



Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start: The First Two Years

A summary of the local evaluation
August 2000 – May 2002



What is Sure Start?

Sure Start is a national Government initiative for families with children under 4 years of age, who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Sure Start aims to give children the best start in life by improving their health, their social and emotional development, and their ability to learn, and by strengthening families and communities.

Sure Start in Rose Hill and Littlemore

Sure Start was established in Oxford in 1999, when a partnership of voluntary and statutory sector workers, and local parents, was set up to plan and develop the programme in Rose Hill and Littlemore. Creating a genuine partnership with parents, and developing effective collaboration between statutory and non-statutory organisations, are key elements of the ethos of the programme. Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start is run by an independent legally constituted organisation with charitable status. One third of the Board of Trustees are local parents. With the exception of the director and administrator, all staff are accountable to both Sure Start and the agency that employs them.



The Sure Start Area

The programme covers two distinct neighbourhoods in Oxford – Rose Hill and Littlemore. Deprivation and ethnic minority composition in these areas are average for a Sure Start programme: 10% of the population are non-white, two-thirds of whom are South Asian; 24% of families with children under 4 years of age had a weekly income of less than £125 in 1998. A total of 568 children under 4 were estimated to be living in the area when Sure Start was established¹.

The Evaluation of Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start

All Sure Start programmes are required to monitor and evaluate their progress. Rose Hill-Littlemore Sure Start commissioned a research team from the Oxford Health Services Research Unit to conduct an independent evaluation of their programme.

The researchers gathered data to inform the evaluation using a variety of methods, including interviews with local parents and staff, participant observation, and scrutiny of documentation. They have also made use of information collected by Sure Start staff about the number of parents and children using Sure Start services between 1st April 2001 and 31st March 2002.

As the evaluation was based on an action research approach, important findings that could have had an impact on the development of the programme have been fed back to the Sure Start team during the course of the evaluation. The essential principle of confidentiality of participants was consistently maintained.

Findings of the first phase of the Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start evaluation, spanning the period September 2000 to January 2002, are presented in full in 'Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start: The First Two Years. A report of the local evaluation August 2000 – May 2002'. This is a summary of the full report.

Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start: The First Two Years

A summary of the local evaluation
August 2000 – May 2002

Tameron Chappell
Jessica Schaffer
Sarah Stewart-Brown

Health Services Research Unit
University of Oxford
Institute of Health Sciences
Old Road
Headington
Oxford
OX3 7LF

The authors would like to thank Melanie Towns and Louise Harriss for their contributions to the evaluation, and Paul Gallagher for the design of this summary.

¹ Oxford City Council Household Survey 1998

Sure Start Services

During the first two years of the programme, a wide range of services were established or commissioned, adding to services already available in the area in a number of ways.

Some services were entirely new. Others, such as the Sure Start Health Visitors and Midwives, extended the capacity of existing services by enabling staff to work with more families, and to deliver traditional services in an innovative way. Sure Start speech and language therapy, for example, has been mostly delivered in the home.



Sure Start services running by the end of May 2002:

Drop in

- New child health clinics
- Support for Dads
- Lending & Recycling: safety and nursery equipment
- Playroom for children and parents
- Snack & Play sessions for parents and children

Groups

- Bumps to Babes: for pregnant women and new mothers, led by their midwives
- Café Club
- Check It Out: for parents to talk about the Sure Start programme and feed in their ideas
- Parenting Programmes: a structured course meeting for 2 hours a week for 10-12 weeks
- Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP): an early education programme providing weekly groups for parents that help them foster their children's social and cognitive development, from birth to age 5.
- Special needs support

Home visiting

- Health Visitors
- Home-Start
- Midwives
- Parent support workers: support in the home after birth
- Asian family support workers
- Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP): the home visiting arm of the group-based programme
- Special needs support
- Speech therapy
- Lending & recycling: to assess needs and deliver equipment
- Family Centre workers
- Family Services Co-ordinator

Other Services

- Community Events and Trips
- Crèche: parents can leave their children whilst they attend groups or other Sure Start services
- One-to-one counselling services: e.g., Relate for couple counselling and OxPIP, a mental health programme for parent and infants
- Training for parents in a variety of skills including food handling, computing skills
- Taxi service: for parents who need to take their children to appointments in other parts of the city

Service uptake

Sure Start Services are well used by parents and children in both Rose Hill and Littlemore: over 80% of 0-4 year olds living in the area have used Sure Start services at least once.

