

**Middlesbrough Sure Start,
Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End
Parental Participation Strategy**

'What we have done and where we are going'

**An Interim-Evaluation Report
of Process and Outcomes**

June 2004



Dave Sillence
Community Evaluation and Research Group,
Social Futures Institute
School of Social Sciences and Law

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Community Evaluation and Research Group (CERG)

Robin Bunton, Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences & Law

Dr Steve Conway, Senior Research Fellow School of Social Sciences & Law

Paul Crawshaw, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Care

David J. Sillence, Researcher, School of Social Sciences & Law

Sue Anderson, Researcher, School of Social Sciences and Law

Charlene Thornberry, Administrator, School of Social Sciences and Law

Executive Summary

This interim report documents the findings from the ongoing evaluation of Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End Sure Start programme during the period July 2003 – May 2004. This is the first year of a two-year schedule which sets out to evaluate both the ‘processes’ and ‘outcomes’ of services provided by the programme. The first year will focus upon both community and group activities, whereas 2004-2005 will concentrate upon an evaluation of health and family support services.

Grounded in the views and experiences of a diverse research population (n=62), this interim-report examines service provisions, processes and outcomes from the perspective of users. Prominent research themes include service provision, emotional and social development, improving health, improving learning, strengthening families and communities, and future evaluation strategy details and recommendations.

An underlying prerogative of the evaluation was the stipulation that it would be founded upon the principle of ‘parental participation’. A small group of parents participated in an evaluation methods training programme with the overall objective that the findings of this report be fundamentally based upon data collected by parents, from parents.

The parents involved had little or no experience of what was constituted formal evaluation processes but, after subsequent training, performed the complex tasks admirably. However, it should be noted that the subsequent findings detailed within this report do, to a degree, reflect this chosen methodology, and attention is drawn to this where and when applicable.

The main findings are summarised under the following headings:

1) Sure Start Service Provision

- ◆ Central to the achievement of the programmes objectives is the provision of a range of services, specifically designed to address the problems faced by its users, yet sympathetic to the needs of children and parents / carers.
- ◆ Positive comments were received from parents in relation to a wide variety of services provided for their children. The '*Playbus*', '*Playgroup*', '*Busy Bee's*' and '*Parent and Child*' services all showing high levels of usage and user satisfaction. Other services including '*Jolly Babies*', '*Fun Tots*', '*Gym Tots*' and '*Swim Tots*', which also showed significant usage levels.
- ◆ User recommendations supported these views; requests focussing upon '*more of the same*' at '*different times*' and suggestions supporting the need for existing services to also '*continue during school holiday periods*'.
- ◆ Parent-carer focused services, while not enjoying the same levels of usage, were still commented upon positively. Particular services singled out for praise included, '*Active for Life*' and '*Access to Leisure*'. Favourable comments were also received for the '*Welfare Rights*', '*Aromatherapy*' and '*Health Drop In*' services.
- ◆ Parent-carer recommendations in relation to their own provision supported comments received for their children's services. However, conflicting messages were received from parents in relation to their knowledge of the services on offer. A number of parents in response to questioning suggesting '*they did not know*' about certain services currently on offer, but then commenting favourably about the same services when asked to '*assess*' them.
- ◆ It should be noted that conflicting messages such as this illustrate one of the dilemma's of 'participatory' research, particularly in relation to participants wary of formal interviewing procedures, and interviewers who are themselves in the process of 'learning' qualitative research methods.

2) Emotional and Social Development

- ◆ The Social and Emotional development of both children and parents has been recognised as a key area within programme development. To this end the wide variety of services provided by the programme, both for children and for parents, incorporates a range of measures to both encourage and stimulate users' personal development.
- ◆ In relation to the emotional and social development of their children a wide variety of positive comments were received. This was particularly in relation to the ways in which children's social development, through increased '*friendship relations*' with other children, allied to '*improvements in behaviour*' with children and parents, had been observed.
- ◆ Favourable comments were also expressed in relation to the ways in which these increased levels of interaction, and had also '*improved children's communication skills*', both with other children and within families themselves.
- ◆ In relation to recommendations towards service improvement, parents made a number of requests. These included suggestions for additional sessions, at alternate times, to assist with their children's communication skills, as well as additional help through things such as '*cooking courses*'.
- ◆ Parents comments in relation to themselves focussed primarily on the way since joining Sure Start they had made '*lots of new friends*', and how getting help with their children had helped them to '*relax and feel better about themselves*'. Analysis of transcript data showed that attending Sure Start had benefited parents both socially and emotionally in a wide variety of ways.
- ◆ Parents made a number of requests in relation to recommendations for service improvements. By far and away the most repeated was that for '*increased child care and crèche facilities*' Parents saw this as the most useful way of helping them to relax and also to take more advantage of the services provided for them by the programme.

3) Improving Health

- ◆ Sure Start has a specific objective of improving children's health and fitness, as well as instilling in them the benefits of a healthy and balanced diet. In relation to parents this includes providing information and advice to help achieve these goals as well as advising and helping parents themselves to lead a more active and healthy lifestyle both during pregnancy and afterwards. Programme services are specifically designed so as to facilitate these aims.
- ◆ Feedback from parents in relation to improvements in their children's health focussed on two areas. The first was the impact of Sure Start policy in the provision of fruit and vegetables for children during the activities they attended. Many parents commented that this had encouraged them to provide the same kinds of food at home. The second area in which parents commented on '*how much more active*' their children had become since attending Sure Start activities.
- ◆ Recommendations included suggestions in relation to getting children involved in '*sporting activities*' and also the provision of '*external play areas*'. Similarly a number of requests were made in relation to parents receiving assistance with providing their children with fruit and vegetables at home, as well as help with being taught about the '*right diet*' for their children.
- ◆ Parent's feedback in relation to the services specifically provided for them was very positive, particularly in relation to the activities designed to help them get fit. '*Active for Life*' and '*Access to Leisure*' were both singled out for praise on a number of occasions. Both for the health benefits, and also for the social aspects. Parents commented on how they could interact with other parents easily during these events.
- ◆ Recommendations in relation to what was provided included requests for '*more of the same*' type of courses '*at different times of the day*'. These were supported by requests for more '*beauty type courses*' and '*aromatherapy*' courses. Again, requests for more '*childcare and crèche facilities*' were repeated, especially in relation to parents having the opportunity to be able to participate in what was being offered.

4) Improving Learning

- ◆ Sure Start views the nurturing of children's communication, numeracy and literacy skills as a vital part of their pre-school education and as such essential in breaking down barriers of exclusion. Similarly, a core objective of the Sure Start programme is the aim of 'empowering' parents by helping them back into the world of work through the provision of a variety of educational type courses.
- ◆ Feedback from parents in relation to improvements in their children's learning was widespread. Communication skills came in for particular praise, as did their children's improved abilities in relation to both counting and reading. Several parents commenting on their children's increased appetites for '*story reading*' and '*reading books*'. The library service was spoken of favourably in this respect, as was the practice of reading to children at Sure Start activities by programme staff.
- ◆ Once again requests for '*more of the same*' and '*at different times of the day*' were the most common requests received. This supports the belief that a large majority of existing services are delivering what is required. A number of additional requests were recorded. These included '*bigger groups*' and '*more staff*' as well as the provision of existing activities both '*after school*' and '*during school holidays*'.
- ◆ Similarly, in relation to recommendations parents were quite forthcoming. A high number of requests for '*more computer courses*' and more '*learning courses*' were qualified by an insistence that all of these courses should have some type of accreditation attached to them. This was reinforced by several requests for '*NVQ*' type courses as well as both '*college and OU type courses*'.

5) Strengthening Families and Communities

- ◆ While parent's feedback in relation to what was provided for them by the programme was generally positive, particularly in relation to training courses which were seen as both '*very useful*' and '*empowering*', a minority of parents were less enthusiastic about measures targeted at helping them back into work. They suggested that they wanted to '*see their kids grow up*' and '*look after them their selves*'.

- ◆ These comments conflict with alternate requests for 'more childcare' but it is suggested that there is little in the way of evidence to support a 'link' between these. Alternately it is further suggested that these apparent contradictions can be explained through deep-rooted and complex 'cultural' beliefs within which the primacy of childcare is fundamental.
- ◆ Sure Start also actively encourages parental involvement in the day to day running of the programme as well as asking parents to promote both Sure Start services and philosophy within their own communities. It is suggested that parents 'active' within Sure Start could carry this attitude of social responsibility over into both their families and broader communities. In line with other service provision objectives this is also seen as benefiting families in general through increased levels of social cohesion.
- ◆ Supporting the above comments a number of parents admitted to involvement in a variety of community activities up and above that of their Sure Start involvement. Others questioned suggested '*a lack of time*' prevented them from engaging more actively within the programme. However, several parents suggested that 'with help and training' they would be willing to become more actively involved.
- ◆ There was a large and vociferous response to questions about 'problems' within their communities. Many of these focussed upon issues of '*crime*', '*vandalism*' and '*vehicle related problems*'. A predominant issue was that of '*young people with nothing to do*' and young people being responsible for many of the problems cited. Additionally, '*nuisance neighbours*' and '*drugs and alcohol*' were identified as contributory problems.
- ◆ Solutions to these problems varied from those who recognised a '*need for more facilities*' for young people to those advocating '*stricter punishment and sentencing*'. A widespread response was that of the need for more '*police on the beat*' allied to '*more street wardens*'. Many of those questioned laid the blame for these problems at the doors of the troublemakers' parents. *Suggesting 'it was their responsibility'* to sort their own kids out and it should be them who were punished for their offspring's misdemeanours.
- ◆ Parents also made a number of suggestions in relation to raising the profile of Sure Start, suggesting that those involved might act '*more responsibly*'. A number of comments were received in relation to the necessity to make sure everyone knew that '*Sure Start was different from Social Services*'. Parents commented that they thought this was what scared many people off Sure Start. There was a consensus on the benefits that Sure Start involvement could bring to all of those involved with it.

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1) Introduction

Sure Start is the New Labour governments key social policy initiative. Local programmes aim to improve the health and well-being of families and children before and from birth, so that children are ready to flourish when they go to school. To date 524 Sure Start local programmes are operational, helping up to 400,000 children living in disadvantaged areas - including a third of under 4s living in poverty (Sure Start Local Programmes, p1)

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/surestartlocalprogrammes/>

Sure Start Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End is a 'fifth wave' Sure Start programme encompassing the wards of Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End in Middlesborough. In engaging these communities the programme has the overall objective of improving the health, social, emotional and learning opportunities for pre-school children and their parents.

