



# Acknowledgements

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With thanks also to the Sure Start managers who are members of the Sure Start Performance Management Group who helped to develop the Sure Start Parental Survey: Caroline Milligan, Catriona Maguire, Mairead Gilmartin, Maria Kelly, Sharon Kirk, Sharon White and Winnie Kelly.

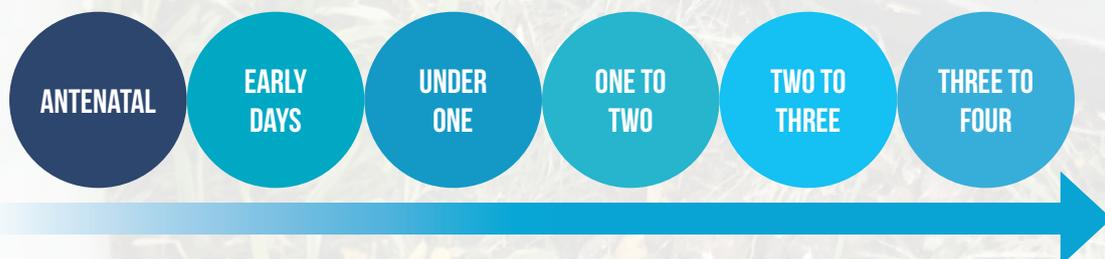
Also, with thanks to the staff in the Strategic Planning and Performance Group - Department of Health (SPPG) Mairead McMullen, Roisin McCooey, Kevin Duggan, Shauneen Mullan and Lauren Coulter.

## Reflection

In the first year of a baby's life their brain grows rapidly and they develop the building blocks needed to succeed throughout life. It is a critical time in children's development and can be the most significant in defining future outcomes. Evidence shows that early childhood (pregnancy to age two, often referred to as the 'first 1001 days') is critical in laying the foundations for a child's future health, wellbeing, learning and earning potential (Parent-Infant Foundation), with the child's first 12 months being a key part of this stage.

Studies in the UK and internationally show that when a baby's development falls behind during the first year of life, without additional support, it is much more likely to fall even further behind in subsequent years, than to catch up with those who have had a better start. That is why the work of Sure Start in Northern Ireland is so crucially important, that children and families get the right start in the earliest stages of life and are never left to fall behind.

## Parental Journey Through SureStart



# Introduction

This report represents the results to a survey carried out with parents across 38 Sure Start Projects in Northern Ireland in June 2023. The main aim of the survey was to gather the views and opinions among the targeted Sure Start population, that is parents and carers who are users of Sure Start and expectant parents.

Parents were asked to give feedback on how Sure Start had supported them and their family. Questions were asked across four topics, linked to each of the Sure Start Policy Outcome areas:

- Improved Language Skills & early Identification of Developmental Delay
- Improved Access to Services
- Enhanced Parenting Skills
- Effectively Integrated Services

The survey was developed in partnership with a group of Sure Start Managers across Northern Ireland, who are part of the Sure Start Performance Management Group, chaired by the SPPG. The survey was set up on Microsoft forms and piloted within some Sure Start projects, before being issued regionally across Northern Ireland.

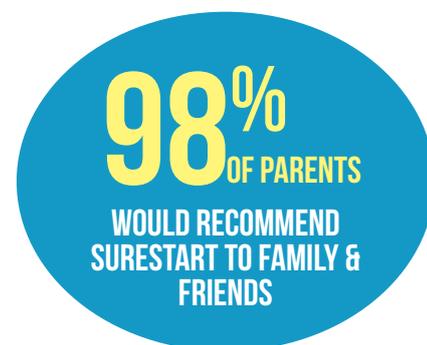
The parental survey was shared regionally across all Sure Start projects, to promote the completion of the survey over a five week period commencing in June 2023 via social media, websites, newsletters and this was also made available anonymously by parents at Sure Start groups and services. The data analysis and report writing were carried out by the SPPG and this report is based on the cross-tabulations of this information.

