

**SURE START TAUNTON 2004**

**PARENT PARTICIPATION AND  
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**



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## **Technical Note**

It is recognised that the views of carers/guardians as well as that of parents are represented in this research. For ease of reference, the term parent is used to represent parent, carers and guardians.



## **1. Executive Summary**

### **Background**

- 1.1 A study looking at the level, extent and expectations surrounding parent participation was carried out during 2004 for the Sure Start Taunton local programme.

### **Method**

- 1.2 Questionnaires and depth interviews were carried out to explore parent participation within the Sure Start Taunton local programme. Postal questionnaires were distributed to all Sure Start eligible households, 702 in total. In addition, depth interviews were carried out with five staff from a range of differing levels within the programme.

### **Results**

- 1.3 A response rate of 26.7% was achieved for the postal questionnaire. Respondents to the questionnaire were most likely to report that they have been involved at a user level or had no involvement to date. For parents that would like to participate within the programme, the most popular way is at the user level, by receiving information about the programme or through consultation. Only a small number of parents wanted to be involved in joint or delegated decision-making about the programme and its services.
- 1.4 Parent circumstance and need influenced the level and extent of participation and different parents varied according to how much time, energy and skills they could commit to the programme. The study shows that the programme recognises a tension between involving a large number of representative participants at what might be termed a 'lower' level of participation, or a small and potentially less representative group at a 'higher' level of participation.
- 1.5 The findings show that although there is a wealth of 'good practice' guidance regarding participation, there are a number of difficulties in implementing an 'ideal' model of participation.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 1.6 Parents within the Sure Start programme are most likely to want to be involved at the 'lower' ends of the participation spectrum. Only a small number show interest in becoming involved at a decision-making level. The programme should therefore aim to provide 'parent informed' services and involve parents at a greater level where this is possible.

- 1.7 One of the main factors preventing parent participation is a lack of time.
- 1.8 There was recognition that there was a tension between involving many parents at the 'lower' end of the participation spectrum or fewer parents at the 'higher' end of the participation spectrum. The programme should consider new and innovative ways for parents to influence decision-making in large numbers (for example through community or audience voting, parent's panels or large scale questionnaires where this is feasible).
- 1.9 Parents were most likely to see parent participation as a way of providing better and more responsive services. Staff recognised that parent participation was a useful way to help shape services and also valued the contribution that parent participation could make for individual development.
- 1.10 The programme needs to consider what they are looking to achieve through parent participation (for example more responsive services, development opportunities for parents) and how that should happen. The views of all staff should be sought regarding parent participation to ensure that the team can come to a shared understanding about what parent participation is and what it sets out to achieve.
- 1.11 The research challenges the idea that there is an 'ideal' model of participation that can be applied to any given situation regardless of context. It is recommended that the programme adopts the models of participation from this study which have been informed by the experiences of the programme to date, to inform how parent participation is implemented and carried out within the Sure Start local programme.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 Recently, there has been much government interest in public involvement and participation. This is especially evident in the regeneration programmes that have been set up by the current Labour government. There is recognition that for regeneration to be successful, it is necessary not only to focus on the physical environment and services available to communities, but also social regeneration, to ensure that changes are sustainable (Greenhalgh and Shaw 2002:14).
- 2.2 Sure Start local programmes are government funded area based initiatives which focus on improving life chances and the services available for young children and their families. Programmes are required to work towards a number of key targets and objectives. One of these objectives focuses on strengthening families and communities, '*...by involving families in building capacity in the community and creating pathways out of poverty*' (Sure Start Unit 2003).
- 2.3 The aims and objectives of this piece of research were to consider community involvement and participation within the Sure Start programme. One aim of the study was to consider the level, extent and expectations of involvement and participation that staff within the programme would like to see from local families. In addition, the study considered the level, extent and expectations of community involvement and participation that families would like to see in the programme and whether the views of families and staff matched or differed. The study also considered any factors which may influence levels of participation and influence the way in which participation can be implemented within the Sure Start programme.

### 3 Literature Review

- 3.1 A number of different areas informed the planning of this piece of research. These areas include theories about poverty and social exclusion and participation.

#### Theories about Poverty and Social Exclusion

- 3.2 The work of Lewis (1964:xxiv) has been influential in helping to explain why particular groups of people have experienced poverty, whilst other groups did not. His theory concentrated on a '*culture of poverty*', which suggested that the reasons why particular groups experienced poverty was as a result of their attitudes and culture. People who are 'trapped' in a 'culture of poverty' are often seen to have particular values such as fatalism and '*present time orientation*' which act as a defence and coping mechanism to the poverty in which a family may find themselves. The culture of poverty is passed from generation to generation, and therefore even though economic conditions in the local area may change, the culture is such that it persists over time, despite a change in opportunities.
- 3.3 Joseph (1972 cited in Morgan et al 1995:223) discusses the '*cycle of deprivation*'. This concept has a wider and less individualistic perspective than that of Lewis, and uses economic and environmental factors to explain the reasons why poverty may persist over generations. The '*cycle of deprivation*' is characterised as having a number of different stages which Holman (1978 cited in Morgan et al 1995:224) notes are as follows. Parents may have what are judged to be '*inadequate childrearing practices*'. Children within these families are seen to experience poor childrearing practices and may suffer '*emotionally, socially and intellectually*'. It is suggested that this can then lead to poor attainment at school. As a result of low levels of achievement, these children when leaving school may find it difficult to gain well paid employment, and therefore have little money to move out of the deprivation that they face. The cycle of deprivation suggests that living in such conditions may lead to unstable relationships and family lives which can then result in '*inadequate parenting*' from where the cycle begins again.
- 3.4 Some theories regarding poverty and social exclusion can be judgemental and oversimplify routes in and out of poverty and social exclusion. For example, what is considered to be '*inadequate parenting*' may vary between different social groups. However, theories about poverty and social exclusion influence what type of programme is put into place to tackle poverty. Sure Start programmes are based on an understanding of social exclusion and poverty as partly caused by cycles of deprivation. The programme is designed to break that cycle.

## Theories and Models of Participation

- 3.5 The motivation for participation is an important consideration when looking at the theories of participation within the literature. Beresford and Croft (1993:8) distinguish between consumerist and democratic approaches to participation.
- 3.6 Consumerist approaches to participation are seen as the means through which better services can be provided. For example, users of particular services can influence how they are run and how they might be improved (Beresford and Croft 1993:8). This approach to participation is sometimes referred to as a '*top down*' approach (Hallett 1987:5) or an '*instrumental*' approach (Richardson 1983:54). The approach is labelled '*top down*', as it first and foremost serves the needs of, and the scope is determined by, policy and decision makers.
- 3.7 The democratic approach to participation is also known as a '*bottom up*' approach or developmental approach (Richardson 1983:54). Some writers see it as a basic human right to be able to participate and to be listened to (Hallett 1987:5, Beresford and Croft 1993:19). The notion of empowerment is a key concept for the democratic or developmental approach. People gain in terms of self confidence, and develop an increased political awareness as a result of the process (Beresford and Croft 1993:9).
- 3.8 There are a number of different models of participation which have been developed to explain and describe the nature of participation. Arnstein's (1969 cited in Stewart and Taylor 1995:16) Ladder of Participation is one of the most well known models. This model has a number of different steps or rungs. The lowest rung of the ladder includes participation methods which Arnstein judges as an inadequate way of involving people, with the top rung being seen as the best way for people to participate. The model provided by Arnstein has been criticised as being too simplistic and for ignoring power relations and resources (Stewart and Taylor 1995:17).

Figure 1: Ladder of Participation



Source: Arnstein 1969

3.9 Wilcox (1994:8) adapts and develops Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation to consider in greater detail the stage of participation and the different ‘*stakeholders*’ who may be involved. The levels and purpose of participation include elements that Wilcox terms ‘*substantial participation*’ such as ‘*supporting*’, ‘*acting together*’, and ‘*deciding together*’. Other elements on the ladder which are not termed substantial participation include consultation and information. Wilcox sees different levels of participation as appropriate for different groups of people, and while some people may want greater involvement in decision-making, others may be content simply to be informed or consulted about issues. In contrast to Arnstein’s ladder, the different levels on the ladder are not judged in any way. Greater participation is not necessarily seen as superior to lower levels of participation with regard to involvement in decision-making.

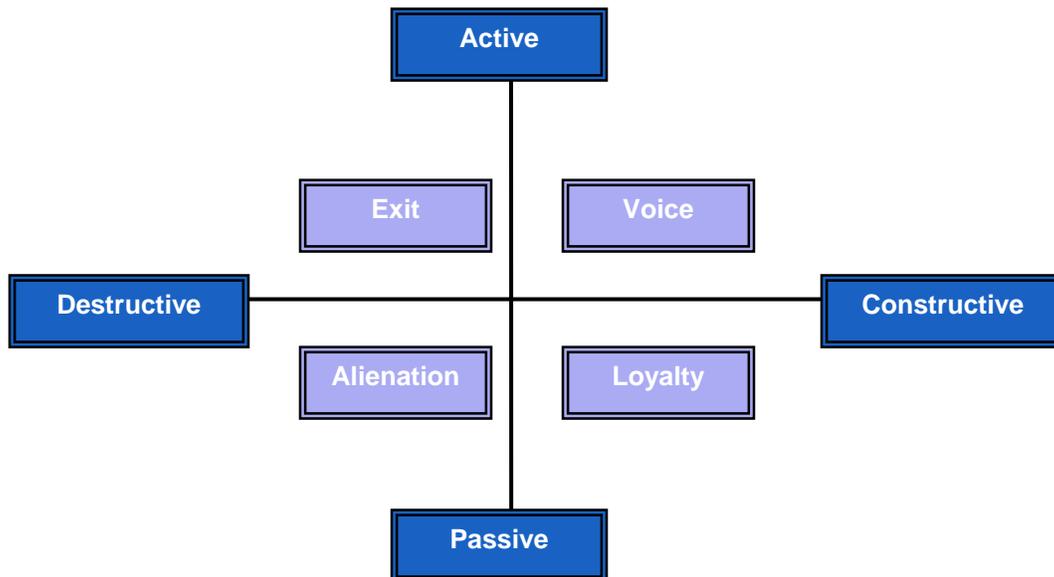
Figure 2: Wilcox’s Model of Participation

Level of participation	Phase of participation	Who is involved?
Information	Initiation	Politicians
Consultation	Preparation	Officers
Deciding together	Participation	Activists
Acting together	Continuation	Residents
Supporting independent community interests		Business
		Local groups

Source: Wilcox (1994:8)

- 3.10 Beresford (1993:11) notes three possible steps for involvement and participation. These include firstly, users of services becoming involved in the services that they use, secondly becoming involved in the management of services, and finally, helping to develop and plan new services.
- 3.11 Stewart and Taylor (1995) describe a model of participation developed by Hirschmann (cited in Lowery et al 1992:76). This model describes a number of different reactions that an individual can take when deciding how to deal with poor services. An individual may take an active approach to this type of situation, and either voice their concern or choose not to use that service. Alternatively, they could take a passive approach and continue to use the service (loyalty) or they may simply become alienated from the service. In addition, individual responses can be categorised as ‘destructive’ or ‘constructive’.

