

Kirklees Sure Start Thornhill

User Satisfaction Survey

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Introduction

All Sure Start programmes are required to conduct user satisfaction surveys (USS) at key points in their lifespan. Sure Start Thornhill commissioned a User Satisfaction Survey to be conducted during the early part of 2004. Sure Start Thornhill is a trailblazer programme and is therefore a relatively mature Sure Start and is therefore in a good position to measure the impact which the initiative has had on local people's perceptions of the quality and breadth of services which they can access.

Methodology

The User Satisfaction Survey was conducted in the form of a self-completing questionnaire. The original questionnaire was designed by Ann Martin and Matthew Pearson using examples of good practice taken from the National Evaluation of Sure Start website (<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/>). In producing the original survey instrument, we had to balance the need to collect useful and meaningful data and keeping the survey within to a size which participants would be comfortable in completing. Our aim was to create a use friendly survey which would encourage the maximum number of responses and provide data targeted at measuring how well Sure Start Thornhill was performing and create a sense of where future efforts and resources could be applied to improve services.

The survey was incentivised through the use of a prize draw. Offering prizes for completion is a well documented practice which increases participation. The ethos of Sure Start was reflected in the prizes on offer which consisted of fresh fruit and vegetables to the value of £100, £75 and £50. The produce was provided by Walker Welfare who operate a stall during their day centre provision in the centre adjacent to the Thornhill centre. Surveys were handed out to Sure Start users at both centres, and we also arranged for the two primary schools in the area to send questionnaires out to all parents. This meant that over 450 surveys were sent out to parents in total. The return rate was not spectacularly high, but 88 completed questionnaires were returned which is considerably better than other satisfaction surveys conducted in other Sure Start areas. The completed questionnaires were returned to the Sure Start centres and to the schools. We can compare the response rates to this survey with others conducted for Sure Start programmes, for instance the Crawley (Broadfield) survey had 29 completed questionnaires for their study conducted in 2003, and Abbey Bucknall Sure Start showed a return rate of 52 surveys in their 2003 report.¹

The questionnaire asked a range of questions about Sure Start and other services for the under 5s in the Thornhill area. Respondents added their postcodes so that we could verify that they lived within the catchment area of Sure Start Thornhill, although the geography of the area makes it extremely unlikely that questionnaires would be completed by non Thornhill residents. The next set of questions concerned the number

¹ Reports are available from National Evaluation of Sure Start website.

and ages of children under 5 for each respondent, and the gender of the respondents. The remainder of the questions were a mixture of Lickert style items and open questions about services in the area. Lickert questions offer the respondent a numbered scale (in this case 1 to 5), asking them to rate their satisfaction with various items and are acknowledged as being an effective way of collecting quantitative information about user's perceptions of services. The open questions invited respondents to explain in their own words and in a little more detail their thinking in key areas.

The data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and the results are presented in this report. A range of statistical tables and bar charts will be used to present the results and these will be accompanied by a textual commentary to orient readers to the most important issues arising from the study. A final section summarises the open questions from the survey and the thematic issues which have arisen.

Findings

We will begin by considering the demographic composition of the respondents. Unsurprisingly, the majority of respondents were female, of the 88 completed questionnaire, 84 were female and 4 male. This result probably mirrors the domestic division of labour within households in the area and the key role that women play in looking after children under 4 years of age. All respondents had postcodes within the Sure Start Thornhill “catchment” area so all went forward for analysis.

The next question asked people how many children under the age of 5 they had. A Lickert scale ranging from 1 to 4 was used, where 1 represented “very satisfied”, 2 “satisfied”, 3 “dissatisfied” and 4 “very dissatisfied”. The results are summarised in the table below:

How many children do you have under the age of 5?