There were 4,450 parental responses to the survey – 94% of respondents were female, 5% of respondents were male and 1% of respondents identified as other. 427 of the respondents were currently pregnant (10%). The following provides a breakdown of the number of children the respondents had:

Respondents Number of children	Total	Percentage
Pregnant ( <i>First Time Mum</i> )	109	2%
Pregnant ( <i>Have been Pregnant before</i> )	96	2%
One	1602	36%
Two	1574	35%
Three	723	16%
Four	250	6%
Five	61	2%
Six/more than 6	35	1%

# It takes a village to raise a child

The level of satisfaction of parents across all of the Sure Start services areas was very high. Almost all respondents were very satisfied with the services they had received, and it was rare for parents to indicate that they were dissatisfied. This was reflected in the overall satisfaction rating that parents gave the Sure Start. In fact, 90% of respondents rated their Sure Start service as Excellent, with 6% rating it as Very Good. A very small percentage of respondents thought that the service was Average (3%) or Poor (1%).



Staff roles	Number of staff
Developmental Programme 2-3 year old staff	341
<i>Admin, Finance &amp; HR</i>	120
Allied Health Professionals	36
Early Years Staff	322
Family Support Staff and Team Leaders	266
Nursing & Midwifery	56
Managers	40
Other Support Staff	30

Parental feedback was very positive regarding the impact of Sure Start with 89% of parents rating Sure Start as excellent 5/5 as having had a positive impact on them and their family.

Many of the parents provided feedback that Sure Start helped in the journey of parenthood and really helped in difficult times and wrapped around their family to provide a range of support. Feedback from parents emphasised that being part of Sure Start makes family life so much better. The Sure Start team are the greatest resource of Sure Start. Parents highlighted that the relationships and trust built with the staff, are what made a difference in their lives.

Many parents commented that the main benefits of Sure Start was socialising with other parents and staff to reduce isolation and loneliness. They kept highlighting how they have made lifelong friends in their community through Sure Start. Their own personal development with increased confidence, motivation and the development of coping strategies were what made a difference in their family life.

## How Parents rated their Local Sure Start project?



A woman with long dark hair tied back, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a dark blue carpeted floor. She is holding a small, colorful children's book titled "Look at Me!" and looking down at it. A baby with light hair, wearing a blue and white hoodie and white pants, is sitting on the floor next to her, looking at the book. The background shows a light-colored wall and a striped chair.

The Sure Start worker would be the first person I would phone in need, as she is so easy to talk to, helpful and never judgemental

A network/family of support and knowledge who are always willing to help

I was depressed, lonely, uncertain, over-exhausted and they gave me all the tools and time and help I needed to overcome my obstacles. I highly recommend the girls from Sure start who went above and beyond

Family support has been a life line for my family unit. the family support worker has been an angel to us and forever grateful

We are not from here - Sure Start helped a lot to get on better in the community

My mother passed away and Sure Start helped me so much

These services were and still are life savers to me and my family

Genuinely would have been lost without the service .. parenthood is the most toughest & amazing job in the world and to have such support right on our doorstep really is so important

# The Health & Well Being of our Parents Matter – authentic relationships are the Key!

Parents emphasized the need to look after themselves physically, mentally and emotionally to give them the energy they needed, to help their child grow and thrive. This involves looking after their relationships, health and wellbeing. When parents are focused on looking after their babies or children, it is easy to forget or run out of time to look after these parts of their life. Almost all of the parents reported that the authentic relationships built with the Sure Start teams was key to supporting them, providing reassurance and developing trust to open up to issues they were facing with no judgement and to find solutions to make their lives better.

Stress in mothers with a young baby is becoming an increasingly significant issue. Families with a baby have reported that their mental health had worsened as a result of increased financial strains caused by the cost-of-living crisis. They were concerned about a knock-on effect on their children's wellbeing and development. Many parents thanked Sure Start for their continued contact and support during and coming back from Covid.

*If it wasn't for this service I wouldn't be here today*

*The Sure Start health visitor supported me with my post-natal depression and anxiety*

*Every person who works for them are so genuine and concerned for you without any judgement at all*

*Sure Start have supported me to receive counselling sessions outside sure start. This service has been life changing for me*

*Gave us reassurance when we needed it most*

*Sure Start was there when the normal services were hard to reach or get hold of*

*We lost out on so much with covid and the girls and the programme were an amazing support for us both getting back out into the world again*



# Creating Connections in Communities – Sure Start signposts families to additional support services

Sure Start plays a key role in signposting families to additional support services to improve access and for the identification of early developmental delay with their children. Sure Start practitioners work like community navigators, guiding parents in a supportive way, to all of the places they may need help.