Figure 3: Hirschmann’s (1970) Model of Participation (adapted)

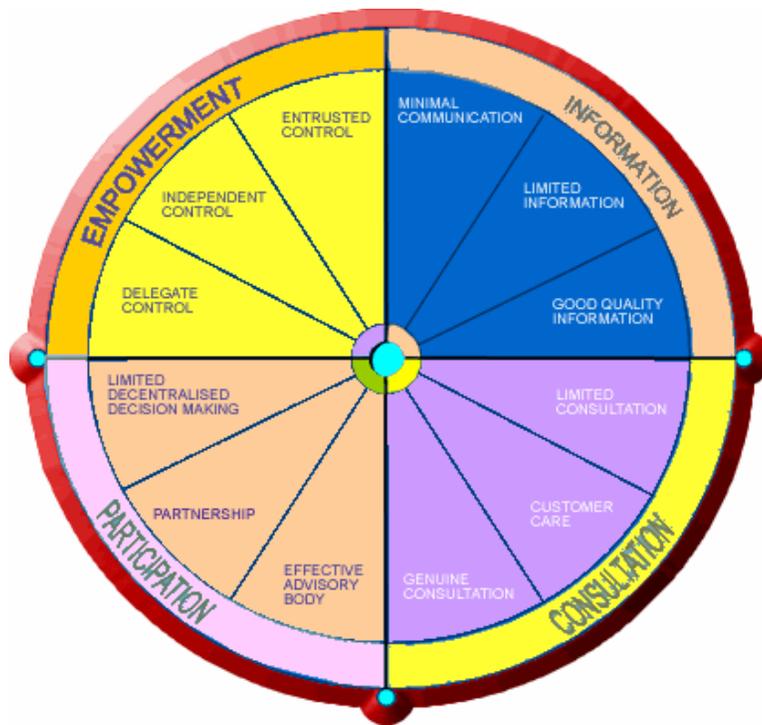


Source: Lowery, De Hoog and Lyons 1992:76

- 3.12 A further model of participation is provided by the ‘Wheel of Participation’ which has been developed by South Lanarkshire District Council (2003). The wheel looks at levels of participation in decision-making. The different slices of the wheel consider different areas which are important to participation. One slice of the wheel considers information and different levels of information giving (minimal, limited, or good quality information). The next section of the wheel considers consultation which is subdivided into limited consultation, customer care and genuine consultation. Participation forms another section which can be at one of three levels (an effective advisory body, partnership or limited decentralised decision-making). The last section considers the category empowerment

which includes delegate control, independent control or entrusted control. The wheel is shown below:

Figure 4: Wheel of Participation



Source: South Lanarkshire District Council (2003)

### **Good Practice in Participation**

- 3.13 There are a large number of 'good practice' guides to participation in the literature. However, there is also seen to be an absence of evidence relating to the effectiveness of participation. As Burton (2003:6) notes, *'there...appears to be a significant gap in our knowledge about the effectiveness about public involvement'*. It might be considered somewhat surprising that so many 'good practices' guides are available, given the lack of evidence on judging when participation has been effective.
- 3.14 There are a number of key themes which run through the guides to 'good practice'. These include being clear about the scope and aims of participation, involving the community at an early stage, identifying all stakeholders, providing adequate resources, having community representation at management level, providing community friendly meetings, sharing information with all parties and meeting out of pocket expenses for participants (Ecoregen 2003, Taylor 1995:2).

- 3.15 The review of the literature has highlighted a number of important issues to be considered when looking at and researching participation and community involvement. These are discussed in further detail below.

### **Defining and Measuring Participation and Involvement**

- 3.16 An important theme within the literature focuses on how participation is defined, conceptualised and measured. The models and theories about participation illustrate that there are a number of different elements to participation.
- 3.17 Attwood et al (2003:77) notes a number of different types of participation, civic participation (for example, signing a petition, contacting a councillor or MP) social participation (such as involvement in groups or playing in a team), informal volunteering (giving unpaid help on an individual basis) and formal volunteering (which includes giving unpaid help which is organised by a club or organisation).
- 3.18 Richardson (1983:11) notes that participation may be direct or indirect. Each type of participation is defined in relation to whether a person has personal contact with government representatives. Direct participation is defined as where '*...people take part in efforts to influence the course of government policy involving personal (face-to-face) interaction with official spokesmen*' (Richardson 1983:11). In contrast, '*indirect participation*' refers to where people try to influence policy, but not directly through an official spokesperson (for example through voting or pressure groups).
- 3.19 Atherton et al (2002:16) note that participation and community involvement can take place at three different levels which include general involvement in activities, involvement in the process of development, and involvement in the delivery or implementation process.
- 3.20 The models of participation discussed earlier also highlight that there are many different elements to participation. A particular issue concerns how best to accurately measure participation given its complexity and the range of different factors involved. Participation can be measured in terms of the type of participation, who participates, at what levels or in what ways, and for what reasons. Careful consideration needs to be given to develop a concise definition and valid measure of participation.
- 3.21 Before measuring and examining community involvement and participation within a Sure Start local programme, it is important to consider what is expected by the Sure Start Unit with regard to guidance around these issues. Although parent participation is not explicitly defined in the Sure Start literature, it is clear from the Sure Start principles that parent participation is a key lever to help develop more appropriate and responsive services. Recent planning guidance for local programmes noted that '*Sure Start is about a cultural change to make services more responsive to parents' needs. To provide a better understanding of these needs, parents must be consulted and represented within the management and decision-making process*' (Sure Start Unit 2002:5).

- 3.22 The Sure Start Unit also discusses the level of involvement expected from parents. *‘The intention is for parents to participate in, and not merely attend, meetings of the partnership’* (Sure Start Unit 2002:6). There is an intention to involve parents in the management of the project. By 18 months from the start of a Sure Start local programme they are expected *‘...to have parents and community members represented on the main decision-making body and involved in a variety of ways in its management and consultation structure’* (Sure Start Unit 2002:6).
- 3.23 The Audit Commission (2002:6) distinguishes between community participation and community involvement. Community involvement is seen as involvement in a range of potential activities in a variety of ways. In contrast, community participation is said to refer to: *‘...enabling people to become active partners in the regeneration of communities by contributing and sharing the decisions that affect their lives. Participation should enable people to have a degree of power and control in the processes in which they are involved’* (Audit Commission 2002:6).
- 3.24 The definitions considered here tend to focus on how people become involved in effecting and contributing to decision-making about local services and facilities in their area. Hickey and Kipping (1998:84) help to continue this focus on participation with services and define user involvement as where *‘...service users participate in the decision-making process.’*

### **Assumptions about Participation**

- 3.25 A number of assumptions regarding participation and community involvement are present in the literature that has been reviewed.
- 3.26 Firstly, there is a widespread assumption that greater involvement and participation in social life is a positive step and one worth pursuing. This idea is often based on the reasoning that better services will result from participation. In addition, people may also develop better skills and ‘re-engage’ with their communities. This can then lead to better communities and a reversal of the social decline that has been said to be linked to a lack of participation and engagement.
- 3.27 Secondly, there is an underlying assumption that people will choose (and wish) to participate to a greater extent in a range of different matters. This is interesting, seeing that the evidence points to people actively choosing not to become involved in a range of different activities such as voting. If people don’t wish to participate, it is often seen because they lack the personal skills to participate. Many programmes talk about *‘capacity building’* as if the panacea to the problem of non-participation is simply education and providing the skills to those who are seen to lack them.

- 3.28 A further assumption is that greater participation will lead to a number of particular outcomes, for example better services, capacity building and more cohesive communities. It is suggested that over time, participative communities should see a decline in social problems as a result of increased participation and involvement in their communities.
- 3.29 It is often assumed that people will want to participate. Richardson (1983:67) notes this area as important, and asks whether there is '*...a demand for participation among the potential participants?*' Richardson notes three separate viewpoints on the demand for participation. The first position notes that people will want to become involved in participation because they will recognise that they stand to gain in some way from participating, '*...there is no question of consumers' willingness to become involved; they are assumed to have an active desire to take part*' (Richardson 1983:68).
- 3.30 The second position that Richardson (1983:68) notes, is that few people are interested in participating in policy discussions as it places a burden on their time, which they would rather spend doing something else. Toynbee (2003:129) has recently noted that participating in community activities may be burdensome for those living in areas labelled as deprived,
- 'It is strange that it is always the people with the fewest resources... who are expected to galvanise themselves into heroic acts of citizenship...Since no one ever demands the residents of Mayfair get involved with their street lighting or pavements, why should these people, whose difficult lives and lack of money make it harder?'*
- 3.31 This position is backed up by research carried out by Attwood et al (2003:93), who found that '*people who lived in the least deprived areas were more likely than those who lived in the most deprived areas to be involved in all types of voluntary and community activities.*'
- 3.32 The third position noted by Richardson (1983:68) is that people will choose to participate under certain conditions. For example, when people are satisfied with services that are being provided, or think that they will not be able to affect any change, then they may choose not to get involved. People will participate where they think there is a need for them to get involved and that their participation and views will be heard and make a difference.

### **Further Issues**

- 3.33 Some interesting issues are discussed by the literature. For example, Attwood et al (2003) considers who participates and finds that those in the most deprived communities are the least likely to participate. Questions therefore need to be raised about whether participation initiatives simply give greater voice to those already able to speak out and influence policy.

- 3.34 There is a question about who participants actually represent, and whether they are representing themselves or the community (Richardson 1993:12). There is an obvious tension in the notion of participation for the community, as in practical terms not everybody will be able to be involved and participate.
- 3.35 The theories and models of participation in the literature have helped to inform the planning and focus for this research. The next section considers the specific research area that the study addresses and the appropriate methods of data collection.

## **4 Methods**

### **Aims and Objectives**

4.1 The aims and objectives of the research were as follows:

- To consider community involvement and participation within a Sure Start local programme.
- To consider the level, extent and expectations of involvement and participation that staff within Sure Start programmes would like to see from local families.
- To consider the level, extent and expectations of community involvement and participation that local families would like to have in the programme.
- To see whether the expectations of staff working within the programme and families living within the community match or differ.
- To examine the factors that may influence levels of participation.
- To test existing models and theories about participation and if necessary to develop data driven models or theories about participation.

### **Postal Questionnaire**

4.2 A postal survey was used to explore the views of 702 households within Sure Start Taunton. The survey was sent to all families who were eligible to use Sure Start services. The research explored the views of all families with young children within the area regardless of whether they had used Sure Start services.

4.3 The questionnaire was piloted with a number of parents and where appropriate changes were made as a result. Two reminders were sent to non-responders; a reminder postcard after two weeks, followed by a replacement questionnaire and reminder two weeks later.

4.4 In addition, given that the questionnaire was looking at participation it was felt that it was important to understand and assess the extent to which non-respondents differed from respondents. To reflect on the reasons for non-response, an additional brief postal survey (see Appendix 6) was administered to a random sample of 100 non-responders asking about their reasons for non-response.

4.5 The data received from the postal questionnaire was coded and entered into the data analysis package, Statistics Package for the Social Scientist (SPSS). Data was systematically checked to ensure its accuracy and quality prior to analysis.

## **Depth Interviews**

- 4.6 Depth interviews were carried out with five key staff within the Sure Start Taunton. Prior to the construction of the topic guide, an informal discussion about parent participation took place with two key members of staff. This provided an insight into some of the issues that the programme was facing and these issues along with those areas gleaned from the research literature and research questions informed the construction of the topic guide.
- 4.7 All interviews were recorded (with the interviewee's permission) and fully transcribed prior to analysis.

## **Ethics**

- 4.8 The research was carried out in conjunction with the standards set by the Local Research Ethics Committee (NHS) and by the Human Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of Plymouth.
- 4.9 The storage of data was considered carefully. For the postal survey, the database containing personal information about the sample frame was password protected and deleted after use. The data from the questionnaire returns was stored anonymously in a separate password protected file and in a different location.
- 4.10 The interview transcripts were stored securely in an anonymous format and all tapes were destroyed after transcription. Where quotes from the transcripts have been used as supporting evidence in the report, care has been taken to ensure that they do not compromise the anonymity of any individual who has taken part in the research.

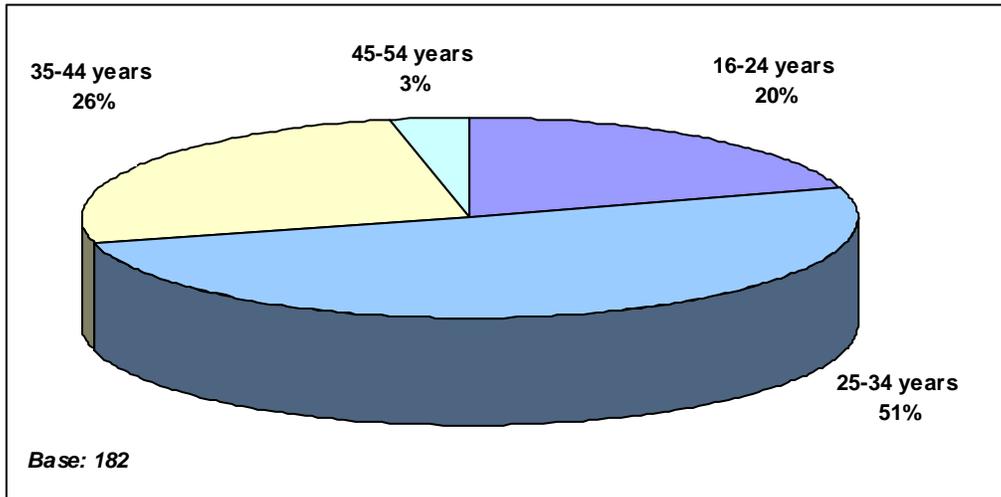
## 5 Analysis of Survey Results

- 5.1 The analysis of results has been divided into two sections. This section considers the findings from the postal questionnaire, whilst the results from the depth interviews are presented in the following section.