Programme evaluation at a local level is a fundamental principle of the Sure Start evaluation strategy. Local Sure Start programmes are required to monitor progress towards nationally prescribed objectives, targets and benchmarks. Programmes are also expected to implement an ongoing process of monitoring and reviewing of working practices with the objective of improving core principles such as professional practices, partnership working and local participation.

Where the first year evaluation dealt primarily with issues of 'process', the second and third years of the evaluation will be, in-line with NESS recommendations, focussed upon both 'process and outcome'. During the course of Year 2 it is suggested that in addition to the ongoing analysis of quantitative data, programmes 'involve process evaluation to clarify changes necessary for continued improvement in service delivery' (Henderson et-al, 2002).

In addition, and after lengthy consultation between the project manager and the Community Evaluation and Research Group (CERG), it was decided that this would be built primarily upon the active involvement of parents within the evaluation process. While there are obvious limitations within this approach, not least in relation to a lack of qualitative interviewing experience on behalf of both 'interviewers' and 'interviewees', a central tenet of the evaluation brief was that this process be adopted.

Following Sure Start guidelines, it is suggested that a central way of involving both parents and carers within the functioning of Sure Start programmes be through their active involvement within all aspects of the ongoing evaluation process. In addition (Brodie, 2003, p5), a growing body of research supports the belief '*that we cannot understand how well services work unless we ask those who use them*'.

This document forms the basis of an interim-report detailing the findings from the first year of a two-year evaluation schedule, specifically aimed at reflecting these priorities. It builds upon the preliminary report Sillence (2003) '*Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End Evaluation Report Establishing Sure Start An Evaluation of Formative Processes and Issues*', delivered in May 2003. It is the product of the ongoing relationship between Sure Start Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End (SS-PPBHPE) and the University of Teesside's Community Evaluation and Research Group (CERG).

1.2 Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The aims of this evaluation are:

- To evaluate the progress and future direction of the programme in relation to addressing the four core Sure Start objectives. These include, '*Emotional and Social Development*', '*Improving Health*', '*Improving Learning*', and '*Strengthening Families and Community*'. During 2003-2004 this will focus upon both community and group activities, whereas 2004-2005 will concentrate upon an analysis of both health and family support services.

- The development and delivery of evaluation training specifically geared towards a strategy of 'parental participation' with which to achieve this aim. This programme will be both sympathetic to the needs of the predominantly unskilled parents, yet sufficiently rigorous so as to provide robust data, which will guide the future direction of the programme.
- To carry out an evaluation consistent with NESS requirements and recommendations.

These objectives follow NESS directives both in relation to requirements for Sure Start programmes to measure the progress made in achieving the four core objectives, as well as ensuring the active participation of users at all stages of programme monitoring and future development. The capacity for local evaluation to both inform current programme work, as well as influencing future programme development, has been a central objective of this study.

To this end a 'parental participation strategy' was adopted, with the fundamental aim of involving parents within all aspects of the evaluation research process. Evaluation results will both influence future programme development as well as contribute towards the overall NESS database.

1.3 Evaluation Strategy and Timetable

In relation to the overall evaluation structure laid down by NESS, current programme development is structured around the stages of 'process' and 'outcome'. A process of evaluating current service provision allied to influencing future service development necessitated the development of an evaluation strategy sympathetic to these aims.

Following subsequent discussions between all of the interested parties, allied to verification from the management board, it was decided that during the period August 2003 to May 2004 the evaluation would explore the progress made by the programme in addressing the four core Sure Start objectives. Specifically, this would be achieved through the implementation of a 'Parental Participation Strategy'.

To this end a training programme was prepared which would incorporate a methodology informed by the views of parents, particularly in relation to just 'what' it was that needed to be found out, and also feasible data collection methods that recognised the inexperience of the majority of the participants. The following schedule was agreed upon.

Timetable

Aug-Sept 2003: Preparation of evaluation training programme in consultation with programme staff and users.

Formation of evaluation sub-committee

Oct-Dec 2003: Delivery of evaluation training programme.

Ongoing Discussions with evaluation sub-committee.

Jan- Mar 2004: Data Collection through both individual and focus group taped interviews.

Support-feedback sessions with interview team

April- Jun 2004: Data Analysis, Report Compilation and Delivery.

1.4 Layout of the Report

This report sets out the background, methodology and key findings of the evaluation. Chapter 2 contextualises the report within current government social policy and details the research methodology employed, as well as both the rationale underpinning it and the specific parental participation strategy undertaken. Chapters 3-7 detail the main findings of the research, with results banded under the four core Sure Start objectives.

These include, '*Emotional and Social Development*', '*Improving Health*', '*Improving Learning*', and '*Strengthening Families and Community*'. In addition, user service usage levels are also examined in relation to current provision, as well as recommendations and suggestions for service improvements and future provisions. Chapter 8 details the forward strategy to be employed during 2004-2005.

2) Evaluation Context and Research Methodology

2.1 Context

Sure Start is a national programme of action designed to improve the health and well being of young children and families, so that children are ready to thrive when they start school. Since its introduction in 1999 as a cornerstone of New Labour's policy drive to tackle social exclusion, Sure Start is estimated to be currently spending over £500 million pounds per year in England (Glass 2003).

Sure Start now has over 500 programmes in England in disadvantaged areas that serve in excess of 300,000 children and their families (National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team 2004).

The elimination of child poverty by 2020 is a central target, New Labour and Sure Start is being promoted as the main way of achieving this. The extra resources given to early years development through Sure Start have provided a valuable and new experience for many children and their families and for professional stakeholders both within and outside Sure Start programmes.

In addition, there is now overwhelming and still accumulating evidence about the effectiveness of various health, education, welfare and other intervention programmes for disadvantaged young children and their families (*Ibid*).

While the initial, first year report (Sillence, 2003) was engaged with the evaluation of formative issues and processes, both the second and third years of the study are focussed upon evaluating both process and outcome, with the aim of shaping the future direction of the programme.

Similarly, and in line with NESS recommendations, a fundamental aspect of this strategy would be that of 'parental participation' (NESS, 2002, p2). This is premised upon the following research methodology.

2.2 Research Methodology

Sure Start evaluation combines a national focus on implementation, impact, context and cost-effectiveness with a local focus on activity, process and progress. These programmes are typically designed as complex partnership initiatives comprising multiple interventions, working with different groups and towards ambitious targets.

This section highlights the principal questions asked in this evaluative study and discusses the methodologies and research methods employed in achieving these goals.

2.2.1 Parental Participation Strategy

A central focus of Sure Start Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End second and third year evaluation is 'parent-participation'. The initiative manager has requested that parents be actively involved in both the collection and generation of research data.

'Parental Participation' is seen as a key objective of the Sure Start Initiative (NESS, 2002, p2). It is further suggested that this should include parental involvement within all aspects of the evaluation process, thus aiding the overall development of local programmes as well as encouraging participation at all levels (Brodie, 2003, p4).

Central to this is the belief that, while the involvement of parents can be seen as an integral part of Sure Start ideology, this involvement can produce a number of practical benefits. These can include:

- Parents and carers can help to ensure that the issues and outcomes which are important to them and therefore to the success of Sure Start are identified and prioritised within evaluations.
- Parents will have specific skills and knowledge, which can help improve the overall quality of the evaluation. For instance they may have more extensive knowledge of cultures within the community, and of languages spoken than the Sure Start staff.

- Involvement in evaluation can provide opportunities for parents and other family members to acquire new skills and build on existing ones.
- A robust evaluation will need to include information about the families who do not use services. Parents can help local programmes to make contact with other parents for the purposes of evaluation, including hard-to-reach groups.
- Parents can help disseminate the results of evaluation and can work to ensure that changes are implemented. If an evaluation shows that a particular service (e.g. drop-in crèche) is not being used, local parents can alert other community members to its presence and encourage them to attend.
- Parental involvement can help the local evaluation to be more efficient in terms of time and resources, for example by conducting community-based surveys.

(Adapted from Consumers in NHS Research Support Unit, 2000)

Weighed against this is the reality that the adoption of a 'participatory' approach brings with it, its own set of problems. These can include,

- The work may take more time. A participatory approach by definition demands that time is spent talking to and working with parents, and with others for whom evaluation is a new idea. If this is to be an integral part of a local evaluation, it is essential that realistic consideration be given to planning this into the evaluation schedule.
- If parents are volunteers rather than employees the research can be difficult to manage – this is partly linked to the issue about time listed above. Participatory approaches mean more people will be involved, more views need to be taken into account, and there is always the danger that this creates difficulties in getting the work done.
- Involvement of local residents can result in bias – this could relate to any aspect of the research process. There are issues around, for example, data collection. If parents are interviewing other parents whom they know well, the respondents may feel less inclined to disclose information that is important to the evaluation, or they may tell fellow-parents what they think is an acceptable happening.

(Brodie, 2003, p6)

2.2.2. Participatory Research Methods:

Ongoing discussions with potential participants revealed that they had little or no knowledge of formal research/evaluation techniques/skills. Thus, a primary focus during the early stages of the evaluation was the production of a training programme to help address this. The programme would incorporate both 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' research and evaluation processes/methods.

The challenge for both programme staff and evaluators is to find methods which are methodologically rigorous, yet sympathetic to the particular needs of users unfamiliar with traditional evaluation / research processes. The overall ambitions of the adopted strategy included the following objectives:

- ◆ Creation of a 'self-evaluation' culture
- ◆ Empowerment of users/parents
- ◆ Utilising the ability of 'parents' to communicate with other 'parents'. The rationale being, participants will feel more at ease talking to other parents rather than professionals.
- ◆ A 'break' away from the more traditional academic models/approaches of evaluation and a move towards accommodating the particular needs of 'community' based programmes.
- ◆ Stimulating the growth of an 'inclusive' evaluatory culture involving the participation of 'all' programme stakeholders.

Towards achieving these goals, a number of current research models exist which lend themselves to these aims.

Both 'participatory' and 'action' research methods are acknowledged as being particularly suitable when working within community settings (Tilakaratna, 1990; Hills & Mullett. 2000; Goode, 2000; JRF, 2001,2002; Barnes et-al, 2002; Brodie, 2003).

A variety of contemporary research methods lend themselves to these approaches and, as evaluators, it has been necessary for us to rigorously

examine them for their suitability within the Sure Start evaluation process.

2.2.3 Fourth Generation Evaluation

An integral part of the initial evaluation of 'formative' processes and practices was the adoption of Guba & Lincoln's (1989) 'fourth-generation' evaluation methods. Following this approach, 'evaluators are subjective partners with stakeholders in the literal creation of evaluation data' (1989: 110). This is essentially a participatory form of evaluation in which the evaluator collaborates with programme stakeholders through all stages of the research process.