	Frequency	Percent
0	27	30.7
1.00	42	47.7
2.00	14	15.9
3.00	3	3.4
4.00	2	2.3

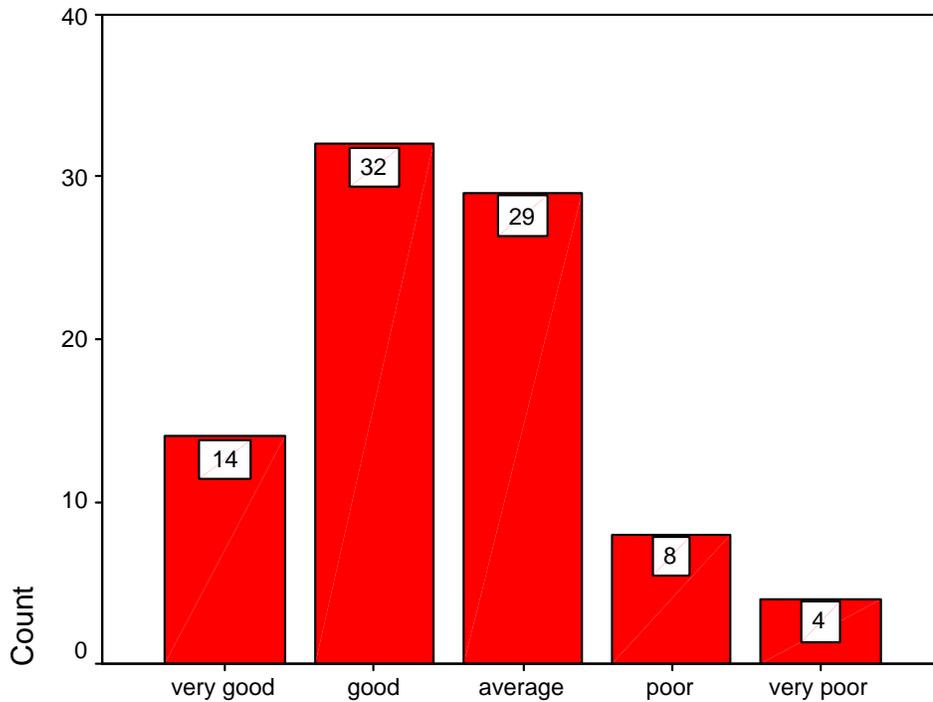
48% of respondents had just one child below the age of 5, nearly 16% had 2. 3 respondents had three children under the age of 5 and 2 respondents had 4 in this category. The results here are largely self explanatory, but attention needs to be drawn to the 27 respondents who did not have any children below the age of 5. Although these respondents are not directly eligible for Sure Start services, and could therefore be disregarded, a methodological decision to leave these cases in the dataset was taken. This is because these respondents will have meaningful views on services for children in the area, either because their children have only recently passed their 5th birthdays or because they know people who do have direct knowledge of services for the under 5s.

Satisfaction with Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5

The next question asked respondents to rate how satisfied they were with Thornhill as a place to bring up children younger than 5.

How would you describe Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5 years?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very good	14	15.9
	good	32	36.4
	average	29	31.8
	poor	8	9.1
	very poor	4	4.5
	don't know	1	1.1



Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5

More respondents reported they were satisfied with the area than rated it poor or very poor. 14 people rated Thornhill as very good, 3 as good, and a further 29 decided that the area was average in this respect. 8 people decided that Thornhill was a poor place to bring up children under 5 and just 4 people rated Thornhill as very poor. From this we can conclude that the balance of opinion on Thornhill as a place to bring up the under 5s is positive and although there is room for improvement (for instance shifting the respondents who recorded “average” into the good and very good categories), generally parents are positive about Thornhill as an area for parenting.

Further analysis of this important item on the survey reveals a more complex picture emerging among parents in the area. We looked at the average responses to this question for 3 groups of parents, those with no children under 5 (27 responses), those with only 1 child (41 responses) and those with 2 or more children (19 responses). The results are

summarised in the table below:

How would you describe Thornhill as a place to bring up children under-5 years old?

Number of children	Mean	N
No children under 5	2.92	27
1 child under 5	2.46	41
2 or more children under 5	2.10	19
Total	2.52	87

In this table, a lower mean score indicates a better the rating of Thornhill as a place to bring up children. We can see that those parents who have children under 5 are more positive about the area than those without, and those with 2 or more children are more positive still. This survey item can be presented in a different format by crosstabulating the responses to the question with a result determining whether the respondent had children under 5 or not. The results are below:

ow would you describe Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5 years * Children under 5? Crosstabulation

			Children under 5?		Total
			.00	1.00	
How would you describe Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5 years	very good	Count	2	12	14
		% within Children under 5?	7.4%	20.0%	16.1%
	good	Count	9	23	32
		% within Children under 5?	33.3%	38.3%	36.8%
	average	Count	10	19	29
	% within Children under 5?	37.0%	31.7%	33.3%	
	poor	Count	4	4	8
	% within Children under 5?	14.8%	6.7%	9.2%	
	very poor	Count	2	2	4
	% within Children under 5?	7.4%	3.3%	4.6%	
Total	Count	27	60	87	
	% within Children under 5?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

