



‘WHAT WORKS IN INVOLVING PARENTS IN SURE START’?
A Research Project for local Sure Start Parents

‘What Works In Involving Parents In Decision Making in Sure Start’

FINAL REPORT- OCTOBER 2003
Communities Count

SUMMARY

The following report presents the findings from the first stage of a two-year research project. The research has been commissioned by five Sure Start programmes in North and North East Lincolnshire to evaluate parental involvement in the running of the programmes. The aim of the research is to establish what works in involving parents in Management meetings and in decision-making more generally within the programmes.

Three programmes were involved in the initial stage of the research, which took place between April and October 2003. The six-month project focused on parental involvement on Management Boards and Parents Groups. The three programmes involved were, Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park (1st wave), Scunthorpe Old Town (3rd wave) and East Marsh (4th wave).

The research findings for each programme are presented separately within the report, followed by recommendations for improving parental involvement on Management Boards and Parents Groups. As will be seen, each programme has its own identity and some issues that are relevant to one programme may not be to another.

However, there are issues that appear to make a difference to parental involvement across the programmes. The final section of the report examines crosscutting themes that emerged from the research. General recommendations for improving parental involvement in Management Boards, Parents Groups are also included.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

- Local parents do feel they make a difference to the decision-making on Management Boards.
- Local parents do believe the Parents Group makes a difference to decision-making in the programme.
- The local community believe that parental involvement makes a difference to decision-making in the programme.
- Personal issues can be as much of a barrier to involvement as more practical issues, such as available childcare.
- Most professionals do support the idea of parental involvement in decision-making.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

.....Page 4

SECTION ONE:

Introduction to the research

.....Page 5

SECTION TWO:

Methods overview

.....Page 6

SECTION THREE:

Nunthorpe & Bradley Park (Round 1)

.....Page 10

SECTION FOUR

Scunthorpe Old Town (Round 3)

.....Page 47

SECTION FIVE

East Marsh (Round 4)

.....Page 81

SECTION SIX

Crosscutting Themes/ Summary

.....Page 113

SECTION SEVEN

Conclusion

.....Page 117

Recommendations

.....Page 120

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Communities Count would like to thank all those who have help with the research project to date.

Many thanks to the Managers and Parent Participation workers who have offered help and practical assistance to keep parents involved throughout the research. This has involved crucial things, such as making sure that childcare and transport are available for parents' to attend Steering Group meetings, through to providing a venue accessible for interviews with local parents.

Thanks also go out to Sure Start staff members for all their help over the last six months.

Thank-you to all the parents and professionals who gave up their time and were open and honest with their answers, the report could not have been written without you.

And finally, many, many thanks to every parent involved in the Steering Group. Without your time, effort, ideas and practical help this research would not have captured the dynamics of Sure Start parental involvement. Your efforts and enthusiasm have lasted throughout - from thinking about what questions to ask in the beginning, piloting questionnaires and walking the streets to find parents willing to take part - through to thinking about the final recommendations. The research could not have been carried out without you.

Julie Killingbeck.
COMMUNITIES COUNT

SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT RESEARCH

Involving Parents In The Decision Making Process: 'The Management Board' & 'The Parent's Group'

Sure Start is a Government funded initiative aimed at providing services in the local community for children under four and their families. The long-term goal of Sure Start is ensure that young children and their families have access to a variety of health, social and educational services that will help children flourish and succeed once they get to school.

Parental involvement in Sure Start is a key aim of the Government and is considered crucial to the successful development of local programmes. The views of parents living in the community are central to shaping programmes in a way that delivers services the local community needs, in a way the local community wants them.

This research project has been commissioned by five Sure Start programmes in North and North East Lincolnshire to evaluate parental involvement in the running of the programmes. The aim of the research is to establish what works in involving parents in Management meetings and in decision- making more generally within the programmes.

Three programmes were involved in the initial stage of the research, which took place between April and October 2003. The six- month project focused on parental involvement on Management Boards and Parents Groups. The three programmes involved were, Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park (1st wave), Scunthorpe Old Town (3rd wave) and East Marsh (4th wave).

The Management Group and the Parents Group are common features in all three of the programmes presently being evaluated. These groups were identified for two main reasons, 1) Sure Start has set a target for programmes to have a 50 per cent representation of parents on the Management Board with 18 months of approval; 2) It is recommended that a Parent Group be established to "ensure that the voice of parents is strong and is not diluted by being one among many" (Sure Start: Guide To Planning and Running Your Programme Summer, 2002 Section 3 p.9).

The research findings for each programme are presented separately within the following report, followed by recommendations for improving parental involvement on Management Boards and Parents Groups. As will be seen, each programme has its own identity and some issues that are relevant to one programme may not be to another.

However, there are issues that appear to make a difference to parental involvement across the programmes. The final sections of this report examine crosscutting themes that emerged from the research. General recommendations for improving parental involvement in Management Boards, Parents Groups are also included.

SECTION TWO

Methods

A selection of research methods were used to make sure the evaluation captured as broad a picture as possible of what works in involving parents in different contexts. The key data sources are:-

- Semi-Structured interviews with parents.
- Semi-Structured interviews with professional Board members.
- Survey of local parents.
- Documentary evidence.
- Observations

INTERVIEWS - Management Boards

This involved carrying out semi-structured interviews with all Parent members of the Management Board, 'Professional' members of the Management Board and Sure Start Managers. These interviews aimed to find out what it is like for parents to sit on the Sure Start Management Board and identify what can be done to improve the experience of being a Board member. Key areas covered in the interview are:

- What do parents think their role on the board is?
- What do 'professionals' think their role is?
- What do 'professionals' think the role of parents is?
- Do parents believe they influence the decision making process?

- Do 'professionals' believe parents influence the decision making process?
- Do 'professionals' think involving parents in the decision making process is a good thing?
- Do parents think the Board is where the main decisions about the programme get made?
- Do 'professionals' think the Board is where the main decisions are made?
- What could be done to improve involving parents on the Board?

INTERVIEWS - The Parents Group (s)

This involved carrying out semi-structured interviews with a sample of parents who regularly attend the local programmes Parents Group. Eight members have been selected as a representative sample as the average regular attendance of parents across the three programmes varies between eight and twelve. The sample was selected on an opportunistic basis. That is, efforts were made to interview any member of the Parent Group who was willing to give their time to the interviewer.

Key issues explored in the interviews are:

- Who do parents think should be present at Parent Group meetings?
- What is it like to be involved in the Group?
- What would put people off coming along to the Parent Group?
- What could help be done to improve the meetings?
- Do parents think the Parent Group is taken seriously?
- Do Parents feel that the Parents Group can influence the decision making process?

SURVEY- Parents NOT on the Management Board/Parent Group- (hard to reach group)

A sample of 15 per cent of the eligible population from each programme were surveyed to try and find ways of improving the level of parental involvement. The sample was selected on a random basis by targeting programme services such as annual trips and Drop-ins'. Researchers also reached parents through local schools and walking around the local community. The questionnaire investigated areas such as:

- How much parents know about the Management Board and the Parent Group, how to join etc.
- What could be done to make it easier for parents to get involved in both groups?
- What might stop them wanting to get involved in the groups?
- Would they like more information on these groups and if so, what would be the best way of getting that information to them.

The survey also included a question aimed at addressing the latest 2003-2006 Objective Four SDA target to measure 'improvement in satisfaction' within Family Support Services. "*Seventy five per cent of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support*" (Sure Start Guidance, Summer, 2002 Annex A2)

OBSERVATIONS- Management Board Meetings & Parent Group Meetings

Alongside interviews there have been observations of Management Board meetings and Parent Groups meetings. The observations provide an opportunity to watch how meetings are carried out and to see where and how decisions are made. Observations also provide a chance for the researcher to look at what influence parents have in the meeting. This involves observing whether parents do have an equal opportunity to have their say during discussions that take place in meetings. And also whether their views/opinions are taken seriously and acted upon.

Documentary Evidence

A review of available Minutes from meetings, newsletters, etc provided additional evidence for the report.

There is also an on-going additional review of Best Practice involving parents/users in decision-making processes and what works in engaging people in research most effectively. This will be included in the final report out in January 2005.

Steering Group

A Steering Group has been established and meets regularly. The group membership includes two/three parent members from each of the programmes involved in the research and one member of staff from each programme who has a responsibility for parent participation.

The Steering Group have been instrumental in shaping the research project. Interview schedules have been designed, constructed and piloted with the help of the Steering Group. These research tools have been used throughout the research. The group have also been involved in making recommendations for the final report.

Ethics

Ethical principles have been followed throughout the research project. The research has been carried out within the Research Governance Framework of North East Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust. Full ethics committee approval was not required for the project.

Informed consent has been sought from all those who took part in the research. Issues of confidentiality have also been considered. Parent researchers were not involved in carrying out survey interviews within their own programmes. Where questionnaires were handed out for people to complete, an envelope was provided to seal completed questionnaires, ensuring staff, parents and managers did not have access to the comments.

SECTION THREE

Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start

Background

Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start falls within the South Ward of Grimsby. With a resident population of 13,066 (2001 Census data), the Ward ranked amongst the top 10 per cent of the most deprived wards in England and Wales. In 2001, the resident population were largely from a white ethnic background (99 per cent) and all other ethnic groups in the area were lower than average for England and Wales.¹

The unemployment rate for the area, at 8.3 per cent, is nearly two and a half times the national average of 3.4 per cent. Of those unemployed, 36 per cent were long-term unemployed.²

The number of lone parent households with dependent children is 14.5 per cent: more than twice the national average. Local residents are nearly three times more likely to live in rented accommodation than the average for England and Wales. The number of households without central heating is 10.6 per cent compared to 8.5 per cent for England and Wales.

Over half of Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park residents (50.9 per cent), aged 16 -74, had no educational qualifications (the average for England and Wales is 29.1 per cent). And only 5.3 per cent were educated to degree level or above compared to 19.8 per cent for England and Wales.

¹ Ethnic Population for Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park (South Ward, Census Data 2001: percent of resident population):

Source: ONS

White (Including white Irish)	99.0
Mixed	0.4
Asian or Asian British	0.3
Indian	0.2
Pakistani	0.1
Black or Black British	0.1
Caribbean	0.0
African	0.1
Other Black	0.0
Chinese or other Ethnic group	0.2

² All statistics quoted are taken from ONS- Census data 2001. www.statistics.gov.uk unless otherwise stated.

Residents of Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park are more likely to be divorced and slightly more likely to describe their health over the previous twelve months as 'Not Good'.³

According to the Child Poverty Index, in 2000, almost three out of four (70.03 per cent) of children under 16 years of age living in the area were dependent on means tested benefits⁴.

It was a culmination of these facts that lead to the area being identified as being eligible for funding from the Sure Start initiative as a 'Trailblazer' programme.

The programme Delivery plan was written in October 1999 and the programme was granted approval from January 2000.

The Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start programme was designated an early designation Children's Centre from 23rd June 2003.

The Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start

Background To The Parents Group

Local parents were heavily involved in the development of the Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start programme. In the run up to the delivery plan being prepared several parents became involved in consulting with local parents. The parents carried out early consultations with the local community to find out what the needs and wants of the area were.

During these early days the Manager worked out of a small room in a house on the patch with the help of a few parents to get the programme of the ground. By and large, local parents did not really have ready access to the Manager and his team on a daily basis (as is the case when programmes find a building to accommodate both staff and parents very early on). This combination of interested parents but lack of practical space to further involvement may have influenced how the Parents Group developed. Encouraging parental involvement in the day- to- day running of

³ Average divorce rate for England and Wales - 8.2 per cent compared to Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park 11.2 per cent.

9.2 per cent of the population of England and Wales described their health over the previous 12 months as 'Not Good' compared to 10.5 per cent of the population of Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park. Source: ONS- www.statistics.gov.uk

⁴ www.CCNAP shows the Child Deprivation Indices by ward in North & North East Lincs.

the programme may have proved more difficult due to the lack of facilities that the present centre now provides.

The Venue

The venue for the meetings was varied before the Sure Start Centre became available. The Parents Meetings began in September 2000 at Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Resource Centre, nine months after the programme approval: twelve people were present ten parents, the manager and a member of staff. In December 2002 the meetings moved to the new Sure Start Building and have become firmly established as a monthly event. The current Parents Group has built on these early beginnings and remains a regular opportunity for the local parents to have their views heard.

The Meetings

The meetings take place at the Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start Centre, 1.00-2.30. Tea/coffee and cakes and biscuits are available during the break. Child-care is available at the centre.

The meetings are held in the training room at the centre. The room is private and large enough to accommodate many parents. At present, the Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Parents Group is a dynamic and lively group. They meet on a monthly basis. At the time of the research, which included interviews and observations, the group was meeting on a regular basis.

The group discussed a wide range of issues and discussions were generally very lively with active contribution from the majority of those present. There were some quieter personalities in the group, but the stronger personalities did not go unchallenged and quieter members of the group did have the chance to have their voice heard, although this sometimes took time.

The programme Manager and a variety of staff members attend the meetings. The group seems to have a good relationship with the Manager and staff and speak up on all issues. It was noted during observations that it was difficult to know who were staff members and who were parent volunteers, as both groups were wearing the Sure Start shirts.

All the parents interviewed felt that the times and venue were convenient for the meetings. However, four of the parents interviewed (half of

sample) did raise concern over the availability of childcare, especially for children under two years of age, as the places available are limited. The issue of childcare can influence whether some of the parents can attend the meeting.

However, the problem could be a symptom of the success of the group. Regular average attendance of 10 (parents) for the Parents Group as well as parents using the child-care facilities for training etc... may well put a strain on resources available.⁵ The Parents Group meeting held in May 2003 noted the problem of childcare available for the meetings. The issue was discussed and it was suggested that the timing of the meetings be changed to morning sessions to free some crèche places. This was agreed at first, but the lack of availability of the room meant that the next meeting had to remain in the afternoon. Parents were asked to book places as early as possible for childcare in the future.

It may be practical to have a rota system in place specifically for places available for the Parents Group. This would help ensure that each parent had an equal number of places during the year. It may also be easier to access alternative childcare for the meetings if it were on a less regular basis.

The meetings cover many issues relating to parental involvement and the running of the programme, these include:

- Requests for volunteers,
- Complaints,
- Requests for parents to be involved with interviews
- Trips
- Rules, regulations
- Activities
- New equipment
- Family Room
- Services
- Request for parents to join sub-Groups
- Training for Parents

⁵ Sure Start has 10 places available in each morning and afternoon session. But spaces for under 2's are limited due to 3 in line with Health & Safety regulations. Parents do not have to pay for their childcare if they are attending the parent group meeting.

Joining The Parents Group

Parents who attended the parent group meeting had been using Sure Start services on average for 18 months, although this ranged from eight months to three years. None of the sample interviewed joined the Parents Group straight away and the average group membership was 8 months.

The average time for parents beginning to use Sure Start services to becoming involved with the group was 8 months (although this ranged from one month to 14 months). The average attendance was 10 parents and staff attendance varied from month to month. Most meetings have a guest speaker invited from a variety of backgrounds.

The meetings are almost entirely made up of female members, although there have been men (between 1-3) at some of the meetings. Eight parent members were interviewed- one male and 7 females.

All except one of the parents agreed that the meetings were easy to follow and that any paperwork was easy to understand. The majority of parents heard about the group through accessing services such as the Family Room or through coming into the centre to use services and listening to parents/friends talk. Several parents were told about the group and encouraged to go along by a friend who already attended.

Attendance was reported to be high with the majority of parents saying they could attend on a monthly basis, as long as childcare was available. Reasons for getting involved in the group varied:

- 'To get my point across.....listen to others points of view...'
- 'To have your opinion...and to hear what's going on'
- 'Spare time on my hands'

Most (5) of the parents said they didn't know what to expect before they attended, but were pleasantly surprised at how relaxed and informal the meetings were. The remaining parents said the meetings were 'pretty much' what they expected. Generally the parents thought the meetings were a chance to have their say and also to hear what was happening in the programme.

Should Staff Attend Parents Group Meetings?

Parents were asked three questions around the issue of whether staff members should be allowed to go along to Parent meetings. The questions looked at three 'types' of staff: parents who are employed by Sure Start, Sure Start staff and the Manager.

Parents Employed by Sure Start

All the parents interviewed felt that parents who were also staff should be allowed to go along to the group, but only in their role as a local parent:

- "Yes, because at the end of the day you're a parent first"
- "Yes, think so...when not working they use the building as parents"

Staff

The majority (6) felt that Sure Start staff should attend the meetings:

- Yes. They can answer queries.'
- Yes. Because you can bring up issues and discuss with them, especially legal and Health and Safety.'

One parent felt that staff should only be present sometimes and one parent felt that having staff present may stop people having their say, especially if complaining about staff.

Manager

Half of the parents felt that the Manager should only be present at meetings 'sometimes'. The other half felt that the Manager should be present at the meetings on a regular basis.

Getting parents to Parents Meetings

Most of the parents said that they first heard about the meetings through hearing parents talk about it in the family room at the centre, or from a friend. In one case, one of the parents was asked by a staff member go along to the meeting. The staff member was waiting for her when she arrived to take her in to her first meeting.

Parents were asked how the meetings might be improved and what they thought might make it easier for parents to come along to the group.

'Not knowing anyone', 'not being listened to' and 'not knowing what to expect', were given as examples of what might put parents off attending the group. Some parents also felt that the group itself and formal introductions may be off-putting:

- "Introductions put people off.'
- Some lack confidence, afraid to speak out - it may seem intimidating'

A parent 'buddy' was also considered a good idea to get people along for the first time. One parent thought that the introductions at the start of the meeting could be off-putting, especially as the group is quite large and so may see intimidating. This issue was brought to the attention of staff and formal introductions at the meetings have now stopped. Parents are now encouraged to wear a sticky label with names on so that everyone can see who's who.

Another of the parents felt that sometimes issues take too long to discuss and take over the meeting. Introducing a time limit on agenda items was suggested as a way of stopping this happening.

However, generally, parents thought that it was fairly easy to come along to the group if parents wished to get involved.

Further suggestions for improvement included:

- Bringing newer parents
- More childcare

The meetings do appear to provide local parents with an arena to voice their opinions, and joining the group simply involve turning up when the meetings take place. The meetings are publicised in the building and some of the parents were told about the meetings by staff. It may help to have the minutes of the meeting more readily available in the Family Room.

Where Do Decisions About The Programme Get Made?

There was a mixed response as to where parents thought decisions about the programme get made. Three of the parents were not sure where decisions get made, four parents thought that the Parents Group and

Management Board make the decisions and one parent thought that the Manager made the decisions, but only after approval at a higher level.

The Role Of The Parents Group

All of the parents felt that the role of the Parents Group included letting parents have an input into the programme. Parents felt that the role of the group covered the following areas:

- To help make decisions about the programme,
- Getting parents views across,
- Help make suggestions about the programme,
- To make sure staff know what parents want,
- To help run Sure Start,
- To ask questions about the programme,
- Find out more about Sure Start.