### Demographic Profile

- 5.2 A response rate of 26.7% was achieved for the postal survey of 702 households. The largest majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years. The majority of respondents were female (95.6%) with only a small number of male respondents (4.4%). Of all respondents, 94.5% had heard of the Sure Start programme prior to receiving the questionnaire. The chart below shows the age of respondents to the postal questionnaire.

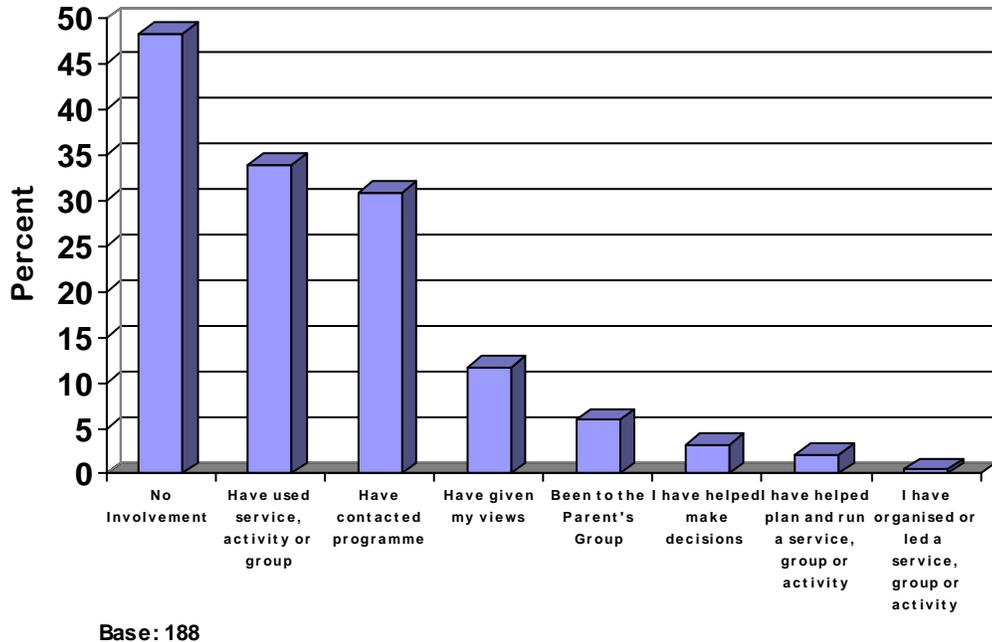
Figure 5: Age of Respondents



### Current Extent of Participation

- 5.3 The study explored current levels of participation and involvement within the Sure Start programme. A number of respondents had little or no involvement with the programme to date. 48.4% of respondents reported that they had not been involved with the programme. 34.0% of respondents had used a Sure Start service, activity or group and 30.9% had contacted the programme. 11.7% of respondents reported that they had given their views about activities within the programme and 5.9% had been to a parent's group run by the programme. Only 3.2% of respondents considered that they had helped to make decisions at a Sure Start group or meeting, a further 2.1% had helped plan and run a Sure Start service, group or activity and only one person had organised and led a Sure Start service, group or activity.

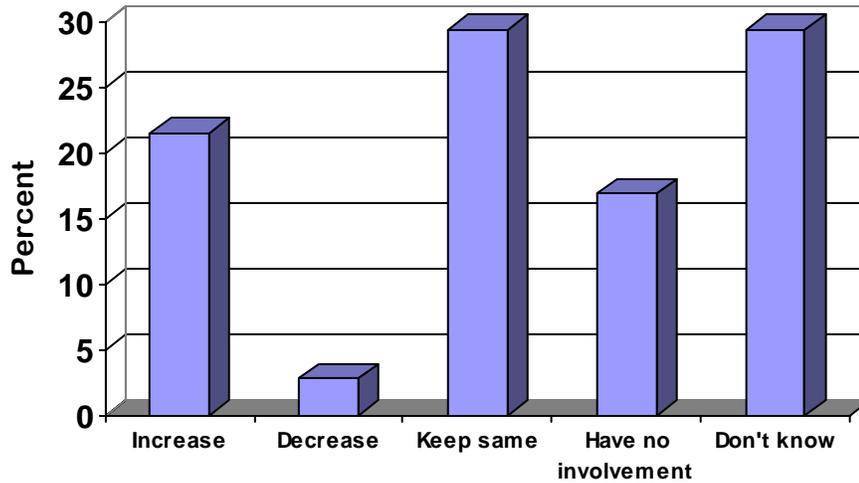
Figure 6: Current Level of Involvement



### Desired Levels of Participation

- 5.4 The study explored the desired levels of participation within the programme for parents. 29.4% of respondents reported that they wanted to keep the same levels of involvement as they currently have. A further 29.4% of respondents were unsure about the level of involvement that they would like. 21.5% of respondents would like to increase their levels of involvement, 16.9% would choose to have no involvement at all and 2.8% of respondents would like to decrease their involvement.
- 5.5 Of those respondents that reported they would like to keep the same levels of involvement, the largest majority of these respondents (63%) were currently involved as a user of Sure Start services.

Figure 7: Future Involvement



Base: 177

**At what level do parents wish to become involved?**

5.6 Table 1 shows the levels of participation that respondents would like to have. The most popular way that parents would like to participate is by receiving information about what is planned. Just over one fifth of parents would like to see joint decision-making between parents and Sure Start.

**Table 1: Level of Participation**

Level of participation that parents would like	Percent
Information about what is planned	61.2
To be consulted about opinions	9.6
To give opinions but final decisions to rest with those running groups, services or activities	10.1
Joint decision-making by parents and Sure Start	21.3
Parents to have delegated decision-making powers	10.6

Base: 188

### How would parents like to be involved with the programme?

- 5.7 For respondents that would like to be involved in the programme, the most popular way of doing so is by using groups, services and facilities. 57.4% of respondents would like to be involved at a user level. 23.4% of respondents would like to be consulted about their views and become involved in this way. A smaller proportion of respondents (10.1%) would like to get involved by helping to run groups, services and facilities or by helping to decide how they are run (9.0%).
- 5.8 Respondents that were interested in contributing to decision-making reported that they would like to do this as shown below. Postal questionnaires were the most popular way that respondents would like to be able to become involved in decision-making.

**Table 2: Involvement in Decision-Making**

Ways that parents would like to be involved in decision-making	Percent
Postal Questionnaire	45.7
Vote on a number of issues	12.8
Discuss issues in a small group	12.8
Give views to a local parent representative	6.4
Attend a public meeting	4.8
Act as a parent representative at a management group meeting	4.8
In another way (no example given)	0.5

Base: 188

### How can the programme ensure that it involves parents in a fair way?

- 5.9 The research explored how the programme could involve parents in an equitable way. Respondents felt that this was most likely to happen if parents were given the opportunity to give their views through short questionnaires (70.2%) or at public meetings (43.6%). Community voting sessions or parent representatives had similar levels of popularity at 38.3% and 36.7% respectively. Discussion groups and online voting were selected by 23.4% and 19.1% respectively as fair ways for parents to give their views about service provision.
- 5.10 Although 36.7% of respondents felt that parent representatives would be a fair method of involving parents, only 8.9% of respondents would be willing to stand as a parent representative.

## Expectations and Outcomes of Participation

- 5.11 Respondents were most likely to perceive participation as a way of ensuring that services are responsive to the needs of parents (77.7%). However, a small group (11.2%) felt that few changes would occur as a result of participation. The table below illustrates the range of parent views with regard to the potential outcomes of participation:

**Table 3: Expectations and Outcomes of Participation**

Expectations and Outcomes of Participation	Percent
Services will be more suited to the needs of parents	77.7
Parents will become more confident at expressing their views	54.8
Parents will be more likely to challenge poor services	48.9
Parents will develop new skills	45.7
I think few changes will occur	11.2
Other (no example given)	0.5

Base: 188

- 5.12 Another interesting finding from the questionnaire data showed that although 76.4% of respondents felt that parent participation can lead to better services, only 23.7% of respondents reported that they would become more involved if services needed improving.

## Barriers to Participation

- 5.13 Respondents were asked whether any factors acted as barriers to them becoming more involved in local groups, services or activities. A lack of time was cited by respondents as the top barrier to becoming more involved. Table 4 shows the extent to which different factors act as barriers for parents:

**Table 4: Barriers to Participation**

Barriers to Participation	Percent
Not enough time	65.8
Difficulty in getting childcare	38.5
Lack of confidence	34.6
Don't hear about opportunities	32.1
Meetings or opportunities are usually at an inconvenient time	24.6
May not have the right skills	23.0
Transport difficulties	11.2
Simply not interested	10.7
Don't always understand the jargon at meetings	9.6
Think very little will change as a result	7.5
Other (no examples given)	2.1

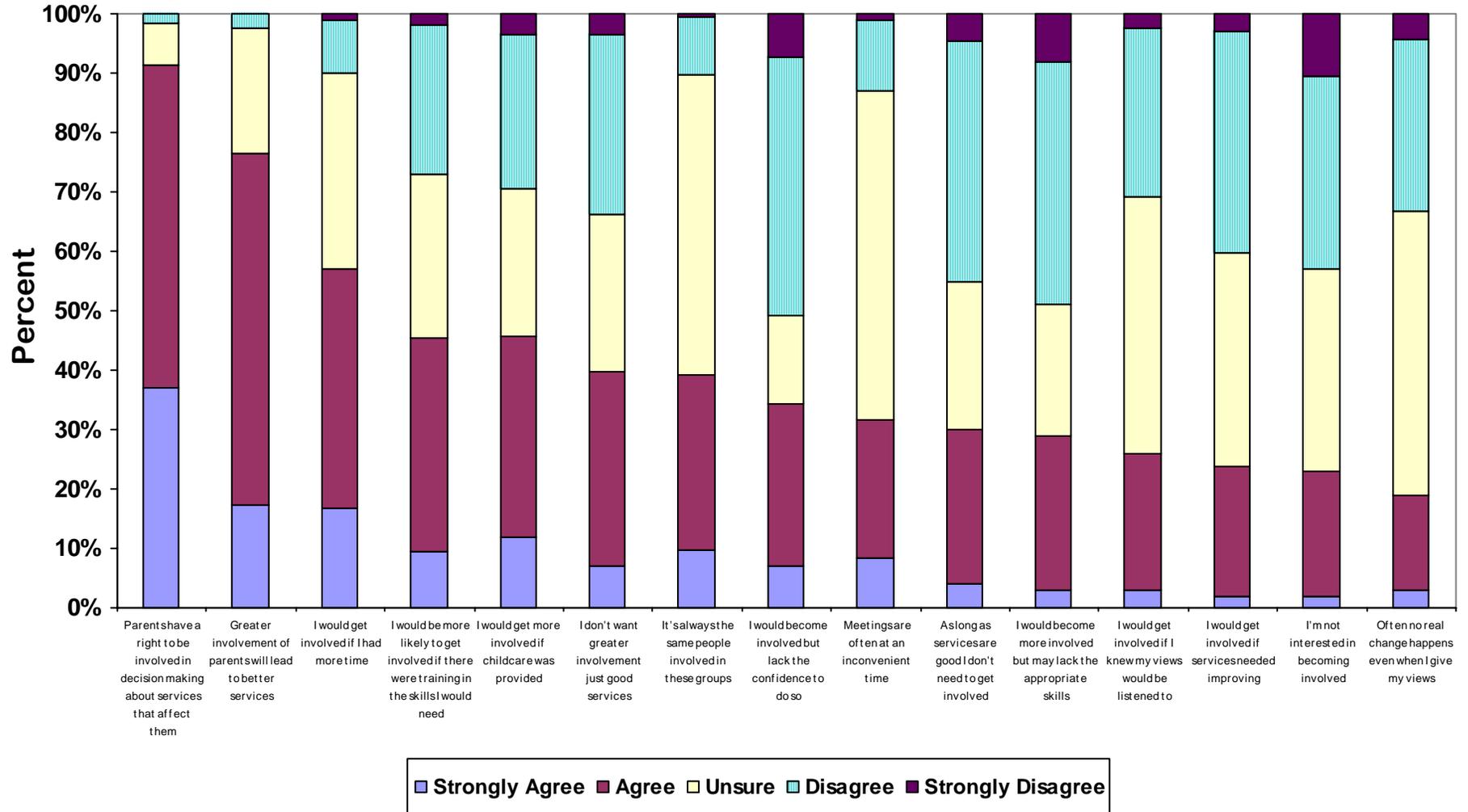
Base: 188

- 5.14 The research also looked at what might happen if particular barriers were reduced. 45.5% of respondents reported that they would be more likely to get involved if childcare was provided, whilst 45.3% would be more likely to get involved if there was training in the skills they would need.