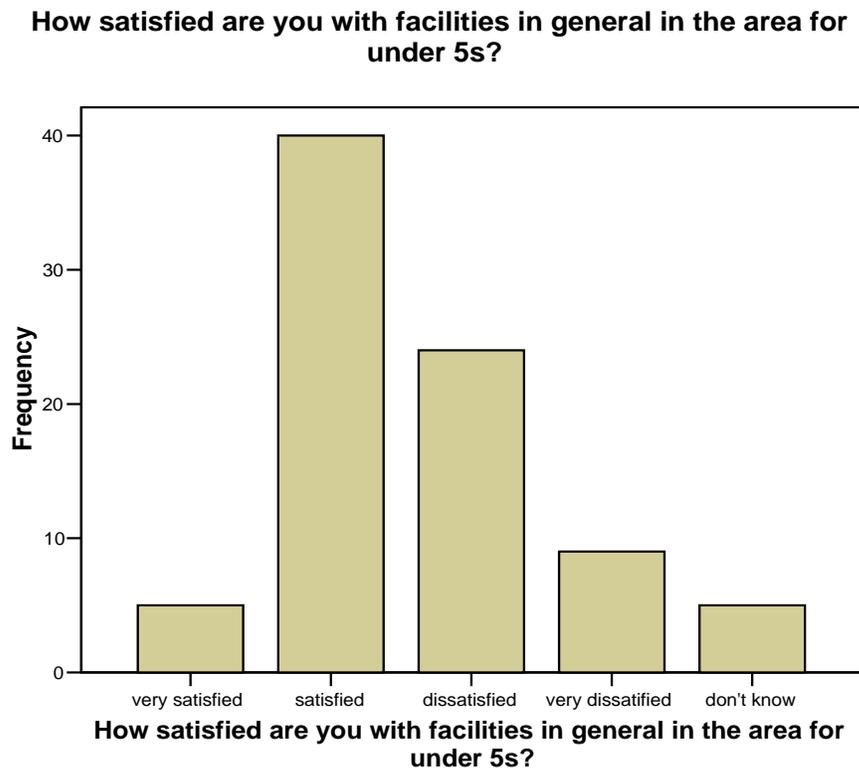
From this table it can be noted that 20% of parents with children under 5 rated Thornhill as a “very good” place to bring up children, as opposed to just 7% who rated it “very good” and had no children under 5. The figures are roughly the same for the next

response (good), although the response from the parents of children under 5 is still higher.

We can therefore conclude that parents with children under 5 are likely to be more positive about Thornhill than those with no children under 5. We can surmise that the parents with no children under 5 will have been less likely to have experienced the benefits of Sure Start, and therefore we have some tentative evidence that Sure Start is indeed improving the perception of parents of Thornhill as a place for parenting. It must also be said that many other factors may have influenced this result so conclusions need to be treated with some caution. For instance the parents of older children may experience issues with the parenting in the area which are specific to older children and which has caused them to give a lower rating of Thornhill as an area in which to raise children.

How satisfied are you with facilities in general in the area for under 5s

Following on from this question, the next item asked how satisfied parents were with facilities in the area for the under 5s. The results are summarised in graph form below:



We can see from this chart that again there are considerable levels of satisfaction with services for under 5s in the area, with 5.7% being very satisfied and 45.5% satisfied with services. But 27% express dissatisfaction with services and 10% are very dissatisfied with the services, so 37% or nearly 2 out of 5 parents are not satisfied with the services for their children under 5. The mean level of satisfaction across the 83 respondents who answered this question was 2.6, which represents an answer located between the satisfied and dissatisfied responses. This is a significant finding and demonstrates that although Sure Start may have made a major impact on the provision of services for under-5s in Thornhill there is still some hard work to do to convince all parents in the area that they can access high quality services.

As for the question about bringing up under 5s in Thornhill, it is worthwhile to interrogate this answer for the 3 different groups (no children under 5, 1 child under 5, 2 or more children under 5) used before.

How satisfied are you with facilities in general in the area for under-5s?

Number of children	Mean
None	2.63
1	2.41
2 or more	2.41
Total	2.47

Once again we can see that parents with children (1 or more) are more satisfied with facilities in the area than those with no children under 5, but the differences are much smaller in this case.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the reasons for their answer. All of those who indicated dissatisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction with the area and who chose to fill in the open section (18 in total) singled out issues to do with the public spaces in Thornhill (litter, kids hanging around, vandalism, lack of things for older children to do), there were no responses that specifically mentioned health or social care services for the under 5s. Those who were positive about facilities and chose to write a response (10 in total), were specific in naming Sure Start, a typical response being: “Sure Start had made a difference, there are more facilities now”. This is further clear evidence that those families how have accessed Sure Start services, are positive about their experiences and perceive Sure Start as being an important factor in the improvement of facilities in the area for the under 5s.

Differences between parents who use Sure Start services and those who do not

It was possible to identify two groups of parents from the questionnaire, those who had and were using Sure Start services and those who were not. Using these two groups of parents, it was possible to do further analysis on the key indicators of parent satisfaction in the area. The results are contained in the two tables below, which are crosstabulations of the question about facilities in general in the area, and the one about perceptions of Thornhill as a place to bring up children.

