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National evaluation report

Improving the employability of parents in Sure Start local programmes

SureStart

Report 06

Evidence & research

SURE START LOCAL PROGRAMMES AND IMPROVING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PARENTS

by

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National Evaluation of Sure Start

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Glossary:

ATJ	-	Action Team for Jobs
CAB	-	Citizens Advice Bureau
DWP	-	Department for Work and Pensions
EAZ	-	Employment Action Zone
ESF	-	European Social Fund
ESOL	-	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EYDCP	-	Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership
FE College	-	Further Education College
ILM	-	Intermediate Labour Market
JCP	-	Jobcentre Plus
JSA	-	Jobseekers' Allowance
LA	-	Local Authority
LCA	-	Local Context Analysis
LEA	-	Local Education Authority
LLL	-	Life-Long Learning
LSC	-	Learning and Skills Council
NDC	-	New Deal for Communities
NDLP	-	New Deal for Lone Parents
NESS	-	National Evaluation of Sure Start
NN	-	Neighbourhood Nursery
NNI	-	Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative
NVQ	-	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	-	Office for Standards in Education
SRB	-	Single Regeneration Budget
SSLP	-	Sure Start Local Programmes
WEA	-	Workers' Educational Association

SURE START LOCAL PROGRAMMES AND MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PARENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On average nearly half the children aged 0-4 living in Sure Start local programme areas live in households where no adult has a job. Reducing this figure is one of the national targets for all Sure Start local programmes.

In nineteen of the twenty-five Sure Start local programme areas included in this study, mothers' main role is as homemakers. Only in four areas are they likely to play a dual role as both workers and mothers. These differences are likely to reflect different local perceptions and values around what constitutes being a good mother. Sometimes these differences in values are reflected in the view of Sure Start local programme staff.

The programmes examined in the study included at least one from each of the regions of England, and at least two from each of the first four Rounds of Sure Start local programmes. The local labour market and social conditions varied, although there was a bias towards more deprived areas.

Sure Start local programmes vary in the priority they attach to activities whose main aim is to improve the employability of parents. The study identified five approaches among the twenty-five programmes in the study:

- *active* approaches involving collaboration with a range of other agencies and a positive encouragement to parents to take advantage of the opportunities offered (eight programmes)
- *lifelong learning* approaches, where there were few links to employment initiatives and help in job search, but where there was an emphasis on learning new skills throughout the programme (six programmes)
- *quasi-intermediate labour market* approaches, where the programmes themselves stressed the importance of employing parents in as many roles as possible within the programme, reconfiguring jobs and giving special training where necessary (two programmes)
- *passive* programmes, which offered links and referrals to other organisations, but which did not actively promote these (five programmes)
- *disengaged* programmes, which were not actively engaged in employability work (four programmes)

The approach taken by a particular programme depends more on the ethos of the programme itself, rather than on the exact local circumstances.

The main way in which Sure Start local programmes work to improve the employability of parents is via collaboration with other organisations. These include the Learning and Skills Council, local colleges, local area-based regeneration projects, intermediate labour market projects and Jobcentre Plus Employment Action Teams for Jobs and benefits advisors. The presence of a particular initiative in an area (such as a New Deal for Communities project) does not by any means guarantee that there will be a collaborative relationship with the Sure Start local programme.

The nature and quality of the collaboration varies. In some cases there is a two way process to the mutual benefit of both organisations. For example, some colleges have found that they can fill more places on mainstream courses by collaborating with Sure Start to provide introductory courses. Others have found that where Sure Start has encouraged them to provide childcare for training courses they have been able to attract more students from the general population, not just from the Sure Start local programme area.

In some cases the relationship is more passive with the Sure Start local programme acting as a signpost to the other organisation. In others there is some tension where the providers of employment support and training are unwilling to adapt their provision to the needs of Sure Start parents. The most important of these needs are accessibility and childcare while taking part in training, job interviews or work experience. The study also found examples where other organisations do not regard it either as worthwhile or as necessary to collaborate with Sure Start local programmes.

Most of the Sure Start local programmes which take either an active or a lifelong learning approach to employability issues employ employment or training co-ordinators. Employment co-ordinators generally play a role analogous to that of a personal adviser in New Deal programmes, although their caseloads tend to be much smaller. They offer advice and support to parents who are looking for work, and they help them to tackle any barriers they face, including helping them to find appropriate training and childcare. The other part of their role is generally to develop and maintain relationships with other organisations offering employment and training support.

Training co-ordinators generally have responsibility for developing education and training of all kinds for parents. Typically their main responsibility is to develop parenting training, basic skills, English as a second language and leisure courses. Their work developing training related to employment and helping parents find suitable mainstream vocational training courses is part of the programme's wider learning ethos.

Almost all the Sure Start local programmes in the study reported that it was often difficult to engage mothers' interest in employment or training activities (fathers are rarely in touch with the programmes). Typically even in the most active programmes the number of parents who were involved in employability-related activities was very small. Groups of fewer than ten were common, and programmes were encouraged where they had groups of fifteen or more.

Confidence building plays an important role in bringing parents to the point where they are able to start developing new skills. Even so, most programmes, and interviews with parents, suggest that mothers who are not already working would prefer not to have paid work until their children are at primary school. This is consistent with strong local traditions related to appropriate behaviour for mothers in respect of paid work and childcare. As a consequence the proportion of parents who take part in employment and training activities, even in the most active and encouraging programmes, is low.

Sure Start local programmes that encouraged parents to gain new skills while their children were young, so that when they did go to work once their children were at school they would be able to get better jobs, felt that this work was not being recognised. Their target only gave them credit for increasing the employment of parents of children aged 0-4.

Some parents use the training provided by Sure Start local programmes for board members or volunteers as a stepping-stone to paid employment, either within the programme or elsewhere.

Sure Start local programmes that take a lifelong learning approach and offer a wide range of training opportunities, find that parents often progress from child-related training through leisure courses to more vocational provision by the Sure Start local programme. A few then progress to mainstream college courses and a handful go on to degree courses.

Programmes that give a high priority to the employment of parents within the programme have to overcome a range of obstacles. They have to reorganise job descriptions so that a wider range of jobs can be done by people without professional qualifications. They have to negotiate with their parent bodies over the relaxation of equal opportunities policies. They have to provide additional help and support to parents in order to enable them to get through the application process. And they have to ensure that confidentiality procedures are strong enough to ensure that parent's privacy is not endangered.

The only successful collaborations with local employers among the twenty-five case study programmes were in four programme where large new supermarkets had recently opened. Other attempts to help employers recruit new staff had not been successful.

Only a minority of the twenty-five case study programmes were providing childcare for working parents, or had any plans to do so. Those that did were typically offering around 30 places. The main reason why so little childcare was on offer was that the demand from parents was low. Many were reluctant to use non-family members for childcare while they were at work (although crèche sessions both for respite and while they were doing training courses were popular). Parents (and often the programmes themselves) did not believe that it was appropriate for them to take paid work and use formal childcare. They felt that being a good mother required them to be at home with their children until they were ready to go to school.

Added to this was the fact that existing childcare provision in the area was often struggling to maintain viability, and Sure Start programmes were reluctant to make this worse by adding extra capacity.

One of the reasons for the limited demand for childcare is that the even with the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, childcare for children under school age is expensive, and parents who consulted benefits advisors found that they would not be better off in work after paying their residual childcare costs.

Only one programme in the study had placed a high priority on subsidising childcare for parents who were working. The provision was very welcome to those parents who were using it, but there were fewer than thirty places, and the cost to the programme of the subsidy was £175,000 a year. This had given rise to concerns about whether the provision was likely to be viable in the long run.

However, the provision of childcare for training courses was a significant commitment that SSLPs are able to make to improving parents' employment prospects in the longer term.

By emphasising confidence building and raising aspirations, Sure Start local programmes can reconcile what is sometimes perceived to be a conflict between promoting good parenting and promoting employability.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGOUND AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 KEY POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Sure Start local programmes are located in areas of high levels of deprivation. They aim to improve the health and cognitive, social and emotional development of children and to strengthen families and communities. On average just under half the children aged 0-4 living in Sure Start local programme areas live in workless households.

- Sure Start local programmes all share the objective of reducing the number of children living in workless households, although programmes which started operating before 2001 did not have it in their early stages of operation.

- This report is part of the implementation module of the National Evaluation of Sure Start. It is essentially based on a set of qualitative case studies supplemented by background information drawn from other modules of the evaluation.

- Twenty-five programmes were selected to take part in this study on the basis of either or both of the following criteria:
    - They had at least 50 per cent of children living in workless households.
    - They had spent at least £10,000 on measures to improve the employability of parents in either 2000-01 or 2001-02.

- The programmes included in the study had widely varying labour market backgrounds with unemployment rates ranging from a low of under 5 per cent to a high of 25 per cent. The proportion of the population living in the area with qualifications of A level equivalent or above ranged from around 20 per cent to around 60 per cent.

- Only in four areas did women play a dual role as both mothers and workers. In nineteen of the twenty-five areas women's primary role was that of homemaker. These areas are characterised by relatively low economic activity rates for women and low rates of full-time work among those who are economically active. These patterns reflect in part the moral values attached to motherhood within these communities.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.2.1 About Sure Start local programmes

Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) are a cross-Government initiative, which works with parents to be, parents and children in disadvantaged areas to promote physical, intellectual and social development of babies and children under four. The aims of Sure Start local programmes are to improve:

- the social and emotional development of children;
- children's health;
- children's ability to learn; and to
- strengthen families and communities.