Of the parents surveyed 63% (2,817) had been signposted to an external service. The external services most mentioned were GP, Dentist, Child Development Clinics, Speech & Language, Health visitor, Midwife, Early years/Education services, Mental health support, Family support hubs, Disability, Counselling, Audiology, Physiotherapy and Occupational therapists. Many parents also highlighted they really valued the guidance from Sure Start to receive support with breastfeeding support, community services, housing, benefits advice, financial advice, charitable aid/food banks and home safety.

Many parents commented that they felt supported by Sure Start and felt they had a listening ear to concerns they had. For families new to the area, it helped them to settle into the community through the help of Sure Start to register with doctors, dentists and local community activities.

*They helped me figure out who to go to regarding health issues with my son*

*Helped me with information to help with cost of living*

*I had recently moved back into the area so it helped me reconnect with people and become aware of services*

*Brilliant access to services that you were not aware of*

*Helped me when I had concerns with my child's speech and referred me to speech therapist*

*Having the Sure Start health visitor as our contact for the first year was invaluable*

*Helped me get diagnosis and support with tongue tie so that I could continue to breastfeed my baby*



# Speech, Language and Communication is everyone's business in Sure Start

Speech Language and Communication is woven through all Sure Start services and all practitioners play a key role in supporting it. Speech, Language and communication in Sure Start begins from antenatal stage onwards, to meet families needs and evolves to meet local needs.

The relationship with the unborn baby is associated with infant attachment. Parenting begins in pregnancy and how a mother thinks about her unborn baby and her bond with him/her, is a strong indicator of how she will interact with him/her in the postnatal period (Foley et al (2019). The work in Sure Start helps to support parents with this important relationship and bonding. The earliest years are crucial for creating 'secure attachment' between a baby and their main caregiver. Secure attachment is the attachment style which evidence shows best promotes positive outcomes for the child, including a love of learning, a comfortable sense of self, and positive social skills (Centre on the Developing Child, 2004).

Infant attachment is a key predictor of child language and early learning. Facilitated by their attachment to their main caregiver, the first year of a baby's life is when their brain starts to develop skills that are foundational, in that they are vital precursors to learning all the other essential skills the child needs to thrive throughout their life. In the first nine months, the most important skills a baby will begin to learn are foundational social and emotional skills. Babies develop these skills through their attachment and communication with their main caregiver. Developing social and emotional skills is vital for a baby because they can only go on to fully develop their higher cognitive skills – like literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving – if their social and emotional foundations are in place.

In the survey Parents were asked questions regarding Speech Language and Communication in Sure Start, which form part of the core elements of the Sure Start Programmes. Of the parents surveyed 48% (2,118) had attended Sure Start Speech & Language Services. 82% parents strongly agreed/agreed that Speech and Language Services:

- Helped to identify issues and concerns
- Helped improve their knowledge of their child's language and communication skills
- Helped them to apply strategies to support their child's language/communication skills
- Provided them with information for Early Intervention Support Services

*Sure Start helped me understand the importance of bonding and attachment, even during pregnancy. It really is a life line for me and my child.*

*All the staff have been amazing guiding me and supporting me with my two children. I can't thank them enough*

**2118/4450**  
OF PARENTS SURVEYED HAVE ATTENDED  
SURE START SPEECH LANGUAGE &  
COMMUNICATION SERVICES

**82%**  
OF PARENTS  
STRONGLY AGREED / AGREED THAT  
SURE START SPEECH, LANGUAGE  
AND COMMUNICATION SERVICES  
WERE HELPFUL

Speech, Language and Communication in Sure Start works at three levels which includes - Universal to improve wellbeing with community development; Targeted which includes capacity building with parents and practitioners with evidence based practice and training. Also at a specialist level with partnership working to provide timely support to signpost children and families, with the right children accessing the right support, at the right time.

Sure Start Speech, Language and communication supports and helps build capacity of those closest to the child including the practitioners who work with them and their parents. The speech and language of our children develops within and because of attuned and responsive relationships. The work in Sure Start support parents with this capacity to be attuned and responsive with good serve and return interactions with their children. Parents highlighted the benefit of engaging with practitioners they already knew and trusted (or were able to build a relationship with). There is strong evidence of behaviour change, when parents are given the tools and supported through modelling and discussion with a trusted intermediary, as in Sure Start.

