Local Evaluation of Sure Start St Ann’s Programme

Interim Report to Sure Start Staff
(July 2003)
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1. Introduction

This is an interim report of the local evaluation of Sure Start St Ann’s which marks the culmination of an initial period of involvement from August 2002 to May 2003. It sets out some of the main themes of the local evaluation and starts to identify some of those characteristics and processes which typify the progress that Sure Start St Ann’s has made. The report should not be considered as an end in itself, rather it is simply one aspect of the formative process of local evaluation – any comments or observation included in this report should be viewed as preliminary findings only, posed to provoke discussion amongst staff and stakeholders about how to build upon Sure Start St Ann’s achievements.

The evaluation strategy has to date sought to: identify innovative practice; recognise good practice in partnership working; obtain reliable and credible information about community perceptions of Sure Start; and finally, generate robust monitoring information which highlights progress and which might influence decision making. The evaluation consists of five interrelated strands:

1. **Action Learning Evaluations** – One initiative from each of the four Sure Start Objectives has been evaluated in collaboration with staff members and stakeholders seeking evidence of good practice and innovative working.

2. **Case Studies** – A small number of families have become the focus of short case studies. These offer a more developed insight into life in St Ann’s, and recognise the impact that Sure Start can have.

3. **Community Survey** – A survey will offer reliable evidence about community perspectives on the impact of Sure Start St Ann’s. Community volunteers will play an active role in designing, undertaking and reporting this survey.

4. **Data Monitoring** – Monitoring a range of local and Sure Start data will help to chart the progress that the programme is making.

5. **Stakeholder interviews** - Interviews with a wide range of individuals linked to Sure Start St Ann’s and to St Ann’s will help to situate Sure Start in the local context and help to direct and frame this evaluation.
This short report\(^1\) focuses upon case study material, the action learning evaluations and Sure Start monitoring data to demonstrate some of the very positive achievements that Sure Start St Ann’s has made.

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\(^1\) A full report (and summary) have been produced, and can be obtained from Jean Pearson (Sure Start St Ann’s) or Paul Leighton (University of Nottingham).
2. Case Studies

Case Studies are a more broadly focused component of this evaluation which offer a detailed insight into life in St Ann’s and a more connected vision of Sure Start and the impact that it has upon local people. In this phase of evaluation, case studies have been utilised to gather Sure Start success stories.

2.1. Kevin.

Kevin has lived in St Ann’s with his wife and three children since August 2000 (although he has known the area for much longer), he has been involved with Sure Start since 2001 and currently participates in a considerable number of activities and groups.

Kevin recognised that St Ann’s has a terrible reputation for drugs and violence, but suggested that programmes like Sure Start might not only help individual families but might also combat these stereotypes and produce stronger communities. More specifically he felt that Sure Start had helped him as a parent, as a person and as an active member of the community.

As a parent he has benefited from better provision for children and young families:

*there wasn’t much to do with the kids before Sure Start. I’d be out walking the pram around town for about 4 hours because there was nowt to do. But now, if [my wife] wants to get on with the housework, or whatever, I can keep the kids out of the house all day from one event to the other.*

He has also benefited from improved parenting skills and greater awareness of parenting issues:

*I had a lot of problems with my son, his behaviour was very bad because of things that have happened to him. ... the training I went on last year was an eye-opener in how to handle my son. At the time I was only having him at the weekend, I was picking up the pieces and it was a nightmare. It was hard to deal with him and my daughter was being left out. It gave me an insight into how to handle things, that was fantastic. ... [when I was teaching on parents united] I learned as much from the other parents as they did from me ... I’m not a brilliant parent, but its helped me. There are still issues that are coming up but now I’m confident enough to seek help and admit when I am making mistakes. It’s opened my eyes to see that I am doing things wrong.*

More significantly, Kevin felt that Sure Start has helped him personally to become more self-confident:
[now] I’ve got good self-esteem. Some of the training that you do is confidence building. Like you have to talk to professionals. I’ve had child protection training, and I’ve had child protection issues and I’ve told the head of social services that he was doing his job wrong, it’s given me the confidence to do that, because I thought he was and he came back to me and said ‘yeah’.

Sure Start has enabled Kevin to become an active member of the community:

I didn’t like the way that they were doing things, so I jumped up and said so, and they took it on board … there were needs in the community, and my experiences were valid. They seemed to take on board all your things and work around you … Like I feel that I’m not responsible for all of it, but from my comments and suggestions positions have been made or avenues have been ventured.

