

SURE START RAVENSDALE
BABY GROUP REUNION
19/12/01

INTRODUCTION

In December 2001 a reunion meeting was held to examine the long-term impact of attendance at Sure Start Baby Groups.

The purpose of the reunion was

- To provide an opportunity for mothers who attended SS Baby Groups to meet together and share parenting experiences.
- To ascertain whether mothers perceived any changes in their own social, emotional and environmental circumstances due to coming to Baby Group.
- To record any impact on the development of babies whose mother attended the Baby Group.

Sure Start has run 3 Baby Groups to provide local support to new parents with babies under 6 mths old and to introduce them to Sure Start.

Sept 2000 7 parents Old Library

April 2001 5 parents Old Library

Oct 2001 11 parents Sure Start Centre.

Each group ran for 6 sessions of 2 hours long to avoid over-tiring the babies.

12/23 parents (mothers) attended the Reunion. ALL of these are current Sure Start members.

METHODOLOGY

3 Baby Groups have run with a total of 24 participants. All were invited by letter, visit, phone call or conversation within the Sure Start Centre to attend the Reunion meeting. Lunch and a Crèche were provided.

Those mums who no longer attend Sure Start (6/23) were contacted by phone. One mum who couldn't attend gave feedback over the phone.

The reunion took the form of a focus group. First, the group were asked to respond yes or no to a series of simple questions. This provided information and served to focus their minds on their experience of baby group.

A brainstorming session and small group work elicited more detailed information.

Finally participants were asked what they would say if they were advertising the Baby group. Some drew pictures, others came up with an explanatory phrase.¹

¹ See 'Baby Group Reunion' material in appendix

KEY FINDINGS

Putting Learning into practice

Participants reported using advice/skills gained at Baby Group at home with their babies on the following topics: - sleep advice, baby massage, play activities, controlling crying, breast and bottle feeding, weaning.

Changes in mothers perceptions of circumstances (social, emotional, environmental)

100% of participants still come to Sure Start activities and are in regular contact with people they met at Baby Group.

All those participants who had attended Baby group 6mths or more ago had made at least one friend who they see outside of Sure Start.

9 participants had 2 or more children and 4 of these had made friends at an NHS baby group when they had their first child.

They reported that making these friends has made a 'terrific difference' to their lives- helping by sharing childcare, understanding the things they are going through and stopping them 'going mental'.

Having these friends also assisted the development of their children by making mothers more relaxed, and by enabling the children to mix with other children and 'know more other people'.

Relationships in the Outside World.

Participants reported feeling more relaxed and more confident in their everyday lives. ' the housework still doesn't get done, but I don't worry about it now'

They felt relationships at home had improved because they had something to talk about other than the children and that coming to Sure Start enabled them to still be a person 'not just a mum'

Another important benefit of coming to baby group was being able to have a moan to others who understand the frustrations of being a parent. Again this resulted in mums going home less stressed.

The baby group gave participants another source of advice and information, so that they don't have to 'just take family at their word.' This support from professionals was highly valued and the informality of the staff approach enabled mums to feel comfortable. One mum's trust was gained when 'Sue and Paula helped me with my buggy'

The best things about the baby group were reported to be

- Making friends
- Support from professionals.
- getting a break from the children, The crèche was seen to be beneficial to both parent and child. 'Having time for ourselves' whilst knowing that

'responsible people were caring for my baby and that there was amusement for her here'

- Pampering for parents
- Hot full cup of coffee.

Session content

When asked about the sessions the mothers remembered the following topics being covered

Massage

First aid

Make up

Sleep

Nutrition

Speech and Language

Stress relief

Criticisms were very few but here they are

Sessions not long enough

Sessions not strongly structured and some parents '*waffled on*'.

At the stress session there was insufficient information given to tell people how to get further help.

Some people did not get a food blender. (The funding for this was not available to the earlier groups.

CONCLUSIONS

All participants reported an improvement in their emotional health, social relationships and confidence/self esteem through attendance at Baby Group. There was a general feeling that the children had benefited but specific questions were not asked on this subject.

Participants valued the learning, the friendships, the pampering and the chance to be themselves. The informality of the 'professionals' was particularly important.

Defining the informal approach.

