake of benefits in entitled groups and identify the importance of reducing poverty in families with young children.

Prior to SureStart there were a number of ways in which families could access welfare rights advice:

- 1 The CAB – who have a network of offices throughout Sandwell.
- 2 The Council's Welfare Rights Service – Prior to September 2002 this was an advice service for Social Workers, to enable them to advise people in relation to claiming benefits. In September 2002 the service was extended to provide a direct service to the public. A helpline is available to all Sandwell residents to seek advice about welfare issues. Currently, approximately 40% of calls to the helpline result in a face-to-face meeting.
- 3 In 2002 the community legal team provided 3 year funding for a separate benefits helpline provided by a consortium of legal firms. Take up of the service in its first year has been quite low.
- 4 Various community organisations such as the Sandwell Muslim Organisation.

## How is welfare rights advice provided in the SureStart programmes in Sandwell?

Burnt Tree, Park Estate & Temple Way	Need for Welfare Rights Work not identified
Cradley Heath	Part time CAB worker employed 1 day/ week offering a mainly drop in based service
Friar Park, Mesty Croft & Woods	No service at present, although programme is in negotiation with Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Advice Service to provide a worker for 1 day/ week
Rood End, Oldbury & Dartmouth Central (West Bromwich)	Part time worker employed 2.5 days/ week through based at Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Advice Line providing a mainly outreach based service
Rowley	Full time CAB worker providing a drop-in and outreach service from the SureStart base
Smethwick, Cape Hill & Windmill Lane	Volunteer CAB worker offers drop-in advice sessions from the SureStart base for 1 morning every other week
Smethwick, Uplands & Londonderry	Part time worker employed 2.5 days/ week through based at Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Advice Line providing a mainly outreach based service
Tipton	Part time CAB worker employed 2.5 days/ week providing an outreach & drop in service from the SureStart base

The service offered by the CAB and the Welfare Rights Advice Service is quite different and the approach to CAB work is different in different programmes:

- 1 Whilst both offer welfare rights advice, this is the sole focus of the Welfare Rights Advice Service but just a part of the service offered by the CAB. The CAB also offer advice about countless other issues from housing problems to pet ownership.
- 2 Not all CAB workers take on 'casework' – i.e. work proactively with clients who are entitled to additional benefits or grants until such benefits/ grants are paid. In addition, not all CAB workers are able to advise in relation to benefit appeals. Those that are not, refer individuals on to a specialist from within the CAB.
- 3 When the Welfare Rights Advice Service open a case the Welfare Rights Adviser is held accountable for the benefit gain achieved. This results in a very proactive service – the Welfare Rights Adviser will make continual efforts to follow up a family. The CAB adopts a different approach. They tend to see a larger number of individuals, but will close a case if a family does not appear interested in pursuing their claim. There are obviously pro's and con's to each approach.
- 4 When benefits are granted, the Welfare Rights Advice Service workers receive direct confirmation from the Benefits Agency, so they know when a file can be closed and can report results in terms of actual monetary gain. The CAB does not have such direct access to this information and not all workers routinely collect information about monetary gain.

**In terms of being able to demonstrate the impact of welfare rights advice it seems to be beneficial for:**

- 1 Welfare Rights Workers to have clear targets to work to, against which progress is routinely monitored
- 2 Welfare Rights Workers to adopt a casework approach, as this seems to make it more likely that individuals will pursue benefit applications and makes it easier for workers to assess the benefit gain achieved

That is not to say that work not adopting this approach is not benefiting the community – just that it is harder to quantify the benefit provided.

## What's different about what SureStart are doing?

The main difference between the service offered by SureStart and the mainstream/ pre-existing services available is that SureStart is offering a very local service, focusing on the SureStart area that is provided by a named individual. In addition, the SureStart services tend to be provided on an outreach basis – a lot of effort is made to advertise the service and encourage people to access the service and workers will make home visits/ go to venues such as play sessions to provide a service. The workers who provide the service feel this means that SureStart is accessing people that existing services are not – those who are less confident asking for help, or more wary of authority.

