



# **Bramley Family Support Service**

## **Evaluation Report**

**November 2002 - March 2003**

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*(a parent researcher funded by Sure Start Bramley and working with the Nationwide Children's Research Centre)*

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## **Introduction and Acknowledgements**

I was appointed as a parent research worker in September 2002 to undertake this project, and saw it as an opportunity to learn new skills. I had some previous experience of carrying out research through studying for a diploma in health and social welfare at the Open University, but had never had a part in a piece of work as involved and challenging as this.

I have a three-year old son who currently attends nursery, and am expecting a second child.

I would like to thank the following people for all their help and support throughout this project: Kathy Shaw, Debbie Flintham, Lily Reindl, Clare McMullan (Hemsworth), and Rev. Ian Drummond at Bramley Baptist Church. Also the rest of the staff at Bramley Family Support- Louise Mouatt, and all the playleaders for keeping a closer watch over the children as I interviewed their parents, and helping to gather information from the children at Storytime; the Sure Start Outreach Team for their help in distributing questionnaires and answering my questions. I would like to thank all of the parents, childminders and grandparents who agreed to be interviewed and for giving their time, and the children at Storytime who gave me their opinions. I would also like to thank Chris Hall for helping me write up the interviews.

**Michelle Potts**  
**March 2003**

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## **Executive Summary**

### *Background*

Bramley Family Support is situated in Bramley close to local amenities. The project started from Bramley Baptist Church and later became a collaboration between the church and a charity named Spurgeon's child care. Sure Start became involved with BFS in 2000. BFS is open to people with pre-school age children from birth. Services are attended by children with parents, grandparents, carers

and childminders. A large proportion of people who use BFS live in the Sure Start Bramley area. There are some people attending who live in neighbouring towns and other areas of Leeds. Activities and groups on offer at BFS include a baby and toddler session 5 mornings a week, a crèche running 3 mornings a week, a pre-school session 5 afternoons a week, a toy library in one of the baby and toddler sessions, a mobile toy library, and a safety equipment scheme.

### *Method*

The views of some of the children at BFS were obtained in the Storytime session with the use of "Circle Time" and a tape recorder. A short group interview was conducted in a Tuesday Tots session with parents who do not use BFS to obtain their opinions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who use BFS, members of staff, and the Sure Start outreach team. All interviews were tape recorded. A questionnaire was designed for parents / carers who do not use BFS and was distributed via the outreach team and in the local library.

### *Research priorities*

The following issues were seen as priorities for this piece of research:

- The satisfaction of parents and carers who currently use the facilities at BFS.
- Investigation into possible reasons why some local people do not use BFS.
- How the connection with Bramley Baptist Church is perceived by parents and carers.
- The participation and sense of ownership of the project for local parents.

### *What people think about BFS services*

Mixed views were expressed about life in Bramley, though people were generally positive. People generally felt well informed about the activities taking place at BFS. The notices on the walls were particularly appreciated as effective ways of passing on information. Some confusion surrounded the crèche- who can use it and where it is. A high level of satisfaction was shown with BFS. The following positive aspects were mentioned: "the staff", "the rooms", "the level of organisation", "activities for the children", "toys", "the location" and the "cost".

Most of the people who were interviewed stated that they could not think of anything that could be improved. None of the following suggestions were made by more than one person- "more staff", "parents could talk to each other more", "more to encourage parents to participate with their children", "staff could participate more", and "the booking system at crèche could be looked at". Two people showed dissatisfaction with the waiting list for Storytime, and two people said that they would like to see more activities in the long school holidays.

Most people who were asked if people in the baby and toddler session talk to each other enough stated "yes". Friendships built up amongst attendees were mentioned, as well as appreciation of the fact that grandparents, parents and childminders seem to mix well.

Parents and carers generally feel that they can contribute by offering opinions if not to staff directly through other people attending the activities. Many people contribute by being volunteers, or plan to when they feel that they have more time to spare. Parents who do not want to be become more involved say that it is because of lack of spare time rather than a feeling of not having something to offer.

People felt that BFS is of benefit to themselves and their children, with many examples being given. BFS contributes to adult's lives by helping them have a break from boredom and the children, and

giving them the opportunity to talk to other adults. The greatest benefit to children was stated as helping them to become more sociable with one another.

#### *How people find out about BFS*

Most people found out through a friend or family member. The Sure Start outreach team and local authorities were also mentioned.

Examples of ways in which BFS have worked to encourage people to attend for the first time include keeping links with the outreach team, advertising in clinics and the local library, bringing the toy library into the community and taking on work experience students from a local school.

#### *Working relationships at BFS*

The Sure Start outreach team and BFS work effectively together to pass in information to local people about the projects that they both organise and run.

Bramley Baptist Church have fulfilled their original objective by bringing members of the local community together at BFS, though people who use BFS are mostly unaware of the links with the church.

Emphasis is given on supporting whole families, not just children at BFS. Ongoing work to encourage improved behaviour of children takes place through the policy of non-physical punishment and work on individual children. Parents have given examples where they feel they are being treated as individuals by the staff at BFS. Some local parents work as volunteers for the project- their contribution is appreciated by staff.

The relationship between BFS and Sure Start goes beyond the obligations set out by the service agreement- the manager of BFS sits on a number of Sure Start sub groups. Extra events are sometimes organised between Sure Start and BFS.

#### *Why people might not use BFS*

They might be a working parent, and the times of the sessions at BFS do not fit around their working patterns. BFS may not be in convenient location for some people. People may be experiencing emotional problems, such as isolation or depression, and having difficulty meeting people may act as a barrier. Being a single parent where everybody else seems to have a partner can be a factor, also financial circumstances and the number of children.

Examples are given throughout the report of ways in which BFS and the outreach team are working hard to counteract the effect of these factors.

## 1. Research Priorities

This is a small scale piece of qualitative research to obtain the views of staff and people who attend BFS.

The purpose of this piece of research was discussed with the Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager (7/11/02) at BFS. They were very keen to find out the opinions of parents / carers currently using Bramley Family Service. In the deputy manager's own words "*We need to know if we are providing a service that people actually want to use.*" They were currently receiving feedback from people currently using BFS and wanted to find out if this was representative of all parents / carers. This issue of obtaining feedback was also discussed in an interview with the playleader. She was concerned that people were reluctant to give negative opinions or suggestions for improvements. She said that she would be interested to find out if someone not working at BFS would receive different opinions from the ones currently being expressed.

The managers at BFS were also concerned about people not accessing services. They wanted to know why some people do not use the services provided and if there were ways of encouraging a wider cross section of the local community to attend the groups and activities.

Issues to do with how Bramley Baptist Church is perceived by people accessing the services were also discussed.

The participation of parents at BFS was also an issue that was felt to be of importance in a meeting between the NCRC and the researcher (5/11/02). It was decided that some research would be conducted to determine how far parents have a sense of ownership of local services.

## 2. Methods used

### *Obtaining the views of the children at Bramley Family Support*

The Staff at storytime have "*Circle Time*" with the children. The children sit in a circle on chairs and share special news like saying "hello" to children who are new to the group, or singing to a child if it's their birthday. The children are encouraged to share information with the group such as what they did at the weekend. This was a good opportunity to obtain some opinions from the children.

The researcher attended two "*Circle Time*" sessions and asked the children what they liked doing at storytime, and comments were received. The tape recorder was used, for the purpose of recording the children's comments accurately so that they could be quoted directly. The tape recorder also interested the children and they enjoyed hearing their own voices. This was a great help as they became very enthusiastic about speaking into it.

The children who were engaged in activities in the rest of the session were also asked what they were doing and what they liked. Some of them wanted to speak into the tape recorder, others did not want to and talked directly to the researcher or through a member of staff.

### *Group interview with parents who do not use Bramley Family Support*

An interview was conducted with the parents who attend the "*Tuesday Tots*" being organised and run by one of the outreach workers in Hough Lane Early Years Centre just over the road from Bramley Family Support.

This interview was undertaken quite spontaneously- the opportunity arose to talk to a group of people at the beginning of the Tuesday tots session before they and their children began to become involved in the activities organised for the afternoon. As it was important not to take up too much time of the session, people were interviewed as a group and the researcher decided that the tape recorder would not be effective with a group of 7 people, in terms of recording several voices accurately. Written notes were recorded.