The baby groups are co-ordinated by core staff at Sure Start. The baby group co-ordinator phones new parents to personally invite them to attend. The worker then visits those who are interested to introduce themselves and to explain the format of the sessions and how the crèche works. During this visit the worker explains the kind of sessions that are usually provided and asks the parent to choose which ones most interest them. The programme is then designed to meet the expressed needs of the parent participants.

The visiting worker is also at the first (and usually all the) sessions so that a familiar face is already known. On arrival at the session parents are welcomed, given assistance with pushchairs, bags and children. Time is spent introducing crèche

workers and settling babies. Mothers are able to keep their baby with them if they don't feel ready to leave them in the crèche. Drinks are provided.

Workers are addressed by their first names and their roles explained. During the course of the baby group programme various professionals come in to facilitate a discussion on a particular topic e.g., weaning, sleep management. Again their first names are used and roles are explained and a core worker is always around to deal with general issues that arise or to provide support. E.g. Making drinks, providing information, holding babies etc.

The sessions are relaxed and flexible. Parents are encouraged to attend even if they are late, need to go early or miss a session.

Individual workers are friendly, willing to share personal experiences where appropriate, empathetic, challenging if necessary, game for a laugh and skilled in talking to parents at their own level. They are also able to signpost parents to other support networks.

The result has been that parents feel genuine warmth from the Sure Start staff, which encourages them to make further use of the available services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That Sure Start Ravensdale continue to run Baby Groups at regular intervals
- That the informal approach and involvement of relevant professionals remain integral to the groups.
- That further research is carried out to identify the reasons why parents stop using Sure Start services

LEARNING POINTS about the Evaluation Process.

- The review group was a little large to have the in-depth session planned. It was difficult to retain the attention of the mothers as they all had important issues to share with each other.
- Members of the baby group who had just finished meeting were included in the session. This was not really appropriate, as their experience was too recent to assess long term impact.
- A semi structured interview process may well be more effective in drawing out individual experiences in a future study.
- All participants were current users of Sure Start. One mum spoken to on the phone reported still seeing friends made at baby group although she does not attend. It would be useful in future to examine the reasons why people do not continue to be members.

OUTCOMES

A rolling programme of Baby Groups is planned for the next year.

APPENDIX

Baby Group Reunion Material 19 Dec 2001

The one most helpful hint I learnt at Baby Group was.....

- Good sleep advice that I apply daily. Practised baby massage when Brad was a new baby
- I cannot remember any helpful hints
- Crèche staff said they change the baby's activity every 15-20 mins
- Good advice on getting baby to sleep
- Learnt how to stop children choking through first aid
- Gave baby massage as part of bedtime routine to help settle
- Weaning recipes practised and tried. When stressed and upset cos baby wont stop crying I bite down on dummy ring and then can pick up baby gently and all stress goes through teeth.
- We don't think that the sessions were long enough to remember any helpful hints. Please longer sessions (Wendy & Martine)
- Help with breast feeding, different and better and easier methods and when to move on from breast to bottle.

If we were advertising the Baby Club what would you say to people...?

- Sure Start is excellent. Something for the kids and something for the parents
- Sure Start is wonderful
- Sure Start is.... A place for mums to talk and your children to play
- Being a mother is....having a life full of surprises every day.
- Sure Start teaches you how to recognise your baby's cry.(see picture)
- Being a mum is always having a funny story
- Sure Start is like having the book of instructions
- Sure Start isalways having someone to talk to who is going through the same and they really understand
- Knowing other mums with older children is like knowing what's coming next!
- Sure Start is like a girl's night out in the day (with no alcohol!)
- Being a mum when you go to Sure Start is like a Ray of sunshine.
- At Sure Start you learn to relax and you carry that on to your home
- At Sure Start you can learn to be (and know it) the best mum you can be.
- You can moan, cry, laugh, talk, think and there's always someone there who knows how to help or going through the same thing.

Group Discussion.

How many of you still come to SS activities 11/11

How many of you still have regular contact with people you met at Baby Group? 11/11

How many friends have you made that you see outside of Sure Start?

Building Support Networks

2 people had made 1 friend

2 people had made 2 friends

1 person had made 3 friends

2 people had just finished Baby Group and not yet got round to seeing each other outside Sure Start yet.

Without baby group would you have made these friends NO

9 people had 2 or more children. 4 had made friends with the hospital/clinic baby group when they had their first child.

What difference have these friends made to you and your baby?