In conclusion:

[before Sure Start] I just felt that I was a put upon parent. Now I’m a valued member of the community. … I think I was just very kind of closed, closed and reclusive, just like with my family. Y’know I was stuck in the house with the kids, it was too much time just with the kids. … I’m more confident and outgoing now. I know how to conduct myself properly with other people, I feel that I am a valued member of the community.

2.2. Emma.

Emma lives in St Ann’s with her partner and daughter, she has been involved with Sure Start since 2002 and currently participates in a number of activities and groups.

Emma described a community which has considerable problems with drugs and violence; but which more importantly has its own values and codes of behaviour:

St Ann’s has certain rules and regulations… keeping yourself to yourself. When we first came here my partner had a go at me ‘don’t look at people in the face, keep your eyes down’ … even just a month ago he said ‘keep your eyes down, stop smiling’. It’s not nice, there are still times when I’m coming back from school and I can hear footsteps behind me, and you are thinking … it’s not right to be thinking like that but that’s how it is.

It is against this backdrop that Sure Start has had a very real impact upon Emma, giving given her increased confidence and changing her whole perspective on living in St Ann’s. It has helped her form a whole new set of friends and contributed to turning her life around:

Since I’ve joined Sure Start I feel that the area has changed, but maybe that’s because I know more of people now from Sure Start. Now I walk down the street and there are loads of people that I say ‘hello‘ to, all the mums meet on the Chase of a morning, we go off to a meeting or to someone’s house for a coffee. I
think that it’s opened my life up, it’s made me more confident ... I know loads of people here now, it feels more like a community.

I just feel that if me of all people, who has come from the worst brink of self-destruction can come and take full advantage ... that’s why I want to go around and tell everyone ‘I was crap, you wouldn’t have recognised me as a person - now look at me’ and a lot of it has to do with Sure Start because it has made my confidence boom. That’s why I like to tell everyone ‘come and take advantage, it does wonders’.

Sure Start has also benefited Emma’s parenting skills and has had a positive impact upon her daughter’s development:

[Sure Start] enabled [my daughter] to develop her skills. She was a very clingy baby because I was with her all the time, if mummy wasn’t there she wasn’t happy. But going to play groups has enabled her to mingle with other children, her social skill and mental skills soared; it wasn’t until then that I realised I had been holding her back. ... it was down to Sure Start that [my daughter] was able to settle at nursery, I was terrible but she was like ‘ok mum, bye’, she was used to the playgroups

In conclusion:

During the week I can guarantee that I’ll have at least three meetings and two or three playgroups, I’m a busy been now. When Tracy [parent volunteer coordinator] left I wrote a little card I put: ‘if it wasn’t for people like you, you’ve enabled me to live again’. Compared to two years ago when I was virtually nothing, now I’ve got something to do everyday and it is lovely ... They offer all the support, they say if you want us to come round for a chat, we’ll come round. You’ve got the best of both worlds.
3. Data Monitoring.

Whilst these two case studies demonstrate the very strong impact that Sure Start St Ann’s can have, it is also important to consider how broad the programme’s impact is and how many families are benefiting from its services and provision.

Softsmart data compiled by Sure Start St Ann’s highlights that approximately 54% of children under 4 are registered with the programme. Whilst there is still some room for improvement it is evident that the programme is reaching more families than ever before, and that new registrations have become more consistent since the spring of 2002 (since when around 220 new parents and children have registered in each quarter). Data for monthly reach\(^2\), which is perhaps of greater value in tracking the programme’s progress, also illustrates that the programme is reaching more families as it becomes more established.

Data collated at a regional level would seem to support this and illustrates that Sure Start St Ann’s reach is comparable to other programmes in the East Midlands region and slightly better than the average for other Wave 2 programmes.

<table>
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<th>% of all children accessing programmes (Mar 2003)</th>
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<td>% of &lt; 2 months</td>
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This data also shows that Sure Start St Ann’s is especially effective at reaching new born babies in the first two months of life; although, it might be a cause for concern that the programme is less successful with older children (only 12% of 3

\(^2\) i.e. how many families are actively involved with Sure Start St Ann’s each month.
4 yr olds in St Ann’s participated in activities during March 2003). A further pattern which has emerged in this review of Sure Start records is that whilst the programme has been effective is reaching families in the Chase area (where 67% of eligible children are registered), it has struggled to involve families in the Phase 10 neighbourhood (where only 37% of children are registered). Whilst there are likely to be a range of factors which contribute to this situation, it would seem to be no coincidence that Sure Start St Ann’s offers greater provision in the Chase area, and very little in the Phase 10 area.