A key issue is the sensitivity and responsiveness of the caregiver to the infant when they are distressed. However, parent-infant relationship can be impacted on by problems parents can face such as domestic violence; mental health problems; substance/alcohol misuse; and unresolved trauma. Parents highlighted that practitioners in Sure Start were very skilled in supporting them around many of these issues and identifying the specific support they need.

Children develop secure attachment and they engage in meaningful interactions; they are nurtured in a language rich environment in Sure Start with practitioners and parents. This supports the child to be calm and alert and therefore develops self-regulation. This leads to the child developing appropriate play, language, thinking and social skills; this self-regulation and language skills enables learning and socializing into adulthood.

*My only support with a child with additional needs and helps bonding so much*

*The staff are very patient with the children and gave us some parenting advice*

*More speech and language development for toddlers, more knowledge sessions on milestones and how to face these*

*Its a vital place to go and seek help, talk to other parents in similar situations and get advice on Toddler tantrums, autism, speech and language difficulties, engagement activities and talk to other people in similar situations*

# Pregnancy – Sure Start Antenatal Services

39% (1,753) of parents surveyed have attended Sure Start Pregnancy Services. Of those parents who did attend Sure start pregnancy services, 90% of parents strongly agreed/agreed that pregnancy services:

- Helped improve their well being
- Helped them to become more confident and reduce their fears
- Helped them to communicate with their baby / babies
- Helped them build a relationship with their baby / babies
- Helped them improve their knowledge of their baby / babies brain development
- Helped them prepare for the birth of their baby / babies

Many of the parents felt the Sure Start Antenatal Services helped to change attitudes to pregnancy, labour and birth. Some of the parents were first time Mum's and highlighted the support through Sure Start helped them prepare mentally and physically taking away fears and anxiety. Parents emphasised the encouragement and positivity given by staff with emotional and practical support, to help them to understand the importance of bonding with the baby and preparation for breastfeeding; all strategies to help cope with a new born baby and following pregnancies.

**1753/4450**  
OF PARENTS SURVEYED HAVE ATTENDED  
SURE START PREGNANCY SERVICES

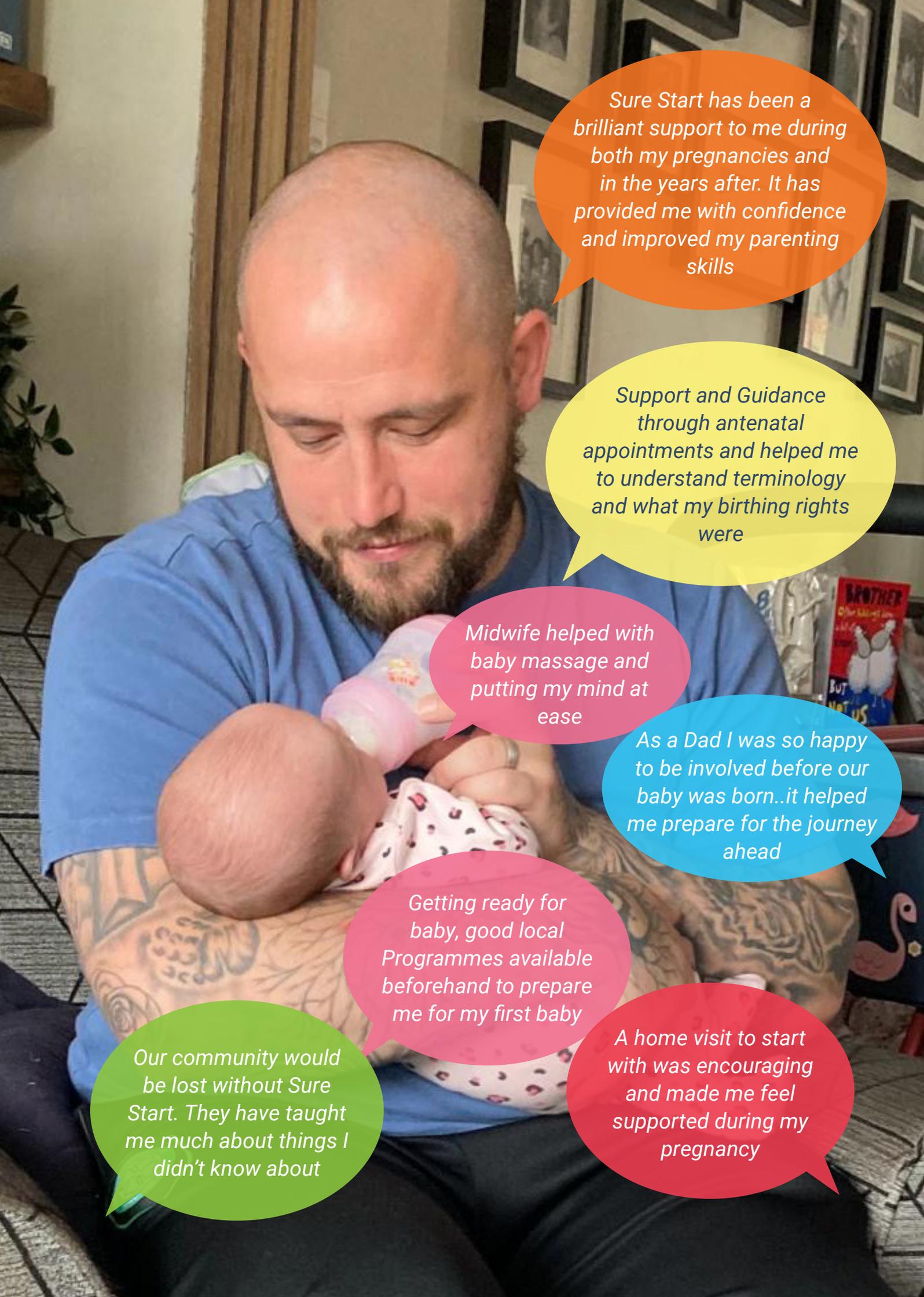
**90%** OF PARENTS  
SURVEYED STRONGLY AGREED  
/ AGREED THAT SURE START  
ANTENATAL SERVICES WERE  
HELPFUL