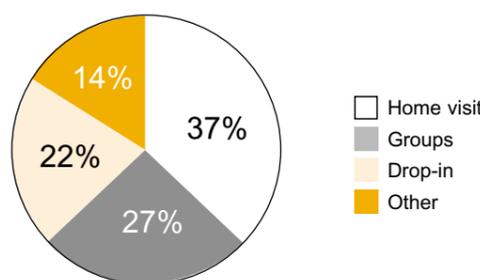
PEEP was the most frequently used service during the evaluation period. PEEP was operating in the area before Sure Start was established, and is now part-funded by Sure Start*. Of the wholly Sure Start funded services, the most popular were the drop-in child health clinics, and the child care facilities - the crèche and the playroom. All services are described in greater detail in the full report of the evaluation.

Uptake and service usage information is based on data held in the Sure Start Mapping Database. This database is still under development, and some of the data are known to be incomplete. They are more likely to be accurate for some services than for others. The information presented here is likely to represent a minimum estimate, making the high usage rates all the more impressive.

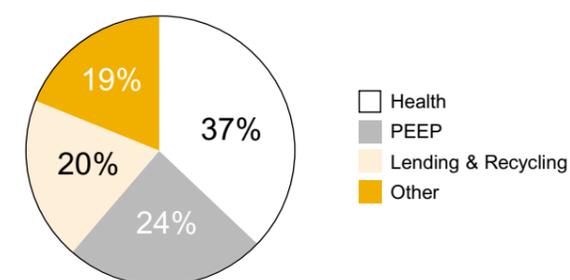
Buildings

A new Family Centre has been built in Rose Hill, and existing premises have been successfully refurbished in Littlemore.

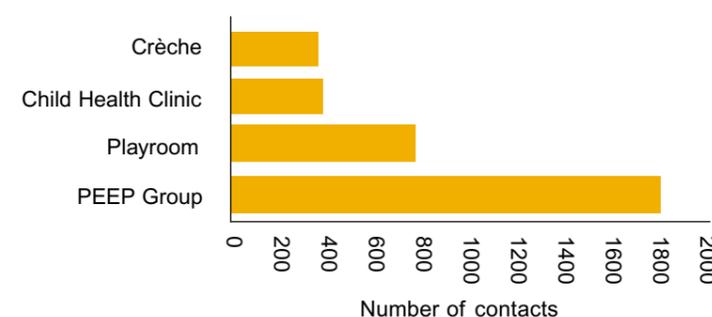
How are contacts with Sure Start distributed across services?



Home visits breakdown



Most popular Sure Start Services (01/04/01 to 31/03/02)



*The figures for PEEP should be viewed in exception as they include ongoing attendance at groups that started prior to the establishment of Sure Start

Parents' Perspectives

The research team interviewed 18 parents over a 10-month period. The sample was selected to include users and non-users of Sure Start services, residents of both Rose Hill and Littlemore, and members of different ethnic groups. These parents had 74 children between them, 30 of whom were under 4 years of age.

Parent interviews covered a range of topics:

- Their views about living in Rose Hill and Littlemore
- Personal support systems
- Use of local services
- Suggestions for service improvement
- Participation in service planning within Sure Start
- Services that they thought should be developed
- Their hopes for the future: Sure Start services and their community

Living in Rose Hill and Littlemore

Parents were positive about the social support available within Rose Hill and Littlemore, and showed a high degree of commitment to living in the area.

"We look after each other. When someone is down you pick them up and everyone helps each other. 'Lend us a tenner until Monday?' 'Okay' and then you do the same or else 'Have you got anything in your freezer' and you go 'Yes here you go until Monday or whatever'." June 2001

Concerns about living in Rose Hill and Littlemore focused primarily on safety issues and the unattractive physical environment.

"It's really just such a mess."

Parents were concerned about street crime, vandalism, the condition of open spaces and parks, racism, and the antisocial behaviour of older children and adolescents. They also spoke about poor housing; many families in the area were living in cramped conditions.

What is good about Sure Start?

Parents who had used Sure Start services were overwhelmingly positive about them.

"They gave me [a] pushchair and two fireguards, and [a] gate, stair gate as well. Because the lady, she came, she said 'You need a stair gate'. I said, 'Well, everybody

in the house don't want...'. She said 'It's safety for the kids'. Then I thought, 'Okay, I'll take one'." January 2002

"It has been a lifesaver because I think I would have got even more and more depressed. I got to the point where I didn't want [my child] at all. I wanted to like hurt myself and it is sort of coming here that really did....[The Sure Start Health Visitor] sorted it out because she arranged for me to go and see OxPIP, she phoned up and did all that for me which was like 'Wow, marvellous' that somebody that I don't really know would do something so nice for me, and that is how I felt, just so 'wow'." June 2001

Parents especially valued the health clinics & drop-in health advice, the Lending & Recycling service, and Sure Start's cultural inclusiveness. They were positive about all services they had experienced, in particular: PEEP, OxPIP, Special Needs support, parenting programmes, Asian families support, and organised trips and outings. Both Sure Start services and the volunteering opportunities that Sure Start provided were appreciated as a way of bringing local parents into contact with others in the community. It was clear from the interviews, however, that many parents were unaware that the services they were using were Sure Start services.