Is the Group Taken Seriously?

The vast majority of parents (7) felt that the Parents Group is taken seriously, although one parent felt that the group was only taken seriously 'sometimes'. Parents are given the chance to have a say about what goes on the agenda and if they wish to raise an issue not on the agenda they have a chance to voice it in 'Any Other Business'. Most of the parents said they do have a chance to meet 'informally' in the Family Room before the meetings to discuss the agenda if they wish. The remaining parents said they did get a chance to discuss the agenda with local parents and friends before the meeting.

Three of the parents said they did not know what responsibilities the group had. The rest of the parents had a mixed reaction about the responsibilities parents feel the group has:

- 'To ensure the smooth running of Sure Start services',
- 'It has a say in what goes on in the programme.'

Over half of the parents interviewed felt that the meetings did work in getting issues up to the Management Board. The other parents were less sure although only one parent said they did not think the group worked in getting issues up to the board. The majority of the parents were less clear about how this takes place. In terms of whether there was

feedback available from the Management Board to the Parent Group, the responses varied:

- 'No. Not noticed that we have'.
- 'Not sure, think maybe newsletter.'

This is an important issue as communication is vital to keeping parents involved in Sure Start, and parents need to know they are taken seriously.

Has The Parent's Group Made A Difference To Services Offered?

Most of the parents felt that the Parents Group had made a difference to services offered. Several examples were given:

- "Yes. Like the Tuck Shop".
- "Yes. Asked for things in the Family Room and got them quickly."
- "Yes. Makes it clearer, e.g. Age limit for trips."

On the other hand:

- "Not Sure".

The Minutes of the Parents Group provide evidence of the parent's views being listened to. The issue of the rules and regulations for the Family Room and for trips and activities are minuted, as is the development of the parent led Tuck shop.

The meetings appear to be parent led and the parents voice their concern over any issue they feel is important. The use of the Family Room in particular was under constant scrutiny. Many parents felt that the room was not being used with respect, being left untidy and children not being attended to. The concern of parents over this issue show the amount of ownership they feel they have over the room. Several tactics have been put in place to try and deal with the issue.

At the time of the research there appeared to be a good, stable relationship between parents and staff. The size and layout of the building may help. Although the staff are in the same building as parents, this is fairly recent and the programme was developing for two years before the Manager, parents and staff were together on a daily basis.

The current lay out of offices offer clear boundaries. Although parents do approach staff when they need to access them and appear at ease doing so.

The Parents Group was established after the programme had been approved for seven months and from the first meeting staff were invited, which may well have established the assumption that staff should be present. However, parents were asked at a recent Parents Group meeting (July 2003) whether they were happy with the current arrangements and it was stressed that the meeting could take whatever shape they (the parents) wished. All parents present at the meetings agreed that they felt staff should be involved with the group and should attend meetings.

The only apparent 'problem' at the time of the research concerned the recall of Sure Start shirts from parent volunteers, by the manager at a Parent Group meeting.

At the time, parent volunteers were given Sure Start shirts to wear-when they were volunteering in the building to distinguish them from parents. Staff also wear the shirts for the same reason. The manager had to ask for the parent volunteers to return the shirts after being contacted by the local police about the whereabouts of staff members-identified as Sure Start staff by the shirt. In light of this she asked for parents to return the shirts so that if approached again she could confidently assume the person wearing a shirt was a member of staff.

The manager stressed that she did not like having to ask for the shirts to be returned, but was left with no choice under the circumstances. As a possible compromise it was suggested that parents still wear the shirts when in the building volunteering, but would leave the shirts on the premises. Parents were not very happy to begin with and the meeting became quite heated.

However, a member of staff pointed out that there were real concerns to be raised about non- members of staff wearing the shirts outside of Sure Start Centre. A key issue revolved around the acceptance of Sure Start in the area and the identity the shirt would give to anyone wearing it. In this instance it was noted that Health staff very often have access to homes with young children. Wearing a Sure Start shirt is often good enough for parents and no further identification is asked for. This example seemed to defuse the situation and parents accepted the situation.

A further concern also raised by some parents is another issue which potentially concerns all Sure Start programmes: the availability of services for parts of the area that are not as close to the Sure Start Centre and provision of most of the meetings/services. In this instance, the Woodland area sometimes have difficulty attending meetings because of picking children up from nursery/school. Timing was the main problem and especially around the school holidays.

Has The Parents Group Made A Difference To The Programme Overall?

The responses of the parents vary from a definite 'Yes' to 'Don't Know'. Evidence from the minutes from the Parents Group does suggest that the Parents Group has made a difference to the programme - in terms of being involved in staff recruitment, new services, and how services are delivered. Observations of the meetings also suggest that the parents do feel they can voice an opinion and have their say. Examples from the parents included:

- ..."In the range of courses and everything like that through Sure Start"
- "Yes, in the way that parents feel they can actually be involved"

CONCLUSION

Overall, at the time of the research the Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start programme had a group of committed parents, some of whom had been working to develop the programme from the very early days and are now employees of Sure Start.

The Parents Group provides a means for parents to voice their views and raise any issues. The present membership consists of 'newer' parents as well as the more established which shows that parental involvement is sustained and continues to develop in the programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS- Parent Group

What would help?

- Standardise the Parents Group name across all programmes.
- A welcome pack for Parents Group members. The welcome pack to include clear information about what the meetings are for and to stress the importance of parents becoming involved in the group.
- Establish a set of 'Ground Rules' or 'Terms of Reference' that includes:
 - The right for everyone to have their say without interruption.
 - Clear guidelines on the role of staff involvement in meetings.
 - Clear guidelines on voting rights.
- Training - committee skills, group work, team building for any parents who want it.
- Introducing satellite Parents Groups at strategic points in the community (e.g. local schools), to maximise the involvement of local parents who may not use the building.
- 'Parent-Buddy' system.
- Annual 're-launch' of the Parents Group meeting- publicised with lunch and crèche included.
- 'Out of Hours' Parents Group. Evening meetings every couple of months for parents in the area who may work and find it difficult to attend daytime meetings. This may also encourage more male carers to attend.

COMMUNICATION

Parents should feel the group is taken seriously if they are to be encouraged to become involved, and more crucially, to stay involved. The group needs to be seen as being listened to and any issues/concerns highlighted acted upon. Suggestions to encourage this include the introduction of the role of Parent Group (PG)- Management Board (MB) co-ordinator.

Parent Group (PG)- Management Board (MB) - PG/MB Co-Coordinator

The role would be introduced to ensure a process is in place for a smooth two-way flow of communication, which can provide evidence of action being taken on issues arising in the PG, and to report back decisions and feedback from the MB.

- The role would be a reporting/recording, independent position and as such, the coordinator would not be a member of the MB and have no voting rights on the MB.
- If no parent volunteer is available, a Parent Participation worker could carry out the duty- but hand over the role if a parent wishes to take over the responsibility.
- If more than one parent is interested then either elections or random draw to select the coordinator.
- Ideally, a further parent, standing in reserve could be kept up-to-date ensure that the role is always occupied.

The introduction of such a position would mean that the PG would be able to track development of issues/ideas/suggestions and have evidence that they are listened to. This would not only provide evidence that the group is taken seriously, it would also mean that the group would be informed of reasons if actions cannot be taken, and consider possible suggestions for compromise.

It would also ensure that any issues/concerns that may take time to resolve are kept in the picture. This could avoid parents feeling that issues raised have not been acted upon and forgotten about. Clear reports/action plans, however brief, would ensure that issues are followed through to whatever the outcome may be. Parents can see where and why things may take time or may not be practical, and consider alternatives. Importantly though, they are kept in the 'loop' regarding decision-making.

Further suggestions to keep all those interested in the development of the programme up to date include:

- A quarterly progress report-up-date by the manager, reported back at an open meeting with all parents and stakeholders and staff invited. This will promote ownership

of the programme for all those involved - particularly the parents.

- The progress report made available, as minutes of all sub-meetings at all venues.
- Staff to take copies of minutes from Parent Group meetings to all drop-in's and activities, along with time and date of next meeting. Copies of all the above to be placed in the Family Room.

The suggestions listed above include ideas from the Steering Group meeting held on 12th September 2003 at Nunsthorpe Resource Centre.

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD

Parent Members of the Management Board

The Management Board of Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park has been in place since before the programme was approved. Local parents have been involved in the Management Board from the beginning, although in the early days there were only two parent members on the board.

The current membership consists of 16 members and the Manager. As in line with Sure Start recommendations, the group consists of fifty per cent parent members and fifty per cent professional members. The programme also has a list of stand-in parent representatives who are kept up-to date with the minutes of the meetings.

A recent evaluation of the Management Board at an 'Away Day' resulted in several changes to the Constitution and Terms Of Reference for the Management Board. For the 50 per cent parent members, the following changes were put in place:

- 50 per cent parents to be Nunsthorpe representative.
- 50 per cent parents to be Bradley Park representatives.
- No more than 50 per cent of the parent members to be employed by Sure Start.
- Chair- preferred person to be a local parent and not employed by Sure Start.
- Re-elections every two years (two year term of office unless parent steps down)
- Must have a child under 4 and live in the catchment area.
- Be willing to undergo a Police check.
- Aim for at least two men and six women ratio.

At the time of the observations most of the parent members of the board (7) had been involved for over two years; two were male and six were female.

Joining The Management Board

The majority of the parent members had been on the Management Board for around over two years, two members had been involved with the board

since it started. One of the male parent members joined in April 2003 after a male parent member stepped down.

The majority of the parents (7) had not been involved with anything like this before they joined the Management Board. Most of the parents had been offered training to help them with their role on the board. Training courses included things associated with the meetings, for example, 'minute taking' and 'chairing'. The newest member of the board had not yet been offered any training. Parents also noted that they valued the support of each other and the support of the manager; both of which helped them to settle into their role on the board.

All of the parent members of the board said they joined the board as a way of becoming more involved with Sure Start. They also thought that what Sure Start was promising for the area was a good thing and wanted to find out what was happening in the community.

The majority of the parents (6) reported that the first time they attended a meeting it was a nerve-racking experience. Generally, they hadn't known what to expect and found sitting in a room with professionals, listening to 'Jargon' daunting. Things had improved though:

What Is It like Now?

- 'We're noticed a lot more now... our opinions matter'
- Easier to speak out if you disagree and have a different view'
- Different now... I enjoy it!

Most of the parents noted that as they spent more time on the board and grew in confidence, the more comfortable they were with speaking out and airing their views in the meeting.

Being On The Management Board

All the parents interviewed said that the meetings were held at convenient times and places with childcare available. Everyone agreed that the meetings were fairly easy to follow and the majority said that the paperwork was usually easy to read, although sometimes could be a bit heavy going. One of the parents did comment that the paperwork for the budget and finances could be difficult to understand and contain jargon.

However, the earlier meetings were not as easy for the parents and the introduction of a 'Jargon Buster' and the use of plainer English in the minutes have all helped to nurture the parents confidence in sitting in the meetings on an equal footing with the professionals.

All of the parents said they did feel they could speak freely at meetings and all said they would speak out and ask if they did not fully understand something being discussed. Although during observations it was noted that parents tend to group together after the management meetings to discuss issues further when not in the presence of professionals.

Overall, parents said they would know how to make a complaint about the meetings if they needed to.

Are Parent Views Taken Seriously?

There was a mixed response as to whether parents thought their views were taken seriously, although the majority did feel they were listened to and taken seriously. Several examples were given as to when parent's views had been listened to. For example:

- The recruitment of the present Manager.
- New ideas, the new building.

However, one parent felt that she had not been listened to over a certain issue and the views of the parents were not taken seriously. This may be the case with involvement in Management Boards when individual wishes may have to be turned down because the issue is already decided before reaching the board. In these cases, the discussion is more likely to be around 'how' parents would like something, as opposed to whether they would like it. This is the case in Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park with regards their early designation as a Children's Centre. (This issue will be discussed later in this report).

The parents were then asked about the role of the Management Board.

What Sort of Things Get Discussed At Board Meetings?

- Spending/Money
- Early Excellence Centre

- Funding/Money
- New Build
- Parents Voice
- Services/activities
- Service provider staffing
- Staff-changing roles/ recruitment
- New Manager
- Monitoring/Evaluation
- Children's Centre

Do You Think This Is Where The Main Decisions About The Programme Get Made?

- 'Yes.'
- 'Majority yes. Some have to go higher'
- 'Yes and No. A lot are, but... we have a lot of input and can shape things, but some things in place are not really in your hands'.

All the parents felt they could offer a great deal to the Management Board. Examples of what contribution they felt they could bring included:

- 'You know the problems of the area and the needs of the children of that age'.
- 'Parents are using services so need to tell Sure Start if they are going wrong.'
- '...it's not all management deciding, it's parent's.'

All parents said they felt a responsibility to the local parents, children and community by being on the Management Board and their roles were not undertaken lightly.

Overall, parents felt they had a chance to discuss issues with local parents before a Management Board meeting. Some issues are also referred to the Parent's Group for discussion and ideas before a decision is made at the board. This is evidenced by minutes from the Parent Group and the Management Board.

The minutes from the Management Board meetings are available at the reception area for those parents who use the Sure Start Centre.

Examples of where parents believed they had made a real difference to the decision-making have been highlighted above, but parents also noted that their involvement in many issues such as, the constitution of the Management Board, training courses, how services are delivered and employing the 'right staff' had also made a real difference to the programme overall.

What Have You Learnt From Being On The Management Board?

Parents felt that they had learnt a lot about Sure Start by being on the Management Board and also, on a more personal level:

- 'Gained a lot more confidence'
- 'All professional's aren't snobs. People do listen'.
- ' Speaking out about different things, listening to other ideas'...

Although, not everyone had such a positive outlook:

- 'Too much bureaucracy'

To end the interview, parents were asked what they thought could be done to improve parental involvement in the running of the programme:

- 'Parent Voice. That's how we started. Take the meetings out.'
- 'Get peoples views. Sure Start has given so much, the community respects them'
- 'Training for jobs in the programme'.

When asked if they had any other issues they wanted to be noted, two parents felt it was important to highlight the fact that being a parent member of the board:

- 'Makes you feel valued and that you are contributing to the running of the programme'.

However, there was one issue that was raised by some of the parents that is likely to impact on many Sure Start local programmes: the introduction of Children's Centres.

Children's Centres & Sure Start

Sure Start has stressed from the beginning the importance they place on involving parents in decision- making and the running of local **Sure Start**

programmes. However, the government decision to implement Children's Centres, with Sure Start local programmes playing a key role, was made without consulting local parents.

For the Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park parent board members, the fact that they were chosen to be an early designation Children's Centre came unexpectedly. It was also seen as a potential threat to parental involvement in the local Sure Start programme. This became evident during the Management meetings held on 28th April 2003 and 9th June 2003.

The parent members of the Management Board arranged to meet with the Sure Start programme manager to voice their concerns over the development of Children's Centres. The manager arranged for someone from the Sure Start regional office to attend the following Board meeting and provide the parents with more information. There was a detailed presentation by the Sure Start regional office at the Management Board meeting held on 09/06/03. Parents were given the chance to voice their concerns and gain more information about the proposed changes. Parents raised several concerns about the issue of Children's Centres.

Their initial concern was the increase in the demand for crèche places. As the age limit for Children's Centres is five, the amount of people eligible for a crèche place would increase. Also, as catchment area for Children's Centres is larger than that of the local Sure Start area the parents questioned whether this would make Sure Start services available to more people-possibly putting a strain on services and staff.

The parents also felt that on a more practical level, given the expectation of the increasing numbers there would be more demand on the reception area and car parking facilities at the center.

Although the parents were confident in questioning throughout the meeting, and their concerns were listened to, in this instance they really did not have a say in whether the Children's Centres would happen; the decision is out of the hands of the programme overall.

Once the meeting was over the parents members did sit together and go over issues, which suggests they may not be fully at ease with the results of the meeting. Perhaps a short break during meetings for parents to

consult as a group would help. That way the more confident of the parents could be 'spokesperson' for those who may be quieter and voice more subtle concerns during the meeting.

In terms of the *Children Centers* issue, (which will become pertinent to other programmes in the future), it may have helped if parents had been given clear information about what role their programme could be expected to play and what impact the changes may have on services.

Also, it could have been made clearer to the parents just how much influence they could have in this particular development. The changes may be interpreted differently if parents believed they could have a say in how the relationship between *Sure Start* and *Children's centers* will work. As one parent pointed out:

- 'I have concerns about *Children's Centres*, we can't change it, but we should have a say in how it is, - shape it'.

Overall, the *Parent Group* and *Parent* membership of the *Management Board* do offer the opportunity for parents to have their say in the running of the programme. Importantly though, most parents on the *Management Board* do feel that overall, they are listened to, supported and their views taken seriously.

'THE PROFESSIONALS'

The long-term aim of *Sure Start* is the mainstreaming of services that are parent friendly and easily accessible to the community. Promoting local ownership of the programme and involving parents in the decision-making will hopefully result in services that are fine-tuned to the needs of the local community.

Central to this process of change in the delivery and provision of services is the involvement of key agencies/organisations that deliver/provide those services. There is clearly a need for the professionals to work in partnership with the local programme and listen to parents wants and needs if mainstreaming of services is to be a success in the long-term. However, working in partnership with parents in this way is something that service providers may not be used to. As such, an important part of the research is to find out what the professionals think about parental

involvement in Sure Start: in particular, listening to and sharing the decision-making with parents.

'Professional Members of Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start Management Board'

The professional members of the Management Board are drawn from a variety of stakeholder organisations/agencies. These include: Nunsthorpe Early Excellence Centre, Voluntary Sector, North Lincolnshire & Goole Hospital Trust, Learning & Childcare, North East Lincolnshire Council, Social Services, North East Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust.

The length of membership for professionals on the Management Board varied from three months to nearly four years, although the average was ten months.

Reason given for becoming involved with Sure Start varied from; wanting to develop closer links with the community, wanting to work more closely to integrate services with Sure Start and simply because 'the position included it'.

WHAT THE 'PROFESSIONALS' THINK

Generally, professionals see their role on the Sure Start Management Board as one of offering support and advice with decision-making improve communication between Sure Start and partner agencies.

What Do You Think Your Role (on the board) is?

- 'Advice, input'
- 'Make sure that the (agency) is communicated with'
- ...'To give perspective of ...(agency)'.

The professionals attended meetings as often as they could although it was noted that other commitments could mean having to miss meetings. Two professional members stated that they had not missed a meeting since being elected. Most of those interviewed said they had a nominated representative in case they could not attend. The usual methods of keeping each other up-to-date with what is happening in the programme was through one-to-one discussions, minutes of meetings, telephone up-

dates and e-mail. However, three members did not have a nominated representative at that moment in time.

The way that information about developments in Sure Start is fed back into organisations varies, depending on the individual agency involved and the organisational backgrounds. For example, what works for feeding back into a voluntary service type setting may not work in feeding back to staff in a Health Service setting. All of those interviewed did say that information about Sure Start was fed back into their organisation in one way or another.