### *Interviews with parents at BFS*

Some of the people attending the baby and toddler session were approached and information about the research being carried out was given by the researcher. To interview a representative cross-section, people sitting in every third chair in the room were approached. This was to avoid the temptation of talking solely to people who seemed more approachable and outgoing. Permission to tape record the interview was sought and it was stressed that confidentiality would be respected. All of the people approached agreed to be tape recorded, and interviews lasted 10-20 minutes. A consent form was signed by all interviewees. Some people did not want to be interviewed straight away and arranged to speak another day for various reasons- they were just about to leave early or they needed to supervise their child a bit more than usual that day. On some of the busier days, the level of noise in the hall where the session was taking place was too high to obtain a good quality sound recording. In these cases parents were taken to another room to be interviewed. The staff were very helpful and offered to look after the children while their parents had gone out. Two of the parents did not want to leave their children so they came too, with some toys to keep them amused.

Interviewing parents at the crèche proved a little more difficult, as they were leaving their children to do other things. Some of the parents had appointments to attend so interviewing them as they were taking their children to the crèche was not the best option. Some parents were interviewed as they were picking up their children afterwards, but again some parents had to set off straight away to collect other children from nursery. Interviews here were usually shorter.

Some of the parents at storytime drop their children off and set off promptly to do other things, and so did not have enough time to be interviewed. Other parents stay for a few minutes, particularly if their child needs time to become settled before they leave, and longer interviews were conducted with them.

The interviews were semi structured. (**Appendix i**) There were specific questions, sometimes asked in a different order so that the conversation flowed better. People were also given the opportunity to raise any issues of concerns and issues of their own, particularly in the first interviews as the relevance of the questions being asked was still being assessed.

#### *Interviews with staff*

The two managers at BFS, and one playleader were interviewed to find out their opinions of the project. These interviews were tape recorded. A list of questions were prepared beforehand and a semi-structured interview was based around them. (**Appendix iii**) Some parts of the interview were led by the interviewees, as they talked about issues that were of particular importance to them.

#### *Interview with two members of the Outreach Team*

A convenient time for the interview to take place was discussed with two members of the outreach team. This was an opportunity to tell them what would be asked later so that they could talk about some of the issues with the rest of the team, before the interview who were encouraged to make a note of them. (**Appendix iii**) The interview was tape recorded and semi-structured in the same way as previous interviews with the staff at BFS.

#### *Obtaining the views of parents and carers who do not attend BFS*

This proved to be a difficult part of the project. Parents who may have been suitable to be interviewed were identified by the Sure Start Outreach Team. These people declined to be interviewed. The researcher decided that an anonymous questionnaire was the best option to obtain people not using the services of BFS.

The evaluator designed a questionnaire to distribute to local parents and carers (**Appendix ii**) who do not use BFS to find out their views on about local services and if there are particular reasons why they do not use BFS. Questionnaires were given to the Sure Start outreach team and also some were left in Bramley library and the staff were asked to encourage people with young children in fill them in.

*Direction from the National Children's Research Centre (NCRC)*

The researcher had regular meetings with Martin Manby from the NCRC. Direction was given in person and over the phone to assess the progress being made and to offer guidance about the content and direction of this piece of research.

### **3. Background Information on Bramley Family Support Project**

#### ***Location***

Bramley Family Support is situated near the centre of Bramley. The local shopping centre with two banks, a supermarket and various smaller shops is a two minute walk away. There is a primary school and a library on the opposite side of the road. From BFS it is a short walk to the local park and a leisure centre about 10 minutes away. The area is well served by public transport- there are frequent buses to other parts of Bramley and the centre of Leeds from the local shops.

#### ***Background information***

*[Information taken from "The Bramley Baptist Project", written on 18/08/1994 Clare Hemsworth (McMullan)]*

Bramley Baptist Church consists of two large buildings built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church has a long history of caring for the community. In September 1990, the church agreed together on a vision for the next five years, and their priorities included providing for families of all shapes and sizes.

The church then looked into the possibility of appointing a Christian worker to help them with their vision. This eventually led to talks with Spurgeons Child Care. A project manager was appointed in summer of 1994.

Spurgeons Child Care is a Christian organisation that provides for children and young people from birth to 18. The main focus of the work in earlier years was running care homes for underprivileged children. There are currently many different projects running under Spurgeons providing help and support for children of all ages.

In 1994, Bramley Family Support was being run as a partnership between Spurgeon's Child Care and the Bramley Baptist Church to help meet the social, emotional and spiritual needs of families with children under 8 in Bramley. Four main priorities were identified by the project manager at this stage. Establishing a team of Christian and non-Christian volunteers, who are well trained and supported was one of them. Listening to people in the local community and working with other statutory and voluntary agencies was another. Re-assessing activity and keeping services up to date, and opening up the service without discriminating against people were also important.

Building links with local schools, health visitors and social workers commenced at this stage. This helped to obtain ideas about local needs.

Projects that already existed at the centre in 1994 were a baby and toddler group running three mornings a week, a village café selling low cost meals two lunchtimes a week, and a holiday and evening club for older children. Future activities proposed by the church included a parenting skills workshop, a safety equipment library, a toy library and expansion of the baby and toddler group and village café (later known as "Meet and Eat"). New projects proposed after consultation with people in the community included clothing sales, an educational pre-school, and visiting elderly people. Some of these projects became popular and thrived; others did not become established. The project continued for 6 years before Sure Start Bramley became established.

Bramley Baptist Church played an important role in the initiative which led to Sure Start Bramley being launched. Rev. Ian Drummond, who had been Senior Minister at the Church

since 1996, was released on a part-time basis and became a member of the partnership group which paved the way for Sure Start to be established.

### ***Sure Start Involvement***

*[Information taken from "The Bramley Sure Start Vision- Investing in children by partnership (2000)."]*

In the early days of the Sure Start Bramley initiative (2000), discussions took place between the founders of Sure Start, and local residents, agencies and other interested parties living and working in the area. The Bramley Family Support Project reported that they were facing constant requests to expand the services they provided. A child care survey was distributed via the primary schools in the Sure Start area and local needs and requested services were identified. A proposal for new services in the Bramley area was made by Sure Start. Development of further provision at Bramley Family Support to facilitate good quality play, learning and childcare was one of them. The provision would include toddler sessions, pre-school preparation, a mobile toy library and a shopper's crèche.

Capital investment was provided by Sure Start to adapt the Bramley Family Support building. The adaptations included bringing the building up to full regulation standards, giving better disabled access and improving the facilities. Work was carried out at a cost of £84,000. Two-thirds of this sum (£56,000) was contributed by Sure Start, and one-third (£28,000) by Bramley Baptist Church.

A service level agreement was drawn up between Bramley Family Support and Sure Start Bramley.

The services provided by BFS are:

- A baby and toddler group running five mornings a week.
- A crèche service running three mornings a week.
- A pre-school nursery session for children aged two-and-a-half to five years, five afternoons a week.
- A mobile toy library, and also a toy library based at one of the baby and toddler group sessions.
- A safety equipment scheme offering parents equipment for their homes at a subsidised price.

BFS was also running a "*Meet and Eat*" session, one lunchtime a week, providing low cost meals. This was not in the service agreement with Sure Start but was used by some of the people attending other activities at the time the evaluation was carried out.

### ***The activities at Bramley Family Support***

#### ***Bramley Family Support Baby and toddler group***

The baby and toddler group is held in a large upstairs hall. The walls are painted in bright colours, and the atmosphere is lively and welcoming. At half past nine when the researcher arrived there were about ten adults- three of them staff, with around a dozen children. In the following half hour more parents, childminders, grandparents and children arrive, and the seats in the room placed in an arc at one side of the room begin to fill. There were various activities for the children spread out around the hall- a messy area with painting and sticking,

a small soft area for babies, tents, jigsaws, small world activities and toys to ride on. There is a wide variety of toys and activities, and plenty for the children to choose from. This is a large room, and there is an abundance of space.

There is a general feeling of liveliness and activity in the room- some adults are sitting and chatting happily to other people, some are playing with the children, particularly with painting and jigsaws. Some of the children are well away from their carers playing confidently; others (particularly the younger ones) are sitting on adults' knees or playing close to them. There seems to be a good mix of mums of different ages, childminders and grandparents- though there was just one male adult in the room.

### *Bramley Family Support crèche*

The crèche runs from 9.15 until 11am. It takes place in a fairly large comfortable room with a carpet, a safety gate on the door and covered radiators. The researcher came in at 9.40 to find a quiet, relaxed atmosphere. The room was very warm and cosy despite the freezing temperatures outside. The crèche was nearly full on that particular day- with a vacancy for a child over 2. Most of the children attending the crèche tend to be younger than 2 years old. Music was playing in the background- songs from children's favourite television programmes. The activities available on the day were Lego, a pretend kitchen, cars, a baby area with a soft quilt and toys, painting, drawing, play dough and a rocking horse. Sometimes sand and water are brought out depending on the ages of the children that day. At 10am the children have a snack. A parent volunteer was helping a child to paint a picture, one play worker was comforting a baby, and the other was encouraging a young child to use the potty. Parents are given a pager during the session in case they need to be contacted.

