

Stay and Play Questionnaire Report

Background

This report forms part of a large-scale evaluation of the Stay and Play service provided by Sure Start Paignton. While the results and conclusions drawn here are valid and can be acted upon it should be noted that they will be presented in a wider context in a larger report to be published in the future.

For a copy of a plan of the full evaluation please see Appendix A.

Method

A total of 113 questionnaire were sent out to all families that had attended Stay and Play in January to March 2004. The questionnaire was trialled with an initial group of ten parents. No significant changes were needed so their data has been included with the main questionnaires. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Results

Of the 113 questionnaires sent out, 36 were returned giving a response rate of 32%.

The following table details the reasons parents gave for attending Stay and Play sessions. Parents were allowed to choose as many options as they felt applicable.

Table 1: Reasons for attending Stay and Play

Reason	Frequency
Convenient time	18
Support	12
For child to socialise	36
Location is easy to access	24
For me to socialise	21
Selection of toys	16
Other	2

The most frequent reason for attending Stay and Play was for the child to socialise with an easy to access location and for the parent to socialise being the second and third most important factors respectively. The two 'other' responses were "Alison's sessions" (which refers to the teacher within the team that runs a preparation session for older children alongside the Stay and Play session) and "to get me out of the house". It is likely that this latter comment could be included in "For me to socialise" but is included here to reflect the participant's response.

Table 2 details how the parents rated individual components of the Stay and Play sessions. They were offered very poor as a choice but nobody chose to circle it so the column has been omitted.

Table 2: Parents rating of aspects of the Stay and Play sessions

Aspect of session	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
Singing	13	19	3	0
Snacks	11	20	3	1
Toys	24	11	0	0
Structured activities	14	15	6	0
Unstructured play	12	21	3	0
Length of session	12	22	1	0
Staff	29	7	0	0

The two aspects rated most favourably are the staff at the sessions and the toys provided. After that the components of the sessions are rated approximately the same. Only one 'poor' response was made and this was referring to the snacks provided at sessions.

Parents made a number of comments on the returned questionnaires and an illustrative sample of these is included below.

Singing

- "my son has learnt more words through songs"
- "helps language skills"
- "my children are scared of the singing so I normally leave early"
- "I learn new songs as well"
- "...encourages children to interact and build up confidence"

Toys

- "not so much water please"
- "in some sessions there are not enough"
- "always a wide selection for all ages and child preferences"
- "as my son has got older he has found them less stimulating"
- "varied – different ideas on occasions to stimulate play"

Snacks

- "simple, nourishing and always well-received"
- "more fruit..."
- "would like to see fresh fruit every week"
- "...more of a variety..."

Structured activities

- "helps to develop concentration and to follow instructions"
- "child too young"
- "need to be more seasonal i.e. water play in summer not winter"

Unstructured play

- "lets the children explore and find their own space"
- "they run round and enjoy themselves without worry of hurting themselves"
- "it gives the children a chance to play with what they choose to"

Length of session

“plenty of time for a child to experience all that goes on”

“1-2 hours is enough for small children as they can tire quickly”

“would like to stay for full session but need to leave for work”

“just long enough for a break”

“any longer and some children get restless”

Staff

“friendly, welcoming and helpful”

“extremely supportive and friendly”

“helpful, attentive and supportive”

“some are more helpful than others”

“some not really interested in your worries or fears, others are very good”

The parents were asked which professionals they have seen at sessions and which they would like to see. Table 3 details how many respondents chose each option.

Table 3: The professionals parents have seen/ would like to see at sessions

Professional	Have seen	Would like to see
Community support worker	3	3
Midwife	12	1
Counsellor	8	4
Health visitor	15	17
Speech and Language Therapist	10	3
Teacher	5	2
Nursery nurse	8	1
Specialist health visitor	0	2
Employment/training advisor*		12
Nutritionist*		17
Benefits advisor*		5
Dental advisor/hygienist*		9
Other	0	2

Nearly one in two respondents would like to see a health visitor and a nutritionist at the session, and one in three respondents would like to see an employment/training advisor. One in four want to see a dental advisor or hygienist attending sessions.

Table 4 describes the responses parents made when asked about resulting changes in behaviour in their children from attending Stay and Play. Respondents were offered a Strongly Disagree option but nobody chose to circle it and the column has been omitted.

Table 4 – Changes in behaviour attributed to attendance at Stay and Play

Behaviour	Strongly agree	Agree	No change	Disagree
Plays better	9	21	6	0
Shares toys	6	18	12	0
Concentrates more	8	13	14	1

The majority of parents did feel that attending Stay and Play sessions had positively benefited their child's behaviour. There was only disagreement for the child concentrating on tasks more and this was also the option that fewest respondents agreed with and over one in three said there was no change. One in three respondents felt there was no change in sharing toys with other children.

Of the 34 respondents (two did not answer) to the final question 23 did not attend any other structured play sessions and 11 responded that they did. Unfortunately few details of other sessions were given so cannot be reported here, but this does show that for two thirds of the attendees Stay and Play is the only structured play session they go to with their child.