A similar theme emerged when professionals were asked whether the arrival of Sure Start had influenced the way their services were organised or delivered. Some services/agencies have little choice but to adjust the services on offer to work closely with Sure Start, for example, the Voluntary sector. In certain cases, changes in the delivery of services were not as easy or practical. For example, Health Services in particular, where the service available can be largely influenced by the structure of the organisations, lack of staff and resources etc...

In terms of what the professionals thought they or their agency/organisation had learnt from being involved with Sure Start, the majority stressed they had learnt the importance of:

- 'The power of parents'.
- 'Looking at whether the services we deliver meet the needs of the parents - re-focus how we set up services and deliver them'.
- 'Different ways any organisation runs and look for best practice'.

The vast majority also said they felt that their involvement with Sure Start would influence the way in which their services would be organised and/or delivered in the future, especially with more programmes being set up within the area.

Professional's Views on 'The Role Of The Management Board'

All professionals agreed that 'anything and everything' gets discussed at board meetings, although there was a difference in whether they thought it was where the key decisions about the programme get made:

- ...'Yes'...it's the board, it drives the programme'.

- 'No, the key decisions not made there- I think they get made by the government and... brought to the board for ratification'.
- ...'Yes probably, but the manager also has some to make'.

In one way or another, the board is seen as a place where parents do have a chance to have their voice heard, and have some influence over decision-making in the programme. Although one member did say they felt that although the parents were becoming more confident they may not always say what they 'really' think:

- 'For example, changes to the building for Children's Centres, parents agreed at the board- but went away and discussed it and decided that they had agreed to something they didn't want'.

All the professional members felt that the current membership (fifty per cent parents/fifty per cent professionals) was about right. Although one member noted that certain agencies were not represented enough, especially Health. Two members also voiced concerns over parent members who are employed by Sure Start sitting as members of the board. They felt that employees should not be involved in decision-making and further, that:

- 'Parents voice is what Sure Start is about- not staff and priorities could be different'.

It was also noted that some parents on the estate could see employing parents who are also on the board as 'clicky'.

The Role Of Parents On The Management Board

Overall, the professional members thought that the role of parents on the board was on an equal footing with the professional's. Parent membership on the board was considered crucial for local parents to feel ownership of the programme.

Alongside this, the role of local parent's in bringing forward the views, wants and needs of the local community were also seen as central to the role of the parent's.

All professionals agreed that having parent members of the board did make a difference to how the meetings were conducted, compared to

other meetings they attended. The majority stated that the meetings were less formal, slower pace, more relaxed.

It was also noted that discussions are more likely to get sidetracked, coffee breaks are more frequent and some issues discussed were not really suitable for board level discussion. However, all agreed that the presence of parents was central to the success of the meetings and the parents helped to:

- 'Tell it how it is, sometimes professionals evade issues with jargon'.

Most of the professional members felt that issues important to local parents did reach the board. Some were not sure exactly how this happened although the Parents Group, surveys and questionnaires were put forward as ways for local parents to get their views across. They were less clear about how parents received feedback for the management meetings, although the Parents Group and the newsletter were believed to be a good way of communicating decisions to local parents.

Several agencies also involve some parents on their management boards/groups, though their representation was not as high as Sure Start.

Do Professionals Believe Parents Make A Difference To Decision Making?

Some of the professionals said they felt that parents do make a difference to decision making in Sure Start and could provide examples of where parental involvement has made a difference, these included:

- 'Appointing staff'.
- 'Swimming. Parents wanted swimming and they got the money for it'.

However, others were less sure and in some cases found working alongside parents and sharing the decision-making a challenge. Some members felt that parents had too much influence over the provision of services and further, that what parents felt they wanted was not always what they needed - from a professional point of view.

These issues may well become more apparent with the implementation of Children's Centres. The need to work closely with a range of services providers, some of whom are not used to listening to or dealing with parents; this could well present a challenge for professionals in the future.

Sure Start has always been parent centred and those with a professional background, especially in statutory agencies such as Health and Education, may feel that parents lack the ability to make a professional, objective decision. This of course is what Sure Start is and always has been about- getting professionals to listen to parents and work in partnership with them. Central to the success of this relationship is the willingness of professionals to work in new and challenging ways that may not always feel 'right' from a professional perspective.

What Can Improve Parental Involvement on Management Boards?

Suggestions from professional members for improving the involvement of parent membership on the management board included:

- 'Support and Training'.
- 'Let them know they can say what they want, rather than what they think we want'.
- 'Making parents aware that their voice is listened to'.
- 'No need to improve it, it is good as it is'.

The majority felt that parents were already well involved in the general day to day running of the programme through various means such as the Parents Voice and other sub-groups. Although suggestions for improvement included:

- 'Communication - see that activities get there, show the board does listen'.
- 'Regular training and support'.
- 'Widen participation - some decisions should be made programme wide'.

To conclude the interview, the professionals were asked if there was anything they felt important relating to parental involvement on the Management Board in particular, and Sure Start in general, that had not been discussed.

The following points were raised:

- 'Need to break the social attitude on the estate'.
- 'If you don't have young children you don't see the enormous benefits'.
- 'Think the change in the parents has been startling- they are a fine bunch of people...it has shown me the value of using parents and consulting with them'.

CONCLUSION- The Management Board

The Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park Sure Start Management Board is currently working as an effective tool for involving parents in the decision making process and the general running of the programme. There is evidence that parental involvement does influence the decisions that get made and that parents have influenced services in general, and the programme overall. The programme has the benefit of a group of committed parents who work very hard to make the programme a success.

The recent implementation of Children's Centres and the decision to make Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park an early designation has created some tensions for the parent members in particular. The parents were not asked whether they wanted to become involved with the Children's Centre, it was implemented as a government initiative.

However, the parents have been nurtured from the beginning of the programme to become involved in the decision- making of the programme. Ownership by parents has been actively promoted- it is dis-empowering for parents to have no say in something that will impact on their programme.

However, the fact that parents do have the chance to voice their opinions highlights the fact that parents do feel able to influence the decision-making generally within the Sure Start programme. They also hope to have a say in how the Children's Centre is implemented.

In terms of parental involvement in the programme overall, besides the Parent Group and Management Group, Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park has just introduced a new structure of management for the programme that will help involve more parents programme wide. The new structure will involve

introducing six sub-groups, each with three parent representatives. Each sub-group will tackle one of the national targets for Sure Start.

There are other groups that the parents can become involved with decision-making; these include the Special Events Group, Evaluation Group and Arts & Crafts Group.

In conclusion, at present there are many opportunities for parental involvement in Sure Start. Parental involvement is supported as far as possible, although available crèche and childcare provision for parents attending meetings can present problems. Importantly, parents do seem to make a difference in the decision-making overall and can see the impact of their involvement.

Compared to the early experiences reported by parents, especially when having to deal with 'professionals', the fact that parents are not afraid to air their views in front of Manager, staff or professionals shows they have grown in confidence as their involvement has developed.

On a more negative note, the implementation of Children's Centres has had a negative impact on the way parents see their ability to influence what goes on with their programme. While they still feel able to have a say about how the local Sure Start programmes is run and what services are available, they felt that they had little say in whether they wanted to become a part of a Children's Centre.

Given the government drive on implementing Children's Centres nationwide this is a potential problem for local Sure Start programmes nation wide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Management Board-What Might Help?

Joining The Board

- Standardising the election/eligibility criteria for parent members across programmes. For Example, parents on Management Board must have children of Sure Start age.
- Standardising the Constitution of Board membership across programmes.
- Build confidence of parents by involving them in sub-group meetings that feedback to Management board first. This is currently being implemented at Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park.
- Publicity information available e.g. - 'Getting Involved' - a leaflet highlighting what groups are available for parents to become involved in decision-making: when they meet, how to join etc...
- Trial period for interested parents to observe meetings without the obligation to join.
- Shadowing- Going along with a parent member- as an observer.
- Training- Committee skills, team building, group working.

'What Might Help?'

Parental Involvement On Management Board

- Provide a welcome pack that fully details what the Management Board is there to do - to include:
 - Clear guidelines on what the Board is there to do.
 - Clear guidelines on the role parents are expected to play on the Board.
 - Clear guidelines on the Terms of Reference/Constitution of the Board- how decisions get made, voting, etc...
 - Clear guidelines on issues around confidentiality, Conflict of Interest etc...
- 'Reward System' for parents putting time and effort into Management Board.
- Pre-meetings with all parents/manager -for support.
- Post- meetings with Manager. *

*Post Meetings with Manager

A post- meeting with the programme Manager to allow parents to say anything that had been 'un-said' in the meeting. Pre-meetings are useful, but it is difficult to know what may arise from discussions. Some parents may not feel they can speak freely in the meeting for a variety of reasons. A Post - meeting would provide a chance to go over issues and raise any 'un-aired' concerns. If there are any issues that cannot be resolved during the post-meeting they could be placed on the agenda for next meeting.

Although practically, timing could be a problem, it may be possible to arrange the post-meeting for a different time/day - but close to the Board meeting so that issues are still fresh in the minds of the parents.

WHAT MIGHT HELP?

Children's Centres

- Meetings with parents to set out realistically, the role of Sure Start local programmes in relation to Children's Centres.
- Involve parents, as much as is possible in having a say in HOW the Children's Centre will work.
- Involve parents closely in all decisions about possible changes to services as a result of Children's Centre implementation.
- Reinforce the key role parents will continue to have in their local Sure Start programme.
- Involve parents closely in discussions around possible changes in the boundary of Sure Start in relation to Children's Centres.
- A question and Answer session for local parents on the role of Children's Centres and how they will impact on local Sure Start programmes.
- Need to reassure local parents about the positive benefits to the local community from Children's Centres.
- A leaflet setting out key points of what the implementation of Children's Centres does and does not mean for the local programme, and the local parents, to be sent out to all registered families.

NOTES

The Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Management Board was subject to an internal evaluation at an Away Day for parents and professional members of the Management in July 2003. Both parents and professionals were consulted. The results of the Away Day were input into the delivery plan for the programme and have resulted in changes in the way the programme is run and the constitution of the Management Board. These changes will hopefully improve the level and quality of parental involvement.

Minutes from the Management Board meetings, April and June 2003 provide evidence of the debate around Children's Centres. Minutes from June 2001 note feedback from Parents Voice. The minutes provide evidence for referral of issues to the parent Voice on 23rd January 2003- minutes from Parent Voice evidence that the issue was discussed at that meeting.

Minutes from the Parent group meetings held in June 2002 note that parents devise rules and regulations for Family room and Trips and Events during the meeting. The idea for a parent led Tuck shop is also noted during this meeting.

Minutes from the Parent Group meeting July 2003 note that parents were asked how they wanted the meetings run, if they wanted staff there etc... This meeting also ended the usual formal round of introductions and replaced it with the introduction of sticky labels with names written on.

SURVEY FINDINGS -NUNSTHORPE & BRADLEY PARK

Parents NOT involved in Management Boards or Voice Group Questionnaire.

SAMPLE SELECTION

The questionnaire was aimed at collecting the views of 'hard-to reach' groups who do not get involved with the Parents Group or the Management Board. The questionnaire was designed to find out how much people know about the Management Board and the Parents Group, what they think the groups are there to do and what might stop them getting involved in the groups.

All interviews were chosen on a random basis by accessing; drop-ins', Trip's, stay 'n' play sessions, playgroups, nurseries, local schools etc.

Sample size: 15% of eligible population.

SUMMARY

Management Board

Overall local parents do feel that the involvement of parents in Sure Start influences both the decision-making and the programme overall.

The majority of local parents believe that the Management Board makes the main decisions about the programme. They also believe that having parents on the Board does make a difference to how those decisions get made.

The Management Board is recognised as an effective way of involving parents- by parents. However, the majority of those who said they would be interested in joining the Board also stated they would not know how to go about joining.

Along with more practical things like childcare and time/venue of meetings, more personal issues such as; 'Not knowing what to expect', 'Never having been to meetings before', being 'shy/nervous' and not being able to understand paperwork are common things that put parents off getting involved with the Management Group.

Training, which involves practical workshops, along with an introduction to meetings on a smaller, more informal setting could help ease parents into more formal meetings like the Management Board. A combination of 'shadowing' and 'mentoring' may also help boost parents confidence to become involved in a meeting type setting. A 'jargon buster' is available for Management Board meetings.

The Parents Group

The majority of local parents have heard about the Parents Group and know that anyone can go along to the meetings. Parents believe that the group is there to listen to local parents views and have a say in what services are provided. Most of those interviewed felt that the group also influences how decisions get made in the programme.

Half of local parents said that they still get their views across, even if they don't go to meetings. The most popular way of doing this was to tell either a member of staff or someone who does go to the meetings. However, nearly a third of local parents said they do not get to know what happens in the Parents Group. Of those who said they would be interested in going along to a meeting, a third did not know where and when they take place.

As Parent-toddler type 'stay 'n' play and drop-ins were stated as the most used service/activity, it may be practical to send out Minutes and information on both groups to as many of these activities as possible. This will increase the availability of information to local parents, especially for satellite groups used by parents who may not use main Sure Start Centre.

Those interviewed believed that the best way of getting the right information to them was by newsletters and post (a letter, addressed to them at home). Other possible ways included posters/leaflets at local schools and shops.

THE KEY FINDINGS

- 90 per cent of those interviewed knew that Sure Start is government funded. Only 2.5 per cent did not know whom Sure Start was for, although responses varied from 'unemployed' to 'local community'.
- 26 per cent of those interviewed were not currently registered with any local Sure Start programme.
- 100 per cent of those interviewed stated that since the arrival of Sure Start in the area the quality of services available for young children and their families had improved.
- Parent & Toddler services/activities (including playgroups) were the most popular service/activity with 30 per cent saying they used these the most.
- Crèche/ day-care facilities were also popular with 30 per cent using these services most often.

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD

- 67 per cent of those interviewed did know that there was a Sure Start Management Board that parents can sit on.
- 51 per cent of parents who knew about the Management Board did not know that Sure Start says half of the members should be local Sure Start parents.
- 46 per cent of parents felt that the Management Board was there to listen to local parents views on the programme.
- 20 per cent thought that the Sure Start Management Board was answerable to the government. 23 per cent thought that the Board was answerable to local parents.
- 54.5 per cent of parents believe that the main decisions about the programme are made at the Management Board.

- 40 per cent thought that the main decisions about the programme are made at the Parents Group.
- 80 per cent believe that having parents on the Management Board does make a difference to how decisions get made.
- 80 per cent of those who said they would be interested in joining the Management Board did not know how to go about joining.
- The most common things that put people off joining the Management Board were: 'Childcare' and 'being shy' (25 per cent each).
- 'Not knowing what to expect', worries over understanding paperwork and 'never having been to meetings' were also things that could put people off.
- 35 per cent stated that available childcare would make it easier to join the Management Board. A further 25 per cent stated that knowing what to expect would make it easier to join.
- Other things that would make it easier to join included: 'Timing to suit school run,' 'feeling confident' and an informal atmosphere.
- 58 per cent said they did not get to see the Minutes from Management Board meetings.
- All of those who did see Minutes from Management Board meetings thought they were easy to understand.
- Parents believed that the best ways of getting the right information to them about the Sure Start Management Board (how to get involved, the role of parents etc.) were by a letter addressed to them at their home and newsletters.
- Other ways of getting the right information included making leaflets available at drop-in's and local schools and poster in local shops and schools.

THE PARENTS GROUP

- 64 per cent of those interviewed knew there is a Parents Group that meets to have their say about the programme.
- 18 per cent did not know that anyone could go along to the Parents Group.
- 64 per cent believed that the Parents Group is there to listen to the views of local parents.
- 59 per cent believe that the Parents Group is there to have a say about what services there should be.
- 30 per cent believe the Parents Group is answerable to the Management Board. 23 per cent thought that the group is answerable to local parents.
- 50 per cent said that if they don't go to meetings they get their views across by telling someone who does go.
- 50 per cent said they would get their view across by telling a member of staff.
- 59 per cent of parents do feel their views were listened to.
- 79 per cent think that having the Parents Group does make a difference to how decisions get made in the programme.
- 32 per cent of those interviewed said they do not get to know what happens in the Parents Group.
- 40 per cent of parents said that not having access to childcare would put them off coming to a meeting.
- 'Never having been to meetings before' and 'not knowing anyone in the group' were also believed to put people off going along to the Parent Group (both 33 per cent).

- No one believed that the Manager or staff members being present at meetings would put people off going along.
- Access to available childcare was stated as something that would help make it easier to go along to the group (50 per cent).
- 'Having someone to go along with', 'Knowing what to expect' and 'timing of the meetings' were also noted as making attendance easier.
- 33 per cent of parents interviewed who said they would be interested in going along to the Parents Group did not know where or when the Parent Group meetings took place.
- The most popular methods for getting the right information to parents about the Parents Group (how to get involved, the role of parents etc.) were, a letter addressed to them at their home and newsletters
- Other ways of getting the right information to parents about the Parents Group were; posters and leaflets at the Sure Start centre, local schools and shops.

SECTION FOUR

Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start

Background

Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start falls across two separate Wards in Scunthorpe, Crosby & Park Ward and Frodingham Ward. With a resident population of 11,738 (2001 Census data), Crosby & Park Ward is ranked amongst the top 20 per cent of the most deprived wards in England and Wales. In 2001, the resident population was largely from a white ethnic background. However, the Crosby & Park Ward has a higher than average resident population of ethnic minorities than England and Wales.⁶ Frodingham Ward has a resident population of 7,777 (2001 Census data) and ranks amongst the top ten per cent of the most deprived Wards in the England & Wales. In 2001, the resident population was largely from a white ethnic background.⁷

⁶ Ethnic Population for Crosby & Park Ward, Census Data 2001 (percent of resident population):

Source: ONS

White	92.1
(Including white Irish)	
Mixed	0.8
Asian or Asian British	6.2 (England & Wales is 4.6)
Indian	2.4 (England & Wales is 2.1)
Pakistani	0.9
Bangladeshi	2.6 (England & Wales is 0.6)
Other Asian	0.3
Black or Black British	0.7
Caribbean	0.1
African	0.5
Other Black	0.1
Chinese or other	
Ethnic group	0.3

⁶ All statistics quoted are taken from ONS- Census data 2001. www.statistics.gov.uk unless otherwise stated.

⁷ Ethnic Population for Frodingham Ward, Census Data 2001 (percent of resident population):

Source: ONS

White	97.2
(Including white Irish)	
Mixed	0.5
Asian or Asian British	1.8
Indian	1.0
Pakistani	0.4
Bangladeshi	0.4
Other Asian	0.1
Black or Black British	0.2
Caribbean	0.0
African	0.2
Other Black	0.0
Chinese or other	
Ethnic group	0.2

The average unemployment rate for the area, at 5.2 per cent, is higher than the national average of 3.4 per cent. Of those unemployed, 28 per cent were long-term unemployed.⁸

The average number of lone parent households with dependent children is 10.35 per cent compared to 6.5 per cent for England & Wales.⁹ Housing in the area is more likely to be rented. Frodingham has more than twice the average council rented properties than for England and Wales. Crosby & Park has a higher than average per cent of private rented properties. Both Wards have a lower than average number of properties without central heating compared to England & Wales¹⁰.