### *Bramley Family Support Story time sessions*

Story time runs from 1pm until 3pm in the same room as the baby and toddler session. There was calming music playing in the background- sometimes classical and opera are played. The children hang up their coats as they come into the room on a peg with their names on. They put a sticker onto a cup for snack time later. There is a "fruit table" where children place fruit to share later. The room has a book area with a book of the week, a home area, an office, a painting table, dressing up, sand, water, modelling, play dough, cars and trains. There are posters with numbers and alphabet, children's paintings, collage and pasta pictures on the walls and on the soft dividing walls between activities. Staff were constantly encouraging and facilitating play- two boys were pushing pushchairs and pretending to shop- a playworker gives them a list of things to buy. Many of the children are working one or two to one adult. The topic of the moment is celebrations and two of the children are making birthday cards. Later, half the children go outside- they go in two groups to encourage children to mix. The situation was not ideal when the researcher visited as the staff had to check that the outside area was safe before taking the children outside. BFS were in the process of building a specific, fenced off play area. Later comes snack time- the children wash their hands and gather round the table with their own cup. The fruit has been chopped up and the milk jug has a lid on and the children pour their own milk and help themselves to fruit. The children also have "*Circle Time*" - a chance for the children to sit down together.

### *The Toy library*

As well as being mobile with the Sure Start minibus, the toy library is based in the baby and toddler session on a Thursday mornings. A book with photographs of all the toys is available for people to browse through in the session.

### *Safety equipment scheme*

This project is still in its infancy. It aims to provide affordable safety equipment for parents with young children such as fire guards and safety gates. The costs to the parents will be means

tested. A similar safety equipment loan scheme was considered several years before, but had to be abandoned through difficulties with insurance and storing items.

### *Meet and Eat*

This project was not part of the service agreement with Sure Start at the time the research was carried out. Meet and Eat was a community café at BFS where people could eat low cost, home cooked food. At the time the research was commissioned Bramley Family Support was running a weekly lunchtime session, supported by volunteers from the Church.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Who uses Bramley Family Support?**

Bramley Family Support is used at least once by around 100 families each month. The facilities are open to anyone- working and non-working parents. Children also attend with parents, grandparents, carers or childminders. They do not have to live in the Bramley Sure Start area, but most of the families attending do. Some live in neighbouring areas such as Armley, Pudsey and Farsley. One of the parents interviewed by the researcher travels to BFS from a different part of Leeds. In interviews with 25 people who use BFS, the following information was gathered.

The following table shows where people attending BFS who were approached for an interview lived:

**Table (1)**  
**Where people live by numbers of those interviewed**

<b>Bramley</b>	19
<b>A neighbouring town</b>	5
<b>Live elsewhere</b>	1

**Table 2** below shows the length of time that interviewees had been using BFS:

**Table (2)**  
**The length of time that the interviewees had been using BFS**

<b>Less than 6 months</b>	11
<b>Between 6 months and a year</b>	5
<b>Longer than a year</b>	9

The table below shows how people approached to be interviewed were related to the child(ren) they attended with:

**Table (3)**  
**Who the interviewees were**

<b>Parent</b>	18
<b>Grandparent</b>	5
<b>Childminder</b>	2

Bramley Family Support Project sends information about the number of children and families attending the project to Sure Start every month. The figures for August through to November of 2002 were obtained by the researcher.

*(The following Information is taken from monthly reports written by BFS management for Sure Start)*

The following table shows the number of parents and families attending BFS at least once in each month:

**Table (4)**  
**Numbers of parents and families attending BFS**

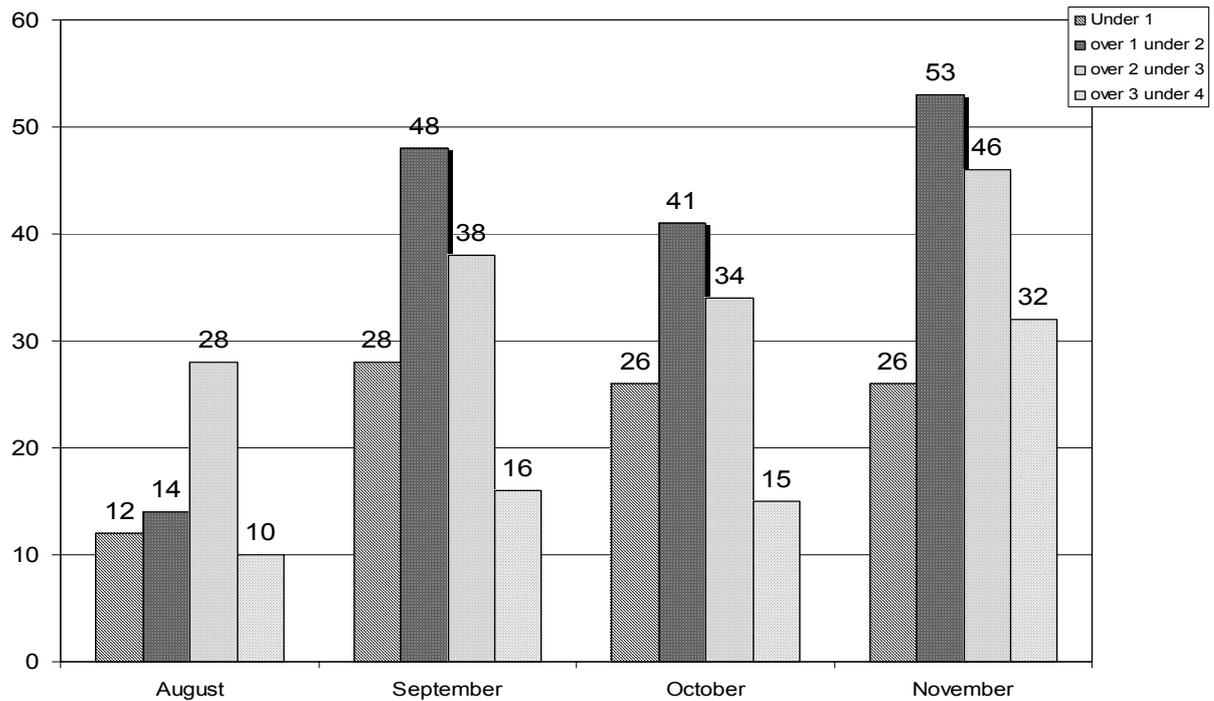
	<b>Number seen</b>			
	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>
Parents	51	114	101	139
Families	46	126	105	144

The differences in these numbers can be accounted for by the fact that some children attend with someone who is not their parent, such as a childminder or grandparent. The table and the chart below show the numbers of children grouped by their age attending BFS:

**Table (5)**  
**Numbers of children grouped by age attending BFS**

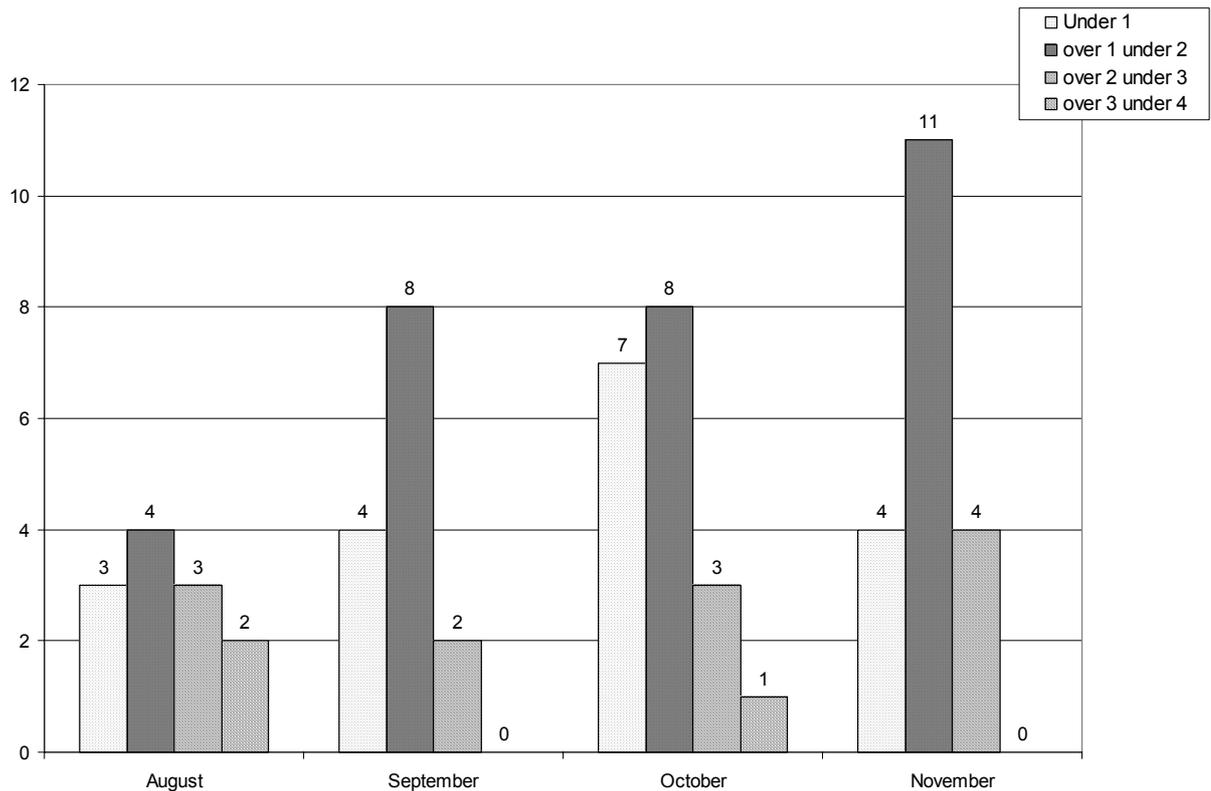
<b>Age of child</b>	<b>Number seen</b>			
	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>
<b>Under 1</b>	12	28	26	26
<b>over 1 under 2</b>	14	48	41	53
<b>over 2 under 3</b>	28	38	34	46
<b>over 3 under 4</b>	10	16	15	32
<b>Total</b>	64	130	116	157

