

**Follow-up Evaluation of
Halewood and Tower Hill
Sure Start Local Programmes**



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Baseline survey reports on the Sure Starts in Halewood and Tower Hill were carried out by Liverpool University, to demonstrate the impact of the programmes on a small sample group since 2002.

Following on from these surveys, it was decided to carry out more work with parents who do not access Sure Start services, or who have attended sessions but are no longer involved.

Invitations to participate in the research programme were sent to fifty parents in Halewood and fifty in Tower Hill, who have never used the services or only used them infrequently. They were offered the chance to discuss their opinions and their ideas about their local programme with independent interviewers, either at their home or in a neutral venue. Incentives were also offered to encourage people to take part.

No responses were obtained from parents in Halewood, so a further fifty cards were sent out. Other methods to target non-users of the service were also adopted, such as people suggested by regular users of the service.

Results

Nine semi-structured interviews were carried out, with five parents from Halewood and four from Tower Hill. Eight of the respondents opted to have the interview at their home, often with children present, and one chose to use Sure Start premises. One of the respondents from Halewood could not be contacted to arrange an interview, but an extra interview was carried out as a parent was visiting the house of one of the original respondents.

The comments made have been analysed as below.

(a) How they heard about Sure Start

Most of the parents interviewed had heard of Sure Start and its services, through a variety of different methods. These included via leaflets or newsletters through the door, word of mouth from other users, a Sure Start stall at the school fair and through health professionals, including health visitors and midwives.

(b) Use of Sure Start services

Several of the parents had used a Sure Start service, or taken part in one of their events. H1 used to attend the meetings, to *“give my view about children’s facilities and parks and trying to make Halewood better”*. She also went to parties for the children and thought they were very good.

H2 said she has not taken part in any of the activities, but she has friends who have gone and spoken highly of them. She appreciated the availability of safety equipment that can be delivered, and input from other outreach workers, including the dental nurse.

H3 spoke of the opportunity to meet other people, in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. She also felt that Sure Start *“brings the kids along. It’s something that our communities needed for a long while, because I do feel that children do need to mix with other children and share.”*

H5 said she has been to a picnic, a few of the special events, swimming, playgroups and musical gym tots. She commented that *“the staff are lovely, they’re really friendly”*.

Another mother, TH1 found out about the crèche and play facilities, and did a first aid course as part of the adult learning. Her children have also been some of the activity sessions and days out. She was grateful for the support provided by the Sure Start staff. Including the fact that they *“know the problems I have bringing them up on my own”*.

A mother-to-be, TH2 spoke to the staff who explained all the activities available, including baby massage.

(c) Reasons for lack of involvement

There were a variety of reasons for people’s lack of involvement in Sure Start, including getting a job, not knowing the area, feeling excluded, lack of awareness of Sure Start, and events being held too far away.

- Halewood**
- a) H1 said she has started a job, and so she is no longer available when the events are held. She also mentioned that she has not lived in the area for long, so she does not know a lot of places where events are held. She also mentioned a friend with a young baby who also stopped going, as she found it difficult to fit in attending the sessions with other demands on her time.
 - b) H2 said that she has now started a job, and she is working on the Sure Start days, with her child in nursery. She is reluctant to change his routine in the nursery, but she does still attend Sure Start events when she is off work or if the nursery is closed.
 - c) H3 said that she does not know much about Sure Start and does not have much to do with them, as it is too far for her to travel with two children: *“I don’t really bother because getting these two down there, by the time I get down there its time to come back up here.”*
 - d) H4 also said that Sure Start is too far away, and explained that it is hard for her to go anywhere as she has to collect one child at lunchtime and drop him back at school.

- e) H5 said that she stopped using the Sure Start service after they stopped running the one event that they really enjoyed (the musical gym tots), said to be due to funding issues, or because something else was planned for September.
- She said that *“you’re constantly getting new programmes through the door, they’re always changing it and I can’t keep up. I like stability. I like to know for the next year that we could come to a play group every morning of the week.”* When asked if she would consider trying Sure Start again, she said *“it’s just knowing what’s on, and what days. You’ve got to have that timetable to hand all the time”*.
 - She did not attend the summer events and trips because her older daughter can be very difficult, and tends to do more with school.
 - She went to the Parent’s Group, but said that only two people turned up: *“I don’t know if it wasn’t well organised or if it wasn’t the right sort of thing for a parent group”*. She thought it should be *“a bit more relaxed”*, as the children were segregated from the parents, with care workers to look after them, but she would prefer the group to be more informal, parents chatting whilst the children were playing around. This would let the children *“relax and play, rather than feeling they’re being shut off away from you”*.
 - She also said that in other play groups she has attended, *“you get to know the mums because you want to... you’re not being forced together as in a whole big group. I tend to get a bit uncomfortable in a large group... I find that a bit overpowering sometimes.”*
 - She commented on the number of questions that were asked, and that there tend to be a lot of forms to be completed. *“...every playgroup you come to, there would be another form to fill in, and they want to talk about your personal details”* She would prefer it to be *“just a bit more relaxing”*, as she tends to go to playgroups to escape.
 - Another reason is stopped her going to the morning sessions was that *“they wanted the mums to take over the financial side, the actual running of it. I think Sure Start should stick to the running of it and just let the parents come and enjoy it with their children.”*

Tower Hill

- a) TH1 said she does not go regularly as she is in college full time, however, she does go when she can.
- She also mentioned other people who do not go as they are not aware of Sure Start, or do not have one in their area.
- b) TH2 said she felt excluded as she has not yet had her baby, but even when she took the child of a friend, she *“just felt out of place”*.
- c) TH3 found that there were already groups of people who know each other, which made it hard to make friends. *“I went to a couple of things, a toddler group, but I didn’t like it. I found that there were already groups, people who knew each other there, it was hard to make friends”*.