Discussion and conclusions

Firstly a response rate of 32% is low for research purposes. In future methods for improving return rates will need to be adopted so that any questionnaires sent out to Sure Start families become a more powerful methods for gaining feedback and researching/evaluating services.

It is clear from the questionnaire that the parents attend Stay and Play sessions for many reasons but by far the most popular is the social aspect, both for the child and themselves. In addition the easy access to the location of the sessions is important to the parents, suggesting Sure Start Paignton has chosen its venues well.

The structure of the sessions is favourably reflected in parents' responses to the individual aspects. Although only one aspect was rated poorly by a single respondent, the qualitative comments made on the questionnaires do provide a richer context to view the individual components of the sessions.

Singing was rated favourably by all parents that attended it bar one who made the comment that their "children were scared of the singing". While this is only one respondent out of 36, to provide as inclusive a service as possible all parents should be offered extra support if there is any part of the session they feel unable to access. With children afraid of the singing session small sessions with just the parent and staff may help them build the confidence to participate in the larger group exercise. It is clear from the comments made by other parents that the singing is a valuable exercise for their children's learning and development, so every effort should be made to make it available to all.

One very promising comment made by one of the parents offers a clear justification for the whole concept of Stay and Play sessions.

"I learn new songs as well."

Stay and Play sessions were designed to encourage parents to interact and play with their children in a quality environment with expert advice and support available. It is hoped that the skills they learn/observe at the sessions are taken home and practised there. This comment would suggest that exactly this is happening.

Snacks provided at the sessions were the only aspect of Stay and Play to receive a 'poor' response. In addition many of the comments suggest a rethink of the snacks being provided is called for. At the time of the questionnaire biscuits were being offered at every session with fruit being offered at snack times frequently but not each time. The feedback received from the questionnaires is indicating that the parents want the Stay and Play sessions to be supporting a healthy eating culture by providing a variety of fresh fruit at each and every session.

While the toys provided at each session were rated favourably on the scale responses the comments made were more mixed. A section of parents felt that there were not enough at some sessions. What cannot be determined here is whether a session has not enough toys or too many attendees. Further research is needed in this area to plan the best course of action for future service delivery.

In addition there was one comment made that water play should be used less. It is not the remit of this report to make recommendations outside the author's expertise, but one suggestion may be that the parent would be happier with the water play if they were forewarned it would be happening. An issue with water may be that it requires a change of clothes that the parent does not necessarily have with them.

The structured activities received the most 'average' comments, which compared to the other aspects does indicate there could be improvement in this area. Again the comments made provide useful information as to issues with this part of the sessions. While those that did participate felt the activities were valuable to their child's development and learning not all children were old enough to participate, which may be a reason for the slightly less favourable ratings. In addition staff planning the activities need to bear in mind the season so that they are not perhaps creating discomfort for the children, e.g. getting them wet during winter. Again, though, forewarning would enable the parent to bring a change of clothing.

From the comments made by parents it would appear those planning and running the sessions have got the unstructured aspects and the duration just right. No unfavourable comments were made by any of the parents nor were there any suggestions for improvement.

The comments made about staff were almost overwhelmingly positive with the vast majority of the parents offering high praise for those facilitating the sessions. Only one negative comment was made but what cannot be explored here is whether this is a single comment due to ongoing poor experience of staff interaction or just a single incident that has been reported here.

The results displayed in Table 3 are interesting for the fact that many of the professions are being reported as seen frequently, while others rarely. This is interesting because the professionals within the team attend the Stay and Play sessions approximately equally. The professionals that form the core team and regularly facilitate the sessions are the community support worker, midwife, health visitor and nursery nurse. In addition the teacher, who runs sessions alongside Stay and Play will also have been seen regularly. This suggests there needs to be more transparency at the sessions about the expertise of each team member so that families know what is available and who to talk with to access them.

To illustrate this point clearly there is a nursery nurse at every, single session yet only two out of nine respondents were aware they had seen one. What would be an interesting future research area would be to investigate why the midwife and health visitor are much better known than the other team members.

Table 3 also contains information for future session planning. When asked who they would like to see at sessions the four clearly most popular requests were health visitor, nutritionist, employment/training advisor and dental advisor/hygienist. While a health visitor does regularly attend sessions, many respondents feel that there should be a health visitor attending more frequently. The employment/training advisor is an upcoming recruitment for the team so future research will need to look into how they best deliver their service.

At present there is no provision for a nutritionist, nor are there any plans. There is however plans to employ a dental hygienist as part of children's centre planning. MORI research completed in the area, due to be published shortly, has shown dissatisfaction with dental services in the area, with access being a primary difficulty. This evidence suggests it's a role that is desired by Sure Start families now.

A primary focus of all Sure Start work is to provide notable outcomes for those families accessing the services. Table 4 evidences the positive differences Stay and Play has made to the families attending. Out of 36 respondents, 30 felt that their child now played better as a result of attending Stay and Play. With play being such an important part of a child's development and learning this is a very promising outcome. The majority of parents (24 out of 36) also felt that their child shared toys better and 21 out of 36 parents felt their child concentrated on tasks more. While these are still good outcomes they are not as widely acknowledged as the child playing better, which suggests there may be a need to plan future activities around these two areas.