**Chart (1)**  
**Numbers of children attending BFS- figures taken from Table (5)**



More children are in the 1-2 year age range than any other. Large attendance is also shown by children in the 2-3 year age range. The smaller numbers of over 3's may be accounted for by children starting nursery in a different place to BFS. The smaller numbers of under 1's may be accounted for by people finding out about BFS several months after their babies are born, or deciding not to attend BFS with a younger baby. **Chart (2)** shows the number of children attending BFS for the first time.

**Chart (2)**  
**Numbers of children attending BFS for the first time**



Children aged between 1 and 2 years account for the greatest number of children attending for the first time. There are also substantial numbers of children attending for the first time in the under 1 age range and the 2-3 year ranges. The lowest numbers of children who attend BFS are over 3.

The pattern of attendance is similar for first time attendees and attendance overall.

#### 4.2 Views about the services provided: Parents

*(The information in this section is taken from interviews with 25 people who use BFS).*

The 19 people attending BFS who live in Bramley were asked if they liked living in Bramley. The replies received are shown in **Table (6)**.

**Table (6)**  
**Views of Bramley residents when asked if they liked living there**

<b>Yes</b>	11
<b>Not sure / undecided</b>	7
<b>No</b>	1

People were generally positive, with only one person saying that they disliked living in Bramley. This was reflected in a questionnaire carried out in Summer 2002 at BFS where respondents had similar opinions.

Seven people had mixed feelings about living in Bramley.

*"I wouldn't say it was the best part of Leeds, but better than some places."*

Aspects of life in Bramley that people stated as positive appear in **Table (7)** below:

**Table (7)**  
**Positive aspects of life stated by people living in Bramley**

<b>Shops</b>	6
<b>Children's activities</b>	8
<b>Family</b>	2
<b>No response</b>	9

The availability of activities and facilities for young children were identified as a positive aspect of living in Bramley. Examples were given of groups being organised by Sure Start and BFS- showing that they are contributing to how Bramley is perceived by people in this interview as a place to live. As local parents stated-

*"I've started going to a few local groups and I'm busy every single day."*

*"There's plenty of things going on for the children."*

Respondents were asked whether there were negative aspects about living in Bramley. Their responses are shown in **Table (8)** below:

**Table (8)**  
**Negative aspects of life mentioned by people living in Bramley**

<b>Crime / vandalism</b>	2
<b>Drug abuse</b>	2
<b>Not enough for older children</b>	3
<b>Not enough affordable activity</b>	1
<b>Poor medical facilities eg GP, dentist</b>	1
<b>No response</b>	16

Comments received included:

*"I moved here a year ago [from another part of Leeds] and I think that the doctors and dentist are worse here."*

*"I personally think swimming is too expensive- I have two young children, so I have to go with my husband. It costs us nearly ten pounds and we might only be in there 10 minutes."*

People mentioned negative aspects of living in Bramley with a degree of acceptance:

*"I know there's a lot of trouble, but where I live I don't really see it."*

*"There's crime here, but you get that everywhere."*

Interviewees were asked how well informed they feel about activities and sessions taking place at BFS (see **Table (9)**) below:

**Table (9)**  
**How well informed people feel at BFS**

<b>Well</b>	18
<b>Fairly well</b>	7
<b>Not well informed</b>	0

Two people mentioned that they found the notices on the wall particularly helpful:

*“When you come here, there are plenty of notices about so you know what’s going on”*

There was some confusion the use of the crèche though. One person thought that they could not use it and it was part of another project. Another person attending the baby and toddler session said:

*“I thought this was the crèche!”*

She thought that some parents left their children in the session and did not realise that the crèche was in a different room.

One parent commented on how other parents / carers helped her to find out information about BFS.

*“I’ve heard that Storytime teaches kids how to start reading and would like to put his (her child’s) name down when he’s a bit older.”*

When asked what they particularly liked about BFS, numbers of people mentioned the following

Some people mentioned more than one aspect of BFS that they liked (see **Table (10)**) below:

**Table 10**  
**Aspects of BFS that parents / carers particularly liked**

<b>Level of activity for children</b>	9
<b>Toys</b>	8
<b>Staff</b>	17
<b>Room</b>	2
<b>Cost</b>	2
<b>How it is organised</b>	3
<b>Location</b>	6

*General comments received*

*“I wouldn’t come if I didn’t like it!”*

*“I like it very much”*

*“We’re used to coming here. We like the staff. It’s also handy for the shops” (parent in Storytime).*

*Plenty for children to do*

Nine people remarked that the children had plenty to do while at the centre.

*"I like the little sing-song at the end"*

### *Toys*

Positive comments about the toys were received from 4 people. The range and condition of the toys was mentioned. Interviewees remarked on their cleanliness and quality.

*"There's always different toys out... and they're clean and tidy...very clean"*

### *Staff*

Of the 25 people interviewed, positive comments about the staff were received from 17. Comments were made about how helpful the staff were. Staff were seen to be keeping on extra eye on the children by some people.

*"(The staff are) very friendly, approachable. They seem to be very good with the children. They're always keeping an eye out if you're not watching them 100%"*

*"I know you have to supervise your own children, but the staff seem to look out for them as well."*

The staff were described as friendly, approachable and good with the children.

*"The staff have noticed that we haven't been for a couple of weeks...that's good. They do notice you."*

*"I like everything really- the workers- they're friendly. They look after the kids well. They're really friendly" (crèche)*

Three parents at the Storytime mentioned that they found out about Storytime by coming to the baby and toddler session and particularly liked the fact that their children were already familiar with the staff.

### *Space available*

The amount of space available in the room for the baby and toddler session was commented on. Two people remarked that the children have plenty of room to move about and play.

*"They (the children) can just come and run around, play and be noisy. There's the space to do it."*

The cleanliness of the room was commented on by one person:

*"I think it's clean- he (my son) crawls around on his hands and knees and his trousers are still alright- I've been to groups where I've had to throw them away."*

### *Cost*

The cost of the baby and toddler session was stated as a positive aspect by 2 people:

*"It gets you out, and for the money you can't go wrong"*

A parent who uses the crèche for 3 of her children said:

*"The kids are always wanting drinks and sweets when we're out, so it saves me money!"*

### *Well organised*

A comment was received about the organisation and structure of the storytime session.

*"Its very well structured...they cover just about every aspect that they need in order in prepare them for school."*

A childminder commented at the baby and toddler session about how they could see regulation standards being met and a level of competent professionalism. One parent made the following comment-

*"There's plenty for them to do...and it's quite well organised."*

### *Location*

The location of the Centre was seen as a positive aspect by six people, and in some cases was one of the major factors in deciding to use BFS. Being near a primary school was a factor for some parents. The proximity to the local shopping centre was also seen as a good advantage for parents and carers taking children to Storytime and the crèche. They found that they could go shopping and pay bills while their children were occupied. Also three people appreciated the fact that BFS is a short distance from where they live.