Stakeholders are not merely viewed as sources of data but are seen as having an important part to play in deciding the nature, form and content of the evaluation itself. A pre-requisite of fourth-generation evaluation should be facilitating communication among the multiple stakeholder groups and creating opportunities for them to formulate their own ideas and participate in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

Fourth generation evaluation methods, while providing a useful overall template, have been supplemented and strengthened through the inclusion of additional 'empowerment' and 'participatory' methods. Because of the overall objectives of this particular evaluation process in respect of incorporating parents as evaluators themselves, these additional methods will compliment existing strategies in achieving the overall aims of the current two-year evaluation programme.

2.2.4 Empowerment Evaluation

'Empowerment Evaluation' is the use of evaluation to help others help themselves. It is designed to foster self-determination, rather than dependency. It focuses upon improvement, is collaborative, and requires both qualitative and quantitative methodologies' (Freeman, 1994: 305 in Clarke, Evaluation Research, 1999)

The overall objective of this approach is to encourage both staff and users engaged within programme activities to embrace evaluation so that it becomes a natural and integral part of the whole process of programme design, planning and management. Rather than relying on professional evaluators to identify key issues and construct and implement the strategy, empowerment evaluation is specifically aimed at empowering stakeholders through self-determination and self-evaluation.

The evaluator takes on the role of trainer-facilitator, whose primary objective is to ensure that the interests served by the evaluation are those of the programme participants. Stakeholders are encouraged to identify their own evaluation needs and develop skills and techniques necessary to become active participants in the evaluation process. It is suggested that,

'empowerment evaluation can be a liberating experience for individuals, groups, organisations and communities. By working in close partnership with stakeholders, evaluators are able to set up mechanisms to support self-evaluation activities presided over by the stakeholders themselves applied across a wide variety of different evaluation settings' (Ibid, p27).

2.2.5 Participatory Action Research

Another form of research that encourages collaboration, is 'participatory action research'. (PAR)

In PAR some of the people in an organisation or community participate actively with the professional researcher throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of results and discussions of their action implications. In essence, participatory action research implies that the relevant stakeholders, or their representatives, play an active part in the research process. Further, it is suggested that a participatory approach must be allowed to emerge rather than be imposed.

Eldin and Levin (1999) suggest that participatory forms of action research provide empowerment through learning in three main ways:

- ◆ Firstly, active involvement in research enables participants to acquire new insights and reach new levels of understanding. Action research is seen as a form of 'self-reflective enquiry'.
- ◆ Secondly; by participating in the research experience stakeholders learn how to learn.
- ◆ And lastly, the whole experience can be a liberating one insofar as participating stakeholders discover how to create new opportunities for action.

Thus, participatory action research, like empowerment evaluation, has the potential to be both illuminating and liberating.

2.3 Evaluation Training Programme

While acknowledging the central importance of these processes to the successful development of local programmes, the Community Evaluation Unit, in conjunction with NESS guidelines, qualified these aims by contending that,

'In order to achieve these objectives, Sure Start local evaluations need to be robust and methodologically convincing'.

(Brodie, 2003, p5)

Again, while Brodie (2003), acknowledges that it is feasible (and should be encouraged) that parents themselves should not only be involved within the design of the evaluation, but could also be actively involved in the delivery and collection of evaluation data itself. This is qualified by the recognition that many, if not all parents, will have little or no experience of evaluation methods and therefore 'must' undergo an appropriately structured training programme which will enable/qualify them to carry out this important process. NESS guidance is quite specific on this point:

...it is essential that training is provided which includes consideration of ethical issues. You will need to be explicit about the boundaries of the research and that information collected should not be discussed outside the research team.

(Barnes et-al, 2002, p8)

To meet this objective, it is particularly important that parents who are involved in undertaking evaluation, especially data collection and analysis, understand the importance of research ethics.

2.3.1 Programme Content

Informed by the aforementioned NESS and University guidance, that is specifically:

- Parents should understand the principle of informed consent and be aware that participants in the evaluation can withdraw from the research at any time;
- Parents involved in data collection and analysis should be aware of procedures to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants;
- Clear rules should be established about who has access to data and the need to ensure that research data are not discussed outside the research team (and even then should not be attributed to named individuals); and
- Parents should know and have contact details for the person they should go to if they have any concerns arising from any work they are undertaking as part of the evaluation; and
- And that, research ethics need to be an important element in any training that is provided for parents who are participating in local evaluation.

(Brodie, 2003, p19)

Informed by both NESS documentation and the aforementioned concerns of the University of Teesside, it was recommended that, at a minimum, the following issues be incorporated within the training schedule. These included:

- What evaluation means for Sure Start and why it is important
- Identification of local issues that parents feel would benefit from more in-depth examination.
- The use of different research methods;
- The ethics of evaluation
- The Principles of Informed Consent

- Training instructing the importance of issues of confidentiality and anonymity
- Training methods to avoid the 'potential for bias'
- Instruction into dealing with issues pertaining to 'childcare concerns',
- Briefing on the handling of both 'sensitive' and 'disturbing' information.
- Interviewer 'safety' procedures.

In consultation with the programme manager, stakeholders, evaluation sub-committee and participating parents, it was therefore decided that the following procedure would constitute the primary focus during the first year of the two-year evaluation process.

- ◆ An evaluation training programme, both sympathetic to the needs of parents yet sufficiently rigorous to produce the necessary quality of data, will be delivered by the Community Evaluation Unit via a number of scheduled teaching sessions.
- ◆ Upon reaching a satisfactory standard parents would then undertake traditional qualitative data gathering methods such as face-to-face interviewing and the hosting of focus groups.

The training programme itself included both an introductory session, followed by three additional training sessions covering the following subjects. These issues constituted the pre-requisites deemed necessary before parents could undertake either individual or focus group interviewing.

- Introduction to the concept of evaluation (how, what, why)
- Ethical Issues including:
- Informed Consent
- Issues of Confidentiality
- Avoiding Bias
- 'Childcare' Issues
- Dealing with Sensitive Information
- Questionnaire Construction (differing 'types' of questions)
- Practical Interviewing Skills (using tape-recorders etc)
- Interview Safety Procedures
- Pilot Interviews
- Commencement of Interview Schedule / Data Collection

2.4 Evaluation Research Methods

The adoption of 'qualitative' research methods, specifically a combination of taped individual and focus group interviews, was a conscious decision taken in consultation with all participating parties. With this approach in mind in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews became the method of choice, chosen with the objective of enabling participants to share opinions, understandings and information within a non-pressured and confidential environment.

In-depth, semi-structured interviewing allows people to present their accounts on their own terms, whilst still providing the researcher with a structure for comparability

(May 1997, p67)

The study consisted of 42 individual interviews and 5 focus group sessions. These representing the perspectives of both parents and users in relation to the services provided for their children and themselves, as well as the perceived benefits in relation to the four-core areas focused upon in this evaluation report (full interview schedule-Appendix 1).

It should be noted that due to a combination of the focus of this years evaluation, allied to the relative inexperience of the interviewers, the findings of this 'interim' report are based upon interviews which took place within community or group activity settings. While this may have produced a degree of 'bias' towards these activities in the responses received, this will be balanced in the 'final' report against next years findings which will be concentrating upon users 'individualized' perceptions of Sure Start service provision and delivery.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the conventions of qualitative analysis. This involved coding the data into a number of categories and themes which where subsequently indexed under topics and headings, from which systematic comparative analysis of all material could then be conducted (Strauss, 1998).

2.5 Findings Overview

The following chapters discuss that material under the general headings of:

- ◆ Service Usage and Feedback
- ◆ Emotional and Social Development
- ◆ Improving Health
- ◆ Improving Learning
- ◆ Strengthening Families and Communities

3) Sure Start Service Provision

3.1 Rationale

Central to the achievement of Sure Start objectives is the provision of a range of services, specifically designed to address the problems faced by its users, yet sympathetic to the needs of children and parents/carers. As an aid to the ongoing development of these services, parents and carers provided a range of both quantitative and qualitative information, which will form the basis of this 'snapshot' assessment of existing service provision.

Interviewees were asked a series of questions in relation to the services currently provided by Sure Start for their children and themselves. These included '*how long they had been using the services*', '*how / where they had heard about Sure Start*', '*which individual services they had used for their children and for themselves*', '*what they thought of these services*', '*how the services had benefited their children and themselves*', and '*what service improvements or new services might be useful in the future*' (see Appendix 1 for full details).

3.2 Children's Service Usage Levels

Quantitative data extracted from the survey sample (n=62) indicated a broad cross-section of usage of all the current services on offer. Particularly popular services included the '*Playbus*' (28), '*Busy Bee's*' (27), '*Playgroup*' (25) and '*Parent and Child*' (23) group. Additionally, '*Jolly*

Babies' (21), *'Fun Tots'* (15), *'Gym Tots'* (14), and *'Swim Tots'* (12) all showed significant levels of usage. Only the *'Fun Book'* (7), and *'Music with'* (8) sessions showed below average use, although as with all samples this and the other results are representative rather than definitive. Predictably, both the *'open day'* events (32) and *'trips away'* (34) both scored significantly above average for both use and popularity.

3.3 Feedback on Children's Services

Parents comments in relation to the services currently provided and the benefits for their children where predominantly positive.

The services themselves were seen as both ***"clean and friendly"*** and ***"educational and fun"***.

Similarly, while all of the events where seen to be hosted within a ***"safe environment"***.

Staff were seen as ***"very helpful"***, as well as assisting in ***"bringing the kids out of themselves"***.

A number of services were singled out for particular praise. These included the *'Busy Bee's'* sessions.

One parent commented how her daughter ***"loves Busy Bee's and all the toys to play with and other kids"***.

Another how, ***"playing with the other kids at the Busy Bees has really helped bring her speech on"***.

The *'Playbus'* was also commented on positively. Parents suggesting that ***"it was a great idea, and that their kids loved going on the bus to play"***.

Another saying, ***"it's very helpful because there is next to nothing else for the little ones around here"***.

The reading and library services also received praise, parents commenting on how their children now “***read more books and were always asking for stories to be read to them***”.

Others on how there children now “***loved to read***”.

Overall, a wide variety of positive comments where recorded relative to the benefits perceived by parents for their children from the services on offer. Additional comments are detailed within the four core areas of focus.

3.4 Recommendations

In relation to improvements in what was currently provided, as well as suggestions for additional events, a range of comments were received.

A number of those interviewed suggested that “***there should be more after school events provided***”;

As well as “***pre-school groups***”, and that current services “***needed to run in the holidays as well***”.