One initiative from each of the four Sure Start Objectives has been selected as an evaluation mini-project, undertaken in collaboration with Sure Start staff (and other stakeholders where appropriate):

4.1. Improving Social and Emotional Development – Parents United.

4.2. Improving Health – Safer, Healthier Homes.

4.3. Improving the Ability to Learn – Toy Library.

4.4. Strengthening Families and Communities - Community Parenting Scheme.
4.1. Improving Social and Emotional Development – Parents United.

This is an eight week parenting skills course for parents who are experiencing social, emotional or behavioural difficulties with their children. To date the course has benefited parents in a number of important ways – creating better awareness of parenting issues, contributing to participants personal development and facilitating mutual support networks. Efforts to establish and expand this programme will enable it to have a positive impact on a greater number of families.

4.1.1. Data Collected.

Observational notes and staff and parent comments derived from attendance at Parents’ United sessions for both the first and second cohorts.

Completed survey responses from those participants who graduated as part of the first Parents United cohort; in addition semi-structured, qualitative interviews were undertaken with five of these parents. Each interview lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. All were recorded on audio-tape, subsequently transcribed and their content analysed in accordance with a coding frame (focused upon course aims/hopes, favourite aspects, course material and education issues, practical problems, home visits and course facilitators) established with the course organisers.

4.1.2. Findings and Observations.

The course appears to have benefited participants in a number of significant ways. First of all in better awareness of parenting issues, improved parenting skills and feeling more confident in dealing with children.

"It’s simple things that make you think gosh. I’m conscious all the time now of saying things that she will understand, it’s made our relationship better. I explain things more now. ... when I started I thought there was going to be an awful lot, but it’s the simple things that make such a difference, that help so much. It sticks in your head and it becomes second nature” (Parent5)

"before I was really depressed, I was ready to say ‘I can’t cope’, I was ready to give him up. This course has helped to put my mind to it and finally face that I can do it. ... before I used to be scared to tell him off in case he lashed out, now I’m more confident to say ‘no’ calmly. I think that the group has helped me to calm down” (Parent1)

Perhaps more significantly the course appears to have contributed to the participants personal development, anecdotally identifying improved self-
confidence, better communication skills and generally feeling better about themselves and their circumstances.

"I’m not so depressed and I’m getting out of the house more as well. Before I used to stay at home and do nothing, ... before I didn’t have the confidence to go out and meet people. Sure Start and the groups I’ve been to have boosted my confidence." (Parent1)

"When I went I had no self-confidence, all I felt was that I was a mother and that was all I had to be. Since I’ve been to the course I know that I am allowed to go out, allowed to enjoy myself, allowed to take these relaxing baths and to do what I wish to do” (Parent3)

Participants recognised other group members as important sources of information and support; there appears to be some considerable potential to use this course (with other aspects of SS) to aid the development of enhanced networks of informal support in the area.

"we’ve all exchanged phone numbers and we are all keeping in touch, that’s how well we got on. I know 2 of the other girls very well, I go round their house, go bingo with them and I had no friends before I joined.” (Parent4)

"That 8 week session has really made a difference - the work that you did in the course and the stuff that you pick-up, and not just off the people running the course but off the other people.” (Parent2)

In summary, Parents United should be broadly applauded for the impact that it has had upon parents, and for its involvement of other local agencies (recent Parents United meetings have included representatives from Base 51, Mayholme, St Ann’s family centre, the LEA, St Ann’s health centre and Sneinton health centre). The only concern which emerges from this action learning evaluation is how to reach more families (younger parents and ethnic minorities especially) and have a stronger impact upon the local community. However, it should be recognised that this programme is still at a very early stage of development (only two cohorts have completed the course), and that measures to address these issues are being put in place: two courses have started in May 2003 (with more planned for the summer), and the third cohort includes parents from an ethnic minority background.
4.2. Improving Health – Safer, Healthier Homes.

This scheme provides fitted safety equipment and information in homes where there is a perceived increased risk of childhood accident and injury (i.e. special needs, multiple children, history of accidents, etc.). The scheme has cross-agency support in the supply and fitting of equipment and in an established referral mechanism.

The scheme perhaps best typifies the broader objectives of Sure Start in its multifaceted and multi-agency working; it is an initiative which has taken significant steps towards sustainability beyond the life of Sure Start St Ann’s.

4.2.1. Data Collected.

A extensive literature review has been carried out and supplements the in-house study of a quick-win pilot scheme carried out by Sure Start St Ann’s. Personal contact has been established with Dr. Denise Kendrick and the team working on a major Nottingham-wide study of childhood injuries.

Non-participant observational notes taken at Home Safety/Healthy Homes meetings. Content analysis of funding applications and programme development proposals.