### *Aspects of the service that parents / carers feel could be improved in some way*

15 people said that they could not think of anything that could be improved, some who did give answers had to think for a while and come back to the question.

### *Staff*

A comment was made about how some of the staff could be more involved with the children at the baby and toddler session.

One person commented that she would like to see more staff in the baby and toddler session.

### *Activity*

Issues to do with encouraging some parents to participate more in the activities with their children were discussed by a grandparent.

*"I think some of the mothers could be encouraged to do more with their children."*

One parent commented on the toys-

*"Most of the time they have a lot of toys out, sometimes they could do with having more out so the children don't get bored."*

### *Waiting lists and booking*

The system of booking the crèche was an issue for one parent using it for her children. Some dissatisfaction was found with the fact that sometimes there are not enough places even when somebody who had previously booked did not turn up.

A parent in the baby and toddler session said:

*"I'd like to use the crèche, but it's always full isn't it?"*

The waiting list for Storytime was commented on by two parents. They were frustrated because they had not been able to get their child in sooner, one parent saw a positive aspect to this-

*“The only trouble is the availability. They’re so popular that we had to wait a while to get him [her child] in. But maybe that’s a good thing because it’s a recommendation from other parents.”*

*Summer activity*

Two parents commented that they missed the frequency of the baby and toddler sessions in the long summer holidays and the following comment was received-

*“There seems to be plenty to do in the summer, like trips, but I’d like to see more toddler sessions”*

*Relationships amongst people using BFS*

The first 10 interviews carried out showed that two people were having some difficulty initiating conversation with others at the session. A question about how parents and carers feel about the way people in the session talk to each other was included in further interviews. The following replies were given:

**Table (11)**

<b>There is a good mix of people</b>	2
<b>People generally talk to each other</b>	5
<b>There are different people to talk to</b>	1
<b>I tend to talk to people with similar age children</b>	2
<b>People are friendly</b>	1
<b>We look out for each other’s children</b>	2
<b>People could talk to each other more</b>	2

*“It’s good that this session is for everybody...grandparents, childminders... not just parents.”*

*“If you haven’t come for a few weeks, you come here and there’s lots more different people to talk to.”*

*“We chat to each other (parents) and sometimes arrange a night out.”*

*“At the moment I don’t know anyone, but when I get to know people it’ll be better for me.”*

A mainly positive response was given with 13 people out of the 15 asked this question saying that people in the session talk to each other enough. Comments were made about how childminders, parents and grandparents seem to mix and get on with each other well. A comment was made about how people sometimes decide to attend on different days so that there are always different people to talk to. Also people with young babies said that others with similarly aged children tended to talk to people in the same position as them.

Two people stated that they felt that people in the baby and toddler sessions could talk to each other more.

*Level of Participation for Parents*

It was important to establish whether people attending the activities at BFS felt that they had a sense of ownership and influence, or if they felt that local services just happened to them and they had no way of shaping them and making their opinions known.

*Making suggestions and voicing opinions*

People were asked “If you had an opinion or suggestion about BFS would you be able to talk to the staff about it?” **Table 12** below shows their replies:

**Table 12**  
**Number of people who feel they could make comments and suggestions to staff**

<b>Yes</b>	15
<b>Not directly</b>	8
<b>No</b>	2

Typical responses included:

*“Yes- they’re always asking for different ideas.”*

Of the people who answered “yes”, many stated that they would find this easy as they think that the staff very friendly and approachable. Examples were given of incidents where this has happened.

In an earlier interview with the Playleader, it was mentioned that the staff put screens around the baby area to separate the younger children from the messy activities such as painting and gluing. Some of the parents voiced concerns about the older children knocking the screens over and the screens were removed. This was also mentioned by two parents.

Eight of the interviewees, including some who had not been attending BFS very long, said that they would not be able to talk to staff directly, but would be able to talk to a parent representative or some of the other parents to put their point across.

Two people said that they would not think about making a suggestion or comment, because they did not feel they needed to.

One person said that in order to obtain comments and suggestions from people that *“...a suggestion box would be a good idea.”*

Other comments received included:

*“I think the staff should talk to the parents more- maybe approach them and ask for suggestions.”*

*“I would speak to other mums and see what they think first before making a suggestion.”*

The following table indicates the replies of people when they were asked if they would you like to become more involved with BFS:

**Table (13)**  
**Numbers of parents who would like to become more involved in BFS**

<b>No</b>	16
<b>I am involved already</b>	5
<b>Yes</b>	4

Sixteen of the parents and carers said that they feel involved enough already in the project by attending groups and activities, or that they did not have enough time to be further involved. Five of the parents spoken to already worked as volunteers, parent representatives or help out in some other way. Four said that they would like to become volunteers when they have more time. A parent with a young baby said that she could see herself more able to give some time when her child was older.

Interviewees were then asked if they could think of ways that BFS has been of benefit to their child or children. The replies given are in **Table (14)** below. Some people gave more than one answer:

**Table (14)**  
**Ways that BFS is of benefit to children**

<b>Child less Clingy</b>	4
<b>More sociable with other children</b>	10
<b>More confident</b>	5
<b>Learning new skills</b>	5
<b>Doing something different from home</b>	5
<b>Gaining enjoyment</b>	5
<b>Improved behaviour</b>	1

People were generally enthusiastic about answering this question, giving examples where BFS have made a real difference to their children. Ten people out of the 25 talked about their children being more sociable, mentioning learning to share and communicate with the other children at the sessions.

*"It lets him mix, and see other children...lets him know that there's other little people like himself."*

*"They were concentrating on (son's name) behaviour because he screamed a lot, and they've helped calm him down and stop him screaming"*

*"She's not as clingy"*

*"He's with kids his own age and he's learning how to play and share."*

*"He's learning to sit down at the table with his drink."*

*"When she's at home and the older ones are at school, she gets bored, so it's nice to come here where there's other children."*

*"She's started learning songs and doing the actions."*

People were also asked if they could think of ways in which BFS is of benefit to themselves. Their replies are in **Table (15)**. Again, some people stated more than one answer:

**Table (15)**  
**Ways in which BFS is of benefit to adults attending with children**

<b>Talking to other people</b>	9
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<b>Getting out</b>	6
<b>Getting a break</b>	10
<b>Completing tasks e.g. shopping</b>	4
<b>Saving money</b>	1

The benefits of using of using BFS given most in these interviews are “*Getting a break*” and “*Talking to other people*”. When discussing what “*getting a break*” means, people at the baby and toddler session talked about how they liked having children occupied by the activity in the room so that they could have time to sit down and talk. Parents at the crèche and Storytime talked about having time away from their children to calm down and spend time doing something that would otherwise be difficult, such as have a haircut.

*“You can come and chat to other mums- have an adult conversation”*

*“It gives me an hour to do my bits of shopping” (Parent at crèche)*

*“I have a chance to get away from the kids and do my shopping and get my bills paid down at the centre (Bramley shopping centre)” (Parent at crèche)*

A parent at Storytime mentioned how she felt at ease leaving her daughter:

*“I’m confident they’ll ring my mobile if there’s a problem.”*

#### **4.3 Views about services provided: Children**

*Comments from the children at Storytime*

A number of comments were received from children at circle time when they were asked “What do you like doing at Storytime?”

*“I like playing with the cars.”*

*“...circle time”*

*“Painting”*

*“I like the bricks”*

*“I like making picnics”*

*“...playing with cars and the horse.”*

*“I like painting. I did a painting for daddy.”*

*“I like paint and cars”*

*“I like dressing up” (What do you like dressing up as?) “A bride”*

*“I like cutting” (cutting paper?) “yes”*

*“...cars and Bob the Builder.”*

Children who were engaged in activities in the rest of the session were asked what they were doing and what they liked.

A boy who was playing in the water showed how he could make the waterwheel turn round by pouring water in. *“Going round look”* he said *“Like playing water”* He mentioned the boats in the water and said *“Look- fish”*. When asked what else he liked to play with he said *“cars”*.

A girl was painting on a very big piece of paper on an easel, mixing the colours up on the paper. She seemed to be enjoying it a great deal and was enthusiastically waving the brush around. *“Do you like painting?”* she was asked. *“Yes”* she said.

Another girl was painting at the table and has just discovered that flicking the brush made an interesting pattern. *“Look- splashy picture”* she said.

A group of five children were playing with the wooden castle. The playworker was handing out figures to the children asking them what they would like to be. One boy said he wanted to be a horse, another said a king. The castle seemed to be keeping the children very interested and they were saying things like *“I’m the baddie”* and *“The king’s riding a horse”*.

A couple of girls were playing in the home corner. One girl was setting out plates and said that she was *“making a picnic”*.

Some of the children came back in from playing outside, and were asked what they had been doing.