Similarly, a number of those interviewed suggested that “***there should be events, provision, things to do for older kids as well***”; with “***Youth clubs***”, being suggested on a number of occasions.

While these suggestions are acknowledged, it is recognized that the provision of services for older children is currently outside of the present Sure Start remit.

Specifically of the services currently provided it was suggested that Fun-Tots needed “***to be bigger with more things to do and more staff***”.

It was also suggested that “***there were not enough things to do/ keep the kids occupied***” on the Playbus.

Comments in relation to service provision across the majority of events on offer included “**more sessions**”; “**sessions at different times of the day**” and “**more Dads groups**”;

Although the Trips / Days Away were universally popular a small number of those interviewed expressed their concerns suggesting that “**regular users should get priority**” and that the “**trips needed better advertising**”.

A minority of parents commented that they were unaware of the wide ‘range’ of services currently being offered for their children.

It was suggested that many parents were single activity participants and “**didn’t know about all the other activities on offer**”.

Parents commented that “**although the activity they did attend was great, they weren’t aware of the other things that were available**”.

Pressed on this (and these are parents views only) it was suggested that maybe “**staff could tell parents more about the other activities on offer**”.

Additional suggestions in relation to these concerns included that, “**there should be timetables of events in prominent locations**”.

Suggested venues included, “**Morrisons, the Doctors and in all of the current event venues**”.

Mixed responses were received in answer to questions relating to the programmes ongoing ‘leaflet-drops’ advertising services and the Sure Start ‘Newsletter’ which is also delivered on a regular basis. The majority of parents acknowledged “seeing them” but several parents admitted, “throwing them in the bin with all the other junk-mail”.

This tends to support evidence that, despite a concerted and ongoing advertising campaign, parents are ‘selective’ about what they perceive as

important, and that this itself is based upon their 'immediate' needs at any specific point in time. However, the development of new and innovative ways of 'getting the message across' to parents remains an ongoing programme priority.

3.5 Role of 'Volunteers'

A number of evaluation sub-committee members suggested that "*perhaps this is an area where 'volunteers' could play an active role*"; commenting that

"volunteers could play an active role in telling both existing and new members of 'all' of the services that Sure Start currently offer for parents and children".

This might take the form of

"volunteers being attached to particular activity groups where they could get to know the users and tell them what's on offer. They could also distribute Sure Start leaflets and timetables to help with this, as well as feeding back users comments on the services they are using as well as any suggestions as to future improvements".

This is a very good example of participatory evaluation in action. Parents involved in evaluating service usage, analyzing identified problems, then coming up with the solutions to address the problems! Similarly these comments should also be viewed in the context of the extensive and wide-ranging advertising programme that currently exists.

3.6 Parent/Carer Use Levels

Parents were also canvassed in relation to their usage of Sure Start services specifically designed to help them, both as parents and as individuals. Results from the survey sample ($n=62$) were somewhat more polarised than with the services for children. By far and away the most popular services were the 'Access to Leisure' (20) and 'Active for Life' (15).

The 'Safety Equipment Loan Service' was also a popular service (14) with the remaining services showing small to medium degrees of usage; 'Welfare Rights' (13), 'Aromatherapy' (10), 'Health Drop-In' (9), 'Making Choices' (8), 'Aqua Natal' (6), and the 'Feel Good Club' (5). From those polled there were no recorded users for the 'Splash Swimming' Service.

3.7 Feedback on Parent-User Services

Although indicated usage levels appeared somewhat lower those expressing opinions were predominantly positive. This was particularly so in relation to the two most popular services, 'Active for Life' and 'Access to Leisure'.

Users expressed the views that "**concession cards were a very good idea**" and that these services were "**very enjoyable, I go every week**".

Other comments suggested that "**they really enjoyed it and that it was really good fun**";

Allied to the added benefit to a number of parents of "**building up my confidence**".

The safety equipment loan scheme was viewed as "**fantastic, and a great help because a lot of this stuff is just beyond the reach of people on benefits**".

Similarly, 'welfare rights' was seen "**as a great help for those with cash problems or for those in debt**".

The benefits of services within the four core areas will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

3.8 Recommendations

Parents were also asked for their views in relation to both improving existing services, as well as suggestions for additional or new services.

Comments echoed the views made in relation to the services provided for their children, particularly in relation to "***making sure we know about 'all' of the services on offer***".

Interviewers comments supported the view that although some of the services were well supported, especially the '*Active for Life*' and '*Access to Leisure*' facilities.

Many of the other services queried were met with blank stares or comments such as "***never heard of that***", or "***I didn't know anything like that existed***".

Again, while on the surface this suggests a lack of 'advertising' of current services, the reality does not bear this out. It was suggested by a number of members of staff that users "***tend to focus on what they 'need' at that particular time, rather than what's available***".

This goes someway towards explaining such apparent contradictions although this is qualified by the ongoing quest of developing new and innovative methods of "***getting the message across to both current and prospective users of what's on offer***".

Of the services that were used / acknowledged a commonly repeated request was that these sessions should be "***repeated at different times of the day to give people a better chance of attending them***".

Similarly, as was the need for "***more welfare rights sessions***", ***the provision of counselling*** and "***more keep fit classes***".

A number of those canvassed queried “***why isn't Sure Start available in all areas?***” This being particularly the case in relation to the North Ormesby area.

Parents also made a number of suggestions in relation to a wide variety of additional courses aimed at improving their academic and social skills; these will be detailed in full under the relevant core category.

3.5 Summary

Analysis of transcript data, reflected in the findings produced here, indicate a good response from parents in relation to the current services provided for their children. There was also a wide range of comments as to how existing services might be improved as well as a variety of suggestions for new services. All of this should prove invaluable in the shaping of future Sure Start service provision.

The overall response in relation to services provided for parents and carers, while not as large as that for children's services, was still predominantly positive. Similarly, many of the improvement suggestions and requests for additional activities and services were constructive. It is suggested that a number of these might also be looked at in greater depth by the programme when forward strategy planning.

4) Social and Emotional Development: (Children)

4.1 Context

Social and Emotional Development has been recognised as a key area within Sure Start. It is suggested that, a child's social and emotional development has significant implications for current and later social functioning, for educational, and employment success.

Further, if emotional development is fostered at a young age, children are more likely to settle well into school, work co-operatively, confidently and independently and to behave appropriately. Whereas, a child with poor social and emotional development is at risk of poor relationships with peers, academic problems, of later involvement in crime, of developing physical health and adult mental health problems.

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/health/socialandemotionaldev/>

It is also recognised that the key to social and emotional development is the child's early relationship with parents/caregivers. Efforts to support parents in understanding and fulfilling their children's emotional needs can help to provide a secure base from which to grow into well-rounded, capable adults with robust mental health (*Ibid*). To this end a central aspect of this evaluation has been to ascertain if the services currently being delivered assist with this overall objective.

It is further acknowledged that both children and parents, while sharing a number of common needs also had their own individual requirements. To this end, and in consultation with evaluation sub-committee members and interview volunteers, a series of questions were devised covering these relevant issues. These were then incorporated into questionnaires employed in both the individual and focus-group interviews.

Issues addressed in relation to children's social and emotional development were addressed through a variety of questions. Examples of these questions included, '*has your child(ren) enjoyed the activities and in what ways?*', '*has your child made any new friends?*'; '*has the way your child gets on with other children changed?*', '*has your child(ren)s*

behaviour changed in any way?; 'have their eating habits changed in any way?' and 'can existing activities be improved or new ones provided?' (full details can be found in Appendix 1).

4.2 Feedback on Children's Services

Parents offered a variety of responses to these questions including comments such as "**yes, she likes doing the activities with the other kids now**";

And "**she loves the activities, loves to run and play with other kids; its really brought her on**".

Positive comments in relation to children participating in Sure Start activities also included a number of parents suggesting how they had helped in getting their children to,

"**play with other kids now a lot more**", and how they had "**helped them to play with other kids of their own age**".

Increased levels of friendship, was also a prominent theme within the responses of parents.

Many of those questioned commented how their **children "had made lots of new friends"**;

And "**how they had enjoyed it and made new friends**", and had "**became more involved with other kids now**".

One mother even commented that her daughter "**had made so many new friends now that when they went shopping she was always pointing them out and going up to talk to them**".

The benefits of increased levels of interaction between children were also spoken of favourably.

Comments included how children now "**interact and are not so selfish since coming here**";

How they had "**learnt how to share things**", and how their "**sharing and giving had much improved**";

As well as and how they, "**play and share with other kids much more now**".

Another parent suggested that her son was "**a lot more confident around other kids since coming here and getting to know them all**".

A further parent commenting, "**she was quite shy but her talking has improved and she is communicating with other children much better now**".

Such increased levels of friendship and interaction also impacted upon the behaviour of many of the children attending Sure Start activities. Many examples of this were cited in reply to the questions asked.

These included one mother's comments on how her daughter "**used to be dead clingy but isn't now and plays with the other kids**".

Another parent, how her son "**used to fight with other kids all the time but has stopped that now since coming here**".

A further mother commented how her daughter was now "**more confident and mixes with other kids much better now**";

Another parent commented on how she was "**so much happier now that she gets on with the other children**".

In relation to their children's behaviour, parents comments included how their children were "**much more sociable and better behaved now**", and how their "**behaviour was much better now**".

A further parent commenting how her son was a "***lot less moody***" since being involved in Sure Start activities with other children.

One parent commented that her child "***wasn't very good at mixing before but is now***";

And another on how, "***she is better behaved after she has been to Sure Start activities***".

Additional benefits that were identified and commented upon, particularly in relation to children's personal development and subsequent improvements in their, and their parents, quality of life included the following.

Parents commented on how, since their children had started attending Sure Start events how their, "***talking has much improved and...[how]... she can associate with other kids better; she mixes better with other kids***".

Another how her daughter "***was quite shy but her talking has improved since she has had help with her speech; she is communicating with other children much better now***".

Another mother on how her son was "***more open and outgoing and communicates better now***" since coming here.

One parent also commented how her child now "***sits at the table and eats properly now***";

Something "***that had never happened before coming here***".

4.3 Recommendations

In addition to the requests detailed under service provision recommendations, a number of other suggestions were also made by those parents interviewed.

Of these was a request for a “***communications group***”.

When pressed this was explained as “***something or someone to help with reading for the kids; where little ones could go who needed help with their reading; that sort of thing***”.

In addition to this another parent giving detailed comments on how,

“***maybe a cooking type course for kids; or at least something to get the kids interested in eating more healthy themselves. We get told about it all the time but if the kids could play around pretending to cook or prepare things, with fruit and such like, it might help them to get to eat more healthy things***”.