#### Factors influencing Participation

- 5.15 In addition to the barriers noted above, a range of factors may influence participation. The chart on the following page shows a range of findings regarding the extent to which different factors can influence participation. In particular, a large percentage of respondents (91.3%) reported that parents have a right to be involved in decision-making about services that affect them. Also, the graph illustrates the difference between the large number of parents that recognise the benefit of involvement for improving services compared to the smaller number that would get involved if services needed improving.

**Figure 8: Barriers and factors influencing participation**



## Non-response Survey

- 5.16 21 non-response surveys were returned out of a possible 100, giving a response rate of 21%. Responders to the non-response survey selected reasons from a list to indicate why they did not return a questionnaire. Respondents could choose from a number of reasons for non-response any that applied. In general, respondents tended to choose one answer and in total 22 reasons were given for non-response. The findings have been presented as frequencies as a result of the low numbers involved. Table 5 shows the results of this non-response survey.

**Table 5: Reasons for Non-response**

Reasons for Non-response	Frequency
I didn't find time to complete it	6
I never received the questionnaire	5
I don't have any young children	3
I did send the questionnaire back	3
Other*	2
Questionnaire was too complicated	1
I didn't feel it was relevant to me	1
I don't like filling in questionnaires	1
I didn't want to get involved, so I didn't complete it	0
Questionnaire was too long	0

\*Responses received under this category included 'destroyed by my young child' and 'never had any response from last questionnaire I filled in'

*Base: 22*

## 6 Staff Perspectives on Participation

- 6.1 Depth interviews took place with five staff from a range of different professional roles within the Sure Start programme. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 ½ hours. The themes and concepts emerging from the data are discussed in the section below.

### Definitions of Participation and Involvement

- 6.2 A range of different interpretations of participation and involvement were evident throughout the interviews. Staff used the terms participation and involvement interchangeably throughout the interviews. Participation was seen as something that could take place at many levels from simply using a group, to consultation about a person's viewpoint right through to taking budget decisions within the programme.

*'...one of the definitions is about having a share...it's not so much about taking part it's about having a share ...' (2)*

*'it's an opportunity for all the partners involved to...make decisions on an equal a footing as possible....there is a whole process of empowerment which goes with that....(and) in theory everyone's view is as valid as everyone else's.' (1)*

### Opportunities for Involvement

- 6.3 Parents can participate within the programme in many ways. Staff discussed how parents became involved in the process of recruiting staff, attending meetings and organising events. Some staff noted that becoming involved as a user of services was one way in which parents could participate within the programme.

### Pathways for Participants

- 6.4 The concept of 'pathways for participants' was used by some staff to illustrate that although there are opportunities for participation in the programme, some staff would like to be able to provide structured pathways and participation opportunities for parents. Without such pathways, there was concern that potential participants might not benefit to the extent to which they could do, or would simply be lost as participants from the programme.

*'For parents who currently attend sessions, there is no structured way in which to move them on to another activity and to develop them. These parents are willing and I am concerned that they will get left to one side or that the programme will lose these parents...' (3)*

## **Outcomes of Participation**

- 6.5 The interviews explored the perceived outcomes of participation. Staff noted a number of outcomes that they expected to see, or had seen as a result of parent participation within the programme.

### Responsive Services

- 6.6 One prominent topic in the interviews was the idea that parent participation could lead to more responsive services for parents. Many staff saw participation as giving parents the opportunity to shape and improve services. Parents were seen as more likely to use services that they had been able to influence and shape.

*'It's an opportunity for parents to influence and become involved in influencing services.'* (5)

*'I think we are going to get a better response to anything that you do, to anything that you set up if it's what the parents are wanting...they are going to be more enthusiastic about it if it comes from them.'* (4)

- 6.7 However, one member of staff felt that it was not parent participation which was the most important element in improving services but the resources that were available to do so. This member of staff felt that if services were adequately resourced then that would drive the improvement of services more than parent participation.

*'Most professions want to offer a good service that is responsive to need – it is more about having the resources to offer a good service rather than parents which then lead to a good service.'* (5)

### Individual Development

- 6.8 Another important outcome of participation mentioned by all members of staff concerned individual development. Parent participation was seen as an important way in which parents could develop skills and confidence to enable them to take up new opportunities both inside and outside of the programme. An important first step was seen as valuing parent's contributions and raising self-esteem and confidence.

*'...for some people it's the first time or experience of positively being listened to and of being recognised and valued and heard and just that simple one to one interaction is actually very beneficial.'* (2)

*'Raising their skills in lots of areas whether it's parenting skills or skills for going back to work, raising their awareness about lots of childcare issues...having access to lots of information that is hopefully useful to them and their family.'* (4)

6.9 There was a strong developmental ethos and reasoning for participation for many staff with the assumption that if the programme was able to raise parents' self-esteem and self confidence that this would lead to a range of opportunities and skill development for parents.

*'...once people's confidence starts to increase, people feel able to go on and do all sorts of other things and we see that with the management committee people going on to do courses... and they themselves say they wouldn't have dreamt of doing this kind of activity if it hadn't been for the confidence that they gain through being valued...'* (1)

Sustainability

6.10 Another element to raising confidence and skills for parents was with regard to the sustainability of the programme and to provide people with the skills and ability to tackle problems in their area. As one member of staff notes, a key outcome of participation is,

*'to empower parents, to help them find their own solution and to take action about issues.'* (3)

6.11 Another member of staff had a similar objective, to transfer skills to the community so that they may benefit in the longer term.

*'It's about transferring skills, knowledge, experience of doing these things and so we would ideally like to see parents who might get the experience through working with Sure Start in a few years might go on through a primary school setting taking more of a role with PTAs (Parent Teacher Association) and things...'* (1)

**Barriers to Participation**

6.12 A number of barriers to implementing parent participation were suggested. These split into three distinct areas and are discussed in further detail below.

**Table 6: Barriers to Participation**

Practical Barriers	Cultural Barriers	Developmental Barriers
Lack of time Childcare Continuity of parents	Gender Social Isolation Jargon	Confidence Experience

### Practical Barriers

- 6.13 There were a number of practical difficulties or barriers that might prevent parent participation such as a lack of time or childcare. In addition, the programme caters for a narrow age range and parents are less likely to continue to participate once their children pass out of the specified age range.

*'It is working with a group of people – (a.) who are very busy and (b.) have limited time given that they are looking after young children. Also the population is always moving – they will be interested in pre-school services when they have pre-school children – these people move on once children do.'* (5)

### Cultural Barriers

- 6.14 Next, there were a number of cultural barriers. Gender was one of these barriers. The majority of participants in the programme were seen to be female and it was felt that this may create a culture which deters male participants.

*'I don't know whether dads would be keen to get involved when the majority of participants are women. That's quite daunting for a man to come into any kind of group...if they are mainly women...'* (4)

*'I think we need to look at how we engage with men...I'd be interested to know whether men think it's for them or not...'* (2)

- 6.15 Other cultural barriers include 'jargon' and language used within the programme. Some staff also noted that families may be isolated, and the style of group that the programme runs may be something which is unfamiliar to some groups of parents.

*'...there are some families who are now coming to XXXXXX but that's been quite difficult to get them there because they are families who rarely go out, who rarely mix with anybody...I think there probably are quite a lot of families like that who don't have the culture if you like, of going to groups of any kind.'* (4)

### Developmental Barriers

- 6.16 The last category, developmental barriers, refers to knowledge and confidence barriers. A lack of confidence or self-esteem is seen as one way in which parents might be prevented from participating within the programme. In addition to this, a perceived lack of knowledge or skills may also act as barriers.

*'I think there is an issue about self-esteem really. If you have never been used to having your opinion sought or valued then if someone comes along and says 'what do you think?' ...it's really quite overwhelming.'* (4)

*'I think perhaps in terms of some of the financial decisions, parents aren't going to have skill or background experience...'* (1)

## **Levels of Participation**

- 6.17 The different levels of participation open to parents were discussed during the interviews. Staff described a range of levels at which parents could become involved in the programme, ranging from taking part as a user of services, being involved in consultation exercises, and joint or delegated decision-making.
- 6.18 Two interesting and overarching factors affecting participation emerged during the analysis. Firstly, that the level of participation achieved was dependent on the parents situation and circumstance. Secondly, that the level of participation deemed to be appropriate was dependent on the decision that was being made and for whom that decision had an impact. These factors are discussed in further detail below.

## Parent Circumstance

- 6.19 The data suggests that a range of different levels of participation are appropriate according to the individual circumstance of each parent. Staff described how the ability of parents to participate can vary according to how much time, energy and skills they can bring with them to the programme.
- 6.20 Parents are seen to have a range of different circumstances and this influences the level at which they are able to participate within the programme.

*'Everybody's different and they've all got different commitments at home as well, so some will be able to give more time and attention to it than others.'* (4)

*'Particularly for our families who may have lots of other issues they're not going to be able to commit themselves to anything long term that takes up a lot of time.'* (4)

- 6.21 Parents' needs and circumstances are seen to be key factors in participation and it is suggested that these, rather than an arbitrary yardstick about levels of participation, should drive the opportunities available to parents.

*'I think it is going to vary for different parents, I don't think they should ever be made to think that they should attain a certain level, I think they should be comfortable with the level at which they are participating with.'* (4)

*'There is no one size fits all, different parents have different needs. This makes it complex and difficult to plan participation opportunities. It also needs to be when the time is right for parents.'* (3)

### Nature of Decision

- 6.22 Alongside the influence of parent circumstance upon participation opportunities was the nature of the decision being made. In some circumstances, even if a parent had the skills and circumstance to enable them to participate within the programme, the level at which a parent could participate was dependant on the activity or decision being made.
- 6.23 A range of different types of decision-making were discussed which ranged from joint decision-making between parents and staff about issues and events within the programme, through to the full delegated decision-making with parents able to take decisions on behalf of the programme.
- 6.24 Central to the discussions about the level at which parents could become involved and participate in decision-making was the issue or area under discussion. Staff felt that certain areas were appropriate for delegated decision-making by parents, whereas in other areas there needed to be input from other representatives. The level of delegation for decision-making centred on two related factors. Firstly the extent to which the decision would impact on the community, and secondly the size of the budget being spent. Where the impact of the decision was small or involved small sums of money then staff were happy for parents to have (within some limited guidelines) delegated decision-making.

*'If it was something like the summer trips and perhaps it is happening anyway, they could be involved in the budget for that and the collecting of the money and the paying of the coach... if it were at a higher level where perhaps the decisions have more impact on not just parents but the wider community then it might have to be overseen by staff.'* (4)

*'None of the types of participation are intrinsically right or wrong – it is what is suitable for the decision being made...when it impacts on the rest of the community then there needs to be a system of checks and balances to ensure that the wider viewpoint is represented.'* (5)

- 6.25 This theme is closely related to the concept of representation and accountability which is explored in the next section.

### **Representation and Accountability**

- 6.26 The issue of representation and accountability stimulated a large degree of discussion within the interviews from which two main areas emerged. One of these areas related to the question of how many parents could possibly participate in the programme. The second area concerned notions about representation, who participants could claim to be representing and a 'typical' participator.