Recommendations

- Plan messy activities further in advance so parents can be forewarned at previous sessions that a change of clothing may be required.
- During a trial period provide only fresh fruit at sessions, then seek feedback from the families as to what they preferred at the sessions. The evidence here suggests families want just fruit at each session but a variety will need to be provided.
- More transparency is needed over staff roles and areas of expertise. Promotional material will need to be produced for each member of staff so that this can be displayed at the sessions they attend/facilitate. This will hopefully enable more parents to access advice and information in areas that they are concerned with.
- The feasibility of having a nutritionist attending sessions should be looked at and if possible planning made to include them at Stay and Play. Any introduction of a new professional would need to be done on a trial basis with quality evaluation to ensure the families receive the service they were expecting. In addition with a role such as this, where the immediate work would be removed from the main target areas of the Sure Start unit's work, mainstreaming needs to be a primary consideration. If a nutritionist were to be introduced to the team there would need to be a clear plan as to how the role would be paid for in the near future.
- As part of the Children's Centre planning a dental hygienist is being budgeted for, but Sure Start Paignton should look moving the introduction of the appointment forward.
- The early years team should investigate methods or activities for improving children's sharing behaviour and concentration so that more families benefit from these outcomes.

Appendix A

Evaluation plan for Stay and Play (Paignton)

There will be three main areas of research/evaluation. It is important that all three of these areas are weighted equally.

Within each area they may be multiple avenues of data collection.

Children

- 1) A small (no more than 6 per each of the three sessions) selection of verbal children will be given disposable cameras to photograph what is important to them at the Stay and Play. A member of staff will accompany the children, rather than the parent of the child as parents can often influence their own child's behaviour unconsciously. The children that do take photos will be allowed to retain a copy.
- 2) For pre-verbal children an older, verbal sibling (again no more than 6 although it is likely there will be fewer children than this that meet the criteria) will be asked to photograph what they think is important to their brother/sister.
- 3) Circle talk involving children from exercise 1) with their photos used as a prompting tool to discuss what's important. The groups will be no larger than 3-4 and will be facilitated by a key worker from the Sure Start early years team.

Parents

- 1) General questionnaire asking about factors of the Stay and Play sessions.
- 2) Structured interview conducted by Research and Evaluation Officer (REO) with parents of children who have taken photos.

Workers

- 1) Focus group facilitated by REO on what they think is important to children and the sessions generally.
- 2) Key workers or workers with particular relationship with children taking photos will be asked what they feel is important to the child. Again the REO will conduct this interview and ideally this will be done before photos are taken because they may be needed to look after the children taking photos and it is important this does not colour their personal perception of what they felt was important.

Quantitative

- 1) Analysis of figures, attendance, venues, participation, feed into other services, other services accessing through Stay & Plays.

Appendix B



Participant no. _____

We're evaluating the Stay and Play sessions & to help us provide the best service we can please take a few moments to complete this questionnaire. All your answers will be held in the utmost confidentiality.

Gender of child (*Please circle*) Male / Female Location: _____

1. Why do you attend Stay and Play? <i>Tick all that apply.</i>				
Convenient time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Location is easy to access	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	For me to socialise	<input type="checkbox"/>	
For child to socialise	<input type="checkbox"/>	Selection of toys	<input type="checkbox"/>	
If other please state: _____				
Please rate these aspects of the sessions by circling the word that most applies:				
2. <u>Singing:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____				
3. <u>Snacks:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____				
4. <u>Toys:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____				
5. <u>Structured activities:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____				
6. <u>Unstructured play:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____				
7. <u>Length of session:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____				
8. <u>Staff:</u>				
Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Comments: _____ PTO				

9. Which professionals or agencies have you spoken to at these sessions for advice and support? <i>Please tick all that apply.</i>			
Community support worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Speech and Language	<input type="checkbox"/>
Midwife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counsellor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nursery nurse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health visitor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist health visitor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please explain): <input type="checkbox"/> _____			
10. Which professionals or agencies would you like to see more of at these sessions? <i>Please tick all that apply.</i>			
Community support worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Speech and Language	<input type="checkbox"/>
Midwife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nutritionist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counsellor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Benefits advisor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health visitor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dental advisor/hygienist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nursery nurse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment/training advisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist health visitor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please explain): <input type="checkbox"/> _____			

Please indicate your response to the statement by circling the comment that best indicates your feeling.

As a result of attending Stay and Play...

11. my child plays better with other children.				
Strongly agree	Agree	No change	Disagree	Strongly disagree
12. my child is more prepared to share toys with other children.				
Strongly agree	Agree	No change	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. my child concentrates more on tasks.				
Strongly agree	Agree	No change	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14. Finally, does your child attend other (not Sure Start) structured play sessions?				
Yes	No	If yes please give details: _____		
(please circle) _____				

Please feel free to make any further comments or suggest how we could improve the session:

Thank you for taking the time to fill this questionnaire in.