The majority of additional requests focussed upon the provision ***of “more of the same services but at different times of the day” or “on other days as well”***.

4.4 Summary

These were perhaps the most common requests made throughout all of the interviews conducted. It could be suggested from this that this is a broad consensus of satisfaction with current service provision. Their requests tended to focus upon ‘more of the same’, but there would still appear to be a need for additional child care facilities in support of existing service provision.

4.5 Emotional and Social Development: (Parents)

4.5.1 Context

While Sure Starts primary is children, it also recognises the importance of the emotional and social development of parents and carers. It is also acknowledged efforts to support parents in understanding and fulfilling their children's emotional needs, can help parents and carers themselves. A variety of evidence suggests that parents who are happier and stress

free find it easier to deal with their children and that this positive mind set rubs off on the children themselves.

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/health/socialandemotionaldev/>

To this end a variety of questions were posed so as to gain an insight into just 'how' participating parents were responding to the Sure Start activities they accessed. Questions included, '*extended family support with children?*' '*Improvement in quality of life?*' '*Making of new friends?*' '*Social and emotional interaction with other parents?*' '*Improvements in confidence?*' '*Interaction with your children?*' '*Monitoring of children's TV watching?*' and '*suggested improvements and additional services?*' (full questionnaire details-Appendix 1)

4.6 Feedback on Parent-Carer Services

In relation to support with their children the majority of this came from close family members. These included, "*partners and fathers*" and, in the vast majority of cases "*grandparents*".

Very few parents accessed any child care facilities, predominantly "***because they are too expensive***" or "***because there are none near where I live***".

Others commented on how "***they preferred to look after their own***" or would "***only trust my mother / grandmother to look after them***".

In relation to 'external' support, apart from statutory visits by "***the midwife***" in the immediate stages after birth, only a very small number of those asked confessed to receiving any external help.

Of these, "***health visitors***", "***social workers***" and "***children's nurses***" were mentioned.

Again, an emphasis on "***taking care of their own kids***" came across strongly;

As well as comments such as, “***not needing help off anybody like that; I can manage on my own***” seemingly emphasising an almost innate distrust of external service agencies.

A significant majority of parents who accessed services for their children acknowledged that this “***helped them to do more things with their time and gave them more free time to themselves***”.

Additional information suggested that many of the beneficiaries had little or no extended support network and that the services provided by Sure Start, both for themselves and for their children “***where...[seen as]...a godsend by actually giving me back some freedom***”.

Other comments such as “***it's helped me get my independence back***” and “***I can now go out and do other things***” added weight to these opinions.

Parents were particularly vocal in relation to the way in which these increased levels of social interaction had “***helped...[them]...make lots of new friends***”;

As well as “***meeting new people***”, “***talking to other mums***”, and “***not being sat in the house all day***”.

Others contended that their “***social life had improved***” and that “***they felt better about themselves through coming here***”.

Self-esteem levels appear to have risen, reflected in comments such as, “***it's really improved my confidence***” and “***it has made me a lot more outgoing***”.

One particular parent comments suggested that participating in the activities on offer had even “***helped with her depression***”.

Perhaps one of the most beneficial areas of improvement has been that of the relationships between parents and children.

A significant number of parents commented that accessing Sure Start services for their children and for themselves, "***had helped their families to interact more and get on better together***" and how "***everyone seemed more happy now***".

Additional comments indicated how Sure Start had "***helped me to become more tolerant and less stressed out***"; "***less agitated with the kids and I don't shout at them so much***".

Another parent supporting this view by saying she was now, "***more patient and able to spend more time doing things with the kids***".

Increased interaction between parents and children was evident through comments such as, "***I play with my kids more now, I spend more time with them***".

Another parent commented that, "***I feel better about playing with the kids now; Sure Start has helped me to cope better***".

4.7 Recommendations

In common with the other themes explored during interview and focus group sessions, and in response to questions about improvements to existing services allied to suggestions about additional services that might be offered, parents responded with the following requests.

These included "***additional child care***" which was seen as essential in "***giving me a bit of breathing space***".

Another parent commented on how, "***the free time to be able to take part in the courses that are being offered***".

In a similar vein there were also a number of requests for more "***social type events***" as well as "***trips away***" and "***open days***".

Although many of these also involved their children, parents insisted, "***it's the getting away that counts; the kids all play with each other and we can chill out with each other as well***".

Another parent insisted that, "***if it wasn't for the Sure Start days out me and the kids would be stuck round here all the time; it gives us all a break***".

4.8 Summary

A significant number of comments were recorded to justify the continuing importance of Sure Start continuing to provide such social activities, and the subsequent emotional and social benefits they can provide. In addition, regarding how services might be improved, parents and carers made a wide variety of requests and recommendations.

5) Improving Health: (Children)

5.1 Context

In addition to the social and emotional development of children Sure Start has a specific objective of both improving children's health and fitness, as well as instilling in them the benefits of a healthy and balanced diet. Diet and Nutrition has been identified as a key target area of Sure Start. Information and guidance on breastfeeding, nutrition, hygiene and safety is available to all families with young children in Sure Start local programme areas.

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/health/dietandnutrition/>

A growing body of research contests that diet is central to health throughout life. Further, it is suggested that a good diet can help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, strokes and some cancers. A good diet during pregnancy is important for the healthy development of the growing baby and impacts on the health of the person

later in life. Women who breastfeed give their babies the best start in life. In addition, a balanced diet during childhood helps ensure that children grow well and develop good eating habits (*ibid*).

Sure Start activities are aimed at promoting both healthy eating habits, particularly with the provision of fruit and vegetables allied to advice on healthy diet, and the encouragement of children to participate in a wide variety of stimulating physical activities. A series of questions were incorporated within the interview scripts to assess the impact this was having upon children registered with the Sure Start programme (see Appendix 1).

These included, '*have your children's eating habits changed since being involved in Sure Start?*' '*have you changed what you give your children to eat since being involved with Sure Start?*', and '*are you now more careful about the types of food your children eat?*' Also included were questions aimed at finding out just how much TV children were watching as well as enquiring if parents monitored what their children watched?

5.2 Feedback

Sure Starts promotion and provision of fruit and vegetables for children at a number of the activities provided, allied to advice on diet appears to be producing positive dividends.

A large number of parents who where interviewed confirmed that their children, "**eat more fruit now**", "**eat a lot more fruit, veg and yoghurts now**", and "**eat much more fruit now**".

The influence of particular activities was also highlighted, one mother commenting that, "**he eats a lot more fruit now since attending the playgroup**".

Another that, "**she has fruit on the Playbus and at the playgroup, something she would never eat before**".

The influence of the advice and guidance provided to parents was also a feature of a number of the comments received in answer to this series of questions.

One parent commenting that she, "**had learnt a lot more about healthy eating since coming here**".

Another, that she "**was a lot more positive now about healthy eating**".

And a third who suggested that her kids "**used to just eat crisps but now I have fruit and veg on the table and they eat that instead**".

The broader influence of contemporary advice on this issue was also illustrated through the comments of a parent who suggested that her children now, "**eat more fruit now as a part of the '5 per-day' scheme**".

A number of parents interviewed also expressed their happiness at the way that the activities provided for their children have been stimulating both physically and mentally.

Comments from one parent suggesting, "**she is healthier and happier now, and looks forward to coming**".

Another that her son, "**loves the activities; he loves to run and play with other kids**" and "**loves the swimming side of it**".

As well as specifically health focussed comments such as "**her health is a lot better now**" and "**all the running and playing have made her a lot more active now**".

Additional comments highlighted how these increased levels of physical activity had benefited the children at home as well.

A number of parents commenting that their children, "***played outside with the other kids more now***" and "***she plays out a lot more, not stuck in the house all the time***".

In relation to the queries regarding children's TV watching, a significant number of parents commented, "***that they had no rules about how much TV they watched***".

This was balanced by a number of comments that suggested parents were more selective about what they actually allowed their children to actually watch.

One mother stated, "***I am choosy about what they watch on TV***".

Another parent insisting, "***I monitor what they watch on TV and only allow them to watch certain things***".

A further parent commented, "***I don't let them watch horror movies or anything that is not suitable***".

Another that, "***they watch what they like within certain time periods – morning mainly***".

One parent adding that the "***TV was not the problem it's the computer!***"

Perhaps one of the most significant comments came from a parent who said, "***well, like I said before, she plays out a lot more now so isn't sat in front of the telly all the time***".

5.3 Recommendations

While the vast majority of parents appeared satisfied with the way in which Sure Start was helping them to improve the health of their children, a number of comments were received in relation to possible improvements/additions to services.

One parent thought, *"it would be a good idea if Sure Start could get the little ones involved in sports; football, that sort of thing. Especially if the weathers good"*.

Another parent supporting this theme said, *"it would be nice if the kids had some grass to play on instead of being stuck inside all the time"*.

The provision of fruit and vegetables at Sure Start activities was looked upon favourably. A number of parents commenting that, *"it would be a good idea if Sure Start could distribute fruit and veg for the kids to take home"*.

A further parent suggested the idea of "**breakfast clubs**", and another said that "**providing lunches would be helpful as well**".

5.4 Summary

The results from the survey sample indicate that Sure Starts pro-active approach through the provision of fruit and vegetables at hosted activities, allied to the 'healthy eating' message given to both parents and children, is having an impact.

A significant number of those interviewed agreed that their children's diet and eating habits had changed since being involved within Sure Start activities. Similarly, they were also now much more aware of the benefits for their children of healthy eating and a more active lifestyle.

5.5 Improving Health (Parents)

5.5.1 Context

In addition to improving the health and well being of children accessing Sure Start activities, a similar objective exists in relation to expectant mothers, parents and carers. Sure Start provides a variety of services specifically aimed at improving the health and well being of expectant mothers, parents and carers.

They are further assisted by the provision of an informal environment within which all parties can communicate freely. In addition, they can access advice and information on healthy eating and nutrition, with an emphasis on the importance of consumption of fruit and vegetables.

As a means of assessing the perceived benefits of the services provided, as well as gaining an insight into suggested improvements to existing services and possible new services that could be provided, a series of questions were asked of parents to gain this information (see Appendix 1).

These included, '*do you feel any fitter / more active since attending Sure Start activities?*' '*Do you feel more relaxed since attending Sure Start activities?*' and '*have your eating habits changed since attending Sure Start activities?*' Similarly, a number of questions asked, '*are there any improvements or new services that Sure Start might provide for you?*'

5.6 Feedback

A significant number of parents would appear to have benefited both emotionally and socially through involvement with Sure Start. Evidence of this can be gauged from the positive comments received in relation to increased levels of friendship as well as reciprocated emotional and social support levels between parents.