Sure Start local programmes form a cornerstone of the UK Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. They are located in neighbourhoods where a high proportion of children are living in poverty and where the programmes should be able to promote child, family and community development by pioneering new ways of working to improve services.

Each Sure Start area is located in a deprived ward, but encompasses a much smaller area. The aim is to have an area containing 800-1000 children under the age of four. Each Sure Start local programme is managed by a partnership board. The composition of the board varies from area to area, but they are all drawn from the mainstream agencies providing services to children and families, national and local voluntary and community organisations, and parents. In some areas regeneration programmes, housing associations and other service providers are also represented.

Each programme is different but all offer five core services:

- outreach and home visiting – including a visit to each family within two months of a birth;
- support for families and parents;
- support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children;
- primary and community healthcare, including advice about family health and child health and development; and
- support for children and parents with special needs, including help in getting access to specialised services.

All 524 local programmes in England are now operational, helping up to 400,000 children living in disadvantaged areas - including a third of under 4s living in poverty. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own Sure Start programmes. Sure Start local programmes were rolled out in waves (usually referred to as Rounds). Round 1 programmes began to be rolled out

in 1999, with Round 2 programmes starting the following year, and later rounds following on.

Promoting the employability of parents is one of the four core Sure Start service targets for the period 2003-04 to 2005-06. It represents the contribution of SSLPs to the general strengthening of communities. The other targets commit Sure Start local programmes to improving the social and emotional development of children, to reducing the proportion of parents who smoke during pregnancy, and to improving children's language and communication skills. The employability target in full reads:

> *"In fully operational programmes, to achieve by 2005-06 a 12 per cent reduction in the proportion of young children (aged 0-4) living in households where no one is working."*

The current target is similar to one which was operational for the period 2001-02 to 2002-03. However, prior to 2001-02 Sure Start local programmes were not working towards a target covering this area of activity. This means that all Round 1 programmes, and most of those in Round 2, established their services before promoting employability became a target. In addition, all Sure Start local programmes are required to develop local targets for ensuring links between the local Sure Start partnership and Jobcentre Plus local offices. The Sure Start Unit has also produced guidance for Sure Start local programmes covering some of the sources of support for parents seeking training or work, and how SSLPs may be able to work with these organisations (Sure Start Unit 2003).

Promoting parental employability is regarded by the Government as an important feature of Sure Start. There are two broad reasons for this. The first is that parental employment has a direct and immediate impact on family incomes. With the introduction of the more generous Working Families Tax Credit (and now Working Tax Credit) to replace previous in-work benefits, families with an adult working at least sixteen hours a week are generally at least £50 a week better off than they would have been with no working adult. But there is also evidence that children with employed parents make better progress at school, and therefore themselves have better earnings potential as they move into adulthood (see for example Feinstein 1998, Ermisch et al 2001, Gregg et al 1999). Moreover, very recent US evidence suggests that increasing the income of poor families can have significant effects on children's mental health and on conduct disorders and anti-social behaviour including bullying and vandalism (Costello et al 2003). Thus, improving parental employability is part of the process of investing in children's long-term future.

1.2.2 National Evaluation of Sure Start

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) aims to identify the conditions under which and the processes by which Sure Start local programmes foster child, family and community well being. The key questions addressed by the evaluation are:

- *Do existing services change?* (How and, if so, for which populations and under what conditions?)
- *Are delivered services improved?* (How, and if so, for which populations and under what conditions?)
- *Do children, families, and communities benefit?* (How, and if so, for which populations and under what conditions?)

The evaluation, which includes all Sure Start local programmes in Rounds 1 to 4, has four core research components:

- *Implementation evaluation* that considers how programmes are operating and changing
- *Impact evaluation* that considers the effects of Sure Start local programmes upon children and families
- *Local context analysis* that considers communities as units of analysis and how they function and change over time; and
- *Cost-benefit analysis* that examines economic return on investment of the Sure Start local programmes.

This study forms part of the implementation strand of the evaluation. This strand has three inter-related parts:

- A national survey of all 260 Sure Start local programmes in Rounds 1 to 4, which is repeated three times at roughly annual intervals
- Twenty-six general case studies of the implementation process which looks at all the services being delivered in those areas, and also the relationship between those programmes and other organisations locally
- A series of cross-cutting studies of particular types activity on the part of a wide range of Sure Start local programmes.

This study falls into the third of these groups. Two cross-cutting themed studies have already been completed. These cover setting up Sure Start local programmes (Ball 2002) and the involvement of fathers (Lloyd, O'Brien and Lewis 2003). The other themed studies currently under way include maternity services and play, learning and childcare services. The latter is likely to be particularly relevant to the issues discussed in chapter 4.

1.3 METHODOLOGY FOR THIS STUDY

1.3.1 General approach

The present study is essentially a qualitative review of Sure Start local programmes' activities which address the employability target based on twenty-five case studies. The case study programmes were drawn from different Rounds and were therefore at different stages in their development.

There were nine programmes from Round 1, eight from Round 2, five from Round 3 and three from Round 4.

Although the study used qualitative in-depth interviews as the main methodological approach to data collection and analysis, other sources included:

- Data about the local community context from the 2001 Census and from analyses by the National Evaluation of Sure Start Local Community Context team.
- Informal observations of home visits, meetings, etc.
- Collection and analysis of programme level qualitative data (e.g. leaflets, brochures, local evaluations, job descriptions, etc.)
- Data from the NESS implementation study national survey data

1.3.2 Selection of case study programmes

The first sixteen programmes were selected using the following general criteria:

- At least half the children aged 0-3 were living in workless households
- Programmes should cover a range of local labour market conditions
- There should be at least one programme in each government office region
- There should be programmes drawn from each of Rounds 1 to 4.
- There should be differences between areas in the presence of other employment-related initiatives.
- Programmes should have spent at least £10,000 under the heading of measures to improve the employability of parents in either 2000-01 or 2001-02

In practice we modified the selection criteria to include a number of programmes that were spending significant sums of money under the heading of improving parental employability, even though they had relatively low rates of children living in workless households, because we felt it important to gain some understanding of why these programmes had given priority to this work.

We originally planned to include five programmes which had high rates of children in workless households but which had spent no money on improving parents' employability in either 2000-01 or 2001-02 to explore in more depth what was happening in these areas. In the event we included nine such programmes, as it became apparent that expenditure was not necessarily the best measure either of commitment or of activity. This was in part due to the fact that expenditure headings are open to flexible interpretation. What one programme classifies as support for parents another may classify as improving employability. But it also became clear during the first few case studies, that it is the nature of Sure Start local programmes' relationships with

other providers which determines the extent of their provision of support to parents who are looking for work. Expenditure does not determine the depth or nature of these links. Some programmes which were not apparently spending any money were nevertheless active in this area. We therefore took the decision to treat all twenty-five programmes in the same way in our analysis, whether or not they had originally been classified as spending or non-spending programmes. All programmes have been given an identification letter in this report. Essentially programmes A to P were those initially selected as spending on employability services, while programmes Q to W were selected as non-spenders.

We did not manage to make contact (other than with an answer phone) with one programme which was originally selected for the study, and we replaced it with another one from the same city. One which was originally selected suggested that another one in the same city was taking the lead within the city on employment work, and was therefore more likely to be useful to us. One programme with which we held a set-up meeting decided it did not want to participate in the follow-up interviews with programme staff, parents and stakeholders, as it was not actually doing very much. It is possible that its original allocation of expenditure to the employability heading may have been an error, a possibility that reinforced our decision to be more flexible about the expenditure criterion. We have included this programme in our analysis on the basis of the set-up interview, which covered much of the same ground as with other programmes with low levels of activity.

1.3.3 Characteristics of the Sure Start local programmes included in the study

Labour market conditions

The twenty-five case study areas varied in terms of their local labour market conditions. The key elements of this background information about all the programmes are presented in Table 1.1. Four of the programmes in our study had rates of children living in workless households which were below the average. These programmes were all selected on the basis that they had spent money on measures to improve parents' employability. The other programmes were selected on the basis that worklessness was likely to represent one of the significant problems in the area.

The proportion of people living in the local area who have qualifications at A level or above (this includes completed craft apprenticeships) ranges from 21 per cent to 60 per cent. This is a potentially important indicator of the extent to which the local labour market suffers a skills gap, that is there are vacancies but the local population may not be qualified to fill them.

Conventionally measured unemployment rates (that is counting only those who are not working and who regard themselves as economically active) range from a low of 3 per cent to a high of 25 per cent.

Minority ethnic communities

The proportion of the population in the Sure Start areas who are of ethnic minority origin ranges from less than 1 per cent to 68 per cent. The labour market experiences of different minority groups vary. For example, people of Indian and Chinese ethnic origin have relatively good qualifications, low unemployment and relatively high earnings. Those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have particularly poor labour market experiences, which are intensified by their relatively low qualifications. This can be exacerbated by poor written and spoken English. The labour market experience of younger groups of Caribbean origin appears to be worse than the experience of previous generations, so that young parents of Caribbean origin are also likely to be at a disadvantage (Berthoud 2003). Thus, at any given unemployment rate we should expect areas with concentrations of disadvantaged minority groups to have higher rates of children living in workless households.