Over a third of Frodingham Ward and Crosby & Park Ward residents (39.2 per cent average), aged 16 -74, had no educational qualifications (the average for England and Wales is 29.1 per cent). And only 7.7 per cent (average) were educated to degree level or above compared to 19.8 per cent for England and Wales.

Residents of the local areas are more likely to be divorced or separated than the average for England & Wales and slightly more likely to describe their health over the previous twelve months as 'Not Good'.¹¹

According to the Child Poverty Index, in 2000, around a half (50.24 per cent) of children under 16 years of age living in the area were dependent on means tested benefits¹².

⁸ The unemployment rate was 5.4 per cent for Crosby & Park and 5.0 per cent for Frodingham. 28 per cent long term unemployed refers to both Wards. All statistics quoted are taken from ONS- Census data 2001. www.statistics.gov.uk unless otherwise stated.

⁹ Frodingham has 10.4 per cent and Crosby & Park has 10.3 per cent of households with lone parents with dependent children. ONS

¹⁰ 26.8 per cent of properties in Frodingham are council rented compared to 13.2 per cent in England & Wales. The number of council rented properties in Crosby & Park was 18.9.

¹¹ Average divorce rate for England and Wales - 8.2 per cent compared to Frodingham 10.0 per cent and Crosby & Park 11.8 per cent.

9.2 per cent of the population of England and Wales described their health over the previous 12 months as 'Not Good' compared to 10.3 per cent (average) of the population of Scunthorpe Old Town. Source: ONS- www.statistics.gov.uk

It was a culmination of these facts that lead to the area being identified as being eligible for funding from the third wave Sure Start initiative. The programme Delivery plan was written in February 2001 and the programme was granted approval in June 2001.

Background To The Parent Group

The Scunthorpe Old Town Partnership was established out of the original Steering Group of different stakeholders/agencies that were interested in working in partnership with Sure Start. The Steering Group were involved in the production of the delivery plan for the programme. The Partnership remained as the management structure for the programme and will be discussed later in the report.

Parents have been consulted throughout the development of the programme. Early consultations in the run up to the delivery plan being prepared looked at what local parents thought were the main problems in the area and what they believed would make the area a better place to live.

Two of the key parents involved with Sure Start from the beginning did set up a group for local parents to meet and discuss issues and ideas about the programme. These meetings became less frequent due lack of attendance from other parents at that time. However, the key parents in question did have an input into the development of the programme and were also involved in two other working sub-groups.

The current Scunthorpe Old Town Parent's Group evolved out of a combination of two sub-groups that were established in the early days of the Scunthorpe Old Town Partnership Board. These groups, The Play, Learning & Childcare Group and The Basic Needs Group, were set up to tackle specific issues relating to the delivery plan and report back to the Partnership Board. These meetings, which involved a few key parents and professionals, discussed issues such as:

- New developments in the programme.
- Training for parents.

¹² The Wards vary slightly; Frodingham has a higher percentage, 55.58 compared to Crosby & Park at 44.89. The average for both wards is 50.24 per cent. www.CCNAP shows the Child Deprivation Indices by ward in North & North East Lincs.

- Trips.
- Staff recruitment.

The Basic Needs Group initially met monthly, although this changed to bi-monthly in line with the Play, Learning & Childcare meetings. These meetings gradually folded due to lack of attendance and evolved into the current Parent Group that was established in January 2003.

The Venue

At the time of the research the programme was delivering services from cramped offices in a building shared with the local Social Services. The lack of physical space as well as the stigma associated with Social Services may have had a negative impact on the level of parental involvement up to this point. It did not provide an ideal base for meetings and was certainly not really ideal for parents 'dropping in'. However, parent meetings aside, the local parents have been consulted on service and programme issues on a regular basis.¹³

Since January 2003 the Parent's Group meetings have been held at Greeson Hall, - 1.00 -3.00 pm. There is a crèche available, as well as tea, coffee and biscuits. The meetings are held in a large room with plenty of space available for parents.

A regular group of around five 'key' parents attend the meetings and new parents have attended the meetings (six to date). This is an encouraging sign; local parents do appear to be interested in the group. It is essential then, in this early stage, to sustain the interest and input of parental involvement by making the meetings as accessible and as friendly as possible. It is also crucial that parents can see that the group can and does make a difference to the programme.

The programme Manager does not attend the meetings, however, the Deputy Manager does. At present the Deputy Manager arranges the meeting and some staff members are present. The parent Chair of the Partnership Group also Chairs the Parent's Group.

Most of the parents did have some input in discussions, though some were quiet throughout. Given that this was the first time some parents had

¹³ At the time of the report, the new Sure Start Centre was almost ready for opening to the local community and it is anticipated that this will help establish the group in a more central and welcoming environment.

attended and the group is fairly new (Jan, 2003. 1st meeting) this is perhaps not surprising. As the group identity develops and the meetings become more regular hopefully the parents will grow in confidence.

Indeed, compared to the meeting observed in July 2003, an observation of the Parent's Group in October 2003, found that the Parent Group meeting was lively, relaxed and the parents did interact as a group. The atmosphere was informal and although there were three new parents attending they seemed to be relaxed and did contribute to the meeting. Parent's ideas were encouraged and listened to, with the staff promising to look into any issues raised that they could not resolve there and then. The group seems to have a good relationship with the Deputy manager and do speak up on issues when she is there.

At present then, it would appear that the Scunthorpe Old Town Parent Group is developing into a dynamic and lively group. At the time of the research, which included interviews and observations, the group was meeting on a regular basis.

Most of the parents interviewed felt that the times, venue and childcare available was convenient for the meetings. However, one parent noted that the timing was not good for her to get back and pick her child up from school, as she had to travel across the town to attend the meeting. This parent also felt that a certain area was not being given enough opportunity to have their voice heard at the Parent's meetings and that a satellite Sure Start Parent Group should be set up.

This is an issue most programmes may face. Many of the local programmes encompass areas that consist of sub-areas, with a distinct local identity. These areas may not be as close to the main build/base of the local programme and these parents may not practically be able to 'drop-in' or attend as many meetings as they wish. Establishing satellite Parent Groups will help give a voice to these areas and also develop the level of parental involvement in the running of the programme.

The Meetings

The meetings cover many issues relating to parental involvement in and the running of the programme, these include:

- Activities

- Trips - where to go, rules etc...
- Activities.
- New equipment.
- New build- decoration, furniture etc...
- Use of the Sure Start vehicle.
- Boundary issues.
- Staffing up-dates.

Joining The Parent Group

Parents who attended the parent group meeting had been using Sure Start services on average for 17 months, although this ranged from three months to two years. The length of time parents had been coming along to the group varied. Two parents were attending their first meeting, two parents were attending for the second time and three parents had been involved with the group since January. One of the parents had been involved in the early attempts at setting up a Parent Group. The average attendance was 8 parents. The meetings are almost entirely made up of female members, although there have been men (one) at one of the observed meetings. Seven parent members were interviewed- all female. Two of the parents interviewed were from an ethnic minority background.

All parents agreed that the meetings were easy to follow and that any paperwork was easy to understand. The majority of parents heard about the group through friends, two parents heard about the group through their Family link workers and one of the parents heard about the group through the newsletter. Attendance was reported to be high with the majority of parents saying they hoped to attend more meetings in the future.

Reasons for getting involved in the group varied:

- "To have a say in what's going on"
- "Just interest"
- "I thought it would be a good way of putting new ideas forward..."

Some of the parents said they didn't know what to expect before they attended, while others said that in the beginning the group was not what they expected, although it was now. Generally the parents thought the meetings were a chance to have their say.

Should Staff Attend Parent Group Meetings?

Parents were asked three questions around the issue of whether staff members should be allowed to go along to Parent meetings. The questions looked at three 'types' of staff: parents who are employed by Sure Start, Sure Start staff and the Manager.

Parents Employed by Sure Start

The majority (6) felt that parents who were also staff should be allowed to go along to the group, but only in their role as a local parent:

- "Yes, if they are there as 'just a parent' - not as staff/parent, they should not wear their uniform"
- "Yes, difficult one, but, if they live in the area and have kids, yes."

However, one parent was not so sure:

- "Don't know. Some have other commitments."

Staff

Three of the parents felt that Sure Start staff should be allowed to attend the meetings, so they could give advice if needed. One parent felt that their role should be made clear and staff should be there for information only-not for their views. Two of the remaining parents felt that staff should not attend the group and the remaining parent thought:

- " Maybe one or two, it should be run by parents, for parents, let them have the choice."

Manager

Three of the parents felt that the Manager should be involved in the Parents group, three felt that the Manager should not be present and one parent felt that it would be a good idea for the Manager to attend some meetings.

Getting parents to Parent Meetings

Most of the parents said they first heard about the meetings from a friend or a Sure Start employee and came along out of interest. They

were asked how the meetings might be improved and what they thought might make it easier for parents to come along to the group. 'No childcare', 'too many staff', being 'too shy' and 'not being able to speak freely,' were given as examples of what might put parents off attending the group. One parent also noted that not knowing what the group is for could be off-putting to those who did not know what to expect.

The majority of the parents felt that the meetings were fairly easy for local parents to attend if they wished. Although one parent did mention the importance of available childcare in making it easier for parents to attend the meetings. One parent thought that a 'parent buddy' or 'pal' system to take parents along to their first meeting would be a good idea.

Further suggestions for improvement included:

- 'Satellite Parents Groups.'
- 'More relaxed, less formal.'

The meetings do appear to provide local parents with an arena to voice their opinions, and joining the group simply involves turning up when the meetings take place. The meetings are publicised in the newsletter and dates announced at the Partnership meetings.

Where Do Decisions About The Programme Get Made?

There were differences of opinion as to where parents thought the decisions about the programme get made; three parents said they did not know where decisions about the programme got made. Two parents felt that the decisions about the programme get made as a result of consulting with parents and two parents felt the decisions about the programme get made 'in the offices'.

This is an interesting issue, as parents should feel that they can and do influence the decision making process within Sure Start. Consultation is carried out on a regular basis with parents and this allows local parents to have an input into the shape of certain services. Evaluation is also carried out into how satisfied parent's are with services/trips etc.... Decisions around things such as, for example, the internal décor of a new build are also in the hands of the parents.

Given that the group is relatively new to the programme it may take time to build up confidence to challenge the decision- making process and

assert its views. As the group continues to develop and parents can see evidence that their views are acted upon they may begin to feel more involved in the decision making process. It is also important to note that, as mentioned earlier, at the time of the research there was little opportunity for staff and parents engaging on a day-to-day basis; this 'distance' could influence not only how parents see the programme, but also how they see their ability to influence the decision-making.

The Role Of The Parent Group

Only one parent said they did not know the role of the Parent Group. Parents felt that the role of the group covered the following areas:

- 'To make decisions and informed choices.'
- 'Getting parents views across',
- 'To come up with ideas',
- 'To be consulted and asked about everything.'

Is the Group Taken Seriously?

Although the majority (5) felt that the Parent Group is taken seriously, one parent felt that this only 'sometimes' and one stated: "it's getting there, it wasn't, but it's getting". The parent Chair meets with the Deputy Manager before the meeting to discuss the agenda.

Three parents said they are given a chance to have a say about what goes on the agenda. However, the remaining three parents said they didn't. If parents wish to raise an issue not on the agenda they have a chance to voice it in 'Any Other Business'. Some parents (4) get the chance to meet with local parents before the meeting and discuss agenda items, but the others said they did not.

There was a mixed reaction about the responsibilities parents feel the group has:

- 'Don't know',
- 'Quite a lot, representing all parents who don't turn up'

The majority of parents (4) felt that the meetings did work in getting issues up to the Management Board, though they were less clear about

how this takes place. In terms of whether there was feedback available from the Management Board to the Parent Group, the responses varied:

- 'No'
- 'Yes'
- 'Don't know'

This is an important issue as communication is vital to keeping parents involved in Sure Start, and parents need to know they are taken seriously.

Has The Parent's Group Made A Difference To Services Offered?

Most of the parents felt that the Parent Group had made a difference to services offered. Several examples were given:

- "Yes. Trips and events... and the Policeman, we were consulted about what role he was to have."
- "Playgroups and trips."

On the other hand:

- "Don't think so, not here".
- "It's just lately we are starting to make a difference".

The Minutes of the Parents Forum provide evidence of the parent's views being listened to. The issue of the access to trips during the holidays, the use of the Sure Start vehicle and involvement of parents in planning the decoration of new builds is Minuted. Ideas for new services, for example, exercise classes for mums and a possible walking club are also discussed.

The meetings appear to be an opportunity for the parents to voice their ideas and suggestions for the programme. At the time of the research the meetings were organised by staff, although Minutes from the meeting held in August 2003 noted that parents were being actively encouraged to develop the group in any way they wish with the support of the Deputy Manager.

The delay in the forming of the Parent Group in Scunthorpe Old Town may highlight a problem that many newer Sure Start programmes could face. Scunthorpe Old Town have been organising and delivering services out of cramped office space that was not 'parent-friendly' this could impact on the chance for staff and local parents to build relationships in

the early days. Not being in close proximity with staff and using services that are 'out-reach' could have an impact on the level of parental involvement that is practically possible on a day-to-day basis. Once the programme has established itself into a more 'parent-friendly' arena parents will hopefully become to feel more involved and develop more ownership of the programme.

Has The Parent Group Made A Difference To The Programme Overall?

The responses of the parents vary from a definite 'Yes' to 'Don't Know'. While there were no examples offered, evidence from the minutes from the Parent Group does suggest that the Parent Group is beginning to make a difference to the programme - in terms of being involved in discussions about services, service delivery, activities and staff recruitment

CONCLUSION

Overall, at the time of the research the Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start programme had a group of committed parents, some of whom are working very hard to establish the Parents Group as a way for local parents to have a say about the programmes development. The group has grown in confidence and is working in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere with all parents feeling they are able to actively contribute to the meetings.

The Parent Group provides a means for parents to voice their views and raise any issues. It would be a good idea for parents to take control of the organisation of the meetings themselves on a regular basis.

It may also be beneficial to set up satellite Parents Group (s), to ensure all areas of the programme are represented.

RECOMMENDATIONS- Parent Group

What would help?

- Standardise the Parent Group name across all programmes.
- Always set a date for the next meeting.
- Light refreshments- cakes/biscuits- tea/coffee to be provided as a way of saying thank-you to parents for giving up their time to attend the meetings.
- A welcome pack for Parent Group members. The welcome pack to include clear information about what the meetings are for and to stress the importance of parents becoming involved in the group.
- Establish a set of 'Ground Rules' or 'Terms of Reference' that includes:
 - The right for everyone to have their say without interruption.
 - Clear guidelines on the role of staff involvement in meetings.
 - Clear guidelines on voting rights.
 - All the above to be translated into languages that are used within the area and made available for parents at meetings.
- Training - committee skills, group work, team building for any parents who want it.
- Introducing satellite Parent Groups at strategic points in the community (e.g. local schools), to maximise the involvement of local parents who may not use the building.
- 'Parent-Buddy' system.
- Annual 're-launch' of the Parent Group meeting- publicised with lunch and crèche included.
- 'Out of Hours' Parent Group. Evening meetings every couple of months for parents in the area who may work and find it difficult to attend daytime meetings. This may also encourage more male carers to attend.

COMMUNICATION

Parents should feel the group is taken seriously if they are to be encouraged to become involved, and more crucially, to stay involved. The group needs to be seen as being listened to and any issues/concerns highlighted acted upon. Suggestions to encourage this include the introduction of the role of Parent Group (PG)- Management Board (MB) co-ordinator.

Parent Group (PG)- Partnership Board (PB) - PG/PB Co-Coordinator

The role would be introduced to ensure a process is in place for a smooth two-way flow of communication, which can provide evidence of action being taken on issues arising in the PG, and to report back decisions and feedback from the PB.

- The role would be a reporting/recording, independent position and as such, the coordinator would not be a member of the PB and have no voting rights.
- If no parent volunteer is available, a Parent Participation worker could carry out the duty- but hand over the role if a parent wishes to take over the responsibility.
- If more than one parent is interested then either elections or random draw to select the coordinator.
- Ideally, a further parent, standing in reserve could be kept up-to-date ensure that the role is always occupied.

The introduction of such a position would mean that the PG would be able to track development of issues/ideas/suggestions and have evidence that they are listened to. This would not only provide evidence that the group is taken seriously, it would also mean that the group would be informed of reasons if actions cannot be taken, and consider possible suggestions for compromise.

It would also ensure that any issues/concerns that may take time to resolve are kept in the picture. This could avoid parents feeling that issues raised have not been acted upon and forgotten about. Clear reports/action plans, however brief, would ensure that issues are followed through to whatever the outcome may be. Parents can see where and why things may take time or may not be practical, and consider

alternatives. Importantly though, they are kept in the 'loop' regarding decision-making.

Further suggestions to keep all those interested in the development of the programme up to date include:

- A quarterly progress report-up-date by the manager, reported back at an open meeting with all parents and stakeholders and staff invited. This will promote ownership of the programme for all those involved - particularly the parents. (This would be similar to the role of the Partnership at the time of the research).
- The progress report made available, as minutes of all sub-meetings at all venues.
- Staff to take copies of minutes from Parent Group meetings to all drop-in's and activities, along with time and date of next meeting.

The suggestions listed above include ideas from the Steering Group meeting held on 12th September 2003 at Nunsthorpe Resource Centre.

THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Parent Members of the Partnership Board

The Partnership Board of Scunthorpe Old Town evolved from the original Partnership of key stakeholders who worked closely on the delivery plan for the programme. The first meeting was held in September 2000, and the programme was approved in June 2001. Getting parents involved was a challenge in the early days, although participation by parents has gradually increased

The current membership consists of a vast range of professionals and parents are invited along to the meetings; the number of parents attending varies from month to month ranging from 3 to 20. The Chair and Vice Chair are both parents.

There does seem to be a key set of parents that attend the meetings, although any parent who wishes can turn up on the day. The parent members going along to the group tend to be female, although during observations some men were present (2). There were also a few parent members from an ethnic background at the meetings observed (2/3).

The 'open forum' type of style to the Partnership meetings meant that selecting a sample of parents to interview about their involvement was based looking through the Minutes of the meetings and finding a sample of parents who had attended the meetings. The sample of 7 parents selected for interview had attended the meetings at least twice. They were all female and included the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Partnership.

Becoming Involved With The Partnership Board

The majority of the parent members had been going along to Partnership meetings for around 16 months. One more recent member had only been to two meetings.