How satisfied are you with facilities in general in the area for under 5s? crosstabulated with whether or not parents use Sure Start services

			Sure Start user or not?		Total
			Non Sure Start user	Sure Start user	
How satisfied are you with facilities in general in the area for under 5s?	very satisfied	Count % within "Sure Start user or not?"	2 11.1%	3 5.0%	5 6.4%
	satisfied	Count % within "Sure Start user or not?"	3 16.7%	37 61.7%	40 51.3%
	dissatisfied	Count % within "Sure Start user or not?"	7 38.9%	17 28.3%	24 30.8%
	very dissatisfied	Count % within "Sure Start user or not?"	6 33.3%	3 5.0%	9 11.5%
Total	Count % within "Sure Start user or not?"	18 100.0%	60 100.0%	78 100.0%	

How would you describe Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5 years crosstabulated with whether or not parents use Sure Start services

			Sure Start user or not?		Total
			Non Sure Start user	Sure Start user	
How would you describe Thornhill as a place to bring up children under 5 years	very good	Count % within Sure Start user or not?	2 9.1%	12 18.5%	14 16.1%
	good	Count % within Sure Start user or not?	5 22.7%	27 41.5%	32 36.8%
	average	Count % within Sure Start user or not?	9 40.9%	20 30.8%	29 33.3%
	poor	Count % within Sure Start user or not?	3 13.6%	5 7.7%	8 9.2%
	very poor	Count % within Sure Start user or not?	3 13.6%	1 1.5%	4 4.6%
Total	Count % within Sure Start user or not?	22 100.0%	65 100.0%	87 100.0%	

In both tables we can see that the proportion of parents who answer “very good” and “good” is significantly higher when they have accessed Sure Start services. 67% of parents who use Sure Start answered that they satisfied or very satisfied with the general level of services for parents of children under 5 compared with 28% of parents who did not use Sure Start, and 60% of the same group rated Thornhill as “good” or “very good” as a place to bring up children under 5, compared with 32% of parents who did not use Sure Start. This is very strong evidence that Sure Start is having a real and positive impact on the perceptions of parents in Thornhill, and those parents who do use Sure Start services are likely to be far more positive about the area as a location for parenting.

Level of satisfaction with Sure Start Services

The next set of questions related to individuals rating of the various services provided by Sure Start in the area. Again a 4 point Lickert scale was used with 1 representing “very satisfied”, and 4 “very dissatisfied”. In the table below the most popular services are at the top of the list and the least popular at the bottom. It is important to pay attention to the numbers of respondents for each service, particularly as only 4 respondents answered about Superdads which means the response for this item cannot be meaningfully compared with the others. Health visitors and Homestart are the services with the best level of satisfaction, followed by child care and play services, then portage, the speech and language therapists and then family support workers. But it must be noted that the

mean responses are all very close to each other and the general levels of satisfaction in all cases are good (a score of 1 represents all users being very satisfied with a service).

	Number	Mean
Superdads	4	1.25
health Visitors	50	1.56
homestart	16	1.56
child care and play services	53	1.58
portage	24	1.62
speech and language therapists	41	1.63
family support workers	17	1.76

In the tables below, the breakdown for each service is given with the numbers of respondents answering in each category. It can be noted that expressions of dissatisfaction are very rare with just 3 responses across all services in this category.

homestart

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	7	8.0
	satisfied	9	10.2
	Total	16	18.2
Missing	System	72	81.8
Total		88	100.0

health Visitors

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	23	26.1
	satisfied	26	29.5
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	50	56.8
Missing	System	38	43.2
Total		88	100.0

speech and language therapists

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	18	20.5
	satisfied	21	23.9
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	very dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	41	46.6
Missing	System	47	53.4
Total		88	100.0

child care and play services

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	23	26.1
	satisfied	29	33.0
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	53	60.2
Missing	System	35	39.8
Total		88	100.0

portage

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	9	10.2
	satisfied	15	17.0
	Total	24	27.3
Missing	System	64	72.7
Total		88	100.0

family support workers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	7	8.0
	satisfied	9	10.2
	Total	16	18.2
Missing	System	72	81.8
Total		88	100.0