Community characteristics

The Local Community Context Analysis module of the National Evaluation of Sure Start has developed a typology of Sure Start local programme areas based on a range of indicators (Barnes et al 2003). There are five cluster types:

- *less deprived* with more retired people, lower concentrations of children, fewer lone mothers, fewer people dependent on income support, low proportions of residents of ethnic minority origin, lower long term illness among adults
- *average* where programmes are close to the average on most demographic and social indicators
- *most deprived* with high rates of lone parenthood, births outside marriage and births to mothers under the age of 18, high rates of dependency on income support, high rates of poor health
- *areas with more black (and to a lesser extent Asian) families*, more births within marriage and fewer to under 18s, relatively low rates of ill health and average rates of dependency on income support
- *areas with more large families and more families of Asian origin*, low rates of lone parenthood and births to mothers under 18, low dependency on income support, but relatively low economic activity rates among adults

Further analysis is still being conducted by the NESS team on these clusters, particularly with a view to further refining the labels.

Three of our programmes fell into the less deprived cluster, two were in the average cluster, twelve were in the most deprived group, four were in the fourth cluster and three in the fifth. One was unclassified. Thus, although our sample does cover the range of backgrounds experienced in Sure Start local programme areas there is a concentration on the most deprived areas. This is not surprising as these are the areas where there is likely to be the highest concentration of children living in workless households.

Table 1.1: Characteristics of case study programmes

Region	Round	Alias	% children aged 0-3 in workless households	% Local unemployment rate	% ethnic minority	% of population qualified to A level or above	NESS LCA cluster type	Gender role classification
EM	1	A	60-69	10-14.9	5-24	30.6	most deprived	mixed
NW	1	B	70-79	10-14.9	5-24	25.9	most deprived	homemaker
SW	1	C	50-59	5-9.9	<5	26.1	average	homemaker
NW	1	D	70-79	20+	<5	24.4	most deprived	homemaker
NE	2	E	60-69	15-19.9	25-49	47.0	more black and Asian families	homemaker
SW	1	F	50-59	10-14.9	<5	22.7	most deprived	homemaker
YH	1	G	60-69	15-19.9	<5	21.3	most deprived	homemaker
E	1	H	<40	<5	<5	35.5	less deprived	dual role
YH	2	I	50-59	15-19.9	<5	21.4	most deprived	homemaker
NE	2	J	40-49	5-9.9	<5	30.7	most deprived	homemaker

Region	Round	Alias	% children aged 0-3 in workless households	% Local unemployment rate	% ethnic minority	% of population qualified to A level or above	NESS LCA cluster type	Gender role classification
LO	2	K	50-59	5-9.9	25-49	59.3	more black and Asian families	homemaker
WM	3	L	50-59	15-19.9	>50	31.2	more large and minority families	homemaker
LO	3	M	<40	5-9.9	25-49	44.7	less deprived	dual role
EM	3	N	<40	5-9.9	<5	35.3	less deprived	mixed
NW	4	O	<40	5-9.9	25-49	32.0	more large and minority families	homemaker
SE	4	P	40-49	5-9.9	25-49	52.7	more black and Asian families	homemaker
LO	1	Q	60-69	10-14.9	>50	45.5	more black and Asian families	dual role
YH	1	R	50-59	10-14.9	<5	22.7	most deprived	homemaker
LO	2	S	40-49	5-9.9	25-49	39.7	average	dual role

Region	Round	Alias	% children aged 0-3 in workless households	% Local unemployment rate	% ethnic minority	% of population qualified to A level or above	NESS LCA cluster type	Gender role classification
YH	2	T	50-59	15-19.9	25-49	35.0	more large and minority families	homemaker
NW	2	U	60-69	10-14.9	<5	24.6	most deprived	homemaker
YH	2	V	50-59	10-14.9	<5	23.4	most deprived	homemaker
LO	3	W	50-59	15-19.9	25-49	36.8		homemaker
NW	3	X	80+	20+	25-49	40.1	most deprived	homemaker
NW	4	Y	70-79	15-19.9	5-24	41.5	most deprived	homemaker

Notes:
Children in workless households based on DWP counts April 2003 and 2001 of children dependent on at least one of JSA, IS, IB or SDA
Ethnic minority proportion based on Census 2001, Table KS06, % non-white
Local unemployment rate based on Census 2001, Table CAS021, Number unemployed aged 16 to 74 economically active/ number all people aged 16 to 74 economically active.
Qualified to A level and above based on Census 2001, Table CAS105, Number of all people aged 16 to 74 with at least one a level or above / All people aged 16 to 74
Programme Typology based on Barnes et al (2003)
Gender role classification based on typology developed by Duncan and Edwards (1999)

Gender roles

One of the key differences between local communities is the different approaches they take towards the issue of combing motherhood with paid work. Duncan and Edwards (1999) have developed a framework for analysing what they term "gendered moral rationalities". They show both by the analysis of district level data from the 1991 Census, and by small area case studies, that the expectations about the appropriate way for mothers to behave are derived from community norms, and that these are very strong, but often very localised.

They argue:

> *"It is not just the spatial divisions of labour that define women's roles, it is also people's gendered expectations, negotiations and demands about what being a woman or a man is, and what they should do in consequence. These understandings are not only informed by economic conditions in local labour markets, but also by other social relations in households, neighbourhoods and community networks."* (Duncan and Edwards 1999 p 202)

Central to their theory is the notion that mothers' views about what is the right way to behave as a "good mother" are based on socially negotiated understandings, and that these vary by neighbourhood, by local labour market context and by social class. Thus, in some communities there is perceived to be complementarity for a mother between being an earner and being a responsible and caring parent. In others, however, there is a perception that there is a conflict between the two roles, and that a mother's primary moral responsibility is to be with her children. Mothers are under strong social pressures to conform to the norms within their own particular community.

To some extent local perceptions may change, particularly under the influence of good job opportunities. But Duncan and Edwards argue that the geographical pattern of women's paid work in Britain is in part a reflection of traditions developed during the industrial revolution, and reinforced through subsequent generations, as it is of the range of current job opportunities. Thus, in Lancashire, parts of the Midlands and London, women are expected to be both workers and mothers, while in other areas they are not. Thus, what we observe in terms of women's working patterns is the outcome of the interaction of labour demand, women's own qualifications, and the local set of beliefs and moralities around motherhood.

They developed a three-fold typology to define the predominant practice in a particular community:

- *primarily homemaker*, where the social expectation is that mothers' primary focus is to look after their families
- *dual role*, where the expectation is that mothers will combine work (particularly full-time work) with family life
- *mixed*, which falls into neither or the other two categories

Based on figures from the 1991 Census, Duncan and Edwards define primarily homemaker areas as those where economic inactivity among women aged 16-60 is 35 per cent or more and there are high levels of part-time working among those who are employed. They define dual role areas as those where at least 40 per cent of women aged 16-60 work full-time, and where there are low rates of inactivity and a relatively low proportion of part-time working among women. Mixed areas are those with moderate levels of inactivity and relatively high rates of part-time working.

Duncan and Edwards based their classification on figures at local authority district level. Our areas are much smaller than this, so our approach is not strictly comparable with theirs. Nevertheless, as their case studies in Brighton show, there are important differences in attitudes and behaviour in small areas only a few miles apart within the same local authority district.

We have therefore aimed to replicate their general approach to identify the predominant gender roles within the twenty-five case study areas, using data from the 2001 Census. Our Census data includes all women aged 16-74, so in order to make it comparable to Duncan and Edwards' data we have assumed that a quarter of this population is over 60 and that they are all economically inactive. This will not be exactly true, but provides a reasonable approximation.

Table 1.2: Gender role and general typologies of Sure Start local programmes included in employability study

	homemaker	**dual role**	**mixed**
less deprived		2	1
average	1	1	
most deprived	11		1
more black and Asian families	3	1	
more large and minority families	3		
unclassified	1		

Our analysis reveals that four of our areas would be defined as dual role areas (three of these are in the parts of London, which Duncan and Edwards identify as being a predominantly dual role area). Two areas are mixed and the remaining nineteen are all predominantly homemaker areas. With one exception, the dual role and mixed areas are all those towards the less

deprived end of the Sure Start spectrum (although given the starting point, these areas are still considerably more deprived than most parts of the country). Moreover, this exception has a relatively high proportion of the population of Caribbean origin, and Duncan and Edwards show that mothers of Caribbean origin are more likely to embrace a dual role than either white mothers or those from other minority groups. The two mixed areas are both in the East Midlands. As with Lancashire, there has been a strong tradition of women working in this region since the industrial revolution, and both our mixed areas are in districts classified as dual role by Duncan and Edwards. Table 1.2 shows the breakdown between the different types of area.

The revelation that almost all of our areas are classified as having a predominantly homemaker gender role for mothers is important. As we discuss in section 4.3 below, our interviews with parents (and in some cases with Sure Start local programme staff) revealed a strong commitment to staying at home, at least while their children were young, and a belief that it was neither appropriate nor desirable for mothers of young children to have paid work, particularly full-time work. This set of beliefs also influences the attitude of parents towards the use of non-family childcare, which is discussed in Section 5.2 below.

1.3.4 Procedure

We made initial contact with each selected programme by letter with a telephone follow-up, and we made a preliminary set-up visit to each of the original sixteen programmes that had been identified on the basis of their expenditure. These preliminary meetings were generally with programme managers, often accompanied by other staff members. The meetings outlined the purpose and procedure of the study, and explained why their particular programme had been selected. A key purpose of this meeting was to explore the way the programme approached employability issues and which organisations it had links with, in order to identify who should be interviewed or what should be observed during the second main visit. The initial visit also sought to establish the most appropriate timing of the second visit (usually 2-3 days long, but occasionally several shorter visits for programmes within easy travelling distance), both to fit in with the study timetable, and to minimise the inconvenience for the programme.

In the case of the other nine programmes we made a single visit, which took the form of an extended version of the set-up visit and used the same topic guide. In some cases we undertook additional interviews and observations.