All except one of the parents had not been involved with anything like this before they went along to the Partnership meetings. One parent was involved with a committee for a different group. Two of the parents have undertaken training in committee skills. The remaining parents have not been offered any training specific to the Partnership Board.

Most of the members (4) said they went along to the Partnership meetings to find out what was happening in the area. One parent said they went along to the meetings to have an input into the programme. Two of the members were involved with Sure Start before the programme gained approval and said they joined the board as a way of becoming more involved with Sure Start. They also wanted to find out what was happening in the community.

Most of the parents (4) who had been attending Partnership meetings from the early days reported that the first time they attended a meeting it was a nerve-racking experience. Two parents said they didn't really know what to expect and one parent felt that the first meeting they attended was 'ok'. Things had improved though:

What Is It like Now?

- "Not so bad now"
- "It's alright now, more 'normal' people"
- "Percentage of parents higher now"

The parent who had only been to two meetings said that although they felt slightly nervous beforehand; the meeting was better than they expected.

Being On The Partnership Board

Most of the parents interviewed (5) said that the meetings were held at convenient times and places with childcare available. Two parents disagreed and stated that the venue for the meeting was not convenient and could be more central. Everyone agreed that the meetings were easy to follow and the majority said that the paperwork was usually easy to read. One of the parents did comment that the paperwork for the budget and finances could be difficult to understand.

The majority of parents (6) said they did feel they could speak freely at meetings, although one parent disagreed. Most of the parents either knew how to make a complaint about the meeting or felt it would be easy to find out how. Two parents said that while they did not know how to make a complaint now, if they felt strongly enough about an issue then they would find out how.

Are Parent Views Taken Seriously?

All the parents said that they thought they were listened to and that their views were taken seriously. Several examples were given as to when parent's views had been listened to. For example:

- "Yes. Quit smoking course. Also suggested a course for healthy cooking and they are putting on the courses".
- "Yes. Job bureau set up, it was my idea to develop it further."

The parents were then asked about the role of the Partnership Board.

What Sort of Things Get Discussed At Partnership Meetings?

- Spending/Money
- Funding
- New Build
- Trip & Events
- New developments
- Staff
- Progress report

Do You Think This Is Where The Main Decisions About The Programme Get Made?

- 'Yes.'
- 'No.'
- 'Don't know.'

Only one parent felt that the main decisions about the programme get made at Partnership meetings. The majority (5) said they did not think that the main decisions about the programme get made there.

All the parents felt they could offer a great deal to the Partnership Board. Examples of what contribution they felt they could bring included:

- 'Parents have no hidden agenda, know the needs of the area.'
- 'Because it's supposed to be parent led and give a fairer representation of what parents want...they (professionals) don't live in the area.'

- 'We can speak to other parents' who might not want to go to things like that and give their views.

The majority of the parents said they felt a responsibility to the local parents, children and community by being on the Partnership Board and their roles were not undertaken lightly.

There was a mixed reaction as to whether parents had a chance to discuss issues with other parents before a Partnership meeting. Some parents said they had a chance to discuss issues with local parents through the Parent's Group. It was noted that if they didn't go to this meeting then it wasn't always possible. One parent stated that local parents are consulted about issues before the Partnership Board.

Examples of where parents believed they had made a real difference to the decision-making have been highlighted above. Parents also noted that their involvement in many issues such as; the new buildings, Pocket Parks, and employing the 'right staff' had also made a real difference to the programme overall.

What Have You Learnt From Being On The Management Board?

Parents felt that they had learnt a lot about Sure Start by being on the Management Board and also, on a more personal level:

- 'Given me more confidence.'
- 'I've learnt I'm just as good as anyone else and not to feel intimidated.'
- 'I've learnt confidence, no matter how many professionals are there, I can have my say.'

To end the interview, parents were asked what they thought could be done to improve parental involvement in the running of the programme:

- Have Parent meetings at different venues - not all parents want to travel a fair distance.
- 'Consultation, whenever, wherever possible.'

Overall, the Parents Group and going along to the Partnership meetings does offer the opportunity for parents to have their say. Importantly

though, most parents on the Partnership Board do feel they are listened to, supported and their views taken seriously.

'THE PROFESSIONALS'

The long-term aim of Sure Start is the mainstreaming of services that are parent friendly and easily accessible to the community. Promoting local ownership of the programme and involving parents in the decision-making will hopefully result in services that are fine-tuned to the needs of the local community.

Central to this process of change in the delivery and provision of services is the involvement of key agencies/organisations that deliver/provide those services. There is clearly a need for the professionals to work in partnership with the local programme and listen to parents wants and needs if mainstreaming of services is to be a success in the long-term. However, working in partnership with parents in this way is something that service providers may not be used to. As such, an important part of the research is to find out what the professionals think about parental involvement in Sure Start: in particular, listening to and sharing the decision-making with parents.

'Professional Members of Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start Partnership Board'

The professional members of the Management Board are drawn from a variety of stakeholder organisations/agencies. These include: Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Voluntary Sector, National Health Service Trust, Education/Local Education Authority, North East Lincolnshire Council, Children's Services, North Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust, Social and Housing Services, Humberside Police, Bangladeshi Welfare Association, Bangladeshi Sunni Jama Mosque/Madrassa, The Sikh Complex, Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Diocesan Representative.¹⁴

The list of professional members of the Partnership dates back to the early days before the programme gained approval. The Partnership is referred to as the main decision making body in the Delivery Plan and

¹⁴ There are 63 professional members on the Partnership list. The list is a summary of the agencies/services providers.

early correspondence between the lead contact for the programme and the Sure Start Unit.¹⁵ Members are kept up-to-date with the Minutes and are invited to all meetings. The Delivery Plan notes the voting rights of each sector involved in the Partnership and if a decision was needed the group could refer to the Terms of Reference.

The Minutes of all Partnership Board meetings were consulted in order to choose a representative sample of professional members. However, there were some difficulties as some members stated they no longer attended on a regular basis. The sample selected was based on attendance at meetings rather than agency representation, although the following agencies/service providers were included in the sample: North Education Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust, North Lincolnshire Council, Voluntary Sector, and Social and Housing Services. Seven professionals were interviewed.

The majority of professional members said they became involved with Sure Start because they wanted to find out what Sure Start had to offer for the area and also to develop links between their organisation and Sure Start. Most of the sample had been on the Partnership Board since the first meeting.

WHAT THE 'PROFESSIONALS' THINK

Generally, professionals see their role on the Sure Start Management board as one of keeping up-to-date with developments, offering their agencies point of view and developing links with the programme.

What Do You Think Your Role (on the board) is?

- 'To work in Partnership with Sure Start- not to duplicate services.'
- 'To bring a Health view.'
- 'Listening to what's going on and keep up-to-date.'

Most of the professionals attended meetings as often as they could although it was noted that other commitments could mean having to miss meetings. One member said they did not attend the meetings very often, but did in the early days. The majority of those interviewed said they had a nominated representative in case they could not attend. The usual

¹⁵ Correspondence dated 4th May 2001- Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start Progress Report 10th May 2001- Appendix A& B.

methods of keeping each other up-to-date with what is happening in the programme was through Minutes of meetings, telephone up-dates and e-mail. Those who did not have a nominated representative stated they still kept up-to-date with what was happening in the programme.

The way that information about developments in Sure Start is fed back into organisations varies, depending on the individual agency involved and their organisational backgrounds. For example, what works for feeding back into a voluntary service type setting may not work in feeding back to staff in a Health Service setting. All of those interviewed did say that information about Sure Start was fed back into their organisation in one way or another.

A similar theme emerged when professionals were asked whether the arrival of Sure Start had influenced the way their services were organised or delivered. Some services/agencies have little choice but to adjust the services on offer to work closely with Sure Start, for example, the Voluntary sector. In certain cases, changes in the delivery of services were not as easy or practical. For example, Health Services in particular, where the service available can be largely influenced by the structure of the organisations, lack of staff and resources etc... However, it was noted that building close relationships with Sure Start would help to avoid duplicating services in the area.

In terms of what the professionals thought they or their agency/organisation had learnt from being involved with Sure Start, the majority stressed they had learnt the importance of:

- Communication
- Involving of parents
- Different ways of working

The majority also said they felt that their involvement with Sure Start would influence the way in which their services would be organised and/or delivered in the future.

Professional's Views on 'The Role Of The Partnership Board'

All professionals agreed that 'anything and everything' gets discussed at Partnership meetings, although there was a difference in whether they thought it was where the key decisions about the programme get made,

the majority (5) stated that the main decisions about the programme did not get made at the Partnership Board meetings:

- 'No, the key decisions are made before it comes- just arrives for 'rubber-stamping.'
- 'No. I don't think it's where the main decisions get made.'

One professional stated that due to their fairly recent involvement they did not feel able to comment and one member stated:

- Yes, in the beginning, how they chose the office/buildings etc...

There was a mixed response as to whether the professional members felt that the current membership of the Partnership was about right. Four professionals were not aware of the current Sure Start guidelines for membership and constitution of the board, although three of these said they felt that the current membership was about right. One member stated that what actually took place at the meetings was not in line with the guidelines set out by Sure Start.¹⁶

The Role Of Parents On The Partnership Board

Overall, the professional members thought that the role of parents on the board was on an equal footing with the professional's. Parent membership on the board was considered crucial for local parents to feel ownership of the programme.

Alongside this, the role of local parent's in bringing forward the views, wants and needs of the local community were also seen as central to the role of the parent's.

Most of the professionals agreed that having parent members of the board did make a difference to how the meetings were conducted, compared to other meetings they attended. However, one member felt that too many Sure Start staff attended the meetings and felt that

¹⁶ It should be noted that the Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start Partnership Board meetings operate an 'open' meeting and any parent can attend; as well as any member of the professionals on the Partnership list. This does differ from the Sure Start guidelines for programme management. However, at the time of the research the programme Manager was reviewing the structure and is set to implement changes to the structure of the day-to-day management of the programme.

parents might find this off-putting. The majority of the professionals felt that having parents present at the meetings was helpful. However, one member stated that the meetings were not really the right forum for parents to become involved in decision-making.

Most of the professional members felt that issues important to local parents did reach the board. Some were not sure exactly how this happened although consultation and the Parents Group were put forward as a way for local parents to get their views across.

Do Professionals Believe Parents Make A Difference To Decision Making?

The majority of professionals said they felt that parents do make a difference to decision making in Sure Start and could provide examples of where parental involvement has made a difference, these included:

- 'Crèches. Originally the timing was wrong for families- who said so and the times of the meeting were changed.'
- 'Huge difference. Community consultation is central.'

Overall, the professional members of the board did feel that involving parents in the decision -making did work and was a good thing. Several agencies also involve some parents on their management boards/groups, though their representation was not as high as Sure Start.

However, others were less sure and in some cases found working alongside parents and sharing the decision-making a challenge. For example, one member felt that parents should not make a difference to decision -making.

These issues may well become more apparent with the possible implementation of Children's Centres. The need to work closely with a range of services provider, some of which are not used to listening to or dealing with parents could well present a challenge for professionals in the future.

Suggestions from professional members for improving the involvement of parent membership on the Partnership Board included:

- 'Encourage more parents to attend.'
- 'Informal, parent friendly.'

The majority felt that parents were already quite involved in the general day to day running of the programme through various means such as, Consultation and the Parents Group. Although suggestions for improvement included, regular support for parents and more Family Link workers. One member felt that levels of parental involvement might improve once the new Sure Start Centre opens.

To conclude the interview, the professionals were asked if there was anything they felt important relating to parental involvement on the Management Board in particular, and Sure Start in general, that had not been discussed.

The following points were raised:

- Regular user satisfaction surveys, consultation for evaluation and clear complaints procedures.
- Do parents know the Constitution and Terms of Reference?

CONCLUSION- The Partnership Board

The Scunthorpe Old Town Sure Start Partnership Board does have a Terms of Reference with nominated representatives (although attendance is not consistent). However, the Minutes of the meetings and Observations carried out during the research suggest that the structure of the meetings is more in line with a 'feed-back/up-date reporting facility.

The structure of the meetings is based largely on the presentation of the Managers progress report. The Parent Chair introduces the report and hands over to the relevant staff member to up-date the group on recent development/progress, activities, etc... Any questions could be asked during the up-date, but generally little discussion takes place and parents and professionals had little input. The meetings observed lasted approximately 45 minutes and was almost entirely taken up with the progress report feedback.

Unlike more usual management structures, the fact that the meeting is an open forum could lead to potential problems. If a key decision did arrive before the Partnership, there is a possibility for a 'conflict of interests' to arise. This could be addressed by going back to the Terms of

Reference to establish who has voting right. However, given that parent representatives are not elected in the formal manner, it would be difficult to decide who would exercise the parent votes.¹⁷

A clear election procedure with voted parent and professional members, with clear Terms of Reference (as the Delivery Plan) would help the group establish itself more fully as a 'management', decision making body. At present if an issue did require a vote, it could be difficult to exclude parent members from the vote without making them feel that they were not being taken seriously at the meeting.

Parental involvement could be encouraged if the group was more dynamic and less descriptive as parents don't really get a chance to become involved in discussions or decision-making. As a means of involving parents in the decision making process and the running of local Sure Start programme the Partnership may not be as effective as possible. However, as it stands, the Partnership Board does provide an excellent opportunity for both professionals and parents to be kept informed of what is happening in the programme.

It should be noted that a new management structure is being implemented in the near future, which should include more parents in decision-making working sub-groups. It is anticipated that these sub-groups will report to a more formal management board, which will be the main decision-making body.

There are other ways of involving parents in the programme through such means as consultation and parents can influence decisions in this way. However, to be involved more closely in a management group that actually makes the decisions (after the influence of parents has been input) could improve the experience of becoming and being a Parent Partnership Board.

Parents need to see they can influence decisions and that they are involved in the management of the programme to sustain interest, promote ownership of the programme.

There is evidence to suggest that parental involvement does influence decision-making and that parents have influenced services in general, and

¹⁷ There are named parents representatives in the Delivery Plan; however, these names do not appear in the Minutes of recent meetings.

the programme overall. The programme has the benefit of a group of committed parents who work very hard to help make the programme a success.

In conclusion, at present there are many opportunities for parental involvement in Sure Start. Parental involvement is supported as far as possible with available crèche and childcare provision for parents attending meetings.

Importantly, parents do believe they make a difference in the decision-making and can see the impact of their involvement. Given that the programme was running out of cramped office space - shared with Social Services for the first two years, the level of parental involvement has been managed well with lots of consultation with local parents. This has ensured that parents have influenced decision-making during the life of the programme. The opening of the new Sure Start Centre will hopefully help increase and sustain levels of parental involvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Management Board-What Might Help?

Joining The Board

- Introduce a management structure for the programme in line with Sure Start recommendations. Current guidance suggests the board should be as small as possible, with a combined 50/50 professional/parent membership of between 15-18.¹⁸
- The main decisions about the programme to be made by the board- as in line with Sure Start recommendations.
- Implement an election procedure for local parents to become members of the management board.
- Standardising the election/eligibility criteria for parent members across programmes. For Example, parents on Management Board must have children of Sure Start age.
- Standardising the Constitution of Board membership across programmes.
- Build confidence of parents by involving them in sub-group meetings that feedback to Management board first.
- Publicity information available e.g. - 'Getting Involved' - a leaflet highlighting what groups are available for parents to become involved in decision-making: when they meet, how to join etc...
- Trial period for interested parents to observe meetings without the obligation to join.
- Work towards an informal atmosphere- coffee breaks etc...

'What Might Help?'

Parental Involvement On Management Board

- Provide a welcome pack that fully details what the Management Board is there to do - to include:
 - Clear guidelines of what the Board is there to do.
 - Clear guidelines of the role parents are expected to play on the Board.

¹⁸ Taken from the latest Sure Start guidance: Sure Start: a guide to planning and delivering your programme Summer 2002, Section 3, 'Governance' - page 14.

- Clear guidelines on the Terms of Reference/Constitution of the Board- how decisions get made, voting, etc...
- Clear guidelines on issues around confidentiality, Conflict of Interest etc...
- Shadowing- Going along with a parent member- as an observer.
- 'Jargon Buster'.
- Training- Committee skills, team building, group working.
- 'Reward System' for parents putting time and effort into Management Board.
- Pre-meetings with all parents/manager -for support.
- Post- meetings with Manager. *

*Post Meetings with Manager

A post- meeting with the programme Manager to allow parents to say anything that had been 'un-said' in the meeting. Pre-meetings are useful, but it is difficult to know what may arise from discussions. Some parents may not feel they can speak freely in the meeting for a variety of reasons. A Post - meeting would provide a chance to go over issues and raise any 'un-aired' concerns. If there are any issues that cannot be resolved during the post-meeting they could be placed on the agenda for next meeting.

While this may not be practical time wise on the day of the meeting, it may help to pre-arrange the Post- meeting soon after the Partnership/Management meeting to make sure any issues are still fresh in parents' minds.

NOTES

There is a 'Strategy For Parental Involvement' in place.

Minutes from the Parents Group meetings between 8th January 2003 and 8th October 2003 were consulted.

SURVEY FINDINGS - SCUNTHORPE OLD TOWN

Parents NOT involved in Partnership Boards or Parents Group Questionnaire.

SAMPLE SELECTION

The questionnaire was aimed at collecting the views of 'hard-to reach' groups who do not get involved with the Parents Group or the Partnership Board. The questionnaire was designed to find out how much people know about the Partnership Board and the Parents Group, what they think the groups are there to do and what might stop them getting involved in the groups.

All interviews were chosen on a random basis by accessing; drop-ins', Trip's, stay 'n' play sessions, playgroups, nurseries, local schools etc.

Sample size: 15% of eligible population.

SUMMARY

Partnership Board

Overall local parents do feel that the involvement of parents in Sure Start influences both the decision-making and the programme overall.

The majority of local parents believe that the Sure Start regional office makes the main decisions about the programme. Just under a half believed that the Partnership Board makes the main decisions about the programme. The majority of parents do believe that having parents on the Partnership Board does make a difference to how those decisions get made.

The Partnership Board is recognised as an effective way of involving parents- by parents. However, the majority of those who said they would be interested in joining the Board also stated they would not know how to go about joining.

Along with more practical things like childcare and time/venue of meetings, more personal issues such as; 'Not knowing what to expect',

'Never having been to meetings before' and being 'shy/nervous' are common things that put parents off getting involved with the Management Group.

Training, which involves practical workshops, along with an introduction to meetings on a smaller, more informal setting could help ease parents into more formal meetings like the Management Board. A combination of 'shadowing' and 'mentoring' may also help boost parents confidence to become involved in a meeting type setting.

The Parents Group

The majority of local parents have heard about the Parents Group and know that anyone can go along to the meetings. Parents believe that the group is there to listen to local parents views and have a say in what services are provided. Most of those interviewed felt that the group also influences how decisions get made in the programme.