In addition, and as the service feedback illustrated, by far and away the most frequently accessed activities were the '*Active for Life*' and '*Access to Leisure*'. This was reflected through the following comments:

Both '*Active for Life*' and '*Access to Leisure*' were viewed positively; parents "**really enjoyed it**" and thought it "**really good fun**".

Another suggested that the courses, "**were a good idea for getting parents more healthy**".

A further user suggesting that the "**Access to Leisure course was good as it made her go back to the gym**".

Similarly, "**concession cards were seen as a good idea because it's a cheap way of getting fit**".

Other parents suggested how, "**they were surprised at how they enjoyed the exercise, especially the swimming**".

Another how the swimming sessions "**had helped build her confidence in the water**".

Overall, feelings of well being appeared to have risen, with many parents commenting how, "**all the activities had made them feel better about themselves**".

Other parents contending that they now felt "**more independent**", "**less bad tempered**", "**more patient with the kids**" and generally "**less stressed out**".

5.7 Recommendations

In relation to both improvements to existing services and the provision of additional services, parents and carers made the following comments. A number of requests were received in relation to these questions. By far the biggest response came in relation to the timing and frequency of existing courses.

Several parents requesting, ***"the keep-fit courses should run more often"***.

And that ***"they should be at different times of the day so as to help parents with the little ones"***.

Other parents also made reference to the ***"need for more child care"*** and ***"crèches"*** so that parents ***"could take more advantage of what is being offered"***.

Answers to questions about 'additional' services focussed upon two areas.

The first, in relation to the provision of both ***"aromatherapy courses"*** and ***"beauty/facial courses"***.

The other, requesting the provision of ***"health and safety"*** and ***"first-aid courses"***.

5.8 Summary

There was some cross over here with similar responses to questions asked in relation to improving parents learning abilities, although parents did not differentiate between the two. Overall parents seemed quite satisfied with what was currently provided although it might be suggested that higher 'engagement levels' in all activities be encouraged.

6) Improving Learning (Children)

6.1 Context

While it has been shown that many of the children attending Sure Start activities have benefited both socially and emotionally, the nurturing of children's communication, numeracy and literacy skills also forms an integral part of Sure Start services. As a means of assessing the achievement of these goals, a series of questions were also incorporated so as to gauge any improvements made in relation to the other 'learning' services provided by Sure Start.

These included, "*has there been any changes in the way your child(rens) communicate(s) since being involved in Sure Start activities?*", "*has there been any improvement in your child(rens) counting skills since being involved with Sure Start*" and "*has your child(rens) reading and writing improved since being involved in Sure Start activities?*". In addition, parents were also asked if there were any improvements that could be made to existing services, as well as encouraging suggestions for any additional services that might benefit their children (see Appendix 1).

6.2 Feedback

The following comments are drawn from a variety of parents and carers whose children draw on these services.

The impact of a combination of speech therapy and social interaction was evident from the comments of one parent, who suggested that her daughters, "**talking has improved and she can associate with other kids better; she mixes better with other kids**".

Another parent suggested that her daughters, "**speech has come on a lot and she has better social skills as well**";

Another mother who contended that her daughter, "**was quite shy before, but her talking has improved since she has had help with**

her speech, she is communicating with other children much better now.

Additional comments appeared to suggest a general consensus on children's improved communication skills.

Parents comments included how their children's "**speech has much improved**" and that the "**kids are learning loads of new words**", and how they "**talk much clearer now**".

Similar sentiments were received from parents in relation to the perceived improvements in their children's reading, writing and counting.

A number of those interviewed suggested that their children's, "**counting had got better**", that they "**love reading now**" and "**love listening to stories**".

Another mother observed how her son "**reads more books now, loves singing and is more outgoing**".

Another how her daughters, "**speech, reading and writing had all improved since going to the library classes**".

Additionally, a number of parents also commented on the way in which their children's abilities, "**to feed themselves**" and "**become more independent and outgoing**" had improved since attending a variety of Sure Start activities.

6.3 Recommendations

In relation to suggested improvement and additional services, the following comments were received.

Predominantly, and supporting comments made in relation to service provision parents comments focussed upon providing "***more of the same***", with services hosted "***at different times of the day***".

Additionally, comments were also expressed that these services should all be available "***during the school holidays as well***".

In relation to the existing services a number of parents suggested that there should be both "***more staff***" in attendance, and that "***bigger groups***" would give more kids a chance of joining in.

Similarly, requests for activities, both "***before and after school***" were repeated a number of times.

6.4 Summary

The overwhelming response from parents in relation to perceived improvements in their children's communication, numeracy and literacy skills was positive. Virtually all of the parents who were interviewed commented on how their children's abilities to read, write, count and talk with either other children or other people had improved since being involved in the variety of Sure Start activities being offered.

These comments supported the belief that, overall, parents had no concerns with the 'quality' of the services currently provided, but would be even more satisfied if existing services might be expanded, both in size and frequency.

6.5 Improving Learning (Parents)

6.5.1 Context

A core Sure Start objective is to assist parents and carers back into the world of work. To this end the project offers a number of support services

aimed at making this transition more achievable through both guidance into, and provision of, courses aimed at improving users employment skills.

Canvassing participating parents on what support networks they have access to a significant number indicated that they had little or no help with their children at all. This, allied to the high cost of child-care, made many parents reluctant to treat seriously either the issue of becoming more actively involved with Sure Start or returning to the world of work.

As indicated within the service feedback, the activities that parents participated most enthusiastically in were predominantly those of a leisure or keep-fit nature. Despite this a number of parents had already participated, or were thinking of becoming more involved with Sure Start. This took the form of being involved with one or more of the various sub-committees or the management boards.

An alternate avenue that several had participated within, or were thinking of participating within, was that of 'volunteers'. Parents commented that they found the various training that Sure Start provided to help them on sub-committees/management board/volunteer courses as "**very useful**" and "**empowering**".

However, a significant number of parents showed little or no interest in becoming more actively involved with Sure Start. When asked why? the overwhelming response was either,

***"lack of time"* or "*no time because of the kids; I have got enough to do looking after them*"**

A number of questions were specifically aimed at finding out just what types of educational courses or assistance parents thought that Sure Start might provide in the future. These included "*are there any learning type courses that you would like to attend?*", "*is there anything Sure Start can help you with to improve your employment prospects?*" and "*in what ways*

could Sure Start help you attend a training or college course of your choice?" (see Appendix 1).

6.6 Feedback

In response, by far the most requested type of assistance from parents was that of "**computer courses**".

Additionally, requests to "**help me learn computers**", and "**show me how to work on a computer**", also figured prominently.

Additional I.T. orientated requests included a request from a parent to, "**show me how to find things on the Internet and how to use email**".

And another on "**how can I find out about things on the Internet**" and a further request for "**PC courses at the Initiative Centre**".

However while "**computer courses...[were]...wanted, they needed to fit in with school times**", emphasising earlier comments in relation to "**not having enough spare time**".

Similarly, "**I want a computer course but need a crèche as well**" was an oft-repeated request.

A similar request for "**learning courses but only when the kids are at school**" again drew attention to the issue of time shortages effecting so many of the parents.

6.7 Recommendations

Parents were similarly forthcoming in that the courses should be either via "**Learn Direct**" or "**NVQ recognised**".

"Learn Direct PC courses", "NVQ childcare courses", "NVQ 1st Aid courses", and "NVQ Level 2 business Administration courses" were also requested.

Similarly, **"Guidance with selecting training courses" and "help with going to Middlesborough College"** or **"doing Open University (OU) courses"** illustrated that 'guidance' was also a prominent factor in helping parents to help themselves.

Multiple requests were also recorded for **"childcare courses", "health and safety courses", "1st aid for babies courses", and "parent-craft courses"**.

While many of these requests centred around help with their children, parents also made a number of requests in relation to Sure Start providing either more of what was already being offered or a number of other more leisure orientated activities.

These included requests for, **"more welfare rights help", "more childcare", "more keep-fit classes", "beauty courses" and "aromatherapy courses"**.

6.9 Summary

Analysis of both individual and focus group data suggests that many parents are keen to better themselves through participating in a variety of learning courses. By far the most popular of these would appear to be those involving computers, although a number of others were mentioned. However, this needs to be weighed against the comments made in relation to employment.

While there remains a strong argument in relation to the 'empowerment' that parents might attain through becoming actively involved within the world of work, it is suggested that, in line with current programme policy, assistance with and into training is encouraged, particularly in relation to the areas mentioned.

7) Strengthening Families and Communities

7.1 Context

In addition to the 'Emotional and Social Development' of children and parents, as well as measures aimed towards 'Improving Learning' and 'Improving Health', an additional core objective of Sure Start includes that of 'Strengthening Families and Communities'. This remit also includes offering parents-carers help in reintegrating themselves back into the 'world of work' through a variety of educational training courses allied to help and advice.

To this end Sure Start Pallister Park, Berwick Hills and Park End employ a number of processes and initiatives to both encourage and monitor progress towards this goal. These include encouraging parents to become actively involved with the running and organisation of Sure Start, as well as requesting existing users to both discuss and promote Sure Start services amongst friends and neighbours where they live.

In respect of the current evaluation a series of questions were incorporated so as to gauge parent's active involvement both in Sure Start and also within the communities they live within. To this end parents and carers were *asked 'were they actively involved in Sure Start?'*, *'were they involved in any other community activities?'*, and *'did they discuss/promote Sure Start with friends and neighbours?'* (see Appendix 1).

In addition, parents were also asked questions relating to *any "problems within their own communities?"*, *"community interaction"* and *"suggested solutions to these problems?"*. Views were also sought as to the perceived *"visibility of Sure Start to non users"*, as well as suggestions on *"how to better promote Sure Start to non-users"* in the communities they lived in.

7.2 Feedback

7.2.1 Employment Concerns:

What proved to be a particularly contentious issue was that of helping users back into 'the world of work'. Analysis of both individual and focus group interview tapes suggest the existence of an underlying friction in parents' perceptions of what Sure Start is about.

This is none more so than in relation to the issue of assisting parents back into employment. While the responses of parents in relation to what Sure Start provides for their children remains overwhelmingly positive, the issue of assisting parents back into employment necessitates high levels of tact and diplomacy, particularly in relation to how it is presented.

While parents would appear to accept the benefits of a variety of 'learning type' courses encouraged or provided through Sure Start, it was also evident from some of the comments received that parents were very wary of being,

"forced back into work", or made to **"take a dead-end job in McDonalds"**.