1.3.5 Interviews

The qualitative in-depth interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted either on a one-to-one basis or occasionally within a group setting where this was more appropriate. Interviews generally explored the nature and extent of services offered by Sure Start local programmes and the links held with other providers with regards to improving parent employability as well as parental motivation in this

area. Interviews with service users centred on parental commitment and attitudes towards training and employment as well as childcare.

Topic guides for the different groups to be interviewed were divided into four main categories of respondent: programme managers (or their deputies), employment and training co-ordinators, training providers, and parents. Initially, a topic guide for employers was also developed but abandoned at the early stages of the study after it became apparent that there were no close links between Sure Start local programmes and local employers. Copies of the topic guides can be found in appendices A to D.

1.3.6 Study participants

The decision as to who should be interviewed in each programme was made in consultation with programme managers and the key workers responsible for employability related issues where applicable. This had the advantage of enabling us to identify key respondents relatively easily. But it has the disadvantage that the SSLPs essentially acted as gatekeepers. This meant that those whom we interviewed were generally those who had a positive attitude towards the programme's employability activities. In particular, almost all the parents we spoke to were those who were taking part, or had previously taken part in employment and training activities arranged by the Sure Start local programme.

Since part of the aim of the study was to identify good practice, this bias on the part of respondents is not necessarily a disadvantage. However, it is important not to conclude on the basis of the data that we present here that our respondents represent typical examples either of key stakeholders or, more importantly, of parents living in Sure Start local programme areas.

In each programme we conducted an initial interview and visit. These interviews were with the programme manager in eighteen cases, a deputy or operations manager in five cases and another staff member in six cases.

In nine of the programmes it emerged in the course of this initial visit that the programme's range of activities addressing the employability target were so limited that there was little to be gained from interviews with external stakeholders or parents. In the remaining sixteen programmes there were then a series of interviews with other key respondents. These comprised:

4 Deputy programme managers or operations managers

5 Training, employment or development co-ordinators

13 Community Development Workers / Link Workers

2 Jobcentre Plus representatives

2 Benefits advisors

2 people from local Action Teams for Jobs

28 representatives from organisations providing employment support, education or training

2 representatives from local regeneration initiatives

7 people providing childcare services

58 parents who were using SSLP services. (All but two of the service users interviewed were mothers.)

6 others

1.3.7 Confidentiality

This study assured confidentiality to all programmes and interviewees. All data are used in a form that is designed to make it impossible to determine the identity of individual respondents or programmes.

To ensure that all twenty-five programmes remain anonymous, they are referred to by the letters A to Y throughout this report. Where names of people are used within the text, these are not the person's real name, but in all cases are pseudonyms.

Where other initiatives were operational in a case study area, we have referred to it by its proper name (eg Action Team for Jobs) where it is a fairly widespread initiative delivered at a local level. However, in some areas there were local employment, training and regeneration initiatives operating under unique local names. In these cases we have not referred to the initiative by name but have used the general term "local regeneration/employment programme/initiative" to describe these organisations.

CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYABILITY AND THE ROLE OF SURE START LOCAL PROGRAMMES

2.1 KEY POINTS FROM THIS CHAPTER

- Sure Start local programmes activities aimed at improving the employability of parents form part of their role in tackling child poverty.

- The aim of these activities is to help to remove some of the unnecessary barriers faced by parents who would like to work. These barriers can be a reflection of employer attitudes, of the individual's own characteristics, or reflect their circumstances, such as their responsibilities for young children.

- Sure Start local programmes varied in the priority they attached to work related to employability. These differences did not reflect differing local circumstances. Rather, the differences were driven by the ethos of the programme itself.

- We found five approaches to the improvement of parents' employability:
    - *active* approaches involving collaboration with a range of other agencies and a positive encouragement to parents to take advantage of the opportunities offered
    - *lifelong learning* approaches, where there were few links to employment initiatives and help in job search, but where there was an emphasis on learning new skills throughout the programme
    - *quasi-intermediate labour market* approaches, where the programmes themselves stressed the importance of employing parents in as many roles as possible within the programme, reconfiguring jobs and giving special training where necessary
    - *passive* programmes, which offered links and referrals to other organisations, but which did not actively promote these
    - *disengaged* programmes, which were not actively engaged in employability work

2.2 WHAT IS EMPLOYABILITY?

Employability is the ability to gain and keep a job, and to cope with changing employment conditions both in the workplace and in the wider economy, including the ability to get a new job if necessary. For the individual it is usefully summarised in terms of:

"
- *Their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess*
- *The way they use and deploy those assets*
- *The way they present them to employers*
- *Crucially, the context (eg personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work"*
  (Hillage and Pollard 1998)

Measures to improve employability can operate on any one of these four elements. They can improve skills (including both generic and job-related skills), improve the ability to use those skills, improve the way in which individuals present themselves to an employer, for example in terms of preparation for job interviews, or improve the context - in the case of Sure Start particularly the family context - within which people are looking for and finding work.

There is significant variation between Sure Start local programmes generally in the extent to which children in the Sure Start area are living in workless households. Sure Start local programmes do, however, generally operate in areas of deprivation, so that the proportion of households with nobody working is generally significantly higher than the national average. The average proportion of children under four living in workless households in Sure Start programmes in rounds 1 to 4 is 44.6 per cent.

In other words, around half the children in Sure Start areas are likely to live in households where nobody has a job. In some Sure Start areas this reaches eight out of ten households. In others the reverse is true: more than eight out of ten families have one or both parents in work.

This variation is not entirely accounted for by the state of the local labour market. Although Sure Start programmes situated in areas of high unemployment generally have relatively high rates of workless households, some programmes have high worklessness rates in spite of being in areas where employment is generally quite high. This is consistent with the evidence from other area-based programmes (see for example Brennan, Rhodes and Tyler 2000). Thus, the disadvantages experienced by parents living in Sure Start local programme areas are not always, or even mainly, due to the lack of demand for labour, although labour demand obviously has an important role to play. Sure Start parents are often quite young, and some will have limited work experience, particularly if they had babies in their teens. They may not have developed the personal skills necessary to integrate into the workplace. They may have trouble deciding what sort of work they want

to do. They may not have developed the job search skills necessary to enable them to get on in the adult world. They may have difficulties operating in unfamiliar environments (Millar 2000, Green et al 2001, Lakey et al 2001).

But there is also evidence that people who are some distance from being job ready often lead chaotic lives and have little self-confidence. The process of improving employability by developing discipline, confidence and motivation can contribute to a general improvement in the lives of families (Lakey et al 2001).

2.3 THE APPROACH TAKEN BY CASE STUDY PROGRAMMES TO EMPLOYABILITY ISSUES

All the Sure Start local programmes in the study reported that they provided some services for parents to improve their employability, although there were marked differences in the level of service provided and the degree of commitment shown to this area of work. It is important to stress, however, as we discuss in chapters 3 and 4 below, most of the activities by Sure Start local programmes related to improving the employability of parents come in the form of links to and relationships with other organisations which provide support for training and getting into paid employment. Thus, it is the extent and strength of the links, and the commitment to maintaining them, which reflect the importance of employability work.

Our analysis of the data collected from the twenty-five programmes in our study revealed that their approaches to improving employability fell into five broad groups. This typology was based on the nature of the services that the programmes provided for parents who might want to find work, and also on the extent and nature of their engagement with other organisations providing appropriate services. The typology illustrates the inevitable tension between emphasis on work first and emphasis on improving employability. Jobs provide income, a structure to life and social networks, which are all associated with improved outcomes across a range of indicators. On the other hand, if someone fails at work because they are not ready to function effectively in the workplace, the negative impact on their confidence and motivation could make things worse than they were before. Striking the right balance when working with people with multiple disadvantages is very important (see Meadows 2004 forthcoming).

The classifications we have developed are:

- *Active* programmes that hold strong links with a range of provision, actively encourage parents to participate in education, training and employment programmes, identify obstacles that may keep parents from participating in paid employment and try to remove these. There were eight programmes in this group.
- Programmes with a *lifelong learning* focus, which respond to expressed wishes of parents for education and training, encourage a return to

learning, and offer easy progression from very basic to advanced mainstreamed provision. They emphasise skill development rather than employment, however, and their links with agencies delivering employment support are often quite weak. There were six programmes in this group.

- Programmes which take a *quasi-Intermediate Labour Market* (ILM) approach structure job opportunities and recruitment and training procedures with the programme itself in such a way as to maximise the employment of local people by the programme itself. Thus, their main contribution to improving employability among parents and the community more generally is to provide local people with work experience and job-related training, which increases both the level of income and the employed role models within the area, and which will help local people to improve their skills and confidence, so that they can subsequently be able to move into jobs elsewhere. There were two of these programmes.
- *Passive* programmes that offer access to mainstream provision but no particular encouragement, no special provision and no identification of and addressing of barriers. There were five programmes in this group.
- *Disengaged* programmes which hold limited links with other providers, offer no encouragement, and have little or no direct provision of services relevant to employability. There were four programmes in this group.

These five groups are therefore essentially two broad groups: those in the first three groups, which are positively engaged with the employability agenda, albeit in different ways, and the latter two groups which are less engaged. Table 2.1 sets out the classification of each of the programmes and summarises their activities. The details of their activities are discussed more fully in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

It is worth remembering that the earliest Sure Start local programmes (that is all those in Round 1 and most of those in Round 2) did not originally have as a target the reduction in the number of children living in workless households. Many of them had therefore set their priorities and configured their services towards supporting parents who are at home with their children, and they have sometimes found targeting resources and activities towards this target quite challenging, not least in terms of engaging the support of mainstream agencies represented on their management boards, and of persuading staff that the target works to the benefit of children and families. Programmes in later rounds had this target from the start, and built it into their delivery plans. Thus, we found that the programmes in Rounds 3 and 4 that we visited in the course of this study were generally as advanced in their activities in this area as were the programmes from Rounds 1 and 2.