*I have met lifelong friends through some of the courses. It has also provided me with parenting skills to assist me for the rest of my life*

*More confident to ask the right questions when at the antenatal appointments. Great links to help prepare for breastfeeding*

## Examples of Antenatal services in Sure Start

- Antenatal Parenting Programmes
- Antenatal Home Visits
- Antenatal Reflexology
- Antenatal Yoga/Pilates
- Antenatal Physical Activity Programme
- Fathers to Be Support
- Antenatal Drop In Clinic
- Breastfeeding Antenatal Support
- Hypnobirthing
- Preparation for Birth



Sure Start has been a brilliant support to me during both my pregnancies and in the years after. It has provided me with confidence and improved my parenting skills

Support and Guidance through antenatal appointments and helped me to understand terminology and what my birthing rights were

Midwife helped with baby massage and putting my mind at ease

As a Dad I was so happy to be involved before our baby was born..it helped me prepare for the journey ahead

Getting ready for baby, good local Programmes available beforehand to prepare me for my first baby

Our community would be lost without Sure Start. They have taught me much about things I didn't know about

A home visit to start with was encouraging and made me feel supported during my pregnancy

# Postnatal Services - Babies Under 1 Year

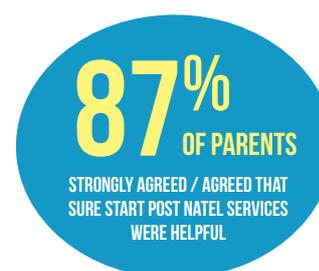
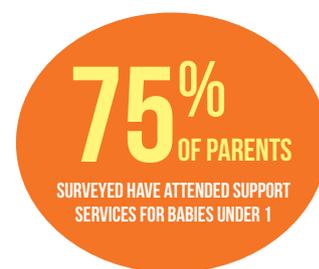
Sure Start offers a number of programmes for parents with babies under 1. In the first year of a child's life they start to develop the skills that are the building blocks upon which their life trajectory is set. Evidence suggests that experiences of poverty in infancy can impede this crucial development. Further, if families experience poverty in the first year of a baby's life, that not only impacts on their first year, but can have long-lasting consequences such as poorer educational, social, emotional and health outcomes throughout their life.