Over a half of local parents said that they still get their views across, even if they don't go to meetings by telling a member of staff. However, over a third of local parents said they do not get to know what happens in the Parents Group. Of those who said they would be interested in going along to a meeting, the majority said they did not know where and when they take place.

As parent-toddler type drop-ins and trips/special events were stated as the most used service/activity it may be practical to send out Minutes and information on both groups to as many of these services as possible. This will increase the availability of information to local parents.

Those interviewed believed that the best way of getting the right information to them was by newsletters and post (a letter, addressed to them at home).

KEY FINDINGS

- 86.5 per cent of those interviewed knew that Sure Start is government funded. Only 7 per cent did not know whom Sure Start was for, although responses varied from 'families with financial difficulties to 'everyone'.
- 23 per cent of those interviewed were not currently registered with any local Sure Start programme.
- 83 per cent of those interviewed stated that since the arrival of Sure Start in the area the quality of services available for young children and their families had improved.
- Parent & Toddler services/activities (including playgroups) were the most popular service/activity with 48 per cent saying they used these the most.
- Trips/Special events were also popular with 42 per cent using these services most often.

THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

- 65 per cent of those interviewed knew there was a Sure Start Partnership Board that parents can sit on.
- 44 per cent of parents who knew about the Partnership Board did not know that Sure Start says half of the members should be local Sure Start parents.
- 73 per cent of parents felt that the Partnership Board was there to listen to local parents views on the programme.
- 46 per cent thought that the Sure Start Partnership Board was answerable to the government and 44 per cent believed the Board was answerable to local parents.
- 54 per cent believe that the Sure Start regional office makes the main decisions about the programme. 48 per cent of parents believe that the Partnership Board makes the main decisions about the programme.

- 31 per cent thought that the Parents Group makes the main decisions about the programme.
- 86 per cent believe that having parents on the Partnership Board does make a difference to how decisions get made.
- 74 per cent of those who said they would be interested in joining the Partnership Board did not know how to go about joining.
- The most common things that put people off joining the Partnership were: childcare (36 per cent) and time/venue (33 per cent).
- 'Not knowing what to expect', 'never having been to meetings' and being 'shy/nervous' were also things that could put people off joining.
- 33 per cent stated that available childcare would make it easier to join the Partnership Board. A further 36 per cent stated that knowing what to expect would make it easier to join.
- Other things that would make it easier to join included: 'Timing to suit school run,' 'feeling confident' and 'being able to understand what's going on'.
- 72 per cent said they did not get to see the Minutes from Partnership Board meetings.
- Of those who did see Minutes 64 per cent thought they were easy to understand.
- Parents believed that the best ways of getting the right information to them about the Sure Start Management Board (how to get involved, the role of parents etc.) were by a letter addressed to them at their home and in newsletters.
- Other ways of getting the right information to parents included having posters/leaflets available at drop-in's and local schools.

THE PARENTS GROUP

- 69 per cent of those interviewed knew that there is a Parents Group that meets to have their say about the programme.
- 20 per cent did not know that anyone could go along to the Parents Group.
- 71 per cent believed that the Parents Group is there to listen to the views of local parents.
- 69 per cent believe that the Parents Group is there to have a say about what services there should be.
- 27 per cent believe the Parents Group is answerable to the Management Board.
- 35 per cent thought that the group is answerable to local parents.
- 58 per cent said that if they don't go to meetings they get their views across by telling a member of staff.
- 34 per cent said that they would get their views across by telling someone who does go.
- 61.5 per cent of parents do feel their views were listened to.
- 83 per cent think that having the Parents Group does make a difference to how decisions get made in the programme.
- 35 per cent of those interviewed said they do not get to know what happens in the Parents Group.
- 34 per cent of parents said that the time and place of the meetings could put them off coming to a meeting.
- 26 per cent said that having no childcare available would put them off going to meetings.
- 31.5 per cent believed that being nervous or shy would put people off going to the meetings.

- 'A clicky group' and 'Never having been to meetings before' were also believed to put people off.
- Only 3 per cent believed that the Manager or staff members being present at meetings would put people off going along.
- Access to available childcare was stated as something that would help make it easier to go along to the group (37 per cent).
- 'Having someone to go along with', 'knowing what to expect' and 'timing of the meetings' were also noted as making attendance easier.
- 65 per cent of those interviewed said they would be interested in going along to the Parents Group.
- 77 per cent of the parents that said they would be interested in going along to the Parents Group would not know where or when the meetings took place.
- The most popular methods for getting the right information to parents about the Parents Group (how to get involved, the role of parents etc.) were, a letter, addressed to them at home, and newsletters.

SECTION FIVE

East Marsh Sure Start

Background

Prior to May 2003, East Marsh Sure Start fell within the North East Ward of Grimsby. It now falls within the new Ward of East Marsh. With a resident population of 11,749 (2001 Census data), the Ward ranked amongst the top 10 per cent of the most deprived wards in England and Wales. In 2001, the resident population were largely from a white ethnic background and all other ethnic groups in the area were lower than average for England and Wales.¹⁹

The unemployment rate for the area, at 9.9 per cent, is nearly three times the national average of 3.4 per cent. Of those unemployed, 36 per cent were long-term unemployed.²⁰

The number of lone parent households with dependent children is 13 per cent: twice the national average. Housing in the area is more likely to be rented and 20.1 per cent of households in the area are private rented. Much of the housing in the area is run down. The number of households without central heating is 24.7 per cent: nearly three times more than the average for England and Wales.

Over half of East Marsh residents (51 per cent), aged 16 -74, had no educational qualifications (the average for England and Wales is 29.1 per cent). And only 4.3 per cent were educated to degree level or above compared to 19.8 per cent for England and Wales.

¹⁹ Ethnic Population for East Marsh, Census Data 2001 (percent of resident population):

Source: ONS

White (Including white Irish)	98.9
Mixed	0.4
Asian or Asian British	0.3
Indian	0.1
Pakistani	0.1
Black or Black British	0.2
Caribbean	0.0
African	0.1
Other Black	0.0
Chinese or other Ethnic group	0.2

²⁰ All statistics quoted are taken from ONS- Census data 2001. www.statistics.gov.uk unless otherwise stated.

Residents of East Marsh are nearly twice as likely to be divorced or separated and more likely to describe their health over the previous twelve months as 'Not Good'.²¹

According to the Child Poverty Index, in 2000, more than two thirds (69.63 per cent) of children under 16 years of age living in the area were dependent on means tested benefits²².

It was a culmination of these facts that lead to the area being identified as being eligible for funding from the fourth wave Sure Start initiative. The programme Delivery plan was written in July 2001 and the programme was granted approval in December 2001.

The East Marsh Sure Start

Background To The Parent Group

The East Marsh parent group evolved out of early meetings with parents during the planning period for Sure Start. Originally, three key local parents were approached at Home Start and asked to go along to a meeting with 'professionals' and other people interested in developing Sure Start. This combination of interested parents and professionals made up the original Steering Group for the programme.

The first meeting with 'professionals' for the Steering Group was described as 'awful' by one of the parents. However, the group later developed into the Management Board, which is discussed later in this report. The Parent Group meetings started at Home Start with Mavis Crawforth and usually involved the three key parents.

Parents have been central to the development of the programme. In the run up to the delivery plan being prepared the three key parents became involved in consulting with local parents. The early consultation was about

²¹ Average divorce rate for England and Wales - 8.2 per cent compared to East Marsh 15.5 per cent.

9.2 per cent of the population of England and Wales described their health over the previous 12 months as 'Not Good' compared to 14.1 per cent of the population of East Marsh. Source: ONS- www.statistics.gov.uk

²² www.CCNAP shows the Child Deprivation Indices by ward in North & North East Lincs.

what local parents thought were the main problems in the area and what they believed would make the area a better place to live.

The parents were also involved in finding the most suitable person to manage the programme. Candidates for the Managers position had an interview with parents as well as the usual more formal interview. Parents were asked to score candidates on several counts, such as 'approachability'. The present manager was the choice of parents as well as professionals.

The Parent Meetings began at Home Start, with the manager and in the beginning only a few parents were involved. Once the programme moved into the Sure Start building on Hainton Avenue the parents took over organising the meetings. The current Parent Group has built on these early beginnings and remains parent led.

The Venue

The meetings became firmly established on a regular basis once the Sure Start building on Hainton Avenue became available. The parents had a physical presence in the building from day one, along with a venue for the meetings. The close proximity of parents and staff in the early days gave parents access to the Manager and her team from the start. This may have helped build relationships and ensured that parents were kept informed of developments within the programme. It may have also influenced the role of the parents and the development of the Parent Group.

The Meetings

The meetings take place at Hainton Avenue, on Wednesday's at 12.45-2.45. The parents had a physical presence in the building along with the Manager and her team from day one.

There is a crèche available. The meetings were held at the front of the building in 'the cage'. At present, the East Marsh Parent Forum is a dynamic and lively group. They meet on a regular basis, weekly for 3 weeks and then one week off. At the time of the research, which included interviews and observations, the group was meeting on a regular basis.

The group discussed a wide range of issues and discussions did become heated. There are some strong personalities in the group although they do not go unchallenged by other group members and quieter members of

the group did have the chance to have their voice heard, although this sometimes took time.

The programme Manager is invited to attend one meeting out of every three, and staff are not present unless invited. The group seems to have a good relationship with the Manager and speak up on all issues when she is there. All the parents interviewed felt that the times, venue and childcare available was convenient for the meetings.

The meetings cover many issues relating to parental involvement and the running of the programme, these include:

- Staff- recruitment and complaints
- Requests for parents to be involved with interviews
- Trips - where to go, rules etc...
- Activities
- New equipment
- New build
- Services
- 'Whistle Blowing Policy'
- Equal Opportunities Statement
- Training for Parents

Joining The Parent Group

Parents who attended the parent group meeting had been using Sure Start services on average for 14 months, although this ranged from six months to two years. Similarly with joining the group, the average length of membership was 14 months. All of the parents interviewed began going along to the Parent Group within a month of using services. The average attendance was 9 parents. The meetings are almost entirely made up of female members, although there have been men (one) at some of the meetings. One male did attend an observed meeting. Eight parent members were interviewed- all female.

All parents agreed that the meetings were easy to follow and that any paperwork was easy to understand. The majority of parents heard about the group through accessing services such as drop-in's and mother & toddler groups, or through friends/listening to parents talk. Several parents were told about the group and encouraged to go along by a parent volunteer.

Attendance was reported to be high with the majority of parents saying they attended at least half of the meetings and some saying they attend all meetings unless they are too ill to attend.

Reasons for getting involved in the group varied:

- "Wanted to know what was going on in the programme"
- "Don't know"
- "Something to do really"

Some of the parents said they didn't know what to expect before they attended, while others said they expected the meetings to be formal and were surprised that they were relaxed and informal. Generally the parents thought the meetings were a chance to have their say, although one parent did say she felt that the meetings could be 'friendlier'.

Should Staff Attend Parent Group Meetings?

Parents were asked three questions around the issue of whether staff members should be allowed to go along to Parent meetings. The questions looked at three 'types' of staff: parents who are employed by Sure Start, Sure Start staff and the Manager.

Parents Employed by Sure Start

The majority (6) felt that parents who were also staff should be allowed to go along to the group, but only in their role as a local parent:

- "Yes, attend as parents though"
- "Yes, if you've got children you're still a parent even though you're staff"

The remaining two parents felt that this group of parents should only attend if invited.

Staff

The majority felt that Sure Start staff should only be allowed to attend the meetings if they were invited. Overwhelmingly the parents felt that staff should not be at every meeting:

- "Only if they are invited because it will feel like they are taking over, it should be for parents."

Manager

Most of the parents felt that the Manager should be involved in the Parents Group, but that they should decide how often they would like her to attend.

Getting parents to Parent Meetings

Apart from the two parents who were involved in setting up the Parents Group, all the other parents said that they first heard about the meetings through hearing parents talk about it, or from a friend. In one case, one of the parents that had been involved in developing the parents group asked a parent to come along - and arranged to meet up and bring her along to her first meeting.

Parents were asked how the meetings might be improved and what they thought might make it easier for parents to come along to the group.

'Not being listened to' and 'parents views and opinions not being acted on' were given as examples of what might put parents off attending the group. Some parents also felt that the group itself may be off-putting to those who did not know them:

- "We are all sat there, we look and stare, and we do!"

Some parents felt that the meetings sometimes ended up being 'loud' and serious and that they needed to be more aware of showing respect for each other's views. A parent 'buddy' was also considered a good idea to get people along for the first time. As one parent pointed out, once you are at the meeting:

- "You just sit here, then you get involved!"

However, generally, parents thought that it was fairly easy to come along to the group if parents wished to get involved.

Further suggestions for improvement included:

- More privacy
- Food/cakes/biscuits

The Parent Group meetings were held in 'the cage' at Hainton Avenue, which was not very private. However, parents did voice their concerns about this issue and the meetings now take place in the meeting room upstairs, which seems to have addressed the problem of privacy.

The meetings do appear to provide local parents with an arena to voice their opinions, and joining the group simply involves turning up when the meetings take place. The meetings are publicised in the building at Hainton Avenue and the Minutes from the meetings are readily available in the reception area.

Where Do Decisions About The Programme Get Made?

The vast majority of parents felt that the Management Board makes the decisions about the programme. However, several parents stated that the Parents Group, the Capital Group, the Implementation Group and the Manager were also involved in decision-making. Parents are involved as members on all sub-groups, as such; they should be involved in any decisions these groups make.

The Role Of The Parent Group

Only one parent said they did not know the role of the Parents Group. Parents felt that the role of the group covered the following areas:

- Making decisions about the programme,
- Getting parents views across,
- To help make improvements in the programme,
- To make sure staff know what parents want,
- To help run Sure Start,
- To come up with ideas,
- Make sure everyone gets what they want.

Is the Group Taken Seriously?

Although the majority felt that the Parents Group is taken seriously, three parents felt that this is only 'sometimes' and stated that some issues raised are not always followed through. Parents are given the chance to have a say about what goes on the agenda and if they wish to raise an issue not on the agenda they have a chance to voice it in 'Any

Other Business'. Some parents meet before the meeting and discuss agenda items, but some parents said they did not get the chance to discuss issues with other parents.

There was a mixed reaction about the responsibilities parents feel the group has:

- 'None Really',
- 'To listen and take every view seriously'

The majority of parents felt that the meetings did work in getting issues up to the Management Board, though they were less clear about how this takes place. In terms of whether there was feedback available from the Management Board to the Parent Group, the responses varied:

- 'Yes'
- 'Sometimes'
- 'Occasionally'

This is an important issue as communication is vital to keeping parents involved in Sure Start, and parents need to know they are taken seriously.

Has The Parents Group Made A Difference To Services Offered?

Most of the parents felt that the Parents Group had made a difference to services offered. Several examples were given:

- "Yes. The Older Mum's Group, the Shalom, new satellite drop-in's and parent groups (Strand).
- "Yes. I have heard things brought up in the group that have happened, say for example another Health Visitor, we wanted one and we got one"
- "Yes. Trying to get schools open in summer for activities, training for parents.

On the other hand:

- "Honestly, I don't know".

The minutes of the Parents Group provide evidence of the parents' views being listened to. The issue of the Health Visitors and the attempts to get the local schools open during the holidays for activities are minuted.

The meetings appear to be parent led and the parents voice their concern over any issue they feel is threatening or lessening their involvement. Minutes from the Parents Group dated 06th November 2002 noted that according to certain parents, recently the staff were:

'not as approachable, everyone's too busy' with no time to relax'.

They also felt that they were not being kept as informed about what was going on in the programme as they used to be.

The Manager did act on these issues and the Minutes of the following meeting notes that parents did feel there had been an improvement in staff attitudes. The Manager had also arranged staff/parent 'team-building' type days to work on the relationships between staff and parents. The Minutes of all sub-group meetings taking place were also made available for parents to get a copy if they wish.

These issues highlight a problem that many newer Sure Start programmes may face. Initially Sure Start staff may have more time to spend developing relationships with parents. However, as the programme develops and the staff find themselves with more work and less time, it is likely to impact on their relationships with parents. What parents expect, based on how things were in the beginning, may become difficult to achieve once staff have more work to do and more parents to see. As new groups are formed and more services and activities are introduced it may prove difficult to keep everyone informed of everything that is taking place.

A further concern also raised by some parents is another issue which potentially concerns all Sure Start programmes: the availability of, and access to, services for families who live outside of the Sure Start area. This issue has been debated during the parent meetings and parents have devised a list of 'rules' governing access to services and trips to parents and their families that live outside of the area.

Has The Parent Group Made A Difference To The Programme Overall?

The responses of the parents vary from a definite 'Yes' to 'Don't Know'. While there were no examples offered, evidence from the minutes from the Parent Group does suggest that the Parent Group has made a

difference to the programme - in terms of being involved in staff recruitment, new services, and how services are delivered. Observations of the meetings also suggest that the parents do feel they can voice an opinion and have their say.

CONCLUSION

Overall, at the time of the research the East Marsh Sure Start programme had a group of committed parents, some of whom had been working to develop the programme before approval was granted.

The Parent Group provides a means for parents to voice their views and raise any issues. At the time of the research, a further parents group was being established by a local parent at one of the schools in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS- Parent Group

What would help?

- Standardise the Parent Group name across all programmes
- Light refreshments- cakes/biscuits- tea/coffee to be provided as a way of saying thank-you to parents for giving up their time to attend the meetings.
- A welcome pack for Parent Group members. The welcome pack to include clear information about what the meetings are for and to stress the importance of parents becoming involved in the group.
- Establish a set of 'Ground Rules' or 'Terms of Reference' that includes:
 - The right for everyone to have their say without interruption.
 - Clear guidelines on the role of staff involvement in meetings.
 - Clear guidelines on voting rights.
- Training - committee skills, group work, team building for any parents who want it.
- Introducing satellite Parent Groups at strategic points in the community (e.g. local schools), to maximise the involvement of local parents who may not use the building.
- 'Parent-Buddy' system.
- Annual 're-launch' of the Parent Group meeting- publicised with lunch and crèche included.
- 'Out of Hours' Parent Group. Evening meetings every couple of months for parents in the area who may work and find it difficult to attend daytime meetings. This may also encourage more male carers to attend.

COMMUNICATION

Parents should feel the group is taken seriously if they are to be encouraged to become involved, and more crucially, to stay involved.

The group needs to be seen as being listened to and any issues/concerns highlighted acted upon. Suggestions to encourage this include the introduction of the role of Parent Group (PG)- Management Board (MB) co-ordinator.

Parent Group (PG)- Management Board (MB) - PG/MB Co-Coordinator

The role would be introduced to ensure a process is in place for a smooth two-way flow of communication, which can provide evidence of action being taken on issues arising in the PG, and to report back decisions and feedback from the MB.