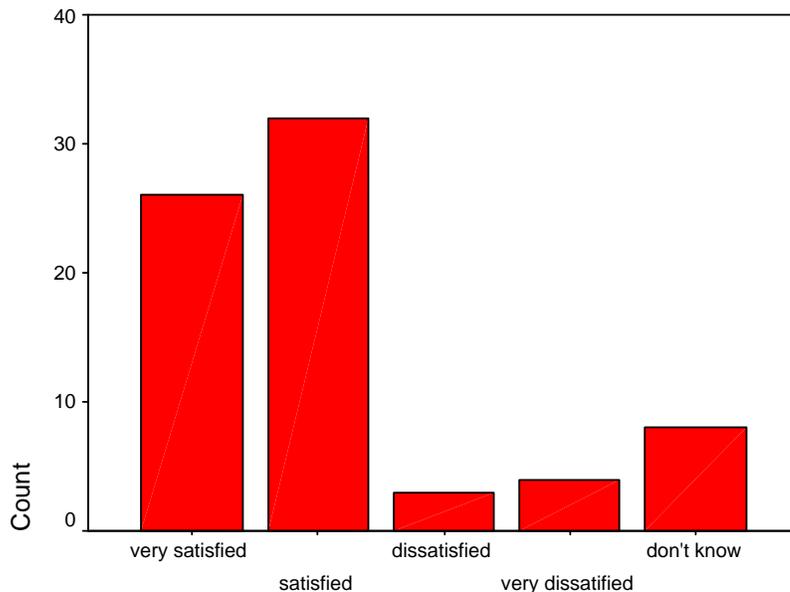
superdads

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	3	3.4
	satisfied	1	1.1
	Total	4	4.5
Missing	System	84	95.5
Total		88	100.0

We can conclude from this that the parents who access Sure Start are generally very satisfied or satisfied with the services. Although there are fluctuations in levels of satisfaction, generally Sure Start is doing extremely well in meeting the needs of these groups.

Satisfaction with services during and after pregnancy

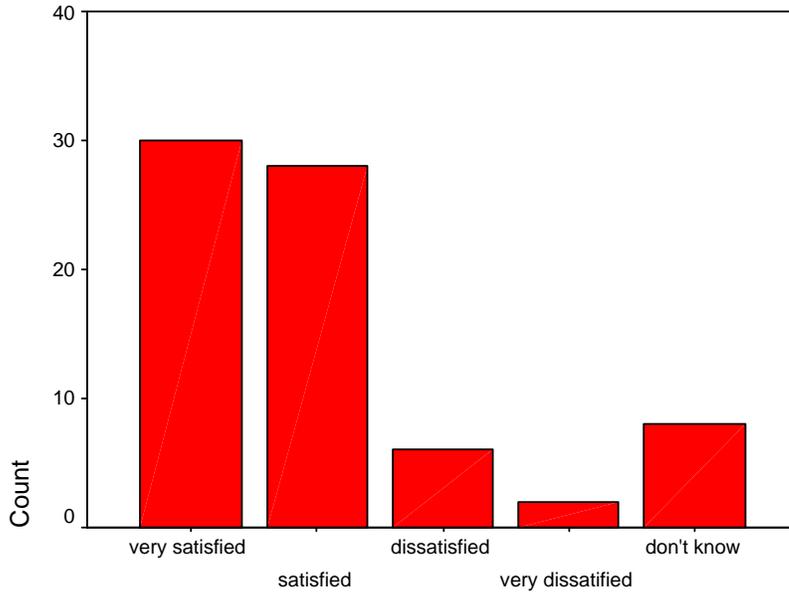
Sure Start programmes are charged with intervening to improve the quality of services and support during pregnancy and when the child is borne, so the survey was designed with questions relating to parent's satisfaction around these services. The graph below shows the level of satisfaction expressed by mothers during pregnancy.



Help and services when you were pregnant

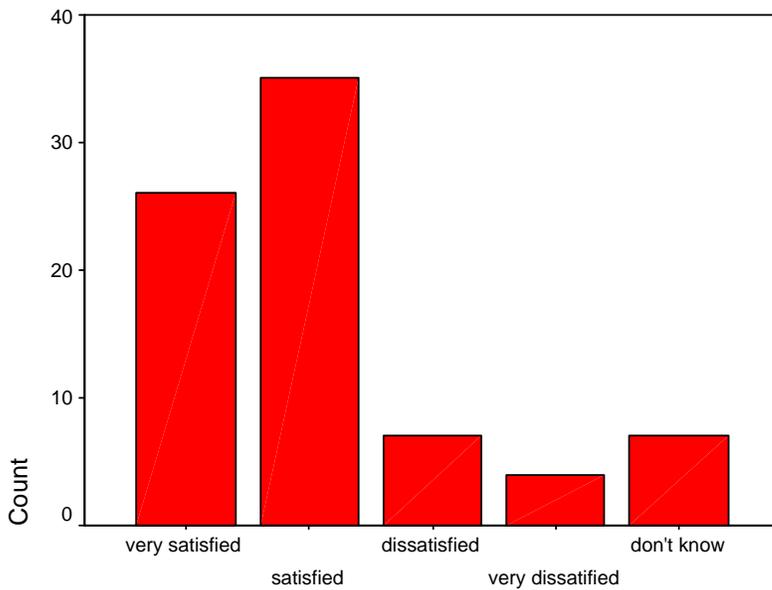
It is clear that the majority of mothers felt satisfied or very satisfied with services during pregnancy. Of course we cannot attribute these high levels of satisfaction to Sure Start alone, they are the result of the work of a number of different agencies and organisations. However Sure Start can learn from this result and aim to launch initiatives which target those mothers who do show dissatisfaction with services and improve their views of the services they receive.