## Results obtained in SureStart Rood End and SureStart Uplands & Londonderry

The key objectives for the SureStart Welfare Rights Advice Service are to see a specified number of individuals per year and generate a specified level of benefit gain and debt reduction. The amount of debt reduction work undertaken has been far lower than anticipated and has not been considered in this evaluation. The need for and success of this work should be considered in the future.

The targets and actual results achieved in relation to people seen and benefit gain achieved are shown in the table below.

The benefit gains reported show the amount of additional benefit individuals will receive in the 12 month period following approval of their claim. For example if a mother successful applied for tax credits of £50/ month in January 2004, that she could have applied for in October 2003 her benefit gain would be £750 – a back payment of £50/ month for October – December and future payments of £50/ month from January to December 2004.

All of the benefit gain figures quoted in this report are based on cases where the benefit/ grant was approved between May 2003 and March 2004.

		Actual May-March	Projected (60:40 split) April-March	Projected (50:50 split) April-March
Individuals seen	Uplands	62	90	120
	Rood End	71	150	120
Total benefit gain in year	Uplands	£60,109.74	£80,000	£100,000
	Rood End	£121,699	£120,000	£100,000

### Individuals seen

- 1 In Uplands & Londonderry, the Welfare Rights Adviser saw 62 individuals – 69% of the target of 90 assuming a 60:40 split, or 52% of the target of 120 assuming a 50:50 split.
- 2 In Rood End, 71 individuals were seen, 47% of the target of 150 assuming a 60:40 split or 59% of the target of 120 assuming a 50:50 split.

There are a variety of reasons for the number of individuals seen being lower than projected. In particular that the Welfare Rights Service was established at a very early stage in both SureStart programmes meaning that the programmes did not have established contact with a large number of families or many staff to help promote the service. In addition, the service began operating at the end of May 2003 and so was not in place for the full financial year for which targets were set.

The interesting thing about the number of individuals seen though, is that the proportion of individuals seen, compared to the target, is more or less the same as, or better, in Uplands & Londonderry than in Rood End. This is interesting because both the programmes and the Council's Welfare Rights Service feel that things are working better in Rood End than in Uplands & Londonderry.

Something that should be noted is that the records of the Welfare Rights Advisor show a waiting list for the Rood End programme but not the Uplands programme which does suggest more interest or more effective promotion in this area.

### Benefits gain

Looking at the overall benefit gain achieved in each area backs up the belief that things are working better in Rood End than in Uplands & Londonderry.

- 1 The Rood End area has seen benefit gain of £121,699, 101% of the target of £120,000 (or 122% of the target of £100,000 if we assume the service is shared equally by the two programmes).
- 2 The Uplands & Londonderry area has seen benefit gain of £60,109, 75% of the target of £80,000 (or 60% of the target of 100,000 if we assume the service is shared equally by the two programmes).

An important observation is that in both areas, the benefit has been higher than anticipated, given the number of individuals seen.

The gain in Rood End has been particularly large. This is mainly due to some very large gains by particular families - for example, one family has received in excess of £24,000 and another 4 have received in excess of £9,000. In comparison, only one individual in Uplands & Londonderry received in excess of £6,600.

There is no reason why families in Rood End should receive more benefit gain than those in Uplands & Londonderry. Certainly, given the working practices and management arrangements of the Welfare Rights Service we can confidently state that it is not due to cases being handled differently or being given different levels of attention - it is simply a matter of the individual circumstances of the people seen. The more people seen, the more likely a programme is to come across a family who is significantly under-claiming.

The Welfare Rights Worker believes that those who could gain most from Welfare Rights Advice are often those most reluctant to come forward and ask for help. Something that intuitively seems very likely. If this is the case, the most sensible approach is for the programmes to continue to promote the Welfare Rights Service widely and proactively and to portray that seeking welfare rights advice is sensible, commonplace, and certainly not something to be embarrassed about.

## How are these results being obtained?

### Advertising the service

All of the SureStart welfare rights advisors (CAB and the Council's Welfare Rights Service) have worked to advertise their service. Techniques used include:

- 1 direct mail to SureStart parents,
- 2 articles in SureStart newsletters,
- 3 posters at/ visiting SureStart activities & events,
- 4 handing out leaflets at schools,
- 5 making local health visitors aware of the service so they can inform local families,
- 6 ensuring other SureStart staff are aware of the service so they can inform local families

The source of referrals has not been systematically monitored, so it is not possible to say what is the most effective approach. However the Welfare Rights Advisers feel that word of mouth (recommendation from other parents who have used the service) and referral from other practitioners is their most effective way of promoting the service.