- The role would be a reporting/recording, independent position and as such, the co-ordinator would not be a member of the MB and have no voting rights on the MB.
- If no parent volunteer is available, a Parent Participation worker could carry out the duty- but hand over the role if a parent wishes to take over the responsibility.
- If more than one parent is interested then either elections or random draw to select the co-ordinator.
- Ideally, a further parent, standing in reserve could be kept up-to-date ensure that the role is always occupied.

The introduction of such a position would mean that the PG would be able to track development of issues/ideas/suggestions and have evidence that they are listened to. This would not only provide evidence that the group is taken seriously, it would also mean that the group would be informed of reasons if actions cannot be taken, and consider possible suggestions for compromise.

It would also ensure that any issues/concerns that may take time to resolve are kept in the picture. This could avoid parents feeling that issues raised have not been acted upon and forgotten about. Clear reports/action plans, however brief, would ensure that issues are followed through to whatever the outcome may be. Parents can see where and why things may take time or may not be practical, and consider alternatives. Importantly though, they are kept in the 'loop' regarding decision-making.

Further suggestions to keep all those interested in the development of the programme up to date include:

- A quarterly progress report-up-date by the manager, reported back at an open meeting with all parents and stakeholders and staff invited. This will promote ownership of the programme for all those involved - particularly the parents.
- The progress report made available, as minutes of all sub-meetings at all venues.
- Staff to take copies of minutes from Parent Group meetings to all drop-ins and activities, along with time and date of next meeting.

The suggestions listed above include ideas from the Steering Group meeting held on 12th September 2003 at Nunsthorpe Resource Centre.

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD

Parent Members of the Management Board

The Management Board of East Marsh Sure Start evolved from the original Steering Group. Local parents have been involved in the Management Board from the beginning.

The current membership consists of 14 members and the Manager. As in line with Sure Start recommendations, the group consists of fifty per cent parent members and fifty per cent professional members. The programme also has a list of stand-in parent representatives who are kept up-to date with the Minutes of the meetings.

The parent members are made up of six females and one male. At the time of the observations the male parent member of the board had stepped down and nominations were being put forward to find another male representative. A male parent member was duly elected, but has yet to sit on the Management Board.

Joining The Management Board

The majority of the parent members had been on the Management Board for around 18 months. Two more recent members joined only a few months earlier and have only attend a couple of meetings. One parent was interviewed after her first meeting as a member.

The majority of the parents had not been involved with anything like this before they joined the Management Board. Parents have been consulted to ask what their training needs are, but as yet have not attended any training specific to Management Board membership.

Some of the members were involved with Sure Start before the programme gained approval and said they joined the board as a way of becoming more involved with Sure Start. They also wanted to find out what was happening in the community.

The parents who had been on the board from the early days all reported that the first time they attended a meeting was a nerve-racking experience. They hadn't known what to expect and found sitting in a room

with 'professionals in suits with badges on', intimidating. Things had improved though:

What Is It like Now?

- "Relaxed, friendly atmosphere"
- "Piece of cake!"
- "Good now. I understand all the things now"

Also, those parents who joined in the last six months said that although they had felt nervous beforehand, the meeting was not as formal as they had expected it to be.

Being On The Management Board

All the parents interviewed said that the meetings were held at convenient times and places with childcare available. Everyone agreed that the meetings were easy to follow and the majority said that the paperwork was usually easy to read. Several of the parents did comment that the paperwork for the budget and finances could be difficult to understand and contained jargon.

However, at the Management meeting held on 4th August 2003 the budget/finance report was presented in a 'parent-friendly' manner. All parents and professionals commented on the ease with which they could understand the paperwork.

The majority of parents said they did feel they could speak freely at meetings, although some were not as confident, especially with certain issues, such as finance. Although during observations it was noted that parents tend to group together after the Management meetings to discuss issues further when not in the presence of professionals.

Overall, parents said they would know how to make a complaint about the meetings if they needed to.

Are Parent Views Taken Seriously?

There was a mixed response as to whether parents thought their views were taken seriously, although the majority did feel they were listened to

and taken seriously. Several examples were given as to when parent's views had been listened to. For example:

- Home Start Issue. Parents felt strongly that Sure Start should act after they were told not to promote Sure Start or wear the Sure Start shirts when visiting Home Start. The Manager intervened and backed the parents. The issue was resolved and parents could promote Sure Start and wear their Sure Start shirts when visiting Home Start.
- Parents felt the age limit for the loan of baby equipment should be higher because of the availability of maternity grants when the baby is first born. They felt the available equipment should be 0-2 years as needs change as the child grows. This issue was resolved with a change in the service to 0-2 as the parents suggested.
- Parents were not happy with the way the service from Health Visitors was being delivered. The issue was around what the parents felt was a lack of continuity within the service, and wanted the Sure Start Health Visitor to only have a Sure Start caseload. The way the service is delivered was reviewed and is now in line with what the parents wanted.

However, one parent felt that she had not been listened to over a certain issue when her wishes were not met. This may be the case with involvement in Management Boards when individual wishes may have to be turned down after a vote or discussion that does not support it.

A way of tackling this problem could be to provide training to clarify the role of the Management Board and the role of parents on the board and how and why decisions get made.

The parents were then asked about the role of the Management Board.

What Sort of Things Get Discussed At Board Meetings?

- Spending/Money
- Funding
- New Build
- Parents Forum
- Other sub- groups
- Staff

- Monitoring

Do You Think This Is Where The Main Decisions About The Programme Get Made?

- 'Yes.'
- 'Not Always. Sometimes a quick decision is needed.'
- 'I think so, that's the impression I get. If not they go to the Government unit- higher decisions'

All the parents felt they could offer a great deal to the Management Board. Examples of what contribution they felt they could bring included:

- 'You know the area, what's needed, what you want, better than the professionals'.
- 'We have different opinions...know what we would like for the area...they listen to us'.
- 'So it's not one-sided...we're living it'.

All parents said they felt a responsibility to the local parents, children and community by being on the Management Board and their roles were not undertaken lightly.

Overall, parents felt they had a chance to discuss issues with local parents before a Management Board meeting through the Parents Group. It was noted that if they didn't go to this meeting then it wasn't always possible to have this discussion.

The minutes from the Management Board meetings are readily available at the reception area for those parents who use the Sure Start building on Hainton Avenue.

Examples of where parents believed they had made a real difference to the decision-making have been highlighted above, but parents also noted that their involvement in many issues such as, the new building and employing the 'right staff' had also made a real difference to the programme overall.

What Have You Learnt From Being On The Management Board?

Parents felt that they had learnt a lot about Sure Start by being on the Management Board and also, on a more personal level:

- 'I can do decision-making'!
- 'I have more confidence'
- '...to respect people better, not frightened by professionals... not intimidated by anyone any more.'

Although, not everyone had such a positive outlook:

- 'You feel as though you have a weight on your shoulders because you have to make decisions...'

To end the interview, parents were asked what they thought could be done to improve parental involvement in the running of the programme:

- Have Parent meetings at different venues - not all parents want to go to the Sure Start building.

Overall, the Parent Group and Parent membership of the Management Board do offer the opportunity for parents to have their say in the running of the programme. Importantly though, most parents on the Management Board do feel they are listened to, supported and their views taken seriously.

'THE PROFESSIONALS'

The long-term aim of Sure Start is the mainstreaming of services that are parent friendly and easily accessible to the community. Promoting local ownership of the programme and involving parents in the decision-making will hopefully result in services that are fine-tuned to the needs of the local community.

Central to this process of change in the delivery and provision of services is the involvement of key agencies/organisations that deliver/provide those services. There is clearly a need for the professionals to work in partnership with the local programme and listen to parents wants and needs if mainstreaming of services is to be a success in the long-term. However, working in partnership with parents in this way is something

that service providers may not be used to. As such, an important part of the research is to find out what the professionals think about parental involvement in Sure Start: in particular, listening to and sharing the decision-making with parents.

'Professional Members of East Marsh Sure Start Management Board'

The professional members of the Management Board are drawn from a variety of stakeholder organisations/agencies. These include: Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Voluntary Sector, National Health Service Trust, Education/Local Education Authority, North East Lincolnshire Council, Children's Services, North Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust.

The majority of professional members said they became involved with Sure Start because they felt there was a need to develop links between their organisation and Sure Start. Most of the sample had been on the board since the first Management Meeting.

WHAT THE 'PROFESSIONALS' THINK

Generally, professionals see their role on the Sure Start Management board as one of offering support and advice with decision-making and the general running of the programme.

What Do You Think Your Role (on the board) is?

- 'Supporting'
- Support, guidance, expertise
- ...'Offering advice and help with decision making'

The professionals attended meetings as often as they could although it was noted that other commitments could mean having to miss meetings. However, all those interviewed said they had a nominated representative in case they could not attend. The usual methods of keeping each other up-to-date with what is happening in the programme was through minutes of meetings, telephone up-dates and e-mail.

The way that information about developments in Sure Start is fed back into organisations varies, depending on the individual agency involved and their organisational backgrounds. For example, what works for feeding

back into a Voluntary Service type setting may not work in feeding back to staff in a Health Service setting. All of those interviewed did say that information about Sure Start was fed back into their organisation in one way or another.

A similar theme emerged when professionals were asked whether the arrival of Sure Start had influenced the way their services were organised or delivered. Some services/agencies have little choice but to adjust the services on offer to work closely with Sure Start, for example, the Voluntary sector. In certain cases, changes in the delivery of services were not as easy or practical. For example, Health Services in particular, where the service available can be largely influenced by the structure of the organisations, lack of staff and resources etc... However, it was noted that building close relationships with Sure Start were working to give a stronger sense of community in the area, particularly for children under three years and their parents/families.

In terms of what the professionals thought they or their agency/organisation had learnt from being involved with Sure Start, the majority stressed they had learnt the importance of:

- Communication
- 'Eye to eye' contact with parents
- Involvement of parents
- Different ways of working

The vast majority also said they felt that their involvement with Sure Start would undoubtedly influence the way in which their services would be organised and/or delivered in the future.

Professional's Views on 'The Role Of The Management Board'

All professionals agreed that 'anything and everything' gets discussed at board meetings, although there was a difference in whether they thought it was where the key decisions about the programme get made:

- ...'All key decisions are brought to the board'
- ' I think they ratify the decisions'
- ...'Key decisions are made in sub-groups...management 'steers' things'
- 'Most things are put to the board, the manager guides them'

In one way or another, the board is seen as a place where parents do have a chance to have their voice heard, and have some influence over decision-making in the programme.

All the professional members felt that the current membership (fifty per cent parents/fifty per cent professionals) was about right. Although some voiced concerns that certain agencies were not represented enough, especially Social Services. One professional commented that meetings were sometimes 'top-heavy' with parents.²³

It was also noted that care should be taken that the parents that sit on sub-groups are not the same ones who make up the Management Board so as to encourage a broader range of parents and views in the decision-making.

Boundary issues were raised once again by some of the professionals, in particular the increased demands on the time of professionals involved with Sure Start to attend Management meetings.

The Role Of Parents On The Management Board

Overall, the professional members thought that the role of parents on the board was on an equal footing with the professional's. Parent membership on the board was considered crucial for local parents to feel ownership of the programme.

Alongside this, bringing forward the views, wants and needs of the local community was seen as central to the role of the parents.

All professionals agreed that having parent members of the board did make a difference to how the meetings were conducted, compared to other meetings they attended. The majority stated that the meetings were less formal, more relaxed and issues discussed tended to be 'more concrete and practical'.

It was also noted that discussions are more likely to get sidetracked, coffee breaks are more frequent and the meetings tended to over-run. However, all agreed that the presence of parents was central to the

²³ It should be noted that the East Marsh Sure Start Management Board Terms of Reference do state that for a decision to be taken there should be a minimum of three professionals and three parents present.

success of the meetings and the parents helped to 'bring the professionals down to earth'.

Most of the professional members felt that issues important to local parents did reach the board. Some were not sure exactly how this happened although the various sub-groups and the Parents Forum were put forward as a way for local parents to get their views across.

Do Professionals Believe Parents Make A Difference To Decision Making?

All professionals said they felt that parents do make a difference to decision making in Sure Start and could provide examples of where parental involvement has made a difference, these included:

- 'Equipment loan service, began as cots etc... Parents decided to change to provide for older children 0-2... so had major influence on that service and how it's delivered'.
- Health Visitors. Parent's were adamant that they were 'in' on recruitment'.

Overall, the professional members of the board did feel that involving parents in the decision making through the Management Board did work and was a good thing. Several agencies also involve some parents on their management boards/groups, though their representation was not as high as Sure Start.

Suggestions from professional members for improving the involvement of parent membership on the management board included:

- 'Confidence building for new parents before they get involved'.
- 'Shadowing'.
- 'Help with skills associated with the meeting'.

The majority felt that parents were already heavily involved in the general day to day running of the programme through various means such as, Consultation, sub-groups and the Parents Forum. Although suggestions for improvement included, regular training and support and the appointment of a nominated staff member, identified to parents, for help and support if needed.

To conclude the interview, the professionals were asked if there was anything they felt important relating to parental involvement on the Management Board in particular, and Sure Start in general, that had not been discussed.

The following points were raised:

- Suitability. Do parents meet criteria for board members? Are there Police CRB checks being made, do they need to be made?
- Do parents know the Constitution and Terms of Reference?
- Confidentiality and Roles - need training in place.

CONCLUSION- The Management Board

The East Marsh Sure Start Management Board is currently working as an effective tool for involving parents in the decision making process and the general running of the programme. There is evidence that parental involvement does influence the decisions that get made and that parents have influenced services in general, and the programme overall. The programme has the benefit of a group of committed parents who work very hard to make the programme a success.

There are some tensions that exist within the programme. However, the fact that parents do have the chance to voice their opinions, especially when of a negative nature, highlights the fact that parents do feel able to challenge the views of staff and the Manager. Confrontation in this manner can be helpful if it is dealt with in an open and fair way and have the end result of changing the programme for the better and improving parent/staff relationships.

In terms of parental involvement in the programme overall, besides the Parent Group and Management Group, East Marsh Sure Start has other sub-groups that involve parents in decision making, these include: The Implementation Group, The Capital Group, The Monitoring and Evaluation Group and the Trips and Events Group.

In conclusion, at present there are many opportunities for parental involvement in Sure Start. Parental involvement is supported as far as possible with available crèche and childcare provision for parents attending meetings. Importantly, parents do seem to make a difference in the decision-making and can see the impact of their involvement.

Compared to the early experiences reported by parents, especially when having to deal with 'professionals', the fact that parents are not afraid to challenge the views of the Manager, staff or professionals shows they have grown in confidence as their involvement has developed.

On a more negative note, the relative success of the programme as it continues to develop may mean that parents cannot feel as involved with everything, on the same level, as they did in the early days. This is a potential problem for all Sure Start programmes where parents have been involved from day one, before staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Management Board-What Might Help?

Joining The Board

- Standardising the election/eligibility criteria for parent members across programmes. For example, parents on the Management Board must have children of Sure Start age.
- Standardising the Constitution of Board membership across programmes.
- Build confidence of parents by involving them in sub-group meetings that feedback to Management Board first.
- Publicity information available e.g. - 'Getting Involved' - a leaflet highlighting what groups are available for parents to become involved in decision-making: when they meet, how to join etc...
- Trial period for interested parents to observe meetings without the obligation to join.
- Work towards an informal atmosphere- coffee breaks etc...
- Shadowing- Going along with a parent member- as an observer.
- 'Jargon Buster'.
- Training- Committee skills, team building, group working.

'What Might Help?'

Parental Involvement On Management Board

- Provide a welcome pack that fully details what the Management Board is there to do - to include:
 - Clear guidelines of what the board is there to do.
 - Clear guidelines of the role parents are expected to play on the board.
 - Clear guidelines on the Terms of Reference/Constitution of the Board- how decisions get made, voting, etc...
 - Clear guidelines on issues around confidentiality, Conflict of Interest etc...
- 'Reward System' for parents putting time and effort into Management Board.

- Pre-meetings with all parents/manager -for support.
- Post- meetings with Manager. *

*Post Meetings with Manager

A post- meeting with the programme Manager to allow parents to say anything that had been 'un-said' in the meeting. Pre-meetings are useful, but it is difficult to know what may arise from discussions. Some parents may not feel they can speak freely in the meeting for a variety of reasons. A post - meeting would provide a chance to go over issues and raise any 'un-aired' concerns. If there are any issues that cannot be resolved during the post-meeting they could be placed on the agenda for next meeting.

NOTES

The Management Board was subject to an internal evaluation at the Management Board meeting that followed the Annual General Meeting held during May 2003. Both parents and professionals were consulted to find out whether both parties had a clear understanding what the board was there for and the role of parents and professionals on the board. The findings of this evaluation will be used to improve parental involvement on the board.

There is a clear and detailed 'Strategy For Parental Involvement' in place, which was reviewed at the Management Board Meeting- May 2003.

Minutes of Parents Forum 18/09/02—Home- Start issue raised and parents request that funding be pulled if issue not resolved- asked Manager- Manager to meet with Home Start

Management training questionnaires to be handed out - Parent Forum 02/10/02

Parents meeting 5th March- evidence of parents' decision that it would be better to buy equipment for 1-4 year old rather than for babies.

SURVEY FINDINGS -EAST MARSH

Parents NOT involved in Management Boards or Voice Group Questionnaire.

SAMPLE SELECTION

The questionnaire was aimed at collecting the views of 'hard-to reach' groups who do not get involved with the Parents Group or the Management Board. The questionnaire was designed to find out how much people know about the Management Board and the Parents Group, what they think the groups are there to do and what might stop them getting involved in the groups.

All interviews were chosen on a random basis by accessing; drop-ins', Trip's, stay 'n' play sessions, playgroups, nurseries, local schools etc.

Sample size: 15% of eligible population.

SUMMARY

Management Board

Overall local parents do feel that the involvement of parents in Sure Start influences both the decision-making and the programme overall.

The majority of local parents believe that the Management Board makes the main decisions about the programme. They also believe that having parents on the Board does make a difference to how those decisions get made.

The Management Board is recognised as an effective way of involving parents- by parents. However, the majority of those who said they would be interested in joining the Board also stated they would not know how to go about joining.

Along with more practical things like childcare and time/venue of meetings, more personal issues such as; 'Not knowing what to expect',

'Never having been to meetings before' and being 'shy/nervous' are common things that put parents off getting involved with the Management Group.

Training, which involves practical workshops, along with an introduction to meetings on a smaller, more informal setting could help ease parents into more formal meetings like the Management Board. A combination of 'shadowing' and 'mentoring' may also help boost parents confidence to become involved in a meeting type setting.

The Parents Group

The majority of local parents have heard about the Parents Group and know that anyone can go along to the meetings. Parents believe that the group is there to listen to local parents views and have a say in what services are provided. Most of those interviewed felt that the group also influences how decisions get made in the programme.

Over a half of local parents said that they still get their views across, even if they don't go to meetings. The most popular way of doing this was to tell someone who does go to the meetings. However, nearly a third of local parents said they do not get to know what happens in the Parents Group. Of those who said they would be interested in going along to a meeting, a third did not know where and when they take place.