## Less is More?

- 6.27 The data suggests that there is a relationship between the number of parents that can participate in the programme and the level of participation. There was recognition that there is a limit to the numbers of people that can participate to any extent within the programme. It is likely that larger numbers of parents will only be able to participate at the ‘lower levels’ of participation, for example as users, or providing their views about the programme. In addition, staff noted that only small numbers of parents would be able to be involved at the ‘higher levels’ of participation in joint or delegated decision-making. This was seen as one of the tensions in trying to provide a participative programme for parents.

*‘...we’ve got 700 odd households so we’re not going to get participation from that number unless you have a postal questionnaire or something... that’s probably the only way we would get the views heard of large or significantly large numbers of parents.’ (1)*

*‘You cannot involve all parents. You can give information and consult with larger numbers of parents...’ (4)*

*‘I think that the government target of numbers of people on management committee is measurable but doesn’t really reflect the true value of participation. I would rather see small number of people involved in a meaningful way than large numbers in a less meaningful way.’ (5)*

## Representation and the Typical Participator

- 6.28 The notion of a typical participator casts light on not only those who currently participate in the programme, but also those parents who are less likely to become involved. It was noted that many parents who did participate to a greater extent were perhaps atypical and not representative of the wider community of parents. Staff recognised that there was a need to find participation methods that gathered the views of the wider and more diverse population.

*‘I think the danger can be that the more vocal parents come to the committee that are often the ones that are the most committed but aren’t necessarily the most representative of parents in the area and that’s a difficult one to crack...’ (1)*

*‘We are aware that parents who are involved may just be a vocal minority – that is why all decisions need to be made with the input of wider agencies.’ (5)*

- 6.29 Typical participators within the programme were seen to be white, young and female and confident to speak up and give their views. This is not to suggest that the programme does not involve other types of participant but that these currently make up the majority of the participants involved in decision-making.

## **Context of Participation**

- 6.30 References to participation were often discussed alongside the recognition that participation was sited within a definite context, whether it is the wider political agenda or other competing pressures on staff time. The context within which the programme operates influences the extent and shape of parent participation.

### Wider Political Agenda and Perspectives

- 6.31 Staff suggested that it was important that participation in decision-making was complemented by the knowledge of representatives from agencies who could provide a broad perspective to inform decision-making. As discussed earlier this is especially important when decisions are likely to impact on the wider community.

*'...people from various agencies can have a much wider view of things than parents can. In some cases you can encourage parents to see the larger picture...'* (1)

*'...there's already an agenda that has been set out by government and we are with the best will in the world saying to people we want you to get engaged in this agenda...'* (2)

### Other Competing Pressures

- 6.32 One factor which emerged was the competing pressures on parents and staff time. Competing pressures may mean that sometimes participation does not happen in an 'ideal' way nor in practice is it always given the highest priority by staff or parents.

*'Some people are probably just trying to get through a whole load of business...they're not looking to see someone shine or to see someone contribute...'* (2)

*'There is a difficulty sometimes in blending our wish list for participation with practical realities of time and workload.'*(3)

### Power and Information

- 6.33 A theme mentioned by a smaller number of staff was the context of power and information with regard to parent participation. It was recognised that although the programme strived to include parents on an equal basis, in practice this did not always happen for a variety of different reasons. It was seen as important that parents were provided with enough information to allow them to participate on an equal basis.

*'The fact is that people have got to have the information, they have got to feel that they are on an equal footing. There is a whole number of factors and if you don't address those it's very hard for people to participate in a very meaningful way.'* (2)

*'...people are not going to be involved in something they know nothing about.'* (4)

## **Facilitators of Participation**

- 6.34 During the interviews two key factors which helped to facilitate participation were suggested, a whole programme approach and clarity of aims and objectives.

### Whole Programme Approach

- 6.35 The interviews highlighted that participation should be part of a systematic whole programme approach if it is to be successful. Participation needs to be well co-ordinated, with staff across the programme working towards similar aims and objectives.

*'Participation at its best needs to be part of a systematic approach, needs to be well resourced and supported and planned to get feedback and to have skilled staff heading that up, but you need to skill all the staff in working effectively with parents.'* (2)

- 6.36 As part of the whole programme approach it was noted that it is important to keep participation informal and fun where possible. Some of the more successful elements of participation within the programme were seen as those opportunities that encouraged an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

*'It's about seeking out parents who perhaps have things to say but perhaps aren't going to be able to speak at the management committee and engage them in other perhaps less formal ways.'* (1)

### Clarity of Aims and Objectives

- 6.37 The clarity of aims and objectives were seen as an important area which could impact on the ability to work in a participative manner with parents. There are two interrelated ways in which the clarity of aims and objectives can impact on participation, clarity for staff and clarity for parents.
- 6.38 Firstly, sometimes the aims and objectives may be unclear. For example, if staff within the programme are carrying out a piece of participative work with parents around their views and needs, then staff need to be aware (but may not always be clear) about the scope of that piece of work and what is feasible in terms of finance and staff time.
- 6.39 Clarity of aims and objectives are also important when staff look to involve parents. It is important that parents are aware of what it is they are committing to, what the purpose of the exercise is and how long it will take.

*'They have to know that there are no strings attached – this is a piece of work and this is what it is and this is what you'll do and that's it finished. That if you commit yourself to this today it doesn't mean to say that it's ongoing and you have to commit yourself forever more.'* (4)

## **Tensions between Theory and Practice**

- 6.40 Although staff were aware of some of the theories about ‘good practice’ surrounding participation, it was evident that sometimes there was a tension between what appeared to be ‘good practice’ on paper and the practicalities of implementing ‘good practice’.
- 6.41 A number of tensions between theory and practice could be noted throughout the interviews and run through many different themes. Some examples of where this occurred are highlighted below.

*‘...it’s difficult because people have got different skills and some professionals have got more skills in some areas so I think it’s difficult sometimes for a kind of equal meeting for a decision to be made. That’s part of the inherent conflict...’ (2)*

*‘...there is also something about accepting that in theory, and it doesn’t happen in practice really, in theory everyone’s view is as valid as everyone else’s. (1)*

## **7 Discussion**

- 7.1 This section considers the results of the study and the extent to which the findings are able to inform the research questions for the study. Before considering the extent to which the data can inform the research questions, a critical appraisal of the research is presented to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

### **Non-response**

- 7.2 The results provide information about respondents' attitudes and beliefs regarding participation. The respondents in the study represent a particular section of the population within the Sure Start programme and the results can not be extrapolated to non-responders. Respondents may be more likely to be motivated to participate in giving their views and therefore to return a questionnaire. Non-responders in contrast may be less likely to choose to participate and have different attitudes and beliefs to that of our respondents.
- 7.3 The non-response survey shows that the most popular reason why non-responders had not completed a questionnaire was because of a lack of time. Other popular reasons relate to the postal system; a number of respondents reported that they had not received the questionnaire, and a smaller number reported that they had returned the questionnaire (and this had not been received by the researcher). It is interesting that non-responders are most likely to cite lack of time as their reason for non-response. A lack of time is an important reason why responders may not participate within the Sure Start programme. It may be that non-responders are therefore similar to our responders and may face similar barriers to participation.
- 7.4 There were few male respondents who returned a questionnaire. The findings therefore represent a predominately female viewpoint. It may be that this questionnaire, focusing on Sure Start services was perceived as a more salient topic by women than men therefore leading to a gender bias in the response rate.

### **Postal Questionnaires**

- 7.5 Using a questionnaire to investigate views about participation has been valuable as the study has been able to access the views of a wide range of respondents. For this study, it would not have been practically possible as a result of time and resource constraints to collect these views using other research methods. Questionnaires have many advantages; respondents may feel more anonymous than they may do in a face to face interview and therefore may be more likely to give truthful answers. In addition, respondents can complete questionnaires at a time when it is convenient for them (Gillham 2000:6). However, it is important to recognise that as well as particular strengths, postal questionnaires have a number of limitations.

- 7.6 Postal questionnaires may exclude responses from particular groups, such as those who may face literacy problems. Also, when using questionnaires as a data collection tool, the researcher can not control who answers the questionnaire, or in which order the questions are answered. It has been suggested that the order of response lists to questions may affect the answers that a respondent gives (Duffy 2003:1).
- 7.7 Lastly, there is no opportunity to clarify queries or misinterpretations of questions when using postal questionnaires and this may affect the validity of the research in that respondents may interpret questions in differing ways.
- 7.8 The sample may have an important bias with regard to a particular finding in the study. Postal questionnaires were a popular way in which respondents wanted to provide their views about services. The respondents who returned a questionnaire may be more likely to report that they like to fill in questionnaires and therefore become a self-selecting sample. The findings may have been different for this particular question had another data collection method been used.

### **Validity and Reliability**

- 7.9 Internal validity refers to whether the research measures what it claims to measure, whilst external validity can be defined as the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other populations outside of the area under study (Denzin 1970:22). External validity is difficult to establish. The postal questionnaires were able to draw from a large sample and are therefore more likely to provide generalisable data. The depth interviews were based on smaller numbers and the sample was purposive. The aim of the depth interviews was to lend insight rather than to provide widely generalisable data.
- 7.10 Validity is more likely to be a problem for the postal questionnaire than with the depth interviews. As previously noted, with postal questionnaires there is no opportunity for respondents to clarify the meaning of a question. In a depth interview respondents often clarify meaning as part of an ongoing conversation and the interviewer can expand on questions if necessary to ensure that the participant fully understands the question. As part of the pilot process the postal questionnaire was administered to a small section of the population under study to ensure the questions were easy to understand.
- 7.11 Reliability refers to the extent to which a study's results are replicable (Hollaway 1997:137). The results of quantitative research are generally acknowledged as being easier to replicate than findings from qualitative research.

## Depth Interviews

- 7.12 The depth interviews added an additional and valuable element to the research. In particular, the interviews provided detailed information and context about how participation worked within a Sure Start programme. Without this element of the research, it would have been difficult to get a feel for the issues that the programme faces with regard to participation.

### What is the extent of participation and community involvement with regard to decision-making about local services and facilities in the Sure Start local programme area?

- 7.13 The data provided by the questionnaire shows that there are still a number of respondents who currently do not participate in the activities of the Sure Start programme. For those who currently participate in some way, they are most likely to have sought information from the programme or participate at a user level. Only a small percentage of respondents report being involved at a consultation or decision-making level.
- 7.14 Data from the interviews shows a similar picture. Although the programme aims to involve large numbers of parents, and this is happening at a user level, only a small number of parents are able to become involved at a greater level such as attending sub-groups or helping to make decisions about particular services.
- 7.15 Staff were aware of the tension between trying to promote the idea of participation, and in practice only being able to offer a greater level of participation to small numbers of parents. Staff recognised that they could involve larger numbers of parents but only at a much lower level of participation.
- 7.16 In conclusion, the programme is successful in involving parents in a wide range of different participatory levels, but recognises the inherent tension between involving many parents at a lower level of participation or fewer parents in what staff sometimes saw as a higher and more beneficial form of participation.

### What level of participation and community involvement with regard to decision-making about local services and facilities do parents and Sure Start staff want?

- 7.17 The majority of parents want to be involved at a user level. Consultation and receiving information are the most popular ways that parents want to be able to shape services and give their views. Consultation is also seen as an equitable way in which to involve parents. There are however a small group of parents that would like to be involved to a greater extent in joint decision-making and delegated decision-making about services and facilities for parents and pre-school children.

- 7.18 There is a desire from staff to ensure that participation is parent focused so that parents are involved in a level that is appropriate for them. Staff recognise that the level of participation that parents can achieve is dependent on a number of factors such as the impact that a particular decision may have for the community, or the wider political agenda that frames a particular decision-making process.
- 7.19 A particular tension noted by staff is the difficulties in involving a large number of parents at levels of participation which include joint decision-making or delegated decision-making. However, it is seen that a larger number of parents can be involved at the level of consultation and information giving. There is also awareness that the small numbers of parents who may want to become involved in 'higher' levels of participation may not be representative of the wider population of parents.

What expectations/outcomes do parents and Sure Start staff have about participation and community involvement with regard to decision-making about local services and facilities in the Sure Start local programme area? Do these expectations about participation differ between programme staff and parents?