Many parents with young children expressed strongly the view that **"they wanted to see their children grow up"**;

And that they **"wanted to be around when they took their first steps"** or **"spoke their first words"**.

Similarly, there was a strong undercurrent that it was **"their responsibility to look after their own kids"**;

And that **"they did not want to be sticking their kids in a crèche or nursery just so they could go out and work"**.

Responses such as this appear to illustrate a contradiction between on the one hand, parents repeated requests for “*more childcare facilities*” while alternatively implying the opposite, as above. Additional questioning upon this issue proved enlightening.

Parents appear to differentiate between ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ usage of childcare facilities. Short-term “**a couple of hours**” is seen as benefiting their children, while long-term, e.g. “**all day if I was at work**” is seen as “**neglectful**” or “**wrong**”.

While on the surface these contradictions might be construed negatively, we would contest this suggests they are instead illustrative of complex underlying cultural beliefs worthy of additional investigation.

7.2.2 Active Involvement

In the respect of existing users, a small number of parents admitted to involvement with other community initiatives. Predominantly this involved the use of local “**community canters**”.

A number of other parents also admitted to being involved actively with a number of other activities including, “**Southlands Leisure Centre**”, “**Endeavour Housing Association**” and the local “**school council**”.

Additionally one parent admitted to having been involved in “**voluntary work**” in the past.

Amongst those interviewed a number were already actively involved with Sure Start. This included “**management committee members**”, “**sub-committee members**” and “**volunteers**”.

Many users were reluctant to the suggestion of becoming more actively involved with Sure Start, “**shortage of time**” being the most frequently cited reason.

However, a minority did express an interest and, from these, several were “**interested in joining the management board**”, “**attending sub-committees**” and becoming “**volunteers**”.

Virtually all of these made the point that they would need both “**training and help**” before feeling confident enough to become actively involved.

Additional pre-requisites also included “**childcare and training**” as well as “**crèche facilities**”.

7.2.3 Community Concerns

A number of questions where included that dealt specifically with issues of community. Parents and carers were asked about any problems they might be experiencing where they lived, and how they might be addressed; how they got on socially with their neighbours, and if they actually discussed Sure Start with their friends and neighbours.

The section dealing with any ‘problems’ produced a large and vociferous response both in detailing the problems parents and carers where experiencing on the three estates covered by the project, and also as to what ‘solutions’ should be applied to these problems. Although many of these issues may well be out of the direct control of Sure Start it is still important to recognise the impact these problems are having upon users lives.

“**Vandalism**” was cited most often in the list of complaints from parents and carers.

This was closely followed by, “**kids and yobs on illegal motorbikes**”, “**twocking – joyriding and car crime**”.

Additional concerns included, “**kids drinking**”, “**kids doing drugs**”, “**kids fighting and making loads of noise**”.

Also cited were the problems of, "*nuisance neighbours*" and "*noisy neighbours*".

Central to the vast majority of these problems would appear to be a significant number of young people with too much time on their hands and very little to occupy themselves with, other than causing trouble or being a nuisance.

These problems appear to be exacerbated by a combination of "*alcohol and drugs*" allied to illegal activities with motor vehicles/motor bikes.

7.3 Recommendations

When quizzed about possible solutions to these problems responses ranged from, "*a more positive attitude to young people*", "*more facilities for kids*" and "*something to do for the kids, a youth club, because they are bored*".

On a more negative note others suggested the need for, "*curfews*", "*sending them to boot-camp*" and "*bringing back the death penalty*".

A significant minority acknowledged that many of the problems they had mentioned stemmed from a lack of facilities for young people.

However the majority of those questioned actually responded by asking for, "*more police*", "*more police on the beat*", "*more street wardens*", "*council wardens*", "*tougher sentencing*" and "*being much stricter with offenders*".

Parents questioned were also critical of other parents, particularly those who were seen, "*as letting their kids run wild*", or "*failing to keep them under control*".

For many of those questioned, offenders parents were as much to blame as the offenders themselves. A number of those questioned, going as far as suggesting

"that the parents should be prosecuted as well because they are supposed to be responsible for their kids".

Those questioned were also asked if they discussed Sure Start with their neighbours and friends. Most of those questioned said they *had mentioned it to family, friends and neighbours at some time*.

A comment that came across on a number of occasions was that amongst non-users **"they thought Sure Start and social services were the same"**.

Additionally, many non-users **"had heard about Sure Start but didn't really have any idea what it was about or what it offered"**.

This reinforced a number of other comments from both users and non-users that there **"didn't seem to be much information available about Sure Start", and that "it needs better advertising"**.

A number of suggestions were received from both users and non-users in relation to raising the profile of Sure Start in the local area.

These included, **"better/more advertising", "leaflet drops", "more posters and adverts in local papers"**.

Similarly, **"more advertising on the three estates", "a stand in Morrisons displaying what's on offer", and " a stand near the Neptune"** were also suggested as ways of getting the message across.

Parents were also aware of the importance of **"word of mouth"** and thought it important that they **"told all their friends just how good Sure Start is"**.

Similarly other suggestions were made regarding spreading the message; these included; ***“giving talks at schools – sending letters home with the kids”*** and ***“telling work-mates about it”***.

Mothers also suggested the ***“need to get midwives to pass the message on and tell mums, give leaflets out, that sort of thing”***.

Reinforcing an oft repeated theme, many of those questioned suggested that ***“a lot don’t know where to go, what it’s about and what’s on offer, they need telling about all the activities going on”***.

This was supported by a number of comments that suggested that there was an urgent need ***“to emphasise that Sure Start is different from social services”***.

In addition it was suggested that there was a need for ***“time tables of events displayed in prominent locations”*** and that these should be ***“updated on a regular basis”***.

Many users were convinced of the importance of ***“getting the message across”*** to non-users.

One parent suggesting that, ***“if we can crack that then there will be lots more people coming along to join; especially when they find out just how many different things they can get for their kids and themselves”***.

Although not a specific focus of this evaluation, from analysis of individual and focus group data there would appear to be a significant difference between the attitudes of users and non-users, particularly in relation to notions of community, individual responsibility, and active involvement.

Evidence of this can be gauged from comments received into questions about 'why' some parents do not draw on Sure Start services and how others lack social responsibility.

A number of users commented that "*a lot of people won't even open their doors, let alone listen to anyone telling them what's available*".

Others, more critically suggesting that, "*they are just ignorant; doesn't matter what you do for them, they never thank you*";

As well as "*they prefer to just sit on their arses, let their kids run wild and don't give a damn about anybody else who has to live near them*".

This was a theme repeated in relation to earlier comments about the unruly behaviour of groups of local adolescents.

Users suggested a correlation between "*those that couldn't care less about how they affected their neighbours, music blaring, screaming and shouting at all hours*"

and "*nine times out of ten its their bloody kids who are responsible for all the vandalism and thieving*".

It was further suggested that, "*they just couldn't give a damn about what their kids get up to and it's the rest of us who have to suffer*".

One parent in reply to questions of this nature made a telling statement,

"maybe if Sure Start had been around years ago, when all these teenage troublemakers were little, the it would have helped the kids and their parents a bit, made them behave better, and we wouldn't be having to put up with all this shit now!"

7.4 Summary

The apparent contradictions raised in relation to 'going back to work' against those of 'childcare provision' are multi-layered and complex. A number of parents commented upon what they perceived as the 'mixed messages' coming from Sure Start. On the one hand Sure Start is seen as promoting the notion of 'family responsibilities' such as making sure you look after your children properly and that they behave correctly yet, on the other hand, they view this at odds with Sure Start trying to get them to go back to work aided through extended childcare provision.

It could be suggested that this is indeed a genuine concern and one that goes to the core of the current New Labour administrations social policy programme provision, worthy of further critique.

However, overall it would appear that those parents who draw on Sure Start services both for their children and for themselves, seem to possess higher levels of social responsibility allied to an enhanced respect for their friends, neighbours and local environment. Similarly, a number of those questioned expressed the view that '*getting more non users involved in Sure Start*' should be a priority, and that this might well produce higher levels of social cohesion allied to less crime and vandalism.

8) Forward Evaluation Strategy

The objectives of the second year evaluation have included:

- To evaluate the progress and future direction of the programme in relation to addressing the four core Sure Start objectives. These include, '*Emotional and Social Development*', '*Improving Health*', '*Improving Learning*', and '*Strengthening Families and Community*'. A specific focus will be the evaluation of health and family support services.
- The development and delivery of evaluation training specifically structured towards a strategy of 'parental participation' with which to achieve this aim. This programme will be both sympathetic to the needs of the predominantly unskilled parents, yet sufficiently rigorous so as to provide robust data, which could guide the future direction of the programme.
- To carry out an evaluation consistent with NESS requirements and recommendations.

8.1 Evaluation of Core Services

As the preceding chapters of this report illustrate, a wealth of qualitative data has been produced, both in relation to users opinions of current services, and also in relation to suggested improvements for these services, as well as requests for a number of new services.

In addition the nature of this qualitative data has helped the programme to both assess and analyse many of the subjective factors which impact upon the social and emotional development of children, parents and carers. Similarly, parents first hand experiences of the changes in the behaviour, eating habits and learning progress of their children has helped to give a much clearer picture of the impact of existing services on their, and their children's lives.

Overall and in line with NESS requirements the evaluation process has successfully made a contribution towards both assessing existing 'processes' and 'outcomes' as well as influencing what constitutes the programmes future service delivery.

8.2 Evaluation Training and Parental Participation Strategy.

The design and delivery of evaluation training programme, sympathetic to the needs of parents but sufficiently rigorous to provide a consistent quality of data has, in the main, proven to be a success. Lessons learnt from the delivery of training sessions to parents have enabled CERG to learn from these initial experiences and will impact upon future training delivery.

The core group of parent research evaluators have performed up and above expectations and have made a huge contribution to the collection of data for this report. They have proven to be receptive and highly adaptable while undertaking both individual and group interviews, and have benefited both through the contribution they have made to the programme, and also in an individual capacity through a enhanced skills base and improved confidence levels.

The utilisation of 'qualitative' research methods such as these, while initially viewed as quite ambitious, have actually proven to be very successful in the production of worthwhile data from recipients traditionally reticent towards formalised interviewing techniques undertaken by professionals. This approach was premised upon the belief that 'parents talking to parents' held out the possibility of getting around this 'reticence' and, in the main this has proven to be the case.

8.3 Year 3 Evaluation Process Strategy

Following the success of this year's parental participation strategy and ongoing consultations with the programme manager, it was agreed that the third year of the evaluation would once again involve parents at all stages of the process. Following NESS guidelines, and in conjunction with the fulfillment of pre-requisite quantitative processes, there will also be conducted a 'qualitative' impact study of a specific Sure Start service. The service that has been identified is that of 'home visiting'.