The relationship between a parent or carer and a young child is one of the most important influences on early childhood development and lays the foundations for lifelong social, emotional development and learning. In order to thrive, babies require the nurture and love of (at least) their main caregiver, cognitive stimulation and verbal and physical interactions. The strongest components of a high-quality home environment have been identified as one-to-one structured parent-child interactions centred around books or joint play (Sylva et al., 2004) and parent-child verbal interactions and play during daily routines.

75% of parents surveyed have attended support services for babies under 1. Of those parents who did attend 87% of parents strongly agreed/agreed that these services:

- Helped improve their well being
- Helped them understand their baby / babies needs
- Helped them bond with their baby / babies
- Helped them become more confident and reduce their fears
- Helped them to communicate with their baby / babies
- Helped them encourage their baby / babies physical and language development

Parents also highlighted the progress and improvement in their children's all-round development for example their speech, language and communication skills, play and physical development. Parents highlighted it really helped them understand their babies needs and helped them improve their home learning environment with their babies.



## Examples of Postnatal services in Sure Start

- Breastfeeding Support
- Postnatal Drop in Groups
- Parenting Programmes
- Postnatal Home Visits
- Fathers Support
- Baby Massage
- Baby Reflexology
- Baby Yoga
- Play Development Programmes
- Weaning support
- Solihull Programmes



The extra support and guidance helped me Breastfeed for a significantly longer period

They provided invaluable family support and play programmes in the home which helped me through challenging times

I had a sick baby in hospital for 6 months Sure Start were brilliant checking if I needed anything support or anything

Understanding how my babies brain develops is amazing

I enjoyed the time with other Dads to chat about our experiences

Even after baby was born and difficulties with breastfeeding I had huge invaluable support from my local sure start

Baby massage really helped me connect with my baby and bond

Sure Start made weaning my baby onto solid food less stressful and so much easier and fun with other Mums

Breastfeeding support from Sure Start was invaluable on my breastfeeding journey-the guidance helped me Breastfeed for a significantly longer period. The health visitor drop in support was also fantastic, reassuring and kind advice was given regularly.

# Parenting Programmes

37% (1,621) of parents surveyed had attended a parenting programme. The parenting programmes these parents attended included: nurturing programme, incredible years – toddler programme, behaviour management programmes, first aid, sleep training, Henry Programme, Potty training and weaning courses.

Studies indicate that parents who access formal types of peer support, like parenting programmes, are less likely to report high levels of stress (Barlow and Cohen, 2017). Parents expecting a baby and parents with a child aged 0–12 months highlighted the importance of access to the mental health support they felt they needed for themselves and their families. Parents highlighted the importance of creche and childcare support in Sure Start, in order for these parenting groups to operate.

Of those parents who did attend parenting programmes 90% of parents strongly agreed/agreed that these services:

- Helped improve how they interact with child / children
- Helped provide coping skills and strategies
- Helped them establish clear and predictable routines
- Helped encourage their child / children's language, social, and emotional development
- Helped manage their child / children's behaviour
- Helped them become more confident

**1621/4450**  
PARENTS COMPLETED THE SURVEY ATTENDED  
A PARENTING PROGRAMME

**90%**  
OF PARENTS  
STRONGLY AGREED / AGREED  
THAT THEY WERE HELPFUL

*Baby cafe was very important to me with my first child. Parenting programs on gentle parenting were amazing for me and helped me keep calm etc*

*I would be lost without sure start especially as a first-time mum because they have been my safety blanket where I can call to ask any questions or just be able to talk about parenting*



*Helped me to manage tantrums and other normal behaviour issues associated with toddlers/ pre-school children*

*Sure Start has been an incredible Support on my parenting journey. I have learned so much from all classes for all my children over the years. Having groups and a reason to get up and out of the house has been excellent for my mental wellbeing*

*Great to get out of the house and meet others and fun environment for my children. Things were tough with 2 COVID babies*

*I'm so grateful for the lovely Sure Start team and I'm definitely more confident as a parent, that'd be great if all parents could have access to that*

# Family Time - Parent and Child Programmes

Parents were also asked questions about Parent and Child programmes. 87% (3,864) of parents surveyed have attended a parent and child programme. 75% of parents who attended parent and child programmes strongly agreed/agreed that they supported them and their children through:

- Helping to identify concerns
- Helping to improve the parents knowledge of child development
- Helping parents to become more confident to support their child's development
- Providing parents with information on early intervention support services

The social aspects to Sure Start were seen as a very protective factor with a whole family approach. Parents emphasised that it helped them understand child development more and also with identifying concerns. They also valued the home visiting support which made a great impact on family life, the practical support of for example budgeting in the household and cooking healthier meals. This also supported healthier foods for weaning with their babies.