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Table 2.1 Summary of typologies and provision of services to improve employability by Sure Start programmes and partner agencies

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
mixed	A	Passive	• Training for Parent Forum • Community Development Worker whose remit includes training & employability • Childcare training • ESOL courses • IT training • Training for volunteers • ESF-funded careers advice worker	• Training Provider funded by SRB • EYDCP • Local Adult Education College • Area-based initiative to improve basic skills among parents • Basic skills training via LEA family learning • LEA taster courses • Jobcentre Plus benefit advisor	• Jobcentre Plus • local employment and training partnership	• Programme does not offer day-care as no demand from parents • SSLP collaborating with NNI to provide nursery for college • SRB promoting childminder training
homemaker	B	Active	• Programme has strong regeneration ethos; managed together with NDC • Courses on confidence building • Vocational (eg IT) and “leisure” courses from very “beginner” to NVQ levels • Childcare Strategy Co-ordinator • Childcare training • Community Education Co-ordinator • Training for parents on board • Support for parents wanting to get jobs in new supermarket	• New Deal for Communities (with access to benefits advice, support for interviews etc) • SRB • LEA Adult education service • Jobcentre Plus Childcare Coordinator • Local colleges • UK Online • Home Start: Volunteers	• Early Years • Community Education	• Both nursery and childminder places available in the area • Childminder recruitment and support • new nursery opening shortly
homemaker	C	Active	• Parent Participation Officer provides individual advice and support • Employs local parents as family link workers • Childcare training up to NVQIII	• Local area based job generation and training initiative (SRB funded) • Jobcentre Plus Benefits Advisor • SRB • Community College	• Learning & Working Theme Group incl. LSC, Jobcentre Plus, Employment Action Zone, Community College, local parents and others	• 3 Neighbourhood Nurseries to provide 50 places for working parents • childminder network (20) to provide childcare for babies • childcare bursaries for parents involved in training for work

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	D	Disengaged	• 2 Outreach Workers • Training for parent board members	• Community College • Action team for Jobs • Development/ community involvement training • EYDCP • New Deal for Communities • Learn Direct	• EYDCP, NDC & SSLP to develop a joint childcare plan	• Crèche provisions for parents on training courses
homemaker	E	Active	• Parent Support Co-ordinator provides individual support • Childcare Co-ordinator helps parents find suitable childcare • Childcare training	• EYDCP • Local Colleges • NDC	• Early years and childcare recruitment and training group • Local Colleges	• range of childcare available • new nursery planned
homemaker	F	Active	• Sure Start Shop for Adult Services incl. Job Broker and Benefits Advice Worker; JB will sometimes accompany parents to initial training sessions • Volunteering lone parent mentoring scheme • Training for parent committee members	• Area-based job generation initiative • Local community college • Learning Links • New Deal for Lone Parents	• Personnel subgroup incl. 7 parents and 5 professionals	• New full day care nursery with subsidised means-tested affordable charges exclusively reserved for parents wishing to return to work or take up training opportunities

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	G	Lifelong Learning	• Development Co-ordinator with remit for training • Committee Training for parents • Priority given to parents for employment with the programme in as wide a range of posts as possible • List of local vacancies held at reception • Support for parents taking courses including pencils, notebooks and lunch • Community Volunteer Course incl. work shadowing • Confidence building courses • Mixture of work-related and "leisure" courses include cookery, IT and office admin courses • Childcare training	• FE college • LEA Adult Education service • Community Learning: Career guidance • Pre-School Learning Alliance • Jobcentre Plus • New Deal for Lone Parents		• Local college provides childcare places; SSLP helps parents to meet the costs • Full day-care available, but not much demand because parents do not want full-time jobs five days a week
dual role	H	Disengaged	• Training Co-ordinator • ESOL courses • Confidence building courses • "Leisure" courses • Childcare training	• Learning & Skills Council • EYDCP • Opportunity Links: area-based job generation initiative (back to work courses)		• Crèches for training courses • Childminder network organiser employed by programme
homemaker	I	Active	• Employment and training co-ordinator employed in partnership with job generation initiative (part ESF funded) provides individual advice and support • Childcare training • Parents act as volunteers	• Area based job generation initiative • New Deal for Communities • Local ILM • Jobcentre Plus Lone Parent Advisor and benefits advisor • FE College	• Employment Steering Group incl. local strategic partnership for employment; job based generation initiative, NDC, SRB, LSC etc	• Crèches for training courses

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	J	Lifelong Learning	• Parent development worker (ESF funded) provides individual advice and support • Taster sessions to encourage return to learning	• Action Team for Jobs • Local college • Area based training initiative/provider		• Crèche for courses
homemaker	K	Lifelong Learning	• Community co-ordinator for employability on secondment from LEA adult education service • Programme currently runs 56 courses, both “leisure” and work related, including yoga, confidence building and IT • Training course booklet with maps and details of childcare availability • Tutor contracted to provide self-development courses • Childcare development worker • Regular drop-in sessions for employment advice • Parent board members receive training	• Local community colleges; • LEA adult education service • Jobcentre Plus Benefits advisor • Home Start (new)	• Regeneration Forum & Training Task Group incl. Jobcentre, Lone Parent Advisor, Partnership Manager, Childcare Partnership Manager, Housing Worker with remit for community development and employment Local community colleges; adult education	• SSLP provides crèche for approx. half of courses on offer • SSLP works with training providers to encourage crèche for all courses • Programme offers vouchers to parents attending courses at college with no crèche facilities • Recruiting childminders
homemaker	L	Passive	• Community Development Worker with remit for training and employment • Training for parents on the forum • Directory of locally available courses • Training for volunteer parents • childcare training	• Local community education colleges • Local area-based job initiative		• SSLP will organise childcare for parents doing training courses • nursery with 65 full-time places

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
dual role	M	Lifelong Learning	• Employment & Training Co-ordinator responsible for developing and arranging training; occasionally offers one-to-one advice • Training courses incl. ESOL, IT, new beginnings and personal development, "leisure" courses • Directory of courses on offer • Outreach workers tell new parents about training opportunities • Volunteers training package for volunteer parents	• Local FE College • EYDCP: childcare training		• Crèche for courses but parents are encourage to make own arrangements • childcare places available locally both in nurseries and with childminders
mixed	N	Lifelong Learning	• Learning Co-ordinator • Community Development Worker • Various courses, e.g. raising self-esteem, confidence building, 1st aid, salsa, IT, CV writing • 'fixed' groups of parents that run over a course of time, and include taster courses such as CV writing, confidence building, childcare training	• Adult & Community Learning • Learning & Skills Council • Learn Direct • Community College • Advice & Guidance Worker • Jobcentre Plus	• Further education college • Jobcentre Plus & others: regular objective 4 meetings • Learning co-ordination group includes WEA, LEA, FE college	• Childcare provisions for all courses • SSLP does not provide daycare as local NN is having difficulty filling places, but costs are high
homemaker	O	Active	• Programme has strong regeneration ethos; responsibility for employability work is shared across the core team; all agencies delivering SS services have to have employability in mind • Taster sessions for both "leisure" and vocational courses • Confidence building training • Childcare and business administration training • Employment pack • Training for parents as community ambassadors	• Service level agreements with mainstream agencies • ILM charity providing work experience, training & outreach • New Deal for Lone Parents • Jobcentre Plus benefits advisor • LA Neighbourhood Management • Learning & Skills Council	• Senior Partnership Board incl. EYDCP, Education	• Crèche provision for all Sure Start activities incl. training and job interviews • New NN about to open

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	P	Quasi-ILM	• Development Officer for the Community • Priority given to parents in employment with the programme, including tailoring job specifications and hours • Prepared job packs to make jobs accessible for local people • Training and benefits advice for employee parents • SS funded employability day held in collaboration with other agencies • Mentoring available for people attending mainstream courses • ESOL courses • "leisure" courses • Training for parents sitting on committees	• FE College • WEA • Local area based training initiative • New Deal for Lone Parents • Jobcentre Plus Benefits Advisor	• WEA • Ideas group with remit for training & employment	• Provide childcare for all courses
dual role	Q	Active	• Business start-up support • Training for parents involved in parents' forum • Training for parent volunteers • childcare training	• Neighbourhood Renewal Project (incl. JCP, Reg. Devt. Agency & others) • Jobcentre Plus Benefit Advisor • Home Start: volunteering project		• Crèche provision for courses • One off payments for childcare when parents move from benefits to employment • LA provides local childcare, but it is expensive

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	R	Quasi-ILM	• Priority for local parents in employment with programme • Offer of pre-application training to local people • Configuration of jobs to maximise the potential for local people to do them • Special training and provisions for local parents who are SSLP employees • Wide range of courses, e. g. IT; parenting skills, confidence building, "leisure" activities • Looking to develop NVQ qualifications which pull together life experiences and learning experience of parents	• Community College • College provided support for parents wanting to work in new supermarket		• No Sure Start childcare provision for courses but SSLP works with a range of local providers • Arrangement places together children with one or more SSLP childcare worker(s) in an existing daycare setting
dual role	S	Passive	• Community Development Worker provides referrals • Training for board members	• Neighbourhood renewal • Action Team for Jobs • Local community education centre • Local community and healthy living centre	• Local community and healthy living centre	• no daycare yet. NNI planned (35 places) • Crèches for some training courses