4.2.2. Findings and Observations.

This scheme stands out in Sure Start St Ann’s as the initiative (of those reviewed) which most clearly reflects the Sure Start priorities of multi-faceted and multi-agency working.

The scheme is broad ranging (impacting upon a number of Sure Start targets); incorporates a considerable number of external agencies (with Sure Start St Ann’s acting as a hub for the involvement and co-ordination of other agencies); is expanding in its focus (developing a greater focus upon child safety more broadly and incorporating fire safety and car safety issues); and, is expanding geographically beyond the St Ann’s area (working with other Sure Start programmes initially, but with a city-wide project planned).

These factors would suggest that the Home Safety scheme is working well towards the goal of sustainability. This fact is further illustrated by an established and effective referral mechanism, by attempts to secure external funding (and a funding steering group) and by the direct referral of households to ENPROVE (the
body which fits safety equipment) rather than via Sure Start St Ann’s. Plans for a publicity event during Child safety week (and the planned involvement of parents in planning and organising this) would suggest that the initiative is trying to balance organisational issues with community involvement and awareness raising.

**Organisations involved in the Home Safety Initiative**

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<tr>
<td>ENPROVE</td>
<td>Nottingham Road Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Renewal Trust</td>
<td>Nottingham Fire and Rescue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nottingham City Council (area 5)</td>
<td>Nottinghamshire Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refugee Housing Association</td>
<td>Metropolitan Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Guinness Trust</td>
<td>The Resource Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Residents Association</td>
<td>R.O.B.I.N.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health visitors from St Ann’s, Sneinton and Sherwood Rise.</td>
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Whilst the scheme should broadly be applauded, evidence for the efficacy of this type of home safety scheme is still unclear – the findings of a major study in Nottingham which will inform this (and the dissemination of home safety information) are now overdue. It is also difficult to assess the impact of fitting equipment in St Ann’s homes at this stage - it will take some considerable time for a meaningful outcome measure to become evident, and this will rest upon tracking accident and hospital admittance data over a number of years, as well as assessing risk awareness in the community.
4.3. Improving the Ability to Learn.– Toy Library.

The Toy Library seeks to enhance good quality play and improve speech and learning skills by operating a toy library van which visits a number of locations in the St Ann’s area. At the start of this evaluation the toy library was at a very early stage of development; this work has tracked its progress as it attempts to become more established in the community.

Despite being recognised as an excellent initiative the Toy Library is experiencing some difficulties in becoming established with local families. However, efforts to rectify this would seem to be heading in the right direction by utilising venues, such as schools and nurseries, where more families are likely to become aware of the provision.

4.3.1. Data Collected.

Information was collected from both the Play Co-ordinator and the Toy Library organiser about the purpose and focus of the toy library. Similar opinions were gathered from volunteers helping to organise the library, as well from representatives of those organisations that host the toy library sessions.

Observational notes and parent comments were recorded at toy library sessions.

During April, toy library records were reviewed to consider the location and frequency of sessions; as well as attendance levels and lending patterns at each location.

4.3.2. Findings and Observations.

The toy library is recognised as an excellent initiative by staff, parents and organisational partners alike. However, attendance at sessions is low, despite there being around 90 registered members as few as 20 families access the service, and fewer still access a toy library session on a regular basis. This is a source of some concern and some considerable frustration.

No more than four families attended any 2-hour session observed as part of this evaluation; on at least one occasion no families attended.

shall I just go and grab someone and tell them what we are doing, how good it is ... drag them in to see (Sure Start Worker – St Ann’s library session)

It’s a shame more people don’t use it ... we think that it has a real benefit. We’ve seen parents joining the library and taking books home with them ... and then coming again (Community Librarian – at a Carlton Rd Library session)
Whilst a number of reasons for this low attendance have been suggested by people in and around the Toy Library (e.g. parents do not like the idea of library, parents do not the idea of used toys, etc.), it is clear that the scheme is not sufficiently publicised. There is little evidence of when and where sessions might be taking place – A4 sized posters were often the only evidence of the library taking place, and on at least occasion it was unclear that the timing of a session had changed. It is also worth noting that the visibility of the toy library would be enhanced if the toy library van was currently being used and driven around the area (this would also ease some of the practical difficulties associated with storing toys in numerous locations and holding sessions in different parts of St Ann’s).

Recent months have seen a number of new toy library sessions and venues introduced, holding these in local play groups, toddler groups, nursery schools and housing association venues would seem a positive way to increase awareness and use of the toy library. However, it is likely that these will take time to become established and successful – it is perhaps unsuprising that one of the longest standing venues (Carlton Road Library) is possibly the most successful (with a number of regular attenders).