*“What did you do outside?” “On bikes” “Are the bikes good?” “yes... I had the yellow one and I didn’t fall off”*

*“What did you do outside?” “Cars”*

The children in the session were very enthusiastic, were kept busy and stimulated and seemed to be enjoying Storytime.

#### **4.4 How the people interviewed found out about BFS**

People were asked how they found out about the BFS project in the 25 interviews that were conducted at BFS. The following answers were given:

**Table (16)  
How people found out about BFS**

<b>Friend</b>	11
<b>Family</b>	5
<b>Local Authorities</b>	2
<b>Outreach</b>	3
<b>Don’t know / cannot remember</b>	4

Most of the people who use BFS heard about the project through a friend or family member. Two of the people who could not remember said that it was because they had been attending for a number of years.

*What are BFS doing to encourage people in the local community to use their service?*

This was an issue that was discussed with the Playleader and the managers in interviews.

BFS has strong relationships with the outreach team - information about the work at BFS is passed on to families involved with outreach.

BFS advertise in the local library and baby clinic. Notices in the children's section of the library contain details about the work at BFS.

The mobile toy library is brought out into the community by using the Sure Start minibus.

BFS have established a link with Victoria Park Special School- they take students on work experience placements. This is of value to the school and some of its students, and also spreads the word about the work that they are doing. Parents with links to the school have attended the baby and toddler session after hearing about it at Victoria Park.

#### **4.5 Working relationships at BFS**

*The relationship between BFS and the Sure Start Outreach team based on interviews with Sure Start outreach and managers at BFS*

The Outreach workers keep the families they work with informed about the facilities on offer at Bramley Family Support, as well as other projects in the local area. They see themselves as advocates for the people they work with and give them unbiased advice and relevant information. They tell people about services funded and run by Sure Start and other projects. There were some examples of parents who found out about BFS through the outreach team found by the researcher.

One parent spoken to at the crèche was having difficulties coping with her son's behaviour as well as caring for her other young children. An outreach worker suggested that she make use of the Helping Hands Crèche to have some time away from her son and help her to cope more effectively.

BFS help the outreach workers in a similar way by facilitating the passing of information to people attending of BFS about the projects they run. Notices are pinned up around the building at BFS- an example being the Halloween and Christmas parties being organized at the time the researcher was being carried out. The playworkers and managers also seem to have a good rapport with parents and use this to tell them about the work of the outreach team. The Meet and Eat session was a very good opportunity for the outreach workers to distribute leaflets and chat to people using the service. The Outreach team also made use of the BFS building for organised activities and groups.

*The role of the Church*

(Taken from interview with managers at BFS)

One of the main concerns of the church is to encourage community development and to help and support local people. The emphasis is no longer exclusively focused on church attendance. The parents spoken to at BFS by the researcher were generally unaware of the connection between the project and the church.

*Participation of parents*

(Sources of information include interviews with parents attending BFS and managers)

One of the managers at BFS emphasised the point about supporting whole families- not just providing play for children. She saw their role in supporting parents as being a very important part of their work. This point was also made by the playleader, who stated that sometimes it is the parents that need particular help and support at the baby and toddler session, and that generally parents are overlooked by providers of services where something is being provided for the children.

Evidence of family support was seen and help for parents having problems with their child's behaviour at BFS have been observed. One parent attending the crèche had a boy who used to scream a lot. The workers at the crèche and the parent together looked at different ways of dealing with this, and he made good progress. As well as one to one work, the centre has a policy of dealing with behaviour in a positive way, ignoring bad and rewarding good behaviour. The idea is that parents are encouraged to by this approach when they see its effectiveness. Physical punishment such as smacking is discouraged, and this is made clear in the policy statements given to people who use BFS for the first time.

People were treated as individuals, and this seemed to come across in the way that the staff talked to the parents and carers. A parent gave an example in an interview. She attended the baby and toddler session with a friend and their children. They had missed a number of sessions through winter illnesses, and were very pleased when one of the members of staff asked why they had not been for a while and if they were all right. She said that she liked that fact that the staff seemed genuinely concerned and recognised them even though they had only been attending a few weeks.

Some parents worked as volunteers for the project, and were appreciated as a valuable asset. Two of the volunteers said that they particularly liked the fact that they were under no pressure to help out at BFS if it would be inconvenient. If they were having a bad day and did not want to attend that was fine, but they could still give time when they were able to. One of the parent volunteers attending the storytime session appreciated spending more time with her child and having some involvement in his learning. Another of the volunteers was encouraged to attend college and attained an NVQ in childcare. A member of staff started out as a parent volunteer, gained a qualification and now works as a playworker. BFS helps parents by giving them the opportunity to take a larger role in the project, increasing their sense of ownership and empowerment. The volunteers' experiences can also increase their employment prospects if they decide to enter work.

#### *Sure Start and BFS- not just a funding relationship*

(Sources of information include interview with BFS management)

One of the managers stated that she has a great deal of involvement with Sure Start, sitting on focus groups and attending meetings. She takes part in decisions to do with recruitment of staff. Some activities are organised jointly by BFS and Sure Start, just one example being a summer carnival in 2002. BFS make use of the Sure Start minibus as part of the service agreement to take the toy library into the community.

#### **4.6 Possible reasons for non take-up of Bramley Family Support**

Issues about why people might not use particular facilities were discussed with the outreach team in my interview with them. (**Appendix iv**) I also received 5 completed questionnaires (**Appendix ii**) from parents who did not use BFS.

##### *Working parents*

This issue was discussed with the outreach team. One of the outreach workers is a parent of young children herself and knows that activities taking place during working hours are not accessible through her own experiences. We discussed whether there was a need for evening activities. The outreach worker said that this would not be relevant to her personally as by the time the children had come back from the childminder and eaten a meal there was little time or energy left to do much else than start winding down for the night. She felt that other parents would be able to identify with this.

This was an issue that arose when interviewing parents at BFS and the parents at the Tuesday Tots group. Many of them worked in part time jobs and the activities that they took

part in had to fit around their working hours so that they could attend. One of the mothers at Tuesday Tots mentioned that she worked mornings and one of the reasons why she chose to go to that particular session and not the one at BFS was because it was during the afternoon. Some of the parents at BFS liked that fact that the baby and toddler session took place every day of the week, so that parents who work two or three days a week are able to access this session.

Some of the grandparents interviewed at BFS attended the baby and toddler session with their grandchildren because the parents of the children were working at the time. Grandparents were largely positive about the sessions, feeling that they are friendly and accessible for them. The staff acknowledge and appreciate the presence of grandparents. An incident was noted where the researcher approached someone with a child in the storytime session for an interview: she seemed reluctant to be interviewed because she was a grandparent and was not sure if the interview would be relevant. The deputy manager overheard this and made it clear that her views would be appreciated and encouraged her to spend some time talking to the researcher. Childminders also attend BFS with the children they mind. The fact that the facilities at BFS are open to childminders and Grandparents means that the children of working parents are not missing out in terms of taking advantage of the services on offer.

#### *Local accessibility*

This was also discussed with outreach. The accessibility of a service is largely dependent of where it is in relation to other things locally. For parents without a car, services have to be within easy walking distance, or on a very reliable and frequent bus route from their home. A bus journey can, however, add considerable cost to attending a service. Distance from a primary school is also relevant - some parents have other children attending school and the service needs to be within a reasonable distance for dropping them off and picking them up.

This was mentioned by most of the parents I interviewed at BFS. Some of them had children attending the primary school just over the road from BFS, and found it very convenient. The importance of BFS being near to home, and to some extent other local services such as shops and banks were discussed. People without access to a car with children at other schools in Bramley would be more likely to use alternative services in a convenient location for them.

#### *Emotional problems*

The Outreach workers stated that emotional problems such as depression, not knowing anyone and feeling isolated can affect a parent's ability to gain advantage from using services. Finding it hard to talk to people can make attending a baby and toddler group extremely daunting. Not having someone to attend a group with can make it harder. The outreach workers help with this by accompanying parents to provide moral support. One of the respondents of the questionnaire for parents who do not use BFS stated not knowing anyone at the baby and toddler session at BFS as the reason why she had stopped using it. Another did not attend for the same reason. Difficulty in coping can cause more problems when other parents in a baby and toddler group seem to be coping more effectively. The outreach workers mentioned that some parents might not look as smart in appearance as the others or may act differently and this can cause difficulty for them.