Problems and Obstacles

Parents found Sure Start services to be relatively problem free. Their criticisms focused on the restriction of Sure Start to the under-4s, targeting of some services to those on low incomes, and perceived differences in service funding and delivery between the two areas of Rose Hill and Littlemore. Obstacles to using Sure Start services included: lack of information about or awareness of services, social obstacles, such as shyness or preconceptions about the programme and people who use the services, and lack of time to explore available services.



"[At the Family Centre] they all said hello and sort of explained that you just drop in and all the rest of it, and the baby can play, and everyone was just friendly and chatty. [...] and then I went on the Family Links [group parenting programme] course, which was brilliant." June 2001



"[Sure Start] means a lot because [...] they help people a lot. There's more going on, like going back years ago there was nothing. There was none of the help and [...] the taxi service, the cooks. There was none of it." June 2001



"It's just somewhere to go [...] and it gets me out of the house. It means I can speak to adults, if I have got any problems I can speak to anyone down there [...] It is just knowing people are there. In whatever capacity you need them for, they are there." June 2001

Parents hopes for the future

Activities

- Clubs and activities for older children
- Indoor play and physical activities for under-4s
- Coffee mornings
- Fitness Classes
- Day trips

Services

- Drop in crèche
- GP Surgery
- Family Planning Clinic
- Career Advice
- Book lending
- Befriending network of local parents
- Courses
- First Aid
- Computers for children
- Swimming

Sure Start's Response to Parent Feedback

Many of the obstacles and problems discussed by parents fell outside Sure Start's remit. However, Sure Start is committed to listening to the opinions of local parents, and had already begun to address some of the issues raised in the parent interviews. For example, Sure Start is now exploring provision for children over 4, and has run taster sessions for parents to try out a variety of activities, from belly dancing to computing.



The views of Sure Start staff

31 Sure Start staff were interviewed between September 2000 and January 2002. A quarter of these staff were also local parents, most with children under 4. They came from a range of professional backgrounds.



Many staff had joined Sure Start because they liked its preventative approach, its community basis, and the opportunities that the programme presented to work in a new way. They believed that Sure Start offered them the chance to support families in ways that had not been possible in the past due to resource constraints within statutory services. Staff were attracted by the opportunities for the development of services through a bottom-up approach, for spending more time with families, and for involvement in effective partnership working between agencies.

Sure Start Successes

Staff were enthusiastic about Sure Start and highly committed to its success. They identified three particular areas of success:

Provision of good services

"I think that with Sure Start, Littlemore - Rose Hill will have some of the best health services in Oxford."
November 2000

Making a difference to families

"And even one of the ladies the other day she had been to that tea and play down at Littlemore and she said it was great, there was nowhere to take her little ones when they were that little bit younger and she said it was brilliant." November 2000

A new way of working, from increased collaboration to meeting previously unmet needs

"Everybody's working in a far more collaborative way. And because it's all working within one bigger service, rather than thinking 'I've got to talk to them about referring to this group or that group' [...] it's much easier [...] once you've got a relationship with a family to say 'Oh you know, if you're telling me you're concerned about that, how about we ask [X] to come in next time and we can have a chat about this?', rather than 'oh, we'll have to make a referral to this other woman....'" February 2002

Challenges for Sure Start Staff

Many of the difficulties raised in the interviews with Sure Start staff have been resolved in the course of the development of the programme. For example, during the early stages of the programme, some staff delivering existing services in the area expressed concern that they were being 'taken over' by Sure Start. These initial problems seem to have been resolved through collaborative working and greater understanding of Sure Start's aims. Early on in the project staff struggled with inadequate office space, but much of this was resolved with the opening of the new Family Centre in Rose Hill.

Some of the challenges that staff faced at the time of the interviews, particularly the pace and volume of their work, and difficulties with attending meetings, are ongoing.

Staff felt that time pressures had impacted negatively on service delivery, partnership working, and staff health and well-being.