- 7.20 Parents were most likely to see more responsive services as one of the main outcomes of parent participation. Nearly three-quarters of respondents saw this as an outcome of participation. A number of parents also saw increased confidence for parents to express views (54.8%) and parents as more likely to challenge poor services (48.9%) as potential outcomes of participation.
- 7.21 Staff also felt that participation could help to develop more responsive services. Equally important to staff was the idea that participation could help with individual development for parents allowing them to gain confidence and skills as a result of participating within the programme. Staff and parents also saw sustainability as an important outcome of participation.
- 7.22 Overall, the focus of participation for parents was as a way of developing more responsive services. Staff were more likely to talk about responsive services and individual development alongside one another. Parents did recognise the scope that participation had for parents to develop skills but this was not the prime reason that parents gave as a possible outcome of participation. It may be that parents would be willing to be involved at a greater level if they recognised that there were individual benefits to be gained rather than simply benefits in terms of better services for parents in general.

How would parents like to be involved in local decision-making about services and facilities that they use?

- 7.23 Parents felt that the fairest way that they could participate in decision-making was through postal questionnaires. More than three-quarters of parents responded that this would be a fair way to involving parents. Public meetings were also seen as a fair way to

involve parents (43.6%). Parents were less likely to see to see discussion groups and online voting as a fair way to involve parents in decision-making. It is interesting that parents have tended to see those methods which involve large numbers of parents as the fairest ways to involve parents in decision-making. This suggests that parents are aware of the tension between involving either a larger perhaps more representative sample through 'lower' levels of participation and that other methods may only be open to a smaller number of less representative parents.

- 7.24 The questionnaire findings echo the findings from the interview data. Staff face a dilemma in the numbers of parents that they can involve at the 'higher' levels of participation at any one time. In addition, it was recognised that the parents that took part at a higher level of participation were not always representative of the wider population of parents and were more likely to be more confident and pro-active. The typical participator was seen to be white, female, and confident and whilst the programme would not wish to deny opportunities for these groups of parents, it presented them with a difficult challenge about whose views were being represented by parents who are likely to be prepared to sit on committees and give their views.

To what extent are the assumptions and good practice guidelines about participation useful when considering participation within Sure Start local programmes?

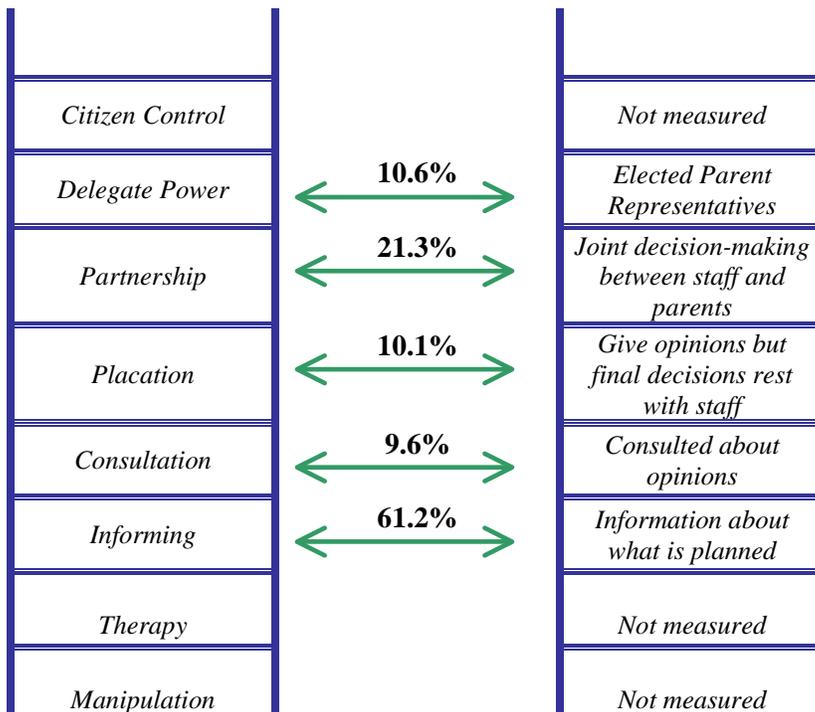
- 7.25 There are many 'good practice' guidelines regarding participation and staff spoke about many areas which matched those found in the 'good practice' guidelines. There is recognition from staff that there is an 'ideal' way in which participation should happen and for a number of reasons it does not always happen as 'good practice' guides recommend. There were a number of tensions between the theory and practice of participation. When a participatory approach was not possible staff often felt disappointed by this, but recognised that sometimes different tensions meant that in reality participation was not appropriate for every situation. Other tensions that staff faced in trying to conform to an ideal model of participation were competing demands upon staff and parent time. The wider political agenda also often determined the extent to which the 'ideal' model of participation could be followed.
- 7.26 Some of the literature around participation talks about the important of 'capacity-building' so that communities can participate effectively. Parents suggested that one of the biggest barriers to their participation is time rather than training needs. It may be that parents find it easier to report that they lack the time to participate rather than to cite more personal issues such as a lack of confidence or skills that prevent them from participating to a greater extent.

To what extent do current models and theories about participation help the understanding of participation and involvement within Sure Start local programmes?

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation

7.27 The study measured the level at which parents would like to participate in the programme according to Arnstein's ladder of participation. The following model shows the ladder, the corresponding concept that was measured within the study, and the percentage of respondents that would like to be involved at each of these levels.

Figure 9: Ladder of Participation Results



NB: Respondents could select all ways that they would like to be involved. The percentages above will not therefore total to 100 percent.

Source: (Arnstein: 1969)

7.28 The data shows that the Ladder of Participation is not a useful way to explain participation within the Sure Start local programme. When given a choice, the most popular way in which parents wish to be involved is by receiving information. Approximately one-third of parents would like to be involved at the higher levels of the ladder as represented by joint decision-making and elected parent representatives, but the majority of parents report that they would prefer participation methods that are situated at the lower end of the ladder. It is therefore important that the programme allows participation to take place at a level parents are happy with, rather than arbitrary definitions about what are good and bad methods of participation.

### Hirschmann's Model

- 7.29 The model of participation provided by Hirschmann was tested by asking parents how they would respond when faced with poor service. Hirschmann's model represents four different options that a participant could take. When the model was tested by providing four distinct answers about how a person could respond, a number of respondents either ticked more than one box, or ticked a box but added particular conditions when the action would or would not apply. Therefore although Hirschmann's model may provide some useful insight into participation, it may be too simplistic to define a response to a given situation as one of four options.

### Wilcox's Model of Participation

- 7.30 The model provided by Wilcox provides a useful insight into how participation works within a Sure Start programme. The model does not judge each level of participation but recognises that the level of participation that is appropriate is dependent on the stage of participation and who is involved. This model fits the data well and helps with the understanding and context of participation within a Sure Start programme.

### Wheel of Participation

- 7.31 The Wheel of Participation developed by South Lanarkshire District Council (2003) contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the different ways in which participants can be involved in the programme. In addition, it begins to consider different ways in which involvement can be understood. For example, data from the interviews show that involvement and participation are not always carried out in 'ideal' ways. The wheel provides a good fit with the data in that it recognises this element within involvement, for example, consultation is sub-divided into 'genuine consultation', 'customer care' and 'limited consultation'. One limitation of the model is that it does not consider the wider context of involvement and participation and for example, why 'limited consultation' may occur.

### Assumptions about Participation

- 7.32 Richardson (1983:67) notes three prevalent assumptions about participation. The first assumption is that people become involved because they recognise that they stand to gain from participating. Data from the study shows that staff recognise that parents can gain from the process of participating. The majority of parents see participation as a way to improve services rather than as a process for self development, although a small group of parents do recognise the value that participation can have as a tool for self development.

- 7.33 The second assumption that Richardson (1983:67) notes is that few people are interested in participating because it places a burden on their time. This assumption is supported by the data from the study, with a lack of time the most popular reason why people do not participate to a greater extent.
- 7.34 The final assumption that Richardson (1983:67) notes is that people choose to participate under certain conditions such as when services need improving. It is interesting that although 76.4% of respondents felt that greater involvement of parents could lead to better services, only 23.7% of respondents reported that they would become more involved if services needed improving.

### Consumerist and Democratic Perspectives

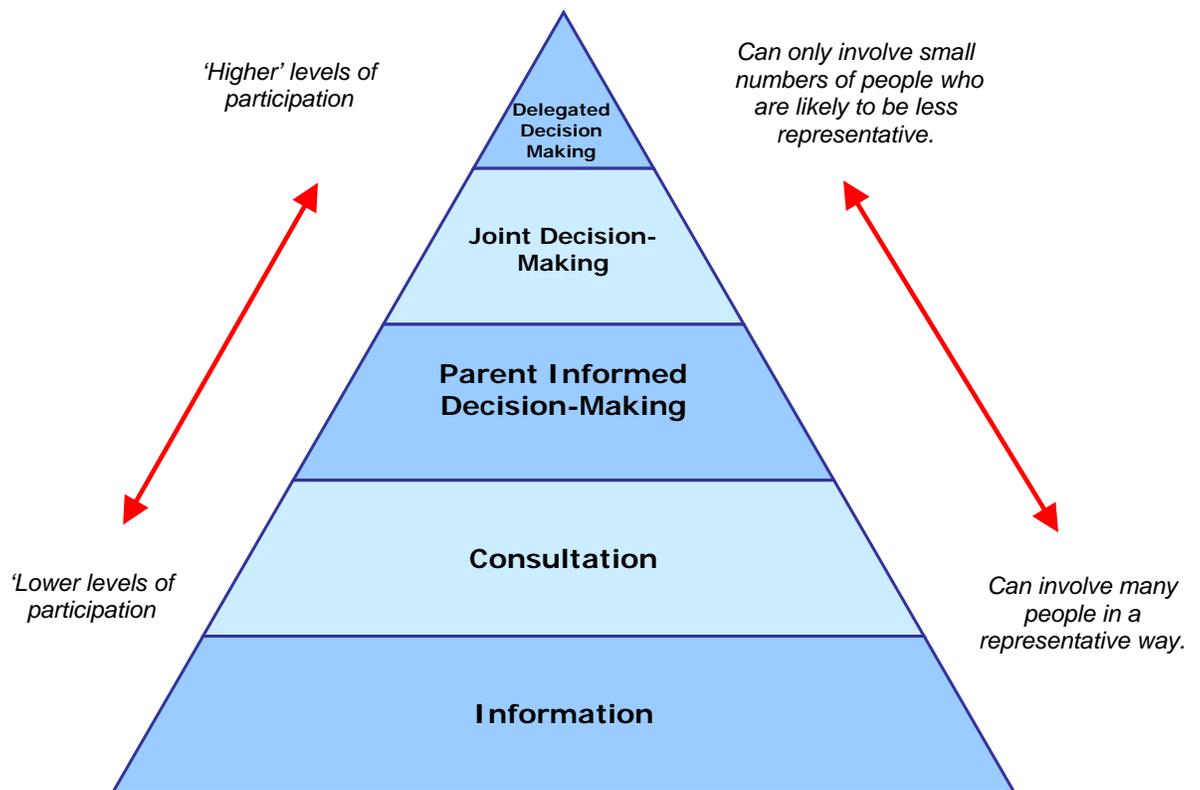
- 7.35 The final area which will be considered with regard to the theories about participation and involvement considers whether participation should be viewed from a consumerist or democratic viewpoint (Beresford and Croft 1993:8).
- 7.36 From the responses provided by parents there is a clear focus on participation and involvement as a consumerist concept. The popular conception of participation by parents is a consumerist one, as something that can improve services. The developmental nature of participation is recognised, but only by smaller numbers. There is recognition from parents that they have a right to be involved in decision-making. However, although parents may feel that they have a right to become involved, this does not necessarily mean that parents want to become involved. In addition, for the group of parents that responded to the questionnaire, practical factors such as a lack of childcare and lack of time were more likely to be the reasons that people gave for not participating than a lack of skills or confidence. As a cautionary note, it should be recognised that it may be easier to report that you do not do something as a result of factors such as a lack of time, rather than a perceived personal 'deficiency' such as confidence or skills.
- 7.37 Staff recognised both the consumerist and democratic purpose for encouraging participation and involvement. It is questionable, given the findings about the levels of participation and small numbers that can be involved whether the programme can fulfil the democratic and development element with the same efficiency and ease as the consumerist role.