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	T	Lifelong Learning	• Responsibility for employability is shared across SS staff • Family support workers provide referrals to training and employment opportunities • Benefits Advice Worker on secondment from CAB for parents who want to return to work • Parenting courses, • "return to learn" project • childcare and learning support training • Board members have used experience gained to move into paid employment	• Beacon School collaboration: LLL and parents: basic skills and ESOL • Area-based job generation initiative • Home Start: volunteer project • New Deal for Communities • Family Learning • Learning & Skills Council		• crèche provisions for courses run by other providers if course meets Sure Start targets • programme does not provide childcare; childcare in area is under-used and struggling for viability • only 1 childminder in the area; trying to increase childminder numbers and promote use among parents •
homemaker	U	Passive	• Early Years Coordinator • SSLP employee is NVQ Assessor in childcare & works with Basic Skills • Programme Support Co-ordinator/ Training Co-ordinator • "leisure" course • Training for parents on board	• Neighbourhood Mgt. • Citizen Advice Bureau • Employment co-ordinating group (incl. CAB, JCP, NDC) • Lone Parent Advisor • JET: Basic Skills • Volunteer Bureau (new) • Family Learning • Local FE College	• Lone Parent Advisor	• programme provides childcare with priority for parents who are working • programme provides crèches for training courses

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	V	Disengaged	• Community involvement worker has run confidence building courses, but not with a view to employment • Half-time training co-ordinator to be appointed • General courses relating to 1st aid, healthy eating • Parent volunteers receive training and opportunity to shadow staff • Parents group receives committee and management training	• Local community college • EYDCP • Has offered funding to ILM for additional places for parents but no take up	• Neighbourhood Management • Home Start	• none currently provided • have applied for NN funding • are promoting childminding
homemaker	W	Passive	• Fathers worker offers individual support and advice (to some mothers too) • ESOL • basic skills	• housing-based regeneration initiative • SRB funded area regeneration programme • FE college		• Crèches provided for training courses
homemaker	X	Disengaged	• 1 p-t parent involvement worker (currently on maternity leave) • 1 Programme Co-ordinator • Circulation of vacancy information from Jobcentre Plus	• FE College • EYDCP for childcare training • Local employment and training programme: 2 lone parent advisors for groups • Private IT training organisation • Applied for add. funding with ERDF to include employability related measures • Limited links with JCP & ND lone parents • Housing Association with community development activities		• Childcare provided for some training courses

Gender role classification	Alias	Typology	Direct service provision	Links with other service providers	Strategic links	Childcare provisions
homemaker	Y	Active	• Programme Manager teaches Basic Skills • Tutor with Credit Union background working towards 'social enterprise' (volunteer project) • Childcare training • Training for Board Members	• Shares building w. community employment initiative • Local Community College • NDC • LSC funding for Basic Skills & ESOL • Basic Skills Agency • ILM funded by ESF and NDC • Joint collaboration with local training project and & NDC for NVQ II course • Adult Tutor from Comm. College partners one of SSLP staff (ESOL) • Jobcentre Plus benefits advice • Community employment initiative worked with new supermarket to support employment of local people	• NDC • Head of Job bank project	• Neighbourhood nursery funding • Crèches for all courses and programme activities • Local employment initiative funding for childcare for parents on courses

Programme Types:
Active: strong links with range of provisions, encourage parents to participate, identify obstacles and try and remove them

Life-Long Learning: respond to expressed wishes of parents for education and training, encourage return to learning, offer easy progression from very basic to advanced mainstreamed provision

Quasi-ILM: Programme structures job opportunities and recruitment and training procedures within the programme itself to maximise employment of local people

Passive: programme offers access to mainstream provision but no particular encouragement, little special provision and no identification of and addressing of barriers

Disengaged: limited links with other providers, no encouragement, little or no direct provision

It is also important to remember that most of the programmes in the study have been selected on the basis that they appeared to be more active than average in addressing the issue of worklessness. It is likely that the overall distribution of SSLPs across the country between the different categories is likely to be more evenly balanced between the more active and the more passive categories.

One of the key factors that distinguishes the active and lifelong learning programmes is that they generally employ a co-ordinator whose responsibility it is to maintain links with other organisations, to help parents with referrals and to act as mentors as parents begin to take up the opportunities available to them. Their role is discussed more fully in section 3.9 below.

2.3.1 Active programmes

Active programmes were distinguished by the enthusiastic approach they took to helping parents find work, and by their commitment to this objective. They saw helping parents to find work as important in terms of developing their confidence and empowering them in their wider lives. Often, programme staff were, at least initially, more committed and enthusiastic about helping parents to find and keep work than the parents were themselves. As one manager of a partner organisation described it:

> *"Part of what we're trying to do now, and I think this is a really key part of everything any type of organisation like this should try to do, is continually raise the level of aspiration and ability and achievement of the people who are living here."*

Active programmes recognised that the barriers to work facing Sure Start parents are often complicated. Some have never worked since leaving school. Many had poor experiences at school and have few qualifications. Their confidence levels are low. They are worried about managing their money when they go into work, while on benefits their key bills such as rent are taken care of. They have transport problems. They need suitable and affordable childcare for their children under four, but they often have older children with childcare needs too. Active programmes recognised that it was not enough to tackle any one of these issues in isolation, since each could be enough in itself to prevent a parent from finding and keeping work. They therefore put services in place, either directly, or via referrals to other agencies, that helped parents to sort out each of the problems in turn.

Most of the active programmes worked closely with regeneration initiatives which were operating in their areas. Some of them had shared boundaries with other initiatives, and sometimes they came under a common management umbrella. All the staff in active programmes, not just those engaged in employment and training work, could offer parents advice and support on employment related issues, and could signpost them to appropriate services. Eight programmes (a third of those in the study) could be described as taking an active approach. We found active programmes between both the spending and non-spending groups, and it was this as much as anything else, which led us to choose to analyse all twenty-five programmes together.

2.3.2 Lifelong learning programmes

Lifelong learning programmes were similar in many ways to the active programmes. Staff were enthusiastic, encouraging and well informed. However, the emphasis was on encouraging parents to develop their skills so that they would be in a position to move into work later when their children were at primary school. They offered a large menu of training opportunities, generally ranging from courses which would attract people back to learning such as salsa, nail painting, aromatherapy and baby massage, through life enhancing (and potentially vocational) such as ESOL and IT, through to supporting people who wanted to build on what they had learned and to develop advanced skills at NVQIII up to degree and professional qualification level. They did this both in response to the expressed preferences of parents, and in accordance with the ethos of the programmes that Sure Start was about improving parents' skills in dealing with their children, not about leaving their children with someone else and going to work. There were six lifelong learning programmes in our study.

Thus, although the lifelong learning programmes, like the active programmes, sought to build parents' confidence and improve their skills, there was often little support or encouragement for parents who wanted to take up employment immediately. Links with colleges and other training providers were good, but links with employment schemes and with Jobcentre Plus were often weak. Again we found lifelong learning programmes among both spenders and non-spenders.

2.3.3 Quasi-ILM programmes

Two of our programmes took an approach to parents' employability that differed from all the others, whether active or passive. One was in the spending group, the other was a non-spender. As far as we were able to ascertain they had not been in contact with each other, but had each developed their approach from first principles. They had encountered similar obstacles and had pursued similar strategies to dismantling them. (In addition, two other programmes gave priority to the employment of local people, but did so in the context of providing other services and support.)

These two programmes took as their starting point that the arrival of the Sure Start programme in the area brought resources and jobs. However, those resources and jobs were subject to leakage to the extent that people employed in the programme were from outside the area. These two programmes adopted the strategy that providing jobs within the programme itself for local people was an important way of improving the income levels within the community, and of developing the skill base so that when Sure Start came to an end members of the community would be better placed to obtain work in the wider labour market. We describe these programmes as quasi-ILM as they are essentially using the programme itself as an intermediate labour market for local people.

Both programmes took the services that the programme would be delivering and structured the jobs needed to deliver them in a way that would maximise the chance that local people, particularly parents, would be able to take them. Thus, although some jobs might require full-time work and professional qualifications, by careful structuring of teams, many would not. In order to improve the employment chances of parents and other local people, the programmes offered pre-recruitment training in

how to apply for the jobs. In each case, both the preference for local people and the pre-recruitment support fell outside the parent body's equal opportunities policy, and in both cases the programmes had to negotiate an exemption from the policy. It also created difficulties with wage rates, as the programmes recognised that initial trainee wages would need to reflect the lack of skills, experience of the new recruits, and would be lower than the standard basic rates within the parent body. Staff employed in this way are given the opportunity to develop a range of skills, including accredited qualifications, which will enable them to move onto other work in due course.

2.3.4 Passive programmes

Passive programmes on paper had many of the same links that lifelong learning and active programmes had. However, although they provide signposting to colleges, training providers and employment opportunities, this is not central to the ethos of the programme, and they do not actively encourage or promote the opportunities available. There were three passive programmes in the study.

2.3.5 Disengaged programmes

The programmes we classified as disengaged did not have many links with employment or training providers, and offered little by way of signposting to parents. There were six disengaged programmes, of which one was in a strong labour market area, so employability work was not a high priority in terms of community needs.

In several (although not all) cases, the programme appeared to be struggling to deliver any services of any kind. These programmes had plans, but had not yet fulfilled many of them. They sometimes had links with colleges and other providers, but these were generally quite tenuous. Some of the work they were doing might help improve parents' employability, but this would be more as a by-product, rather than by design.