- d) TH4 felt that there were interpersonal issues relating to existing members. She was curious about whether her name had been removed from the database, as she had not heard any details about Sure Start. She also felt that there were cliques which made her feel excluded, and had also put off friends and neighbours from going. *“It’s like ‘us and them’, that’s what it makes me feel like, that’s why I don’t like going”*.

(d) Follow-up

Most interviewees were satisfied with the level of follow-up from Sure Start. H1, H2 and H5 all said they receive information from Sure Start about events, and H3 obtains information from someone she knows who is training with Sure Start. TH1 said she is informed by post or phone call about events.

However, TH3 said she has not received any follow-up phone calls.

(e) Suggestions for change

H1 said she did not have any messages for Sure Start, as she felt they are doing well with what they are doing at the moment.

TH3 made a few suggestions, including getting some parents to look out for new people coming in, so that new members felt more welcomed and less put off by the existing groups. She also suggested an advice centre, like a drop in centre to get help with children.

TH4 felt that Sure Start is *“brilliant for kids”* but she thought it should also be aimed at children over 4, who need activities as the community centre has just been shut down. She also said she disliked the emphasis on putting children in a crèche which may be appropriate for a parent who was working or wants to do courses, but was not so suitable for her.

H2 said she would like more facilities in her local area to allow her to make use of it. She also said that if she had a helper allocated to her, she would be more able to attend events with her two children.

H4 also said that she would like events to be held nearer to her.

H5 said that she *“would love to do more in the community and get to know people in my own area, and for [her daughter] to play with other children that she may be starting school with soon”*.

CONCLUSIONS

The response rate from the parents was rather low, with only 9 parents out of 150 responding to the invitation to participate in the research, all of them female. This limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the sample.

However, some useful themes have come from the interviews, which can help to inform the Sure Start services, and stimulate further discussion and exploration.

1. Proximity and accessibility

Sure Start aims to provide local services, but for one of the mothers interviewed, the events were too far away to make it feasible for her to attend. If a parent has several

children of different ages and different needs, their requirements may be more specific. This highlights the need for increased availability and/or awareness of outreach services. What seems to be local to professionals may not seem local to a Mum with three children, with other constraints to manage.

2. Non-mainstream users

Some of the parents are not regular users of Sure Start services because they do not want major involvement. They are satisfied with the events and activities they have participated in, and their limited involvement is due to other demands on their time rather than any shortcomings in the Sure Start services.

3. Continuity

For some parents, having older children who are not eligible for Sure Start makes it harder for them to make use of the services. They do not appreciate the cut-off point at 4 years old, and they would want to see more joined-up services, catering for their needs.

4. Changed circumstances

In some cases, the only reason why some parents have stopped using the services is due to a new job or college attendance.

5. Exclusion

Some parents spoke of their feelings of 'not fitting in', or being wary of attending on their own. Others were put off by perceived problems with interpersonal relationships with people already involved in Sure Start, or the feeling that cliques existed. This could be addressed by ensuring there is an initial welcome for new members from staff and/or parents already involved, thereby avoiding feelings of exclusion.

6. Formality vs flexibility

A concern of some parent was the need to fill in forms whenever they attended Sure Start events. They would prefer to have a more relaxed and informal atmosphere, and some attended their local playgroup in preference to the Sure Start one for this reason. Although some parents appreciate the opportunity to follow courses and take on responsibility in the running of some of the services, others feel that they just want to use the service and a chance to relax.

Follow-up

The key findings from the research should be presented back to those who took part, to ensure their comments were understood accurately, and to inform them that their views have been taken seriously. It is important that the results are presented in a friendly and accessible format, and one which stimulates and encourages further discussion.

As the number of respondents was low, the results will be compared with those from similar research being carried out in North Huyton by Barnardos, to see if the same issues have been found in that area.

More interviews could be carried out over a longer time span, to include a larger group of parents. Targeting parents through word of mouth, via existing contacts might be more successful. These could include parents currently using Sure Start services, as well as the

people interviewed in this survey. A leaflet promoting the services and asking for comments and suggestions could be produced and distributed to key meeting points such as schools or doctors surgeries, to provide a regular opportunity for feedback from parents.

The parents interviewed in this study were asked if they were prepared to take part in an informal meeting with several parents and the Sure Start staff, to discuss further the issues that affect them. All but one of the interviewees agreed. This could be useful in defining the problems or concerns that parents have, and in discussing possible ways to address them. It could also help in breaking down barriers which have dissuaded some parents to take part in Sure Start.