One final point worth highlighting is that some of those families most regularly accessing the toy library scheme (at the Carlton Road library) demonstrated an awareness of the value of good quality play – ordering specialist toys, asking about toy-suppliers and having previous contact with other agencies:

*the library play-sessions are good ... he can play with other children, but I can also find out about where to get the right sort of toys* (parent – Carlton Road Library)

The key question would seem to be not only how to increase usage of the toy library, but also how to reach those parents who are resistant to the notion of a toy library and those who do not appreciate the value of play for child development.
4.4. Strengthening Families and Communities - Community Parenting Scheme.

Community Parents are trained in order to befriend and offer informal support to isolated families in St Ann’s. The first cohort were trained in spring/summer 2002 and a second cohort in spring 2003. All parent volunteers have gone on to take-up placements within the Sure Start St Ann’s programme.

Parents have been positive about their involvement in the scheme and a number of the first group have gone onto employment, further education or training. Effort should be made to establish this initiative more centrally in Sure Start St Ann’s.

4.4.1. Data Collected.

Evaluation material for first cohort training has been reviewed, summarised under the headings community capacity and personal development and fed back to the Parent volunteer co-ordinator.

Through involvement in a number of SSSA activities (the community survey included) comments about the parent volunteer scheme have been collected from the first cohort of community parents.

The Parent volunteer co-ordinator has been interviewed on two separate occasions – the first to review the aims and objectives of the scheme and the second to review its progress (including a strong focus on the failure to develop the be-friending aspect of the scheme).

4.4.2. Findings and Observations.

The success of the community parent volunteering scheme will strongly influence the long-term success of SSSA - by creating a more confident and able local population who are active in community issues.

Despite this there is a strong feeling that this is just one more Sure Start St Ann’s initiative which, more significantly, seems to be operated in isolation of other service providers and other aspects of the programme. At the heart of this there seems to be some confusion about the nature and purpose of the scheme: the
question as to whether the scheme is about creating active volunteers or about supporting and developing parents’ skills seems unresolved\textsuperscript{3}.

\textit{some staff have not been that keen to work with the volunteers, they don’t see it as part of their work ... they forget that the parents are not just a resource but are part of our client group that we have to serve and help}

As a consequence the befriending and community support aspect of the scheme has assumed a much lower priority on the agenda (no volunteer has offered support to a local family, and referrals to the scheme are few).

However, parents are very positive about their involvement and about the training that they receive – “they’ve turned my insecurities into a positive experience”, “it has been a healing process ... ‘I feel empowered, I feel alert’”. It is a testimony to the scheme that a number of the first cohort have moved on to employment or further education and training; and that the second cohort have all assumed placements within the St Ann’s project.

Extending this scheme to reach more people (especially form the Asian community) should be encouraged and the scheme should perhaps seek more active involvement with agencies outside of Sure Start St Ann’s. This will potentially broaden the impact of the scheme and will help it to become more established within the community.

\textsuperscript{3} The scheme is evidently about both of these aspects, but this is not clear and would seem to be the cause of some friction.
5. Conclusions - Observations and Reflections.

At this early stage of evaluation it is difficult to draw strong conclusions, however there are a number of general points that we might tentatively propose, and some more specific thoughts that we might offer about the progress of Sure Start St Ann’s:

1. The programme offers a wide range of high quality and appropriate services which can have a very real and significant impact upon vulnerable families in St Ann’s.

2. As the programme has become more established it has started to reach a greater number of local families; and it has started to establish new ways of working, and effective partnerships with other local organisations.

3. However, the programme is still dominated by a professional, service delivery ethos – Sure Start St Ann’s has sought to serve the community rather than work with it. This has perhaps distanced the programme from the local community – efforts should perhaps be taken to reach and involve more local people, and also to improve local awareness of Sure Start St Ann’s.

A. St Ann’s is a difficult environment in which to work, and a difficult place to involve people. The programme’s progress, achievements and difficulties should be understood in the context of a geographically large, socially diverse community which experiences multiple social and economic difficulties and whose population is perhaps sceptical of this kind of initiative, is stigmatised by a very strong negative reputation and might lack the confidence to get involved.

B. It may be that national targets and the drive towards sustainability bring with them a number of inherent difficulties:

⇒ it may be that local organisational partners and residents do not share Sure Start’s priorities and are consequently reluctant to get involved.

⇒ it is possible that the long-term goal of sustainability masks the short-term importance of involving local people (or vice versa).

⇒ there is a potentially problematic relationship between what Sure Start St Ann’s has to do (to meet national targets) and how it might want to adapt and respond to local circumstances.