"You put yourself under such tremendous stress that at the end of the day you know that it is impossible to get all this done in such a short space of time, and what you needed to do was to spend time getting a couple of things running really well. There is no time to do anything well, and then you just get this huge sense of failure because you are just tearing your hair out."
November 2000

The time commitment necessary to attend meetings was seen as detracting from the work they wanted to be doing, especially for part-time staff. A new meeting structure has had a positive impact, but finding time to attend meetings continues to be an issue.

"You can't find time to go to meeting after meeting, and I think one of the issues is how many meetings should we go to? Especially part-timers because you could spend your whole time going to meetings."
November 2000

Partnership Working

The partnership approach of Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start was viewed by staff as breaking new ground in Oxford. Successful partnership working for staff ranged from recording information in a way that could be shared across agencies, to the opportunity for understanding more about other worker's roles. Staff spoke positively about the dual management system that operates in Sure Start. This provides a strong support structure and promotes inter-agency co-operation. The challenges of partnership working at strategic level were evident from the beginning of the programme, when tensions between different agencies – particularly with regard to assumption of the role of lead partner – made the programme's development a difficult and sensitive process. The establishment of Sure Start as an independent company with charitable status has helped to avert some of the problems that may arise when a statutory agency or existing charity assumes the role of lead partner. Even though many of the early difficulties have now been resolved, ongoing and sometimes challenging discussions and negotiations with partner agencies have been necessary. Successful partnership working will be key to the effective mainstreaming of services that Sure Start hopes to achieve.

Staff's Hopes for the Future

Within Sure Start

- Continue & develop partnership working both within Sure Start and with other agencies
- A period of slowing down new service development, and consolidation of what has so far been achieved

Services

- Continue providing currently successful services
- Develop some new services, especially in Littlemore
- Use database information to inform service planning
- Extend Sure Start to the over-4s
- More training & support for early years education

In the Community

- Increased use of services, especially amongst those with greatest need
- Greater parental involvement in the development and management of Sure Start
- Establish more effective outreach, especially to non-service users, & alternative ways of consulting with the community
- Enable greater support for the community, from within the community



Parent & Staff Participation in Sure Start's Development

Staff regarded Sure Start as highly responsive. They have felt listened to and reported that the suggestions they make have been taken seriously. Parents also felt that their suggestions were positively received, and the 'Check It Out' group – a regular informal forum for parents to discuss Sure Start services – is well regarded. However, parent participation in other formal Sure Start meetings, particularly Board meetings, has not always been straightforward. Some parents found their experiences of early meetings disempowering because of the relative preponderance of professionals and the use of jargon. Initially, parents found that meetings were being held at inconvenient times of the day. As a result, Sure Start have implemented a number of changes to the structure of Board meetings including: the appointment of a local parent to the position of Chair of the Board, fines for using jargon, an open door policy, and provision of a comfortable & accessible venue with a toy box and no Board table. One parent suggested that training for professional Board members in inclusivity might be useful.

Other than expressing dissatisfaction with their experiences of Sure Start meetings, parents rarely spoke about their involvement in the programme's development. This lack of concern may be explained to some extent by the fact that many parents were unaware that the services they were using were Sure Start services. In contrast, Sure Start staff often spoke about their desire for increased parental involvement.

Successes of Rose Hill and Littlemore Sure Start

- Services that are highly valued, particularly in the way they are delivered – e.g., in the home
- Sure Start as an independent company with charitable status
- Dual accountability of staff to both Sure Start and their original employment agency
- Encouragement of parent participation, especially through the Check It Out group

Conclusions of the Research Team

The Sure Start programme in Rose Hill and Littlemore is a success story. A great deal has been achieved in the first two and a half years, and a number of challenges have been faced. Areas for future development of the programme suggested by the research team included: an extension of services to support social and emotional development; the development of more outreach services to access the 'hard to reach'; and further development of the monitoring database.

Future Research

The research team have now embarked upon the next phase of the evaluation, which will continue until 2006. This will focus on a number of broad themes, including social and emotional development, infrequent service users, counselling services, domestic violence, and community development.

This Sure Start is supported by local parents and community groups, Home-Start, Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre, Relate, OxPip, PEEP, the ISIS Centre, East and South Oxford Community Education Centre, Family Nurturing Network, Family Links, the Ark, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Community NHS Trust, Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust, Oxford University Health Service Research Unit, and Oxford University Department of Social Policy and Social Work.

Funding for this project was provided by Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start. The Health Services Research Unit receives core funding from the NHS Research & Development programme.



To obtain a copy of the full report of the first phase of the evaluation, or to find out more about the ongoing research, please contact Tameron Chappell at the Oxford Health Services Research Unit, Institute of Health Sciences, Old Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7LF. The full report is also available to download at www.hsru.ox.ac.uk and www.ness.bbk.ac.uk.