### **A New Model of Participation**

- 7.38 In considering the models of participation that are currently available, it is clear that many models are unable to offer explanations about the complexities of how participation works within a Sure Start local programme. However, elements of Wilcox's model of participation and the Wheel of Involvement do fit with the data collected. In many cases however the models oversimplify concepts and ignore the context of participation.

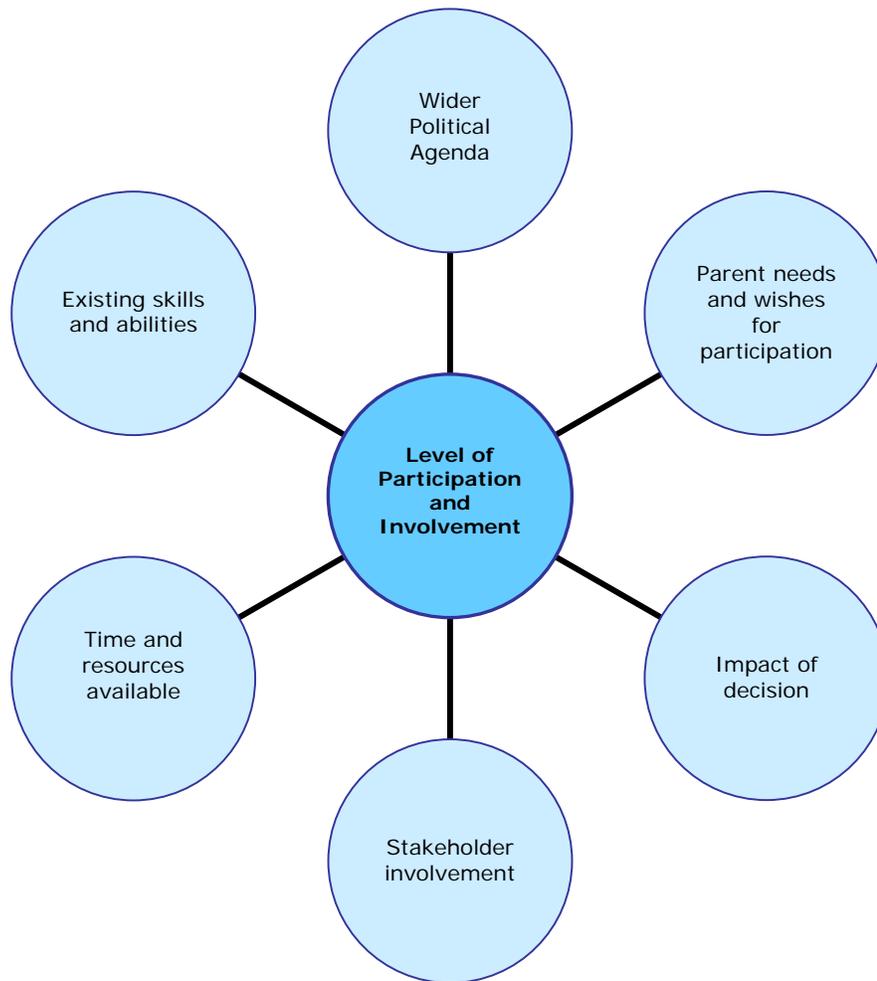
- 7.39 Parents within the programme have differing needs and commitments and therefore a range of different types of involvement and participation are appropriate. For example, a parent who works full time with three children in childcare will be unable to become involved in the same way which a parent who stays at home to look after one child with no paid employment commitments. The evidence provided by the data, (that all levels of participation and involvement are equally valuable), suggests that when considering a new model of participation, a hierarchal model of participation should be rejected as a useful way to understand participation and involvement.
- 7.40 Different levels of participation and involvement should be viewed as equally valuable and the needs of participators put at the centre of any model. It is clear that there is a need to move away from models of participation where 'higher' levels of participation are seen as a gold standard regardless of need and context about the decision being made. A model which ignores the needs and context of the participants themselves is far from the participatory ethos that it seeks to promote!
- 7.41 The data collected by this study has informed the development of two data driven models to promote a wider understanding of participation and involvement for this Sure Start programme. The Pyramid Model seeks to more accurately describe and understand participation and involvement. This model illustrates the relationship between the level of participation and the numbers of people that can be involved at each level. Some levels (for example, consultation) lend themselves to involving large number of people, whereas other levels (for example, joint decision-making) are necessarily limited with regard to the number of people they can involve. The different layers of the pyramid are of equal value. The pyramid shows the tension that exists between trying to involve a large representative sample and involving a smaller and less representative number of people to a greater extent.

Figure 10: Pyramid of Participation



7.42 The Pyramid Model cannot on its own capture a complete understanding of participation and involvement. To explain participation, it is important to represent the wider context in which it takes place. Few models have captured the context in which participation takes place. The context in which participation takes place determines the participatory opportunities that can be offered. The following model attempts to capture the important elements.

Figure 11: The Context of Participation



7.43 A number of factors provide the context in which participation may take place. The data suggests that level of participation is dependent on a range of factors which are discussed in greater detail below.

#### Wider Political Agenda

7.44 Participation takes place within a wider political agenda. For involvement at a decision making level, it is important to be aware that outside factors such as policy guidance and wider strategic factors may influence the decision that is being made.

#### Parents Needs and Wishes for Participation

7.45 It is important that parent's needs and wishes for participation can shape the participatory opportunities that are available to them. Parents may have other competing pressures which may affect the type of participatory opportunities that they can be involved in.

### Impact of Decision

- 7.46 Different decisions have different levels of impact. Where a decision is likely to have a large impact on a community, the input of participators may be curtailed by that of statutory agencies who are deemed to be able to provide a strategic input.
- 7.47 Where the impact of the decision is likely to affect only small numbers of parents on a short term basis, then higher levels of participation are likely to be made available to parents.

### Stakeholder Involvement

- 7.48 Closely connected with the factor above is the extent to which other stakeholders are involved. Parents may not be the only ones who wish to participate in the decision-making process. Where the potential impact of decision making is large there is likely to be an increased number of stakeholders. The level of participation is therefore dependent on whether it is possible to offer shared or delegated decision-making. For example, decisions about a new community building could potentially have a large impact and will often encompass the views of a wider group and other community members. Statutory agencies may be investing funds or have government guidelines to comply with, and the level of participation that parents can have in decision-making is more complex than many previous models would suggest.

### Time and Resources

- 7.49 Participation opportunities need to take account of the time and resources that can be dedicated to involvement. Staff and parents may have limited time and other competing pressures. This will influence the shape of participation opportunities

### Skill and Abilities

- 7.50 The opportunities that are available to parents may be affected by their current levels of skills and abilities. In practice, participation opportunities may only be suitable for parents with particular skills, such as negotiation skills and experience of speaking out in large groups. Although these skills can be developed, a lack of particular skills and abilities may mean that a parent may feel uncomfortable with a participation opportunity.

### How can the models be used?

- 7.51 The two models noted above can be used to help understand the framework within which participation operates. The models challenge the idea that it is possible to carry out participation in an 'ideal' way or to follow 'good practice' guidelines without questioning

and suggests instead, that good participation only takes place when it considers the level of representation that is necessary and the context in which participation takes place. The models can therefore be used as a checklist of important areas to consider when regarding participation in practice and rather than trying to impose 'good practice' guidelines without question or consideration, encourages the use of the models to consider and plan participation according to circumstance and context. Participation can then be shaped to the needs and circumstances of local context rather than the participation being driven by abstract notions of 'good or 'bad' participation.

## **8 Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 8.1 This study has used qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore how participation works within a Sure Start local programme. A number of main findings have emerged:

### **Level and Extent of Participation**

- 8.2 Currently there are many parents involved within the Sure Start programme at a user level. There was recognition that it was only possible to involve smaller numbers of parents at 'higher' levels of decision-making.
- 8.3 Parents within the Sure Start programme are most likely to want to be involved at the 'lower' ends of the participation spectrum. Only a small number show interest in becoming involved at a decision-making level. One of the main factors preventing participation in this group is a lack of time. The desire by a smaller number of parents to be involved in decision-making matches the programme's capacity and ability to involve parents at this level. The programme should therefore aim to provide 'parent informed' services and involve parents at a greater level where this is possible.
- 8.4 Staff within the programme were keen to provide a range of participation opportunities for parents. There was recognition that there was a tension between involving many parents at the 'lower' end of the participation spectrum or fewer parents at the 'higher' end of the participation spectrum. Involving a small number of parents at the 'higher' end of the participation spectrum raised issues about representation. There is no easy answer regarding participation and representation. The programme should consider new and innovative ways for parents to influence decision-making in large numbers, for example through community or audience voting, parent's panels or large scale questionnaires for key decision-making, where this is feasible.

### **Expectations and Outcomes of Participation**

- 8.5 Parents were most likely to see parent participation as a way of providing better and more responsive services. Staff recognised that parent participation was a useful way to help shape services and also valued the contribution that parent participation could make for individual development.
- 8.6 Although a large number of parents recognise that parental participation can lead to better services, only a small number of parents report that they would get involved if they thought services needed improving.
- 8.7 The programme needs to consider what they are looking to achieve through parent participation (for example more responsive services, development opportunities for

parents) and how that should happen. The views of all staff should be sought regarding parent participation to ensure that the team can come to a shared understanding about what parent participation is and what it sets out to achieve.

### **Models and Theories of Participation**

- 8.8 Many of the current models and theories of participation are simplistic and are unable to capture the complexities of participation in practice. The research challenges the idea that there is an 'ideal' model of participation that can be applied to any given situation regardless of context.
- 8.9 The research shows that the level and extent of participation that can be achieved is dependent on the context and wider framework within which participation takes place.
- 8.10 It is important that participation is driven by the needs of participants rather than externally imposed 'good practice' guidelines, or notions of a gold standard relating to participation. Participation can only be 'good' when it meets the needs of participants and considers what level and extent of participation is good given the local context and framework.
- 8.11 It is recommended that the programme adopts the models of participation from this study which have been informed by the experiences of the programme to date, to inform how parent participation is implemented and carried out within the Sure Start local programme.

### **Areas for Further Research**

- 8.12 This study has attempted to answer a small number of questions regarding participation within Sure Start local programmes. There has been relatively little research carried out in the area of participation to date. There is a real need for an evidence based approach to inform the shape of participation throughout a number of different government and public service initiatives. Much current thinking on participation is based on a 'common sense' approach rather than an evidence based approach.
- 8.13 Firstly, given that this study indicates that it is only possible to involve small number of participants at a higher level, it would be interesting to consider the impact that participation can have on the regeneration of local communities. Empowerment of individuals through participation is often seen as a lever to help regenerate communities (MacTaggart 2004). Research is needed to consider whether participation is capable of achieving this impact for communities and whether this type of impact for communities can happen given that 'higher' levels of participation can only be open to a small number of people.

- 8.14 Another area which was beyond the scope of this study concerns the evidence of what works in terms of successful outcomes of participation. For example, it would be interesting to try to measure the impact of parental involvement on service quality or individual development.
- 8.15 The areas for further research noted above would help to move the participation agenda forward in an evidence based approach. There has and will continue to be great emphasis and resources put into participation as a way of improving services and regenerating communities. Further research would ensure that future resources within Sure Start local programmes could be focused in an effective manner and according to evidence about successful methods and approaches to participation.

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# APPENDICES



## Parent and Carer Involvement

An important study is being carried out by the University of Plymouth and the Community Evaluation Unit in Taunton. The study aims to find out more about the reasons why people may or may not decide to get involved in groups and activities that take decisions about their local area or about things that affect them. The findings will be used to help develop ways in which parents/carers can become involved with decisions about local services and groups.

**SureStart**



Sure Start is an initiative that has been set up in your area to improve services and facilities for young children and families, and to involve parents/carers in decisions about local services. Involvement can mean simply going to a group, helping at a group, or giving your opinion on a group. We appreciate that as a parent or carer with a young child, you are probably very busy! However, we would really like to hear your views, whether you are involved with Sure Start or not, to understand more about why parents/carers may or may not choose to be involved.

Your help in telling us what you think is entirely voluntary. It is however important that we hear from as many people as possible to get a wide range of views and we would really appreciate your help. Remember, the information that you tell us will be stored anonymously and you will not be able to be identified from any of the findings that we produce. The number at the bottom of the questionnaire is for administration purposes only.