2.4 REST OF THE REPORT

In chapter 3 we discuss how programmes encourage the involvement of parents with education, training and employment opportunities offered by other organisations and the links programmes have with other service providers. In chapter 4 we discuss in more detail some of the approaches and activities of more active programmes, and discuss some of the issues which emerged from the less active programmes. In chapter 5 we discuss childcare. In chapter 6 we review the evidence on how SSLPs monitor their progress in this area, and suggest some areas of good practice that could be adopted by all SSLPs, irrespective of the emphasis they put on employability in their work.

CHAPTER 3

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

3.1 KEY POINTS FROM THIS CHAPTER

- The main way in which Sure Start local programmes work towards their objective of improving the employability of parents is to work with other organisations whose primary focus this is.

- Given the indirect nature of the delivery of services to improve the employability of parents, the quality of the collaboration determines how successful programmes are in addressing this issue.

- Sure Start local programmes take a variety of approaches to collaborating with employment programmes and education and training providers. This reflects the ethos of the programme, and to some extent the links and networks that programme managers and staff bring with them.

- Where initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities[1] are operating some programmes engage in active collaboration, while others have no links at all.

- Relationships with colleges are mixed. Some are genuinely collaborative with commitment on both sides. In other cases colleges are unwilling to change the nature or location of their provision or provide crèches to meet the needs of Sure Start parents.

- Relationships with Jobcentre Plus were limited. Most programmes worked closely with benefits advisors, and those in areas where Action Teams for Jobs were operating collaborated with them. Otherwise, with a few notable exceptions, links were mainly confined to those operating through multi-agency collaborations rather than directly with Jobcentres.

- Links could happen at either strategic or operational level, but the reality was that operational links were more important, and they could work well even where strategic links were poor.

- The provision of childcare while parents are taking part in training courses is an essential part of enabling parents of young children to take part in training activities. Most of the Sure Start local programmes included in the study were

[1]The New Deal for Communities is a key part of the Government's strategy to combat multiple deprivation in deprived neighbourhoods. They aim to tackle worklessness, crime, education, health and housing and the physical environment. There are 39 NDC projects.

providing crèches or childminders for parents doing courses organised by SSLPs (and sometimes for other training courses as well). Where childcare was limited or not available, parents found it difficult to undertake training.

- Many parents are reluctant learners, at least initially. Training courses need to provided in attractive, accessible locations before parents will consider doing them.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

The main way in which Sure Start local programmes seek to improve the employability of parents is by collaborating with other organisations. Ensuring the engagement of key partners such as schools, private and voluntary sectors, Health Trusts, and Jobcentre Plus is one of the core responsibilities of SSLPs outlined in the Sure Start Guidance Document. This involvement with partner agencies includes the review of existing patterns of provision, planning for development and sustainability as well as reshaping services to better meet the needs of parents and ensuring the development of integrated service provisions. This chapter identifies the key agencies with which SSLPs programmes collaborate with the objective of improving parental employability and explores the extent and depth of these relationships.

Most of the SSLPs we visited maintained links with organisations offering education, training, benefits advice and job search support. Thus the effectiveness of SSLP support to parents who wish to find jobs depends crucially on the nature of the links that the SSLP has to other agencies. This was reinforced when it became clear during the course of this study that the level of spending by the SSLP itself may not necessarily serve as a (reliable) indicator of the extent to which programmes offer services and support under the heading of employability, nor of the effectiveness of those services. As one programme manager said:

> *"I operate on a policy of tapping into what is available free to parents from other providers. It's about how we work together with other agencies."*

Another programme manager whose programme mainly relies on collaborations with job and training related agencies to improve parental employability stated:

> *"Partnership is the sense of a shared responsibility to the communities, and recognising individual strengths and how best to pull these strengths together to contribute to social and economic regeneration. Understanding that partnership working is helping each partner realise their aims and objectives."*

Many programme managers endorsed similar views.

Therefore, although most of the SSLPs we visited had some links with agencies working towards improving the employability of parents, it is clear that the effectiveness of that collaboration depends on the nature and depth of the relationship and to the level of genuine commitment on the part of both parties. In this chapter we explore the nature of those relationships.

3.3 THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLLABORATION

Our analysis of the data collected from the twenty-five programmes in our study revealed that their approaches to improving employability fell into five broad groups. Within our overall programme typology, as set out in Chapter 2 above, the links with other agencies differ between programmes of different types.

- Active programmes hold strong links with a range of provision and with Jobcentre Plus, and work closely with other providers to ensure that Sure Start parents are able to make effective use of the resources that are available. These links were both at strategic and at operational level.
- Programmes with a lifelong learning focus generally have strong links with colleges and other training providers, but their links with agencies delivering employment support are often quite weak.
- Programmes with a quasi-Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) emphasis also tend to have strong links with training providers, but less well-developed links with other initiatives.
- Passive programmes have links in the sense that they offer referrals to other organisations, but there is no active collaboration, no joint planning, and no attempt to influence the provision of other organisations.
- Disengaged programmes hold limited links with other providers, offer no encouragement, and have little or no direct provision.

3.4 COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS BY SSLPS TO IMPROVE PARENTAL EMPLOYABILITY

All the programmes we visited had links with at least one or two agencies, but these varied in terms of depth and extent of the relationship and were dependent on which agencies were present in the local area. Agencies where there were commonly links included: Jobcentre Plus, (benefits advisors, lone parent advisors and childcare co-ordinators), New Deal for Communities (including some programmes which were essentially components of an NDC-led package for the area), Single Regeneration Budget[2] other area-based job generation initiatives, local colleges, the Learning and Skills Council[3], and the EYDCP[4] for childcare training. Table 3.1 offers a summary of

[2] The SRB brings together a number of programmes from several Government Departments with the aim of simplifying and streamlining the assistance available for regeneration. It provides resources for regeneration initiatives in consideration of different objectives which include improving the employment prospects, education and skills of local people among other issues

[3] The LSC is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year olds in England

[4] A local partnership of childcare professionals, representatives from Primary Care Trusts, social services and any other agencies that work with children and families; works with the local education authority to discuss and advise on the work of Early Childhood Services.

the main links that SSLPs held with other agencies for the improvement of parental employability. A more detailed breakdown of how programmes linked in with other agencies and their own provisions can be found in Table 1.4 in chapter 1.

Table 3.1: Summary of main links of SSLPs with other service providers* (n=25)

Type	Jobcentre Plus (incl. benefits advice & NDLP)	FE College & other training providers	EYDCP	SRB, NDC & other job regeneration & ILM projects	UK Online & other learning orgs.	Learning & Skills Council	Employment Action Team for Jobs
Active (8)	7	6	3	8	3	3	
LLL (6)	4	5	1	1	4	2	1
Quasi-ILM (2)	1	2			1		
Passive (5)	2	5	2	5	3		1
Disengaged (4)	1	4	3	2	1	1	1

*The numbers represent the number of programmes, not the number of links. Each programme may have several links within a particular category.

3.5 THE DEPTH/EXTENT OF COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Signposting parents to other service providers and agencies was a very common means of assisting and engaging parents who expressed an interest in training or employment. Regular drop-ins, or 'one-stop' shops held at the Sure Start centre, or on Sure Start buses, as well as the participation in SSLP events such as Open Days and 'Fun Days' aimed at informing parents of the services available in the area, were also common ways of engaging with key partners.

3.5.1 Signposting

At the very basic – or disengaged – level, the extent of the links with other agencies was generally limited to the display of leaflets for, and information on, services and support available to parents. These included leaflets and information on courses offered by local colleges, where to obtain advice on CVs, or how to access area-based job initiatives. Leaflets or posters sometimes also incorporated information on childcare, transport and how to get to the venue. In addition, a number of programmes held information on the latest job vacancies available in the area. These job opportunities were made public through job-boards displayed in and around the centre, or through folders, which were easily accessible to parents (e.g. at reception). Job vacancies are updated at regular intervals, and parents are usually able to make enquiries with the programme, and will then be signposted to the appropriate agency for help in the application process. All the SSLPs we visited mentioned signposting parents to other services and providers as a route into training and employability related activities.

Whether parents are just referred to another provider or whether they are offered additional services or support was dependent on the nature of services the SSLP offered internally. If the programme employed a person with responsibility for employability or training, then other members of staff would refer parents internally and the co-ordinator would generally support a parent through the process of referral to the other agency. Where programmes concentrate on direct referrals to other agencies by a range of SSLP staff dealing with parents, some programmes specifically looked for good communication skills and networking qualities in their staff:

> *"Our staff all have the ability to deal with people, and they know what is going on, and who to refer our clients to."*
>
> *"We only employ 'people persons'. When we recruited, this was one of the main criteria we looked for."*

The ability of staff to be aware and hold close relationships with others and the networking skills and knowledge of SSLP staff were also appreciated by parents. Typical comments were:

> *"The staff here are all very approachable, and if someone doesn't have the answer, then they at least know of someone who will help you."*
>
> *"It's great here. People are all very approachable; they are not really like workers but more like friends. You can have a chat and you can ask them and if they don't know, they know of someone who will know."*

3.5.2 Regular drop-ins and one-stop shops

Regular drop-ins, or 'one-stop' shops held at the centre, or on buses as well as the participation in SSLP events such as Open Days and 'Fun Days' aimed at informing parents of the services available in the area, were another common way of engaging with key partners. The drop-ins are usually held by a number of providers such as Jobcentre Plus benefits advisors and lone parent advisors, Training Providers, Employment Action Team for Jobs, New Deal for Communities, and similar job regeneration agencies. Regular one-stop shops at the Sure Start centre are usually attended by representatives from various service providers at the same time, which is both regular and advertised in advance. Both, drop-ins and one-stop shops are held with varying degrees of frequency ranging from several days per week to once a month. The purpose of these drop-ins is to signpost parents towards different advice services, opportunities for education and training and help in finding work. In addition, a benefits advisor may calculate in-work support including working tax credit and housing benefit available to parents if they were to take a specific job, and how much better off they would be. The role of these representatives will be explored in more detail below.