**75%**  
OF PARENTS

WHO ATTENDED PARENT & CHILD  
PROGRAMMES STRONGLY AGREED /  
AGREED THEY WERE HELPFUL

**3864/4450**

PARENTS SURVEYED ATTENDED A  
PARENT & CHILD PROGRAMME

## Examples of family time - *Child & Parent services in Sure Start*

- Play Development Programmes
- Physical Activity Programmes
- Parent & Toddler groups
- Family Support Groups
- Family Support Home Visits
- Oral Health Workshops
- Health Promotion Workshops
- Family Fun Events
- Father and Family Saturday Services
- Multicultural Groups



The in-person support and groups run in Sure Start are far more important than any literature

It's wonderful, helps the development of my children, helps me think and understand how to do things and maybe different. Has resources and facilities I don't have at home

They provided the idea on how to play and interact with babies. Provided great information on what to expect and how to improve the wellbeing.

My 3-year-old attended busy bees programme who has additional needs and the changes in him speech, social interactions and emotional attachment have improved significantly since attending this year

They provided me with an understanding on my child's development and what I can do at home to improve their learning

Everything Sure Start has provided and taught us as parents has shaped our family life and gets utilised and implemented daily

# Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds

The Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds is a programme with 12 children in each session on a ratio on 1:4. The Programme aims to provide support to those children and their families who would benefit most from the Programme. It is a child-led Programme, in which the practitioners create a home-from-home environment where children's individual needs are met through age and stage appropriate play based learning using staff observations to guide planning. The Programme promotes the holistic development of the children through four key areas of:

- Physical Development
- Personal, Social & Emotional Development
- Language & Communication
- Exploring & Thinking

**1766/4450**  
PARENTS SURVEYED HAVE HAD THEIR CHILD/  
CHILDREN ATTEND THE DEVELOPMENTAL  
PROGRAMME FOR 2-3 YEAR OLDS

The Programme actively encourages the participation of the family in learning and development opportunities - supporting a partnership with parents that builds on their knowledge and skills in relation to their own children and through focusing on positive play and learning. This is done through Stay and Play sessions, Home Visits and through collaboration with other elements of the Sure Start team for example Family Support and Speech and Language.

Poorer development outcomes in the early years can mean children struggling to achieve in school. Thus, since poverty impacts development, it can consequently create conditions that could lead to the child falling behind their better-off peers even before they enter formal education.

35% (1,581) of parents surveyed have had their child/ children attend the Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds. Of the engagement tools offered as part of the developmental programme, parents felt the following engagement tools had the biggest impact on their child / children:

- **Play & Stays (42%)**
- **Workshops (21%)**
- **Home Visits (21%)**
- **Whatsapp Group (14%)**

*The programmes & sessions that are for kids 2 year programme, stay and play etc as well as crèche were hugely important for the kids confidence*

*The 2 year old program was a fantastic program, and a brilliant stepping stone for pre-school*

*All of the programmes 2/3 stay and play etc are invaluable resources and places of safety and advice that I would be lost without*

*Helped with learning & development, encouraged me as a parent to continue with learning at home*

*The 2-3-year programme was the best thing ever for my child, the work the Surestart team do amazing. Keep up the fantastic work!*

*Excellent, the Sure Start 2YP has significantly helped the speech & social skills of my first child*

*The girls that work in the programme are amazing*

*2-3 program is amazing I only got this with my second child and can see an amazing improvement in social skills, self play and development*



# Sure Start Practitioners support the use of Resources with Families

Play and the quantity of available age-appropriate learning materials, especially books, is significant for children's early learning and development. Studies show that poverty makes it harder for families to provide stimulating experiences and materials, meaning children in poverty often grow up in resource-poor households (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013). Parents are less able to pay for toys, books, activities and trips, and to provide access to safe spaces to play and learn that a child's better-off peers enjoy.