The baby and toddler group at BFS is attended by a large number of parents. The outreach team feel that some of the parents are intimidated by this and prefer to attend a smaller group. The outreach worker mentioned at the Tuesday Tots sessions before the parents arrived, that some of the parents who attend the session particularly like the fact that it is a group that offers more familiarity and a quieter, more intimate atmosphere. Though BFS facilitates the passing of information about the work that they do in the local community, most of the parents I spoke to who use the sessions heard about it through a friend or neighbour. People who feel

isolated may not receive the same personal recommendations about local services as someone who converses with people more, and may not take the same advantage of them.

### *Personal circumstances*

This could be about the structure of the family- how many children there are and whether the family has one or two parents can affect the way services are accessed and used. There are practicalities associated with having more than one child- perhaps having to book more places, or the children need more of your attention and time. Not having a partner can affect the way services are accessed for practical reasons also. Issues to do with how parents are perceived by other people if they do not have a partner may also be an issue. The outreach workers mentioned how sometimes single parents can be uncomfortable if no one else in a group is in the same position as they are, or if they feel that they are being judged. They mentioned that one of the parents had a bad experience attending a group not connected with BFS or Sure Start where she was asked very invasive questions about her life because of her family circumstances. This discouraged her from attending other baby and toddler groups. Parents' financial position is also a factor. The outreach workers feel that if a parent attends a group where all the children are well dressed in designer clothes and they cannot afford to dress their child in the same way, then they can feel intimidated.

People with larger numbers of children are made just as welcome at BFS as parents with one child. However, there are difficulties associated with giving attention to larger numbers of children. In the baby and toddler session, a childminder mentioned that she had more children in the summer and tended to stay away from the activities being organised by BFS simply because of the practicalities of keeping children of different ages organised and occupied. She preferred to make her own arrangements. One parent was interviewed who had just used the crèche for three of her children, although there was no problem with this, she mentioned that sometimes the crèche cannot fit them all in.

No evidence was found of parents who felt intimidated at BFS. None of the parents interviewed mentioned such problems, though there were two people who were finding it quite hard to talk to others. A grandmother mentioned that she had only attended the group twice and still needed to feel settled and start conversing with people. A childminder who had recently moved to Bramley from another part of the country mentioned that the researcher had been the only person who had spoken to her so far. Some of the parents talked about the friends that they had made through BFS. One of the Playworkers stated that they had tried hard to stop groups of people making other people feel excluded, for example by paying attention to way the chairs in a certain way.

In terms of financial circumstances, the cost of attending the services at BFS does not appear to be as big an issue as the other reasons why people may not use the service. Many of the parents remarked on how little they had to pay, and felt that this was made even better value for money as the cost included a hot drink for adults and drink and a snack for the children. One parent remarked that the crèche- even though she was paying £1.75 each for three children- actually saved her money as the children tended to ask for food and drink and things to keep them occupied when she went out.

### *Other possible reasons why people might not use BFS.*

#### *Researcher's Comments*

**Not having enough information** might be one of the reasons why people do not use facilities generally. The outreach workers felt that BFS were doing enough to inform local people about the work they do. One out of the 5 respondents of the questionnaire for parents who do not

use BFS stated the reason why they had not used BFS before is because they had never heard of it. “*Word of mouth*” and “*A health visitor or midwife*”, were given as the methods of passing information to parents that the respondents of the questionnaires were most likely to take notice of.

**Level of interest.** Level of interest in services provided was variable. The people who filled the questionnaire and the parents at Tuesday Tots in showed the greatest amount of interest in the crèche. This is likely to be because other, similar facilities to Storytime and the baby and toddler session are offered elsewhere in Bramley, but the crèche is unique as there is nothing else like it in the local area. In a discussion with the outreach team the issue that childcare in Bramley generally tends to be focused more on the needs of working parents was mentioned and Sure Start are running projects to address this, such as crèches running alongside training courses and support groups.

#### **4.7 Brief Case Studies**

The following people were amongst those interviewed; their experiences of BFS stood out as being of particular interest.

Mr A. takes full time care of his son. He regularly attends the baby and toddler session at BFS. He does not live in Bramley - he travels from a different part of Leeds. He was originally from New Zealand and commented on the difference in attitude towards fathers in this country. He had had negative experiences since moving to England- he recalled an ante-natal class where he felt that fathers were not being taken seriously and the midwife had said “you’ll all be in the pub next week”. He had attended a leisure centre where there were excellent facilities for people with children in the ladies changing rooms, but nothing in the men’s. He talked about the sharp contrast between his negative experiences and his experiences at BFS. He described the staff and their attitude as “*exceptional*” with none of the negative stereotypes being placed on him which he had experienced elsewhere. He and his son particularly liked using the toy library, and enjoyed the rest of the toddler session. His only negative point was that the male toilets were more difficult to find than the ladies. When asked about his opinion on a “dads group”, he said that it would be positive to be able to have more male company around for himself, but said that such a group would probably increase segregation between male and female carers. He said that most of the other parents spoke to him in the session, but there were still barriers to break down. Mr A. was interesting because he was one of very few male carers who use BFS, and because of his previous negative experiences of using services.

Mrs B. found out about BFS through the outreach team and had started attending sessions there occasionally. She now works as a volunteer for the project. She has a daughter who attends storytime and comes to the baby and toddler session and the crèche with her when she works. She has been described as a valuable asset to the project by the playworkers and managers at BFS. Mrs B. completed an NVQ level 2 in childcare at college, attending with one of the members of staff from BFS. She gains a large amount of enjoyment from volunteering.

Mrs C. uses the crèche regularly. She has four children under the age of five. She found out about BFS through the outreach team, after having some difficulty coping. She was experiencing problems with her son’s behaviour and it had been suggested to her that if she used the crèche to have some time away from her son, then she would be able to cope more effectively. The workers at BFS and Mrs C. together looked at ways to deal with Mrs C’s son’s behaviour, and he has since improved and attends nursery. Mrs C. now uses the crèche for her other, younger children so that she can have some time to herself. Her youngest is 6 months old, and after having some doubts about leaving a child so young, she feels completely at ease leaving him at the crèche. Mrs C. can see the potential benefits to her children as they are becoming less “clingy” and happier to be left with people.

## **5. Conclusions**

People at BFS had overall a positive outlook of life in Bramley, despite the fact that negative aspects were mentioned. One reason may be that the good things, such as the local facilities, outweigh the bad. People may be able to see positive change and feel optimistic about the future. Another possible reason may be that local people have built up resilience and ways of coping with the negative aspects of Bramley, or it may be that the people interviewed do not live in the parts of Bramley where aspects such as crime and drug abuse are most prevalent. It would be interesting to investigate this further.

One of the major objectives of this project was to find out if people attending at BFS are satisfied with the projects and services. It soon became clear that generally people were happy with BFS. Some suggestions for improvement were made. These tended to be constructive comments rather than factors that would make people dissatisfied and less inclined to use the services.

The positive aspect of BFS mentioned by the most people was the staff. People talked about how helpful and friendly they thought members of staff were, showing that their personal qualities are fundamental to the success of BFS. The manager discussed the difficulties involved in recruiting people in the childcare profession generally. Despite this BFS have been successful in recruiting high calibre staff. The reasons why were discussed- the provision of

training and encouraging personal development, a competitive salary, and a pleasant working environment may be the main reasons for this.

People were impressed with the activities for the children - how they were being kept stimulated and occupied in all the sessions taking place. The researcher was impressed by how the children's enthusiasm for learning in the storytime session was constantly being encouraged. Just some of the many examples that could be mentioned include a girl splattering paint onto paper, a boy dressing up and pretending to be an ambulance man and two boys with dolls in pushchairs being given a pretend shopping list

Parents and carers generally have a sense of ownership and influence at BFS. Some people find giving suggestions and comments to staff directly easy, others are more reluctant and wish to pass on their opinions anonymously. The structures are in place to allow this to happen with the parent representatives. It may be worth considering other ways to gather suggestions from parents / carers.

The main reasons why people do not use BFS were discussed in this evaluation. Evidence was seen of ways in which BFS work hard to counteract difficulties that some people face when accessing services. BFS aim to ensure that grandparents, carers, mums, dads and childminders are all made to feel equally welcome. Services seem to be affordable to everyone, so that people are not discouraged from BFS through financial reasons.

The manager mentioned in an interview that she was concerned that emphasis had shifted away from conducting support work for families and would like to readdress this through projects such as debt counselling.

Local parents and carers who feel intimidated in large groups can find using the baby and toddler session at BFS difficult, because of its success at attracting relatively large numbers of people. The researcher feels that some people experiencing such difficulties have, in some cases, their needs met elsewhere through other projects connected with Sure Start. Some people may not have less severe problems, but still feel daunted by the prospect of attending the baby and toddler group for the first time when they do not know anyone. It may be worth investigating ways in which BFS, in addition to what they already do, can help to alleviate the stress experienced by some people attending until they feel settled.