3.5.3 Open days

A number of Sure Start local programmes had organised themed days in collaboration with other organisations which may include local colleges, the EYDCP, Jobcentre Plus, and Benefits Advisors as well as trained childminders or other professionals giving an account of their day-to-day working lives, and the training

they underwent to get there. These open days, which run under the heading of 'Fun Day', 'Open Day', or 'Employability Day' serve several purposes. On the one hand, it allows key organisations in the area and the SSLP to promote their services both to parents and other local stakeholders and SSLPs in the area, in a relaxed and informal manner. Often the key purpose of the day is to make contact with families who are not already known to the programme with a view to registering parents. But the advantage of bringing all the agencies together with families and others from the area is that it enables a range of different organisations being able to meet similar or shared targets and objectives. Parents either register their details at the entrance, or with the different providers, and indicate what they are interested in, e.g. training and/or benefits advice. The information collated is later shared among the various organisations, and parents are contacted and then encouraged to move forward.

The informal atmosphere at these events makes it easier for parents to access and enquire about the services relating to education, training, jobs, and benefits advice without feeling intimidated. It is also a way for SSLPs to attract the hard-to-reach families. As childcare is usually provided at these events, the obstacle of making provisions for childcare has been removed. Furthermore, these events are often held at an attractive venue in the area such as the local football stadium or park. Sometimes they are fronted by a local celebrity in an attempt to place a greater value on the event with a view to encouraging higher numbers of parents to attend.

Secondly, the collaboration among differing organisations with shared similar objectives allows for the pulling together of resources, while at the same reducing the workload and expenses for all those involved. It means maximising outcome with limited input, and sharing useful information - such as parents' interests, and demographics - among a number of organisations. The following two extracts are taken from two different programmes, one is a meeting which we observed which took place between various providers in order to organise the forthcoming Open Day while the other offers an account of an Early Years Co-ordinator involved in the organisation of an SSLP Open Day.

At Programme E, the aim of the Open Day was to invite all providers of childcare to reach the potential workforce. It would bring together employers and trainers with people looking for work or training in childcare. The partnership received EU funding for the event. The following issues were discussed during the meeting:

- Event to be advertised in local magazine: EYDCP to provide article aimed at people who are unemployed or who want to change career.
- Members of the planning group to attempt to engage people in their wider networks e.g. Connexions, private employers, Childcare connect
- Modern apprenticeship styles to be considered too
- SSLP to have stand with EYDCP
- Parents from the SSLP area are to be logged via 'postcards'

A similar planning event was hosted at another SSLP which included all childcare providers in the area with the purpose of drawing up an integrated strategy concerning childcare training in the SSLP area. Also present at the event were a lone parent advisor, the EY Partnership, and the SSLP play and learning co-ordinator.

At Programme C, an early years co-ordinator was involved in the organisation of the under 5's Festival, and also in the National Sure Start month activities. In promotion of the month, all the Sure Start local programmes in the area came together to publicise their services. They also had a fathers' development worker who organised some activities, and encouraged more men to go into childcare. Activities also included a 'BB' diary room for kids who were looked after by their dads, and there were stalls from several providers such as the local Further Education College, the Employment Service, the Inland Revenue, and other local colleges. The Early Years Co-ordinator organised taster sessions for parents on the different areas of childcare training, and professionals to speak to parents about their jobs. The idea for the Day originated through 'joined-up thinking'. After the event all parties involved got together again to discuss any feedback, and share information.

3.6 LOCAL COLLEGES AND OTHER TRAINING PROVIDERS

All the programmes included in the study had links with local further education and community colleges, the local adult education service, community education service or similar training providers. In the disengaged and passive programmes, these links solely served the purpose of signposting and referring parents towards existing courses at the college or provider, but the relationship went no further. In some cases this was because the SSLP itself had not chosen to be more pro-active in supporting parents through training activities. In other cases it was because colleges were reluctant to change their existing provision to make it more useful and attractive to Sure Start parents.

At the more active level, collaborations were a lot more complex and involved two-way relationships. At the first level of such relationships SSLPs commissioned colleges to provide training (parenting, ESOL, leisure or vocational) for Sure Start parents at times and locations which suited parents. In more genuinely collaborative relationships colleges were responding to requests and suggestions from the SSLP about the nature, timing and location of the college's own courses, funded from mainstream sources.

Several of the SSLPs we visited had carried out surveys which had asked parents what they would like to see in terms of training and courses. The college then ran the most frequently requested courses while the SSLP informed parents of the courses that were now or would be available. In addition, some SSLPs had special arrangements with colleges and/or providers whereby the SSLP provided a certain number of students for a course while the provider attracted the remaining students (in one case, for example a 70:30 split was agreed). This type of arrangement benefits both, the SSLP and the college, as it allows for courses to be run that otherwise might not attract a sufficient number of students. In the event that a particular college or provider is unable to provide a course, the SSLP might look for alternatives to ensure that the courses requested by parents could be run. If these courses ultimately prove popular, then these can be mainstreamed as the example below demonstrates.

Colleges which are actively engaged in collaboration with SSLPs have found that the benefits of the arrangements are shared. Where SSLPs succeed in getting parents actively engaged in learning (and we visited a number of examples where this had happened) they become an important potential client group for the college's own provision. A working relationship with SSLPs allows colleges to meet their targets for community education, and in some cases it has ensured that less popular courses, which otherwise would have had to be abandoned, can be run by having a combination of Sure Start local parents and other students from the community. In some cases, SSLPs have brought together different training providers at one table to collaborate in planning provision, which might otherwise not be viable. This has led to a greater variety of courses on offer because training providers can avoid duplication and thus use resources more wisely as the following two examples illustrate.

The programmes we visited that were working with enthusiastic local colleges were able to offer parents a range of opportunities and choices that were not available in other areas. Several of these programmes stressed that this relationship made a major contribution towards developing community capacity more generally, as the parents sparked off friends and family members to engage in learning too. One programme had persuaded the college to provide an IT course for the local community in convenient premises which happened to be the upstairs room in a pub. This meant that valuable computer equipment was known to be in a building in an area with a high incidence of burglary. There were sufficient members of the community who valued both the course and the college more generally to ensure that the word went out that the computers were not to be touched. The community gained from the risk taken by the college and the SSLP, which reinforced the mutual trust which had ensured its success in the first place.

In order to successfully engage parents in education and training which can improve their employability the activities need to be delivered at venues within the local community and easily accessible to parents, and at times to suit parents. As one Programme Manager stated, reversing the traditional story: "If Mohammed does not come to the mountain, then the mountain needs to come to Mohammed". Some SSLPs insist on the local delivery of courses, and within a good working relationship with a college, this usually happens.

The importance of local delivery of courses is particularly apparent when we consider the experience of SSLPs which have had rather less than satisfactory collaborations with local colleges. There were several examples of this in our study. In one case, although the college offered to deliver courses in variable locations, the reality was that the preferred location was still at the college. It was prepared to offer a single delivery mode only, in other words, standard courses determined by the college, which may not always be the most suitable provision for Sure Start parents who are newly coming back to learning. In another of the programmes in our study the SSLP had cancelled the contract with one of the local colleges because it was not being sufficiently flexible in what it was willing to offer. Several programmes had found that the nearest college was not necessarily the one that was most willing to collaborate, and sometimes the most effective relationships were with colleges some distance away, but which were prepared to work with the SSLP as part of their outreach work. But programmes where there was not a choice of local colleges and where the local

college was unsympathetic did have difficulties in putting together suitable provision for parents.

Example: **Collaboration between a local further education college and a SSLP:**

All training offered by the college is held in centres in the area. Venues include the library, community centres and the health centre. The college is prepared to be creative in this.

The SSLP employment worker has set up a network locally because parents do not want to travel with a pram on the bus. He has also produced a booklet containing information about all training courses on offer in the area, including a map at the back showing all the venues with details of how to get to each. The booklet also indicates the crèche facilities that are available for each course, and where and how to find them.

Thanks to the link with Sure Start, the college can use some of the venues without charge, which has been a great advantage. Courses that the college would not provide were put on by the programme itself. This included a sewing course and a yoga course. Due to their success, when run by the SSLP the college is now offering these courses itself. The benefit is that these courses are now sustainable in the longer term as funding is secured.

Example: **Collaboration between the LEA adult and community learning service (ACLS) and a SSLP:**

The adult and community learning service employs a partnership worker whose role involves working with local people in high deprivation areas. Her remit therefore overlaps with that of the Sure Start local programme. Her target groups include the long-term unemployed, people with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities, ex-offenders, and the older generation. She is able to set up and offer free courses to her target groups at venues that are comfortable and easy to reach. The courses usually include childcare facilities, and are held at the hours to suit people, for example, courses which suit parents' need to take children to school and collect them.

For Sure Start she has arranged various courses such as a salsa dancing class, keep fit classes, as well as raising self-esteem and confidence classes. Her organisation has also funded classes such as first aid, and basic food hygiene. Her approach is very responsive: she finds out what local people want to do, and, if these wishes meet with the organisation's learning plan, then she will try and organise them.