As drop-ins were stated as the most used service/activity it may be practical to send out Minutes and information on both groups to as many drop-ins' and Parent/Toddler type services as possible. This will increase the availability of information to local parents, especially those who do not use the Hainton Avenue Sure Start building on a regular basis.

Those interviewed believed that the best way of getting the right information to them was by newsletters and post (a letter, addressed to them at home). Other possible ways included posters/leaflets at local schools and shops.

THE KEY FINDINGS

- 77 per cent of those interviewed knew that Sure Start is government funded. Only 3 per cent did not know whom Sure Start was for, although responses varied from 'everyone' to 'single parents'.
- 16 per cent of those interviewed were not currently registered with any local Sure Start programme.
- 80 per cent of those interviewed stated that since the arrival of Sure Start in the area the quality of services available for young children and their families had improved.
- Drop-in's were the most popular service/activity with 49 per cent saying they used these the most.

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD

- 66 per cent of those interviewed knew there was a Sure Start Management Board that parents can sit on.
- 31 per cent of parents who knew about the Management Board did not know that Sure Start says half of the members should be local Sure Start parents.
- 60 per cent of parents felt that the Management Board was there to listen to local parents views on the programme.
- 46 per cent thought that the Sure Start Management Board was answerable to the government. 28.5 per cent thought that the Board was answerable to local parents.
- 60 per cent of parents thought that the main decisions about the programme are made at the Management Board. 34 per cent thought that the main decisions about the programme are made at the regional Sure Start office.

- 71 per cent believe that having parents on the Management Board does make a difference to how decisions get made.
- 78.5 per cent said they would not know how to go about joining the Management Board.
- The most common things that put people off joining the Management Board were: 'Childcare' and 'never having been to meetings before' (26 per cent each).
- Not knowing what to expect, worries over understanding paperwork and being nervous or shy were also things that could put people off (17 per cent each).
- 31 per cent stated that available childcare would make it easier to join the Management Board. A further 31 per cent stated that knowing someone already on the Board would make it easier to join.
- Other things that would make it easier to join included: 'Knowing what to expect' (26 per cent), paperwork that is easy to understand (26 per cent), 'times to suit the school run' (20 per cent) and 'training for meetings' (20 per cent).
- 54 per cent said they did not get to see the Minutes from Management Board meetings.
- 87.5 of those who did see Minutes from Management Board meetings thought they were easy to understand.
- Parents believed that the best ways of getting the right information to them about the Sure Start Management Board (how to get involved, the role of parents etc.) were by a letter addressed to them at their home and in newsletters.
- Other ways of getting the right information included making posters/leaflets available at drop-in's and local schools.

THE PARENTS GROUP

- 80 per cent of those interviewed knew that there is a Parents Group that meets to have their say about the programme.
- 11 per cent did not know that anyone could go along to the Parents Group.
- 57 per cent believed that the Parents Group is there to listen to the views of local parents.
- 48.5 per cent believe that the Parents Group is there to have a say about what services there should be.
- 40 per cent believe the Parents Group is answerable to the Management Board. 35 per cent thought that the group is answerable to local parents.
- 57 per cent said that if they don't go to meetings they get their views across by telling someone who does go.
- 31 per cent said they would get their view across by telling a member of staff.
- 52 per cent of parents do feel their views were listened to.
- 69 per cent think that having the Parents Group does make a difference to how decisions get made in the programme.
- 31 per cent of those interviewed said they do not get to know what happens in the Parents Group.
- 'Being nervous/shy' and 'never having been to meetings before' were both believed to put people off going along to the Parent Group (both 20 per cent).
- No one believed that the Manager or staff members being present at meetings would put people off going along.
- Knowing someone already in the group was stated as something that would help make it easier to go along to the group (20 per cent).

- 'Having someone to go along with', 'knowing what to expect' and 'timing of the meetings' were also noted as things that would make attendance easier for parents.
- 34 per cent of parents interviewed who said they would be interested in going along to the Parents Group did not know where or when the meetings took place.
- The most popular methods for getting the right information to parents about the Parents Group (how to get involved, the role of parents etc.) were, a letter addressed to them at their home and through newsletters.
- Other ways of getting the right information included making leaflets available at drop-ins' and local schools and poster displays in local shops/schools.

SECTION SIX

Programme Background Influence on Parental Involvement

It became clear throughout the research that each local programme has its own distinct identity above that of 'Sure Start'. The early days of each programme, especially what facilities are available in the beginning, do appear to influence the development of parental involvement in the programme. This is especially the case with regards to what facilities are available for building relationships between parents and the Manager and their team.

Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park

In the early days the programme Manager delivered services from offices in a converted house on the Nunsthorpe estate. The offices were not practical for parents to hold meetings. Although local parents could drop in, it was far from ideal and realistically local parents did not have access to the Manager and his team on a daily basis. Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park were over six months into delivering services before a Parents Group was established.

However, once Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park found a venue that was suitable for the Parents Group meetings the level of parental involvement increased and has been sustained. The move to the purpose built Sure Start Centre, along with involving parents in the recruitment of the new programme Manager has helped to keep the quality and level of involvement going as the programme develops.

Scunthorpe Old Town

Scunthorpe Old Town were faced with cramped office space in a building shared with Social Services; it is perhaps not too surprising that the Parents Group did not become established on a regular basis in the early days. To combat this, the programme developed a comprehensive consultation plan that was used as a way of keeping parents involved in the decision-making process.

However, since the beginning of the year, the group has been meeting on a regular basis at a venue in the local area. Furthermore, the recent move

into the new Sure Start centre, which includes a 'Family Room' should help increase the level and quality of parental involvement.

East Marsh

East Marsh Sure Start has had a dynamic and lively Parents Group from day one. The fact that both parents and the Manager and her team were in the same building from day one helped develop close relationships and kept parents involved in every aspect of the programme.

However, while a positive influence in the early days, as the programme develops tensions may arise. Increased demands on the time of parents, staff and Manager may seem to threaten the level of involvement for parents who have been involved from day one.

Therefore, it would seem that the availability of a suitable site for the delivery of the programme can not only influence the level of parental involvement in the early days of the programme, but also the future expectations of parents who do become involved early on. Having a suitable site for delivery of services early on can also help to promote local Sure Start programmes as distinct identities - this can also increase parental involvement, community ownership and help establish the programmes locally.

CROSSCUTTING THEMES

It also became clear during the research that there are many crosscutting issues between the Parents Groups and Management Groups across the programmes. These include:

Parents Groups

- Parents DO believe that the group is a chance to get their views across - and find out what is going on in the programme.
- Getting parents along to their first meeting is the biggest hurdle.
- Not knowing what to expect at meetings was believed to be a key issue that put parents off coming along.
- Avoiding formal introductions and keeping meetings relaxed and informal in nature were thought to help parents feel at ease in the meetings.

- The majority of parents do feel the group is taken seriously.
- The majority of parents do believe that the group has made a difference to services in general and the programme overall.
- Having a 'place' for parents to gather before the meetings helps give parents the chance to discuss the up-coming agenda and any issues that they feel need bringing up at meetings. For example, parents meet for lunch in 'the cage' before the meetings in East Marsh. At Nunsthorpe & Bradley Park parents get together in the Family Room before the meetings.
- Communication between the Parent Group and the Management Board could be improved. There is no clear consensus about whether parents receive feedback from the Management Board and parents are generally unsure about how issues get raised from the Parent Group to the Management Board.
- The implementation of Children's Centres may be experienced as dis-empowering for parents.
- Boundary Issues may cause tensions especially around issues such as access to trips & services.
- Boundary issues are also a concern for parents with the implementation of Ward based Children's Centres, especially around issues such as who will have access to Sure Start services.
- Establishing satellite Parent Groups is seen as a good way to increase the level and scope of involvement of local parents (especially those not in close proximity to the main Sure Start base).
- Having a 'Parent Buddy' system would help get parents to the meetings.
- Having early access to an appropriate venue for the meetings can influence when and how Parents Groups get started- as well as sustaining parental involvement.

Parental Involvement On Management/Partnership Boards

- There is a need to establish criteria, which sets guidelines for the eligibility of parents as suitable candidates for Management Board.
- Most of the parent members on the Board had no previous experience of this type of thing before.
- Training helps.
- Support from the Manager helps.
- Parents may find the experience of joining the Management Board 'daunting' in the early days.
- Although practical things such as the availability of childcare can put people off joining the board there are other, more personal issues, such as not knowing what to expect at meetings and 'being shy'.
- Experience of being a member of the Management/Partnership Board increases the willingness of parents to challenge the views of professionals.
- Parent members of the Management Boards do generally feel they are listened to and taken seriously.
- Financial reports are seen as the most laborious for parents to get to grips with.
- Parent members on the Board do feel a responsibility to local parents and the local community.
- Most parents find the experience of being a member of the Board increases their self-confidence.
- Children's Centres could be problematic - parents have no real say in whether they want it- potential for parents to feel dis-empowered.

- Not all parents are clear about the decision-making role of the board.
- Not all professionals are fully supportive of the Sure Start ideology of parental involvement in decision making- may present challenges for professionals. This may become more of an issue as Children's Centres are implemented.
- Overall, professionals are supportive of having parents on the Management Board and being involved in the decision- making.
- Generally professionals felt they and/or their organisation had learnt a great deal from their relationship with parents on the Board.

CONCLUSION

The majority of parents involved with Sure Start on a daily basis experience their involvement as a positive thing and believe it does influence the shape and development of the local programme.

Furthermore, results from the community survey suggests that parents who are seen as 'hard-to-reach' recognise that local parents can and do make a difference to the decision- making in Sure Start. This recognition goes a long way in promoting local ownership of the programme.

The involvement of parents in decision-making is an important contribution to the success of Sure Start. Although local parents may have little past experience of being involved in something like Sure Start, most give willingly of their time and recognise the important contribution they can make to the programme. Many parents report that they grow in confidence as a result of their involvement. - especially through channels such as Parents Groups and membership on Management Boards.

However, although it is relatively easy to combat some of the practical things that may stop parents getting involved, (such as timing and childcare), the more personal issues that may effect the development

and quality of parental involvement also need addressing. These include recognising that parents may:

- Be nervousness or shy.
- Not know what to expect.
- Not know what is expected of them.
- Have no experience of meetings.
- Lack confidence around 'professionals'.
- Lack information about what a Management Board is there for.

Communication is also a key issue related to the success of parental involvement in Sure Start. The community survey highlighted the fact that many local parents are not informed about what goes in the Parents Groups and the Management/Partnership Boards. Many parents who said they would be interested in going along to either of the groups did not know how to go about joining them, or where and when the groups meet.

On a more positive note, although many parents do not have the time, or simply do not wish to become more involved with Sure Start, the majority of all parents interviewed or surveyed believed that local parents do make a difference to decision making in Sure Start and the programme overall.

Another crosscutting issue that became apparent during the research centred on local Sure Start programmes boundaries. Boundary issues may cause concern for parents, especially in relation to who is eligible to access the services. This is especially the case in Grimsby where there are presently five operational Sure Start programmes.

As the five programmes in Grimsby have developed, more parents have access to a local programme. However, there are still some parents who do not. Given that funding is made available on the basis of those eligible for services within the Sure Start boundary area, there have been concerns/complaints from parents who may live slightly out of the boundary, but still feel they would like to access the support and services offered by Sure Start.

A further concern for parents surrounding boundary issues involves the implementation of Children's Centres. As Children's Centres are Ward based and local programmes are not; parents have voiced their

concerns about who will have access to the Sure Start services. Some parents feel this will result in additional strain on both staff and resources.

A more practical problem associated with having five operational programmes in one town is the pressure on professional service/agency providers. Many struggle to have representatives on each of the Sure Start programmes Management Boards. Programme managers face the pressure of trying to establish a Management Board with consistent attendance from professionals. This can impact not only on the availability of 'expert' advice, it can also effect the working relationships between Sure Start and professional services/agencies. This may effect the long term goal of mainstreaming services.

In conclusion, the research findings suggest that local parents do feel they have an influence over the development of their local programmes and can give examples of where they believe they have made a difference to services.

However, the reality of getting parents involved in Sure Start is more problematic. Parents, Managers and staff work hard to encourage and develop the involvement of local parents in their programme. It is no easy task. Taking steps to make sure that obstacles to parental involvement are recognised requires time and resources, as do attempts to remove them.

The final recommendations are suggested as ways of improving parental involvement on Parents Groups and Management Boards. The report also recognises that parents, Managers and staff have worked very hard to reach the level and quality of parental involvement that exists at present - as recorded in this report.

To maximise the level and quality of parental involvement the following recommendations are suggested. Some apply more to all programmes; some are more specific to others. Each individual programme has a list of recommendations.

It is suggested that each programme identify a member of staff to help implement any proposed changes, which are hoped to increase and sustain the level and quality of parental involvement in the programme.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

What would help?

Parents Groups

- Standardise the Parent Group name across all programmes
- Light refreshments- cakes/biscuits- tea/coffee to be provided as a way of saying thank-you to parents for giving up their time to attend the meetings.
- A welcome pack for Parent Group members. The welcome pack to include clear information about what the meetings are for and to stress the importance of parents becoming involved in the group.
- Establish a set of 'Ground Rules' or 'Terms of Reference' that includes:
 - The right for everyone to have their say without interruption.
 - Clear guidelines on the role of staff involvement in meetings.
 - Clear guidelines on voting rights.
- Training - committee skills, group work, team building for any parents who want it.
- Introducing satellite Parent Groups at strategic points in the community (e.g. local schools), to maximise the involvement of local parents who may not use the building.
- 'Parent-Buddy' system.

- Annual 're-launch' of the Parent Group meeting- publicised with lunch and crèche included.
- 'Out of Hours' Parent Group. Evening meetings every couple of months for parents in the area who may work and find it difficult to attend daytime meetings. This may also encourage more male carers to attend.

COMMUNICATION

Parents should feel the group is taken seriously if they are to be encouraged to become involved, and more crucially, to stay involved.

The group needs to be seen as being listened to and any issues/concerns highlighted acted upon. Suggestions to encourage this include the introduction of the role of Parent Group (PG)- Management/Partnership Board (MB/PB) co-ordinator.

Parent Group (PG)- Management Board/Partnership Board (MB/PB) - Co-Coordinator

The role would be introduced to ensure a process is in place for a smooth two-way flow of communication, which can provide evidence of action being taken on issues arising in the PG, and to report back decisions and feedback from the MB.

- The role would be a reporting/recording, independent position and as such, the co-ordinator would not be a member of the MB and have no voting rights on the MB.

- If no parent volunteer is available, a Parent Participation worker could carry out the duty- but hand over the role if a parent wishes to take over the responsibility.
- If more than one parent is interested then either elections or random draw to select the co-ordinator.
- Ideally, a further parent, standing in reserve could be kept up-to-date ensure that the role is always occupied.

The introduction of such a position would mean that the PG would be able to track development of issues/ideas/suggestions and have evidence that they are listened to. This would not only provide evidence that the group is taken seriously, it would also mean that the group would be informed of reasons if actions cannot be taken, and consider possible suggestions for compromise.

It would also ensure that any issues/concerns that may take time to resolve are kept in the picture. This could avoid parents feeling that issues raised have not been acted upon and forgotten about. Clear reports/action plans, however brief, would ensure that issues are followed through to whatever the outcome may be. Parents can see where and why things may take time or may not be practical, and consider alternatives. Importantly though, they are kept in the 'loop' regarding decision-making.

Further suggestions to keep all those interested in the development of the programme up to date include:

- A quarterly progress report-up-date by the manager, reported back at an open meeting with all parents and stakeholders and staff invited. This will promote ownership of the programme for all those involved - particularly the parents.
- The progress report made available, as minutes of all sub-meetings at all venues.
- Staff to take copies of minutes from Parent Group meetings to all drop-ins and activities, along with time and date of next meeting.
- A comprehensive consultation strategy aimed at 'hard-to-reach' groups. This includes targeting parents who may not want to get involved with Sure Start on the level of going to along to groups and meetings, but may want to use services and access support when needed.

Management Board-What Might Help?

Joining The Board

- Consult Sure Start guidance on setting up Management Boards regularly.
- Standardise the election/eligibility criteria for parent members across programmes (For example, parents on the Management Board must have children of Sure Start age).

- Standardise the Constitution of Board membership across programmes.
- Build confidence of parents by involving them in sub-group meetings that feedback to Management Board first.
- Publicity information available e.g. - 'Getting Involved' - a leaflet highlighting what groups are available for parents to become involved in decision-making: when they meet, how to join etc...
- Trial period for interested parents to observe meetings without the obligation to join.
- Work towards an informal atmosphere- coffee breaks etc...
- Shadowing- Going along with a parent member- as an observer.
- 'Jargon Buster'.
- Training- Committee skills, team building, group working.

What Might Help?'

Parental Involvement On Management Board

- Provide a welcome pack that fully details what the Management Board is there to do - to include:
 - Clear guidelines of what the board is there to do.
 - Clear guidelines of the role parents are expected to play on the board.
 - Clear guidelines on the Terms of Reference/Constitution of the Board- how decisions get made, voting, etc...

- Clear guidelines on issues around confidentiality, Conflict of Interest etc...
- 'Reward System' for parents putting time and effort into Management Board.
- Pre-meetings with all parents/manager -for support.
- Post- meetings with Manager. *

*Post Meetings with Manager

A post- meeting with the programme Manager to allow parents to say anything that had been 'un-said' in the meeting. Pre-meetings are useful, but it is difficult to know what may arise from discussions. Some parents may not feel they can speak freely in the meeting for a variety of reasons. A post - meeting would provide a chance to go over issues and raise any 'un-aired' concerns. If there are any issues that cannot be resolved during the post-meeting they could be placed on the agenda for next meeting. Timing could be problematic. The post-meetings could be held on a different day to the Board meetings- although they would need to be held soon after the meeting to ensure that any issues are fresh in the minds of parents.

What Might Help?

Children's Centres

- Meetings with parents to set out realistically, the role of Sure Start local programmes in relation to Children's Centres.

- Involve parents, as much as is possible in having a say in HOW the Children's Centre will work.
- Involve parents closely in all decisions about possible changes to services as a result of Children's Centre implementation.
- Reinforce the key role parents will continue to have in their local Sure Start programme.
- Involve parents closely in discussions around possible changes in the boundary of Sure Start in relation to Children's Centres.
- A Question and Answer session for local parents on the role of Children's Centres and how they will impact on local Sure Start programmes.
- Need to reassure local parents about the positive benefits to the local community from Children's Centres.
- A leaflet setting out key points of what the implementation of Children's Centres does and does not mean for the local programme, and the local parents, to be sent out to all registered families.

The suggestions listed above include ideas from the Steering Group meetings held on 12th September 2003 and 23rd October 2003, Nunsthorpe Resource Centre.