BFS may wish to consider if there are any ways of making BFS more accessible to working parents by perhaps looking at the demand for a "twilight" baby and toddler session or activities on a weekend.

Gaining information from people with young children who do not use BFS proved difficult in this evaluation. People currently experiencing personal difficulties were reluctant to be interviewed. Questionnaires were distributed in the local library, but no-one caring for young children who came into the library filled one in. I spent an afternoon in the library and encountered four mothers with young children. All of them when questioned said that they currently use BFS. This seems to suggest that parents and carers who use the library also use BFS. It is difficult to determine the views of people who are reluctant to use local services, as places such as BFS and the library are places conducive to meeting people and gaining information from them. The researcher felt that trying to talk to people in their own homes was intrusive and chose not to do so. Further investigation may be required with people who do not use BFS and it may be advantageous for people who already have a rapport with them to carry out such work.

The helping hands crèche at BFS is an interesting service because of its uniqueness. It offers parents the opportunity to take advantage of an hour and a half of childfree time. No where else in Bramley offers this service, apart from crèches being run alongside courses. Some confusion was seen from three of the people attending at BFS about whom the crèche is for and there was also a perception from two other people that it is always full. The parents interviewed at Tuesday Tots and who completed the questionnaire showed more interest in

the crèche than the other services. It may be worth investigating how often the crèche is fully booked, the level of local interest and if it would be worth considering the possibility of expanding the service.

The Meet and Eat session at BFS seemed to be offering a service that was of financial benefit to people by offering low cost meals, giving people in the local area somewhere to talk, and encouraging healthy eating. The researcher was concerned that this service was only being run one day a week, and felt that it could fulfil its potential with more funding. The possibility of making the meet and eat café part of the service agreement with Sure Start could be investigated.

Overall the evaluation has shown how BFS contributes in many positive ways to the lives of individual children, the people who care for them, the staff at BFS and the local community.

## **6. The Researcher's Reflection**

I found this to be a challenging and enjoyable evaluation to take part in. I found everyone at BFS helpful and friendly. It was daunting, asking people if they could be interviewed at first, but people were happy to answer questions and for me to record them.

My opinion of the services at BFS as a local parent is very positive. I think an effective way of gauging an opinion about a local service is to ask yourself how you feel about using it for your own children. I used the crèche for my son in the process of the evaluation. He had a wonderful time and I was completely at ease leaving him there. It is likely that I will use the baby and toddler session after my second child is born.

I have learned many new skills by taking part in this evaluation. Trying to make sense of 25 taped interviews was one of the hardest tasks, and I learned an effective way of writing it up through a helpful colleague.

There were advantages of having local knowledge and experience as a parent when taking on this project. It helped in terms of gaining the trust and engaging in dialogue with local parents when conducting interviews to gain the information needed from them. Being a parent also gives me some degree of empathy with the people I interviewed. I can understand some of the day to day stress and problems that caring for children can sometimes bring. Gaining more of an insight into the organisation of BFS and Sure Start Bramley has also been of interest to me personally as my family and I use local services for young children. Disadvantages of being a working parent included finding suitable childcare. It was difficult to decide which options were best for me and my son. I also had to take time off when her son was ill, and for antenatal appointments.

My personal opinion about Sure Start Bramley and BFS is that the work they do contributes towards making Bramley a better place for people to live. I am generally optimistic about living here as families are being given an opportunity to have access to support and places to spend time together, and I can see how this would contribute to making Bramley more of a cohesive local community. Local parents and children are made to feel valued and I feel that having a society generally where children and their carers are seen as important is a positive way forward.

## **References**

Sure Start Bramley, (Jan 2001), "*Service Level Agreement between Sure Start Bramley and Bramley Family Support (Spurgeons).*"

Clare Hemsworth (McMullan) - Project Manager, (Aug 1994) "*The Bramley Baptist Project*".

Robson C. (2000) "*Small-Scale Evaluation*"; Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi.

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## Appendix i

### **Interview structure for people using BFS services:**

Do you live in Bramley? If so what is your opinion of living here?

How long have you used BFS?

How did you hear about BFS?

Do you know anything about the connection with Bramley Baptist Church?

Is there anything you particularly like about BFS?

Is there anything that you think could be improved?

What do you think about the way the parents in the session talk to each other? Do you find it easy or hard to get talking to people in the session?

Do you feel you are given enough information about what goes on in this centre? If not how do you think this could be improved?

Are you happy to make suggestions if there is something you feel can be improved?

Would you like to be more involved in this project? Attending parent meetings? Fundraising? Volunteering? Do you know how to go about it if you do?

Do you feel that the activities have benefited your child in any way? How?

Do you feel that you have benefited? Again how?

Is there anything else that you would like to mention?

## Appendix ii



### Questionnaire for local people who do not use BFS

My name is Michelle Potts- I am a local parent and I have been employed by Sure Start to carry out research about Bramley Family Support. **If you currently do not use Bramley Family support**, and are the parent, carer or grandparent of a child under 4, I am very interested in your views. It would be of great help to me if you could fill in this questionnaire for my research. The information you give me will be **completely confidential**.

How much do you know about Bramley Family Support (Spurgeons) on Hough Lane (next to Baptist church)? [Please tick one]

Never heard of it	
Know that it exists but don't know what goes on there	
Know about one or two of the activities but don't know times	
Know about activities and times	

Have you ever used Bramley Family Support?

If yes, is there any reason why you stopped using it?

If you haven't used it, is there a reason why, *e.g. lack of information, going somewhere else, didn't feel like going out?*

Below are some of activities taking place at Bramley Family Support. We would like to know whether these interest you or not. If they don't we would be very interested to know why so that we can make our activities appeal to different people.

#### **Baby and toddler session**

Session for children and parents/carers aged birth to 4. 9.00-11.30am. Activities and toys. 75p per family. Drinks and light snack provided.

Would this interest you?

Yes

No

Comments

#### **Storytime**

Pre-school session for children aged 2 and a half to school age. 1.00-3.00pm. £3 per session (can get funding at aged 3).

Does this interest you?

Yes

No

Comments

**Crèche**

For children aged 6 months to 4 years. 9.15-11.00am. Costs £1.75 per child.

Does this interest you?

Yes

No

Comments

**Toy library**

Borrow toys for a week. £1 to join. 20p for each toy borrowed.

Does this interest you?

Yes

No

Comments

**Meet and Eat**

Low cost home cooked food in a community café. Example shepherd's pie £1 for adult, 50p for child.

Does this interest you?

Comments

What do you think about the following ways of receiving information about local services for you and your young children? [Please tick boxes].

	Would take notice of this	Would sometimes take	Would take no notice
--	---------------------------	----------------------	----------------------

		notice	
Leaflet through post			
Notice at doctors/clinic			
Shop window			
Advert in paper			
Word of mouth			
Health visitor or Midwife			
The internet			

Are you currently experiencing any difficulties or worries that might make it harder for you to access services *e.g. family problems*?

Is there anything you would like to see in the local area for you and your young children?

**Thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire.**

I would also like to interview a few people to find out more information. Would you be interested in taking part in this? Yes / No

If so please give your first name and telephone number, or if you prefer not to I can contact you through the outreach team- just let them know. You can also ring me on 0113 2165371.

First Name

Telephone number

## Appendix iii

### **Structure for interview with managers at Bramley Family Support**

Could you tell me about the history of the project?

What is Spurgeons?

Who works here?

How many people use this project?

What are your priorities for this piece of research?

What are you hoping to find out about users and non-users?

What is your relationship with Sure Start?

Is it purely a funding relationship?

Are there any points of tension between the church, Spurgeons, and Sure Start?

Do you sometimes have a different agenda or conflicts of interest?

Are there any factors that limit your work?

Such as the building or funding?

What do you think about the quality of your staff?

What are your future plans for the project?

Are you thinking of offering different services or extending existing ones?

Are there any ideas for the project that did not work out in practice?

Is there anything else

## Appendix iv

### Structure for interview with outreach workers

Of the families that you work with frequently, what proportion of them do not use the services provided at Bramley Family Support?

What aspects of the family's lives can make it hard for them to access services generally?

Are there any factors at BFS that make it difficult for some people to use it?

If so are their needs being addressed elsewhere?

Has anyone you know had a negative experience of BFS?

Is there anything BFS can do to encourage people who find it hard to access them to use their services?

Are there any aspects of the work at BFS that you find useful for the families you work with?

Can you give examples of people you have worked with who have had positive experiences of BFS?

How effective do you think BFS are at letting local people know about the work that they do?

Which methods of giving information to local parents do you find most effective for the families you work with?