'Home Visiting' is central to both engaging parents and their children within Sure Start as well as acting as a conduit for ongoing service integration and partnership development. In particular, the ability of families to draw upon a wide variety of professional services, a process facilitated through Sure Start, is seen as essential to the 'mainstreaming' of health service delivery. It is for this reason, allied to overall NESS evaluation objectives, that this service has been chosen.

It is envisaged that this will take the form a two-tier process. Following the successful experiences of year 2, a new group of parents drawn from the programmes 'volunteers' group, will undergo evaluation training with the overall objective of repeating last years process of 'parents interviewing parents'. In addition, it is envisaged that each of the volunteers will also 'buddy' an existing health professional when making 'home visits'. The aim of this is to assist them in better understanding the processes involved, as well as getting themselves known to future interviewees.

A second supporting strategy that has also been suggested, is that of 'research diary' keeping. It is envisaged that a number of families / parents will be engaged within a process of diary keeping, with the objective of detailing there experiences of Sure Start service provision from its inception, and then on through the various stages of development that every Sure Start user experiences. On the one level it is envisaged that this will provide a subjective record of the impact of Sure Start services upon both the individual and the family, and also be useful in gauging the effectiveness of current service provision.

While the former approach, that of providing qualitative evaluation training for parents allied to a 'parents interviewing parents' strategy, has already proven to be successful, the accompanying 'research diaries' approach is still under discussion. It was suggested that while in principle this approach may work, the practical aspects of expecting 'new' recipients of home visits, many of whom are receiving such services

because of being 'at risk' or 'vulnerable', may prove problematic. Ongoing negotiation relating to this strategy will take place during the early period of year 3 of the evaluation process.

8.4 Provisional Evaluation Timetable 2004-2005

July-Aug 2004 Ongoing Strategy Negotiation
 Evaluation Training Refinement
 Familiarisation with 'Volunteers' group.

Sept-Dec 2004 Evaluation Training Delivery / Pilot Interviewing

Jan–Mar 2005 Data Collection – Interviewing
 Research Diary Keeping (to be confirmed)

April-Jun 2005 Data-Analysis / Report Compilation
 Final Report Delivery

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SURE START QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview No

Date

.....

Hello my name is (**say Full Name**). We are carrying out a survey on behalf of the local Sure Start programme (offer interviewee Sure Start leaflet). As a part of this programme Sure Start is trying to find out the views of parents who use their services, for both themselves and their children. To that end I would like to invite you to participate in a short taped interview, which should last between 15-20 minutes.

THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE US WILL BE TREATED IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE AND ANONYMITY IS ASSURED. ALL MATERIALS ARE, UNLESS PERMISSION IS OBTAINED FROM YOU FIRST, OR THOUGHT TO CONSTITUTE RISK OR HARM TO ANOTHER PERSON, FOR THE SOLE USE OF SURE START. DATA WILL AT ALL TIMES BE STORED IN A SECURE LOCATION.

So if everything is ok? Then we can begin:

Section 1:

- a) Is the interviewee male or female (write 'M' or 'F')
- b) Can you tell me what your post-code is please? (write)
- c) Can you tell me which of these age groups you fit into? (tick which one)

16-21, 22-27, 28-33, 34-39, 40-44, 45-50
- d) Are you a registered Sure Start user?
- e) How long have you been using Sure Start?
- f) And how did you first hear about Sure Start? (*if unsure ask if from: Sure Start leaflet? Sure Start Newsletter, poster in Housing Office, GP Surgery etc or from another parent or friend?*)
- g) Can you tell me how many children you have, under 4 using Sure Start?
- h) Have you any other children over 4 years of age (up to 16)

Section 2:

Sure Start offers a variety of services for both parents and children. Can you tell me which of the following services have you used for your child/children?

Service Facility	Tick
PLAYBUS	
PLAYGROUP	
PARENT & CHILD GROUP	
FUN BOOK TIME	
MUSIC WITH.....	
BUSY BEES	
JOLLY BABIES	
FUN TOTS	
SWIM TOTS	
GYM TOTS	
OPEN DAY EVENTS	
TRIPS AWAY	

- a) If they answer 'yes' to any of the list then ask them:
- b) And what did you think of each of them in turn
- c) And do you think it could be improved in any way?
- d) Do you think that these things have helped to improve your child's life? (***and if 'yes' ask in what ways?***)
- e) Are there any other services or help that you think Sure Start could offer your children? (***and if so what? For example help for children with behavioural problems***)

Section 3:

In much the same way Sure Start also offers a variety of services that are meant to benefit you. Which of the following services (if any) have you used personally?

Facility Service	Tick
HEALTH DROP IN	
ACTIVE FOR LIFE	
ACCESS TO LEISURE	
WELFARE RIGHTS	
MAKING CHOICES	
FEEL GOOD CLUB	
AROMATHERAPY	
SPLASH SWIMMING (for children with Special Needs)	
AQUA NATAL	
HOME SAFETY EQUIPMENT LOAN SCHEME	

If they answer 'yes' to any of the list then ask them:

- a) And what did you think of 'each' of them in turn ?
- b) And do you think it could be improved in any way?
- c) Are you currently attending any training or college courses? (*e.g. computer training, education courses, health & safety, first aid etc. If so ask them to describe what they are for*)
- d) Are there any particular courses that you would like to attend? (*if answer is 'yes' press them into explaining 'what' courses and 'why' this would help them*)
- e) Do you think it would be a good idea for Sure Start to either offer these types of courses or help you to attend training courses? (*if they say 'yes' ask them in what ways could Sure Start help them?*)
- f) Are there any other services or help that you think Sure Start could offer you personally? (*and if so what?*)

Section 4:

One of the things that Sure Start is trying to do is improve both your own quality of life and that of your child / children.

- a) Before being involved with Sure Start who else (if anyone) helped you with looking after your child / children? (*e.g. partner/husband/relatives/nursery/crèche*)
- b) What sort of 'outside' help/support did you get? (if any) (*e.g. professional support, or from a health worker/social worker*)
- c) So do you think that there is enough support/help for parents with children outside of what Sure Start offers?
- d) Can you tell me, since using the Sure Start services has your own quality of life improved? (*If unsure of what this means prompt with suggestions such as, 'have you got more free time? Does it give you a break from looking after your children?'*)
- e) ***Is it easy to obtain information / advice from Sure Start?*** (if 'yes' ask in what way; if 'no' ask why)
- f) ***Have you found Sure Start staff helpful and easy to get on with?*** (if 'yes' ask in what way; if 'no' ask for examples).
- g) Since becoming involved with Sure Start have you made any new friends with other parents or users? (*if 'yes' get them to explain how many?*)
- h) Have you learnt any new things since being involved with Sure Start' (*if 'yes' get them to explain what they have learnt?*)
- i) Do you think your confidence has improved since being involved with Sure Start'? (*if 'yes' ask in what ways?*)
- j) Has the information Sure Start provided proved useful to you'? (*if 'yes' ask how; if 'no' ask why not?*)
- k) Since being involved with Sure Start do you treat your children differently in any way? (*if 'yes' ask in what ways?*)

- i) Do you have the time to read to your children? (*e.g. sometimes, often, rarely, never*)
 - m) Do you have the time to 'play' with your children? (*e.g. sometimes, often, rarely, never*)
 - n) Do you have any rules about how much T.V. they watch? (*If 'yes' get them to explain how and why?*)
- o) Since being involved with Sure Start have you altered what you give your children to eat in any way? (*If yes, ask what / how*)
- p) What other things do you think that Sure Start could provide that could help you as a parent?

Section 5:

Since your child has been involved with Sure Start can you tell me?

- a) Has your child/children enjoyed the activities they have been involved in with Sure Start? (*ask them for examples*)
- b) Do you think that the health of your child/children has benefitted in any way since they have been involved with Sure Start? (*If 'yes' ask how?*)
- c) Since being involved with Sure Start has your child/childrens eating habits changed in any way? (*If 'yes' ask how?*)
- d) Do you think that your child/children has learnt any new skills since being involved with Sure Start (*e.g. has their reading / writing / counting or speech / talking improved?*)
- e) Do you think Sure Start could offer your children more to help them with their reading, writing, counting and speech skills? (*If 'yes' push for suggestions as to how*)
- f) What other things do you think Sure Start might offer to do this?

- g) Has your child made any new friends with other children since attending Sure Start activities?
- h) Do you think the way your child gets on with other children been helped'?
- i) Has your child/children's behaviour altered in any way since he/she has been involved in Sure Start'? (***either better or worse and if so get them to explain how and why they think this has happened***)
- j) Can you think of any other activities or facilities that Sure Start might provide that could improve the life and well-being of your child / children? (***e.g. more child care, more activities, more trips away, more open days?***)

Section 6:

- a) Prior to being involved with Sure Start did you attend any community activities within the local area, either on your own or with your child/children? (***e.g. community centre / nursery-creche etc***)
- b) Where or have you ever been actively involved with any community groups? (***e.g. did you do any voluntary work or be involved with any community groups, board member, that type of thing***)
- c) Since joining Sure Start have you either joined the management board or sub-committees or have you ever thought about taking part any of these?
- d) If not, is there any particular reason why? (***if answer is, because 'I have never done anything like that before', ask:)***
- e) So if there was help/training available might this encourage you to become more involved with Sure Start?
- f) Since being involved personally (either on the management board or sub-committees etc) have you thought about or have you actually taken part in any other community activities outside Sure Start?
- g) If answer is 'yes' ask them to explain what?

- h) Do you talk / discuss what's going on in your neighbourhood / area with your friends and neighbours? (***if 'yes' ask them what about?***)
- i) What are the major problems around where you live? (***e.g. crime, vandalism, joyriding, harassment etc***)
- j) What do you think would be the best way of sorting these problems out? (***e.g. more police on the beat, tougher sentencing, curfews?***)
- k) Do you think there is any way that Sure Start might be able to help sort these problems out? (***if 'yes' ask for examples***)
- l) Do you talk / discuss Sure Start with your friends and neighbours (***if 'yes' ask them what they say / talk about?***)
- m) Do you think there are any other ways in which Sure Start could get in touch with families in this area?
- n) Can you think of any other ways in which Sure Start could make itself more appealing to families in this area?
- o) Is there anything else that you would like to say about what Sure Start has done for you and your children?
- p) Is there anything else that you think Sure Start could offer you and your children?
- q) Is there anything else that you would like to say?

"On behalf of Sure Start I would like to thank you for giving up your time to take part in this interview".

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