Poverty works to hamper a baby's well-being and development through creating a lack of material goods and resources, and by reducing the quality of their home environment. Both these issues are often interlinked. For example, parents have told us how, in addition to the impact of material deprivation itself, not being able to afford the things they need to give their baby the best start in life causes them stress and anxiety, which contributes to a poorer-quality home environment.

Sure Start aims to improve access to services, through providing additional resources such as play packs, health promotion information, family support and books. Many of the resources provided in Sure Start are supported by the practitioners. They will deliver programmes around these or support parents in the home and model for them of how to use them with their children. Parents really appreciate this support with good quality resources to use with their families.

66% (2,918) of parents surveyed said that they had received resources from their local Sure Start. The parents who had received resources commented on how the resources helped them to gain further information, provide valuable advice and provided them with practical help i.e. play packs, breast pumps, books, etc. They also emphasised how it changed the home learning environment.

**2817/4450**

PARENTS SURVEYED HAVE RECEIVED RESOURCES FROM THEIR LOCAL SURE START

*I also received a new born pack when I was pregnant with my second child and it came with lots of brilliant resources I used*

*Made things so much easier as Googling for information can be over whelming and conflicting. The resources provided by sure start are in simple terms, easy to understand, readily accessible and very reassuring especially as a first-time parent. Without the resources provided by sure start I think I would have struggled greatly with my concerns and post-partum anxiety*

# How the Sure Start resources helped support me and my family?

*Play pack for kids helped interactions. Great new born packs, with a lot of information to assist us*

*Antenatal classes & information packs were invaluable. They helped me feel more prepared for labour and the arrival of our little one*

*Sure Start gave me a Breast pump and it took a financial burden away and sure start staff offered ongoing support*

*Help to make me understand what my child needs at what stages, provided information books with healthy meals, parental puzzle books - all which I have found so beneficial*

*From information to toys and books they all helped me and my children carry on the progress we made in the classes at home*

*Play packs provided hours of entertainment and joy and bonding time*

*Got warm pack to help keep the young ones warm in winter*



# Programmes and Services parents would like Sure Start to deliver in the future

Parents were asked what programmes and services they would like Sure Start to deliver in the future. Some highlighted that no improvement is needed, other than more of what is currently being delivered and many highlighted that there needs to be recognition of how much Sure Start helps and what difference they make.

Overall parents were highly satisfied but did highlight they would like more and a greater variety of certain activities for example: first aid courses, potty training, antenatal support, fathers' activities, pregnancy yoga, baby massage, play programmes, sleep programmes, swimming, special needs services-speech and language and autism, and parent and toddler groups. They also suggested going back to the drop-in service rather than pre-booking, similar to the way that it was delivered before covid. A high number of parents suggested more places on the 2-3-year-old Developmental Programmes, so all children can access and benefit. Many parents also emphasised the need for more or sustained funding, so Sure Start can help more people and offer more provision.

Some parents highlighted a need for a change in the times – in relation to changing or extending the times when provision was available, this was particularly at 'non-core' times such as evening or weekends to meet working parents needs. It also included ideas around better rotation of days/evenings. The availability of childcare or creche to enable parents to attend the Sure start parent only services was emphasised with a suggestion of Creches being available at all locations. Many parents wanted more programmes that support their well-being and mental health.

Parents emphasised the importance of communication and information of what is on and when, more advertising, having better online services for example list of programmes updated regularly online either on Facebook or websites. Parents also wanted more opportunity for play programmes outdoors, this was linked to sensory needs of children.

Parents also made suggestions if there was a possibility to make services available to all families, provide more transport in rural areas and also extend the age range. It was the relationships that they had built up in their community that they wanted to continue.

*It's sad how after our kids turn 4, we don't have any contact. Maybe a mum's morning?*

*I just wish my friends from other areas could experience the positive experience that I receive within their own sure start*

# Sources

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*Sure Start is a pillar for our children*

*I feel if we didn't have Sure Start I wouldn't have been able to do all those activities with my child and probably would have ended up feeling quiet unwell and down myself*

*Expanded age criteria to help families living in deprived areas with older children*

*Everything they already provided I would be absolutely lost without*

*The entire programme offered is excellent. The care from antenatal to school age has to be commended at all levels and is an essential resource for our communities*

# SureStart

#surestartworks



Partnership working is at the root of  
What makes Sure Start work



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