The Welfare Rights Advisers feel that referrals from within the SureStart team are particularly important. From the data available from Rood End and Uplands & Londonderry, it does appear that staff at Rood End have made more referrals to the Welfare Rights Adviser than staff at Uplands – in particular Maternity Support Workers. However data isn't able to show whether or not this is crucial to the success of the service. Intuitively though, staff referral would seem to be a key way that parents find out about other SureStart services and is something that should be encouraged in all programmes.

### Working closely with other members of the SureStart team:

Staff in SureStart Rood End and SureStart Uplands were asked to indicate if they were aware that the programme offered a welfare rights advice service.

- 1 10/10 of Rood End staff said yes, that they were very familiar with it.
- 2 3/10 of Uplands staff said yes they were very familiar with it, 4.5/10 said they knew the service existed but not a lot about the service and 3/10 said that it was news to them.

They were then asked what they would have said to a parent who asked where to

turn for advice about benefits or debt before receiving the questionnaire.

- 1 1/10 people from Rood End weren't sure, 9/10 said they'd refer the person to the Welfare Rights Adviser, indeed 6/10 mentioned her by name.
- 2 1.5/10 people from Uplands weren't sure, 4/10 said they'd refer to one of the mainstream agencies who offers welfare rights advice and 5/10 said they'd refer the person to the Welfare Rights Adviser, 2/10 mentioned her by name but 2/10 mentioned they wouldn't have access to relevant contact details.

What does this tell us? It certainly seems to be the case that the Rood End team are more familiar with the Welfare Rights Service than the Uplands Team. One of the key reasons is undoubtedly that many of the Uplands team are very new. However, given the importance of the wider team referring parents to the welfare rights service steps should be taken to build the relationship between the Welfare Rights Worker and other staff at SureStart Uplands.

It is important to note that the issue of relationship building is not unique to SureStart Uplands, as both CAB workers interviewed also highlighted that, certainly in the early days of their service, that they had limited understanding of what other SureStart staff did and other SureStart staff didn't seem to really understand what they did. This is perhaps one of the main hurdles multi-agency/partnership working has to overcome. It can be tempting to underplay the importance of relationship building, particularly as it can seem to be something that makes less time available for service delivery, but it is important to take a longer term view – investing time in relationship building should reap benefit in the future.

### The approach of the Welfare Rights Adviser:

Money can be a sensitive issue, so the style of the individual Welfare Rights Advisers is important. Perhaps not surprisingly, the officers report that it is important to be able to put people at their ease and to be very clear about what they can offer and how they can help. Also, that they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to advise appropriately. The manager of the Council's Welfare Rights Advice Services feels the key to success is a combination of personality, training and effective supervision.

### Drop in or outreach based services:

Each of the Welfare Rights Advisers across Sandwell has tried a combination of drop in and outreach based service. Drop in based services appear to have mixed success. Where they have worked they seem to offer a low key, relaxed way of introducing parents to the service and make good use of the time of the Welfare Rights Advisers. Where they haven't the services have either had very low take up or have been visited by people from outside of SureStart's target group – people from out of the area or who do not care for young children. The two drop in services that appear to work most effectively are the one run by Rood End at a woman's refuge and the one run at Rowley SureStart – a drop in service run from their SureStart building which is situated next to a primary school and the Council's local neighbourhood office.

### What do families say about the service?

For the purposes of this evaluation we have not made efforts to ask families what they think of the service. However it is interesting to note that in two general feedback exercises recently undertaken by SureStart Rood End a number of local parents reported that they see the welfare rights service as the best thing about SureStart.