The next question related to the help and services during the first two months after the birth of a child, and again the general picture is of satisfaction during this period. A small but significant proportion do express dissatisfaction with the help and services they received and again Sure Start has an important role to play in gathering information about this group and meeting their needs more fully.



In the first 2 months after the birth of your child

The final question asked mothers how satisfied they were with help and services during the first 4 years of a child’s life. Once again satisfaction and extreme satisfaction were the most common indicators here, although there were still mothers who felt dissatisfied with the help and services they had received during this time.



In the first 4 years of your child's life

Play and learning opportunities

It is important to gather parents' opinions about how they view opportunities for play and learning within the Thornhill area. The next question did this by asking if they felt their children had good quality play and learning opportunities.

Do you feel that your child or children under the age of 5 have good quality play and learning opportunities?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	71	80.7
	No	6	6.8

80% answered yes to this question, so we can conclude that most parents in the area do feel that opportunities for play and learning within the area are good. However, Sure Start has a key role in educating parents about the nature of quality play and learning and its role in child development and this positive response should be taken as the impetus for more work in this area.

Satisfaction with non Sure Start services in Thornhill

The next set of questions related to non Sure Start services within Thornhill. Respondents were polled on their satisfaction with a range of services, including health, social services, leisure and sport and parks and recreation.

The responses to the range of health provision in Thornhill are summarised below. Once again the services are ranged in order from those with the highest level of satisfaction (at the top) to those with the lowest (at the bottom of the table).

	N	Mean
Baby/child clinic	26	1.34
Midwife	24	1.37
Health Visitor	31	1.51
Speech Therapist	20	1.65
GP	67	1.71
social worker	6	1.83
District Nurse	13	1.84
NHS direct	51	1.88

Baby and child clinics are those services which have the highest levels of satisfaction, closely followed by midwives. NHS direct has been used by 51 of the 88 respondents, but has the lowest satisfaction rating.

The next set of questions related to child care issues within Thornhill:

	N	Mean
Nursery School	39	1.30
Playgroups	51	1.41
Toy Library	29	1.41
Parent and toddler group	32	1.59
Private Child Care	17	1.88

Nursery school provision had the highest level of satisfaction, whilst private child care was noticeable for having lower levels of satisfaction among respondents.

The final set of services of a non Sure Start nature were those relating to sport, leisure and recreation:

	N	Mean
Library	30	1.53
Sports/leisure	37	2.16

Parks	67	2.65
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Users were satisfied with library facilities and moderately satisfied with sports and leisure. Parks in the area had the lowest satisfaction rating, both in this category and within the larger set of questions about non Sure Start services. Many respondents took the trouble to write responses about park facilities on the questionnaires which demonstrates that it is an area of major concern for families in the area. Common complaints about parks voiced in the questionnaire were:

- Too much litter, dog waste and vandalism
- Not safe for children to play in
- Not enough play facilities
- Older children use them and make families feel unwelcome
- Concerns about discarded needles and material associated with illegal drug taking

Sure Start does not have direct control over parks in the Thornhill area, but as a body with influence, the concerns of families about the parks need to be taken seriously and Sure Start should act to influence relevant bodies such as the council, to take action to improve the park spaces in the area.

The next set of tables contains the full results for the non Sure Start services with the number of respondents answering in each category included.

Midwife

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	17	19.3
	satisfied	6	6.8
	very dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	24	27.3
Missing	System	64	72.7
Total		88	100.0

Health Visitor

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	17	19.3
	satisfied	12	13.6
	dissatisfied	2	2.3
	Total	31	35.2
Missing	System	57	64.8
Total		88	100.0

District Nurse

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	3	3.4
	satisfied	9	10.2
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	13	14.8
Missing	System	75	85.2
Total		88	100.0

Private Child Care

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	9	10.2
	satisfied	6	6.8
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	very dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	17	19.3
Missing	System	71	80.7
Total		88	100.0

Toy Library

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	17	19.3
	satisfied	12	13.6
	Total	29	33.0
Missing	System	59	67.0
Total		88	100.0

Library

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	14	15.9
	satisfied	16	18.2
	Total	30	34.1
Missing	System	58	65.9
Total		88	100.0

Parks

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	3	3.4
	satisfied	32	36.4
	dissatisfied	17	19.3
	very dissatisfied	15	17.0
	Total	67	76.1
Missing	System	21	23.9
Total		88	100.0