- A terrific difference
- friends going through the same thing
- kids mixing with other kids, know more other people
- kids become more sociable
- someone to have the kids for half an hour
- friends are 'there' or have been there
- when you become parent you lose lots of friends cos you can't do the same things you did before
- haven't gone mental
- not in the house on my own all the time.

What do you remember about Baby Group?

Baby massage

Make up session, First aid, Sleep

Nutrition

Crèche, being pampered

Crèche and coffee, stress relief

Nice to know baby benefiting too

All sessions weren't strongly structured some parents did waffle on

Time to ourselves

Free makeup, make overs first aid baby massage, sleep and nutrition

Baby massage, talking, makeovers, free make up.

We didn't get a food blender, fair

Speech and language

Stress relief

Moaned about men/partners

Crèche

Facial and nails done

Baby massage, first aid, and sleep

Stress session. Good awareness raising but some people may feel that the opportunity wasn't there to talk to Mike or someone else.

None of the sessions was long enough.

Do you think that coming to baby group/ Sure Start has affected the way you are bringing up your baby? Has it changed the way you relate to your partner family?

- You go home in better mood
- Moan at Sure Start so don't moan at home
- Men have got work, we have to have something
- Don't feel just at home, still a person
- More opportunity to moan
- Learn more here.
- Do stuff here other than looking after kids
- Can have a different topic of conversation when I come home.
- Less stressed, more confident
- Check up on advice you're given, don't just take family at their word
- My housework still doesn't get done, but I don't worry about it now
- More relaxed
- More confident to talk (to anyone)
- You've got something to talk about other than the children
- Can't stop talking now.
- SS tips and activities help. Otherwise I'd just go down town. Or stay in the house, talk to the kids and go insane.
- When he's at home can't seem to get anything done
- Have made an effort to come to Sure Start so that I'm not just being a mum and housework.
- Kids like coming cos there are other kids to play with
- Otherwise the children would also be at home on their own.

APPENDIX: FORMAT FOR EVALUATION

Baby Group Reunion 19th December 2001 1-3pm

1pm Welcome. Introduction to today and me.

Everyone here has attended a Baby Group at Sure Start. **The purpose of this meeting is to find out whether coming to that group has affected your life and in what ways.**

This will help us to decide if running baby groups is worthwhile and to plan future groups better

I am Andrea and it's my job to evaluate the projects/ activities we run here. None of the other workers are coming to the meeting so that you can speak freely without upsetting them or making their heads too big. Everything you say will be anonymous, unless we decide it needs to be otherwise.

Apologies about the room

Introductions- your name and the age of your baby

We'll start with some easy hands up questions

Large Group

How many of you continue to attend Sure Start activities?

How many still have regular contact with people they met at baby group?

How many friends have you made that you see outside Sure Start?

1 2 3

Without the Baby Group do you think you would have made those friends? What difference has that made to you ?

Answers on flipchart

Ok FOCUS IN.....

What do you remember about Baby Group? Shut your eyes and think back to who was there, how you felt, what you talked about.

Now write down those thoughts and keep them to yourself for now. You can keep adding to them as we go on. *Individual*

What did you learn that has been of use to you?

Think back to when you stopped coming and how your baby has changed and developed since then. Can you think of any time when where you've remembered something you discussed at Baby Group and used it to help you? Write it down on your sheet.

Get together with the others from your baby group and write down, which ingredients of the baby group were the most useful for you. *Stick up on wall*
Feedback your personal examples

BREAK

Do you think coming to baby group has affected the way you are bringing up your baby? If yes how?

In groups of 3 (2nd time mums together)

How has your partner been affected?

Has it made any difference to how you have reacted to other members of the family, or other professionals?

Feedback to everyone the main points of your discussion.

What about other Sure Start services who still comes to things? What has been the most useful to you?

So from everything we've talked about - what is the one most significant thing you remember about baby group- a sentence or an image or a topic. YELLOW POST ITS

Imagine you are designing a poster about either Baby Group or Being the mother of a young baby
and what it meant to you

BABY GROUP IS..... FUN

BABY GROUP IS..... TIME FOR ME TO SHARE WITH OTHER MUMS

HAVING A BABY/ BEING A MOTHER IS..... A FULLTIME JOB

We may use these to advertise groups in future is that OK?

Do you want me to have your original thoughts sheets?

What I'll do now is write this all up and report it back to Paula and the workers who run the baby group. It will also be useful to show the National SS Unit what our work is achieving.