### What do other SureStart staff say about the service?

As mentioned above, a number of staff would like more information about the Welfare Rights Service. Other comments made show that other SureStart staff have found the Welfare Rights Service to be a very valuable addition to what SureStart offers:

“good service, very well received by most parents”

“the help & support that Welfare Rights has offered the cases that I have referred has been excellent and dealt with within a reasonable time”

### Is the service cost effective?

The two programmes shared a one off set up fee of £2,500 to set up the service

and pay £29,000/ year to cover the salary and associated on-costs of employing the welfare rights advisor.

The table below shows the return on investment for each programme:

	<i>Investment</i>	<i>Return</i>	<i>Return on Investment</i>
Uplands	£11,250	£60,109	5.34 times the amount spent
Rood End	£20,500	£121,699	5.93 times the amount spent

The cost of providing the service has not been looked at in any more depth than the costs the Councils Welfare Rights Advice Service has charged the programmes. It could well be the case that the actual cost of providing the service is slightly higher when all costs such as marketing, accommodation, telephone, mileage and management time are taken into account. However, even if the true cost of providing the service were 50% higher than the cost stated, the service would still be cost effective – that's not to say that the SureStart programmes want or would be in a position to pay much more!

Naturally it would cost more to provide the service without the existing infrastructure of the Councils Welfare Rights Advice Service.

### **The way forward for the service at Rood End and Uplands & Londonderry**

The results speak for themselves in relation to the value of continuing the service. In this respect the service almost has unfair salience in comparison to others with less tangible outputs.

What is apparent though is that the way the service sits within the wider programme is important. In particular efforts should be made to maintain the strong relationship between Rood End and the Welfare Rights Service and efforts made to build a similar relationship at Uplands. It is crucial that the service is well advertised and that all staff in the programmes have an appreciation of what the Welfare Rights Service offers to parents and how they can access this support. It is also important that the support is non-stigmatising and is routinely recommended

to parents - for maternity support workers to mention the service to all new moms appears to be a promising way of working toward this.

## Appendix – Research Details

The following information was examined to prepare this report:

- 1 Monthly activity sheets kept by the Welfare Rights Officer detailing who the service was in contact with each and how they came to find out about the service (e.g. referral by a friend/ practitioner or by contacting service directly)
- 2 The monitoring system used by the Council's Welfare Rights Advice Service that records all of the cases opened (different individual seen) the status of their claim and the additional benefits accessed.

In addition, a semi-structured interview was undertaken with the welfare rights adviser, her manager and the CAB workers in 2 of the 3 programmes who employ CAB workers to find out their view of what their service offers families in the SureStart area, what works and what doesn't.

In addition, the other staff working within SureStart Rood End and SureStart Uplands were asked to complete a simple questionnaire about their knowledge and experience of the welfare rights service in their programme. A copy of the questionnaire is attached below.

8 of the 15 staff working for Rood End (53%) completed a questionnaire and 13 of the 18 staff at Uplands (72%) completed one.

### Welfare Rights Advice (Staff Questionnaire)

We're currently helping to evaluate the welfare rights service provided by SureStart Rood End and SureStart Uplands & Londonderry.

An important element of this is the views of people working in the 2 teams, so I'd be extremely grateful if you could spend a few minutes completing this form.

It's not a test, of you or of the welfare rights adviser, simply a way of understanding how the welfare rights service works – **so please give your honest answers not what you think is the 'right' answer.**

Please return your form to Tharmista by 5<sup>th</sup> May

Thanks a million!

Su & Tharmista

## **The questions...**

### **Which programme do you work for?**

- SureStart Rood End, Oldbury & Dartmouth Central
- SureStart Uplands & Londonderry

### **Were you aware that your programme offered a welfare rights service?**

- yes, very familiar with the service offered
- yes, but don't know a great deal about it
- it's news to me!

### **If a parent asked you yesterday (i.e. before you got this questionnaire!) where to turn for advice about benefits or debt, what would you have said?**

### **Has a parent ever asked you where to turn for advice about benefits or debt?**

- yes, quite a few have
- yes, one or two have
- no - never

**Would you feel comfortable suggesting to a parent that he/ she seeks advice about benefits or debt?**

- yes - in most cases
- yes - probably would
- no - definitely not

**Have you ever suggested that a parent seek advice about benefits or debt?**

- yes, quite a few times
- yes, once or twice
- no - never

**Any other comments about welfare rights advice within the programme?**