Sports/leisure

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	6	6.8
	satisfied	23	26.1
	dissatisfied	4	4.5
	very dissatisfied	4	4.5
	Total	37	42.0
Missing	System	51	58.0
Total		88	100.0

Baby/child clinic

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	17	19.3
	satisfied	9	10.2
	Total	26	29.5
Missing	System	62	70.5
Total		88	100.0

social worker

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	3	3.4
	satisfied	2	2.3
	very dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	6	6.8
Missing	System	82	93.2
Total		88	100.0

Speech Therapist

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	8	9.1
	satisfied	11	12.5
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	20	22.7
Missing	System	68	77.3
Total		88	100.0

GP

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	22	25.0
	satisfied	42	47.7
	dissatisfied	3	3.4
	Total	67	76.1
Missing	System	21	23.9
Total		88	100.0

NHS direct

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	21	23.9
	satisfied	22	25.0
	dissatisfied	5	5.7
	very dissatisfied	3	3.4
	Total	51	58.0
Missing	System	37	42.0
Total		88	100.0

Playgroups

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	33	37.5
	satisfied	16	18.2
	dissatisfied	1	1.1
	very dissatisfied	1	1.1
	Total	51	58.0
Missing	System	37	42.0
Total		88	100.0

Parent and toddler group

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	17	19.3
	satisfied	11	12.5
	dissatisfied	4	4.5
	Total	32	36.4
Missing	System	56	63.6
Total		88	100.0

Nursery School

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	very satisfied	27	30.7
	satisfied	12	13.6
	Total	39	44.3
Missing	System	49	55.7
Total		88	100.0

Questions relating to work and training

Although Sure Start's brief is to improve the life chances of children from 0 to 4 years old, any intervention in a community like Thornhill raises expectations amongst the population about wider opportunities. The survey therefore asked parents to comment on services which they might find helpful and which Sure Start could be involved in setting up:

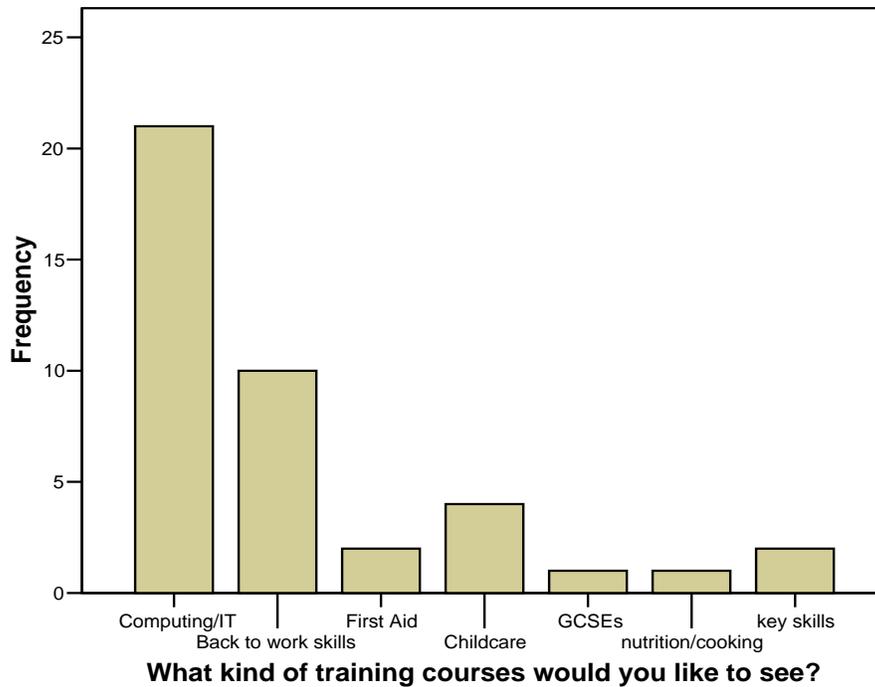
Do you think that training and careers guidance would be helpful in the area?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	73	83.0	96.1	96.1
	No	3	3.4	3.9	100.0
	Total	76	86.4	100.0	
Missing	System	12	13.6		
Total		88	100.0		

73 of the 88 respondents thought that training and careers guidance in the area would be helpful which demonstrates clearly the need for further development and opportunities to get parents into employment or to improve employment prospects which exists in the area.

Respondents were also asked what kinds of training would be helpful to them:

What kind of training courses would you like to see?



There is a clear demand for Computing and IT courses and back to work skills also figured highly on people's list of priorities. There was some interest in child care courses as well, suggesting that there is still more to be done in the area to educate parents about childcare and provide opportunities for them to improve their parenting skills.