Thank you in advance for your time. If you would like to hear about the results of the study, please tick the box at the end of the form, and we will gladly send you a summary of the results. If you have any questions you would like to ask about the research, please contact us on 01823 344394.

Please answer the following questions:

### YOUR CURRENT LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

1. Thinking about Sure Start, to what extent have you been involved with the programme to date? (Tick all that apply.)

- I have not been involved with Sure Start
- I have contacted Sure Start
- I have used a Sure Start service, activity or group
- I have given my views about a Sure Start service, activity or group
- I have been to the Parent's Group (FIRSSSTOP) or 'Coffee Breaks' group
- I have helped make decisions at a Sure Start group or meeting
- I have helped to plan and run a Sure Start service, group or activity
- I have organised or led a Sure Start service, group or activity

2. You have told us about your current levels of involvement with Sure Start. Do you want to? (Please tick only one answer.)

- Increase your involvement
  - Decrease your involvement
  - Keep the same levels of involvement
  - Don't know what level of involvement I want
  - Have no involvement at all
- (please tell us why in the space below)

.....

*If you answered that you would like to have no involvement at all please go to Question 6.*

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT**

3. There are a number of different ways that Sure Start would like to involve parents/carers in the programme. Would you like to be involved in any of the following ways?

- I would like to use groups, services and facilities
- I would like to help run groups, services and facilities
- I would like to be able to give my opinion about groups, services and facilities for families
- I would like to be able to help decide how groups, services and facilities for families are run

4. If you are interested in giving your opinion or becoming involved in decision-making about local services, groups or facilities for families and young children, how would you like to do this?

- By postal questionnaire
- By discussing issues in a small group with others
- By attending a public meeting
- By being given an opportunity to vote on a number of issues
- By giving my views to a local parent/carer representative
- By acting as a parent/carer representative at a management group
- In another way (please tell us how in the space below)

.....

5. If Sure Start were thinking of setting up a new group or service for local parents/carers, at what level would you like to become involved?

- I would like information about what is being planned
- I would like to be consulted about my opinions
- I would like to give my opinions, but final decisions should rest with those who run the services, groups or facilities
- I would like to see joint decision-making made by parents/carers and Sure Start
- I would like to see elected parent representatives having power to make decisions about services for local parents/carers

**IDEAS ABOUT INVOLVEMENT**

6. If you had received a bad service from a local childcare professional (for example, staff turning up late or rude staff) what would you do? Please tick one box only.

- I would not use the service again
- I would raise my complaint with the service
- I would continue to use the service and not complain
- Not sure what I would do

7. Do you think any of the following changes are likely to take place if parents/carers become more involved in decision-making about local services? (Tick all that apply.)

- Services will be more suited to the needs of parents/carers
- Parents/carers will become more confident at expressing their views
- Parents/carers will be more likely to challenge poor services
- Parent/carers will develop their new skills
- I think very few changes will occur
- Other (please write in).....

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please tick the box that most closely matches your opinion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I would become more involved if I had time	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am not interested in becoming more involved	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Greater involvement of parents/carers in the planning and delivering of services will lead to better services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I would get more involved but I lack the confidence to do so	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I would get more involved but feel I do not have the appropriate skills to do so	<input type="checkbox"/>				
As long as the services provided are good, there is no need for me to get involved	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I don't want greater involvement, I just want good services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I would get more involved if the services needed improving	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I find meetings to discuss services are often at a inconvenient time for me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Often no real change happens even when I give my views	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I would have greater involvement if I knew my views would be listened to	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I would be more likely to get involved if childcare was provided	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I would be more likely to get involved if there was training in the skills I would need	<input type="checkbox"/>				
It's always the same people who are involved in these groups	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Parents/carers have a right to be involved in decision-making about services that affect them.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**PRACTICAL ISSUES**

9. It is important that a wide range of parents/carers are able to give their views about the way services are provided. How can Sure Start make sure that they involve people in a fair way?

- Hold public meetings
- Have a number of elected parent/carer representatives
- Hold community voting sessions to allow parents/carers to make decisions
- Hold online voting about important issues
- Send short questionnaires to get our views
- Hold discussion groups with a small number of representative parents
- Other (please write in).....

10. Do any of the following things stop you from becoming more involved in local services?

- Not enough time
- May not have the right skills to take part
- Lack of confidence
- Difficulty in getting childcare
- Simply not interested
- Don't hear about opportunities to get involved
- Meetings or opportunities are usually at an inconvenient time
- Don't always understand the 'jargon' at meetings
- Think very little will change as a result
- Transport difficulties
- Other (please write in).....

11. Would you be willing to stand as an elected parent/carer representative who would talk to others to get their opinions and provide feedback about services?

- Yes       No       Don't know

12. Please tick one of the following boxes to show your age.

- 16-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65 years plus

13. Are you:

- Male       Female

14. Before receiving this questionnaire, had you heard of the Sure Start programme?

- Yes       No

If you would like to hear about the results of this study please tick here

If you would like someone from Sure Start to contact you about becoming more involved in the programme please write your name and telephone number on the space below.

Name:

Telephone Number:

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.  
Please return this questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided.

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*Community Evaluation Unit, Dorset and Somerset NHS,  
Wellsprings Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7PQ Tel: 01823 344394*



## PARENT AND CARER INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

We recently invited you to take part in this survey by completing a questionnaire.

You were one of a number of people asked to take part in the survey, but we have not yet received your completed questionnaire. If you have recently posted it to us, please accept our thanks and ignore this letter. Rest assured that the information you supply will be seen only by our survey staff and no reference will ever be made to any individual.

We really would like to hear your views. Please help us by completing the questionnaire and returning it in the postage paid reply envelope we provided (no stamp is needed). If by chance you did not actually receive a questionnaire, or have lost it, we will gladly send you another. If you have any queries regarding this survey, please contact us on the number below.

Thank you very much for helping us.

Yours faithfully

Community Evaluation Unit

Dorset and Somerset Evaluation Service, Dorset and Somerset NHS, Wellsprings Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7PQ Tel: 01823 344394



**Parent and Carer Involvement Questionnaire**



We recently sent out a questionnaire asking for your views about parent involvement with children's services. We have not yet received a completed questionnaire from you and we have enclosed a spare copy in case you did not receive or misplaced the original questionnaire that we sent to you.

**It really is important that we get your views and we would really appreciate your help in completing this questionnaire. A pre-paid envelope is provided for your convenience.**

If you have any questions, or you would like some help completing the questionnaire, please contact the Evaluation Team on 01823 344394 who will be happy to help.

Thank you for your time and help

**Community Evaluation Unit**



## Introductions

- Outline purpose of the research and how the findings will be used – i.e. to inform parent participation in Sure Start and possibly other area based initiatives.
- Ask permission to tape record interview
- Able to stop interview at any point
- Do not have to answer any questions they do not wish to
- Information provided is confidential, however we may use quotes from the interviews, but we will ensure that these are anonymised and that you will not be able to be identified from any quotes.

### **Area: Understanding of the term participation Motivation for parent participation**

1. What do you understand by the term participation, when thinking about Sure Start programmes?
2. In what ways has the programme tried to involve parents?
3. Why is the programme trying to involve parents?  
(Probe: to improve services (i.e. consumerist viewpoint)  
for parents own development (i.e. democratic approach)  
parent's right to be involved (i.e. democratic approach)

### **Area: What is the level/extent of participation and community involvement with regard to decision-making about local services and facilities?**

1. What levels of participation do parents currently have within the programme?
2. In what ways do parents become involved or participate?
3. How many parents are able to participate in decision-making/running groups?
4. What examples are there of parent participation within the programme?  
Probe for detail and at how parents are participating (can then judge at what level programme is operating at with regard to participation models).
5. How successful do they feel the programme has been to date with regard to parent participation?
6. What are the reasons for the perceived success/lack of success?
7. If able to go back and start parental involvement and participation all over again, what might they do differently AND what might they keep the same?

**Area: What level of participation and community involvement with regard to decision-making about local services and facilities do Sure Start staff want to see?**

1. What level of participation and community involvement would they ideally like to see in Sure Start?  
  
(Probe for detail to see what level this is at with regard to the models of involvement/participation – information/consultation/joint decision-making /delegated decision-making/running services etc)
2. How likely is it that the programme will be able to achieve the level of participation and involvement that it wants?

**Area: What are the barriers to participation?  
What makes participation work more easily?**

1. What issues might stop you achieving the level of parent participation and involvement that you would like to see?
2. What difficulties do you face in trying to involve parents?
3. What things make it easier for parents to participate?
4. Are there any factors which might make it difficult for parents to participate?  
What are they?  
Probe: lack of skills/ understanding the language/ confidence  
lack of time/ time opportunities take place.
- 5.. Are there any particular groups of parents it is difficult to involve?  
Why is that do you think?

**Area: What expectations and outcomes do Sure Start staff/managers have about participation and community involvement with regard to decision-making about local services and facilities in the SSLP area?**

1. Do parents benefit from participation?
2. Are there any benefits for parents in becoming involved or participating in the programme?
3. What impact do you think participation will have on services?
4. Does parent participation have any impact on staff delivering services?
5. Does parent participation have any impact on staff managing services?
6. What impact does participation have for parents at both an individual level and as a user of particular services?

**Area: How would parents like to be involved in local decision-making about services and facilities that they use?**

1. How do you make sure that all parents are able to have an input and participate in the decision-making process?  
  
Probe – meetings/questionnaires/parent’s panel
2. Is it realistic to achieve participation from all parents?
3. How do you make sure that the views you hear are not simply those of a small group of vocal (and confident) parents?
4. Is there a particular type of parent that is likely to participate?

**Area: To what extent do current models of participation help the understanding of participation and involvement within Sure Start local programmes?**

1. There are many different levels at which parents can become involved. Are there any ways of involving parents that you would avoid or definitely aim for?
2. Are some levels of participation better than others?  
Probe: is full participation or delegated decision-making better than consultation/joint decision-making
3. What do you think about the different levels of participation?  
Are some better than others?  
Is more participation a good ‘thing’?
4. Is full participation (i.e. where parents run and make decisions about the programme) always appropriate? Why is that?
5. May provide a couple of different models of participation to prompt discussion and ask whether they fit with their ideas and experience of parent participation.
6. Is the level of participation for parents the same for all activities and areas?
7. Why should we involve parents?  
Probe: Is there a most important reason?  
What is the most important reason why we should involve parents?

**Area: To what extent are the assumptions and good practice guidelines about participation useful when considering participation within Sure Start local programmes**

1. What things have worked for you when ‘doing participation’?
2. What advice would you give to another Sure Start programme just starting up about parent participation?
3. Have you followed any guidelines about participation?  
If so how useful were they?/What guidelines did they follow?

If not - Where did you get your ideas from about what to try, what times to put on events, how to put on events?

4. Are there other issues that SST has needed to consider which is not covered by 'good practice' guidelines?
5. Have you tried any participation in such a way that is considered good practice which has then not worked?
6. Any other areas which the interviewee would like to discuss in regard to participation?

Thank you and close of interview.

Remind about how the data will be used and when the research will be completed.

# INVITATION LETTER

# APPENDIX 5



Community Evaluation Unit  
Dorset and Somerset Evaluation Service  
Taunton Deane Primary Care Trust  
Wellsprings Road  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA2 7PQ

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2004

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently carrying out a piece of evaluation for a local Sure Start programme in conjunction with the University of Plymouth, looking at parent participation and involvement in the programme.

As an important and key member of staff within the programme with regard to parent participation and involvement, I would like to arrange a time when I can come and speak to you about your thoughts and experiences of this area of the programme.

As part of the study, a postal questionnaire is also being carried out with local Sure Start parents to ask them about their views on parental involvement and participation.

I will telephone you in a few days time to see whether you would be willing to take part and to answer any questions you may have about the research. Of course, although your views would be very valuable you are not in any way obliged to take part in the research.

Any information that you provide will be anonymous. The results of the study will be used to inform the progress with regard to parent involvement and participation and establish future directions for the programme with regard to this area.

Yours sincerely

**Lynnette Chapman**  
**Community Evaluation Unit**  
**Tel: 01823 344305**