Summary of open questions from the survey

The survey contained a number of open questions where respondents were invited to write prose answers to prompts which were open ended and allowed for a multiplicity of responses. These kinds of questions provide valuable qualitative evidence to contrast with the quantitative data which have been reported on thus far in this document. From a methodological point of view, there are a number of options when reporting on data of this type. One approach is to code all of the responses into a limited number of categories and treat this data as quantitative in nature and thus amenable to statistical analysis. This approach was used in the processing of this survey, but instead of presenting the results in tabular format, this section of the report draws out the ideas and concerns of respondents in a thematic way and uses a qualitative framework to present the results. It was possible to identify a number of themes emerging from the open questions which create an additional perspective on the statistical data. The themes are:

Lack of services and provision for working parents

Many of the open questions raised the issue of what was being done to address the needs of parent and families where one or more adult member was in employment. These people reported that they were often not in a position to access Sure Start services because of opening times of the centres and a lack of weekend and evening provision. Many respondents expressed concern that Sure Start services were available to parents who did not work and could thus attend flexibly during the day time and at different times during a week, but little account was taken of the needs of parents whose work commitments prevented them from attending Sure Start centres at the allotted times. The abolition of the weekly quiz was lamented by 15 of the respondents and the strength of feeling about this issue suggests that Sure Start Thornhill could explore further creative ways of involving local people in activities. Although these activities may not have a direct and unequivocal link to the operational concerns of Sure Start, it is clear that they have real symbolic value and should therefore not be underestimated.

Information and publicity needs improving

Many respondents also raised, in some form or another, the issue of publicising Sure Start events and bringing them to the attention of the wider community of Thornhill. Typical responses were “we would come more often if we knew about events”, and “we don’t really know what Sure Start could do for us”. Sure Start Thornhill has put considerable energy and resources into improving publicity but the results of the satisfaction survey suggest that more work is needed to bring the Sure Start message to everyone in the area. Another theme which emerged was the power of personal introductions to services. Over 25% of respondents said they would be more likely to access Sure Start services if they had someone to personally introduce them and act as an advocate to get them started.

Services and support for older children

A frequent response to the open questions was around the lack of provision for children over 5. Many respondents voiced anxiety and concern that resources were being concentrated on younger children and subsequently older children (those over 5) and teenagers were still disadvantaged by conditions in Thornhill. Sure Start's remit is to work with the under 5s and their families, but it is important to realise that for many of the Thornhill residents, this nuance is lost and they see a lack of provision for older children as a shortcoming of the programme. Improving this perception is of course beyond the scope of Sure Start as a single agency, but the message from the survey is that residents see Sure Start not as a strategic intervention with the under 5s, but as a general programme for social amelioration which could therefore do more to enhance the lives of older children in the area.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is clear from the user satisfaction survey that Sure Start has been effective in Thornhill in a number of areas. Where parents are using the services they are generally satisfied with provision and Sure Start Thornhill is clearly meeting the needs of the community it serves, particularly those families whose circumstances allow them to access provision within the frameworks set up by the programme. Support for mothers during pregnancy and beyond is strong and perceptions of Thornhill a place for raising children are good. There is tentative statistical evidence emerging from the survey that Sure Start is playing a part in improving services for parents of the under-5s.

Sure Start Thornhill however needs to do more to address the needs of working parents and evolve flexible provision which allows access to services in more flexible ways than is currently the case. There is within Thornhill a group of parents who work and are therefore currently disadvantaged in accessing services because of their commitments. Addressing this issue will need work on both the practical level and at the symbolic level. Practical steps should be taken to research the needs of working parents and develop service approaches which meet their needs, and on the symbolic level, Sure Start needs to work much harder to communicate its message to all families within the area and demonstrate a commitment to innovative service delivery. These changes may require some major rethinking of current patterns of delivery and working arrangements, but the evidence from the survey strongly suggests that Sure Start Thornhill needs to work harder to reach out to all families and not just those who are able to use services during normal working hours on weekdays.

Publicising the work of Sure Start Thornhill is still an issue and improvements could be made in this respect. Many of the respondents raised questions about the local area which are beyond the operational remit of Sure Start, for instance the condition of local parks and provision for older children, but which they clearly see Sure Start as having a stake in. Sure Start Thornhill should seek to find ways to use its local power to exert

pressure for change in these key areas, and where change may not be possible, the programme should communicate clearly to the local population what steps it has taken in these areas. In short the programme should think creatively about how to manage publicity about its activities and seek ways to improve its standing within the wider community. Doing good work with parents and children within the centres is no longer enough, the programme has to be proactive in reaching out to all families within Thornhill even when this means going beyond established channels of communication and possibly rethinking the ways in which it works.

The final recommendation is that Sure Start Thornhill works hard to build on the foundation of this survey and that further data and research evidence is gathered to create a deeper understanding of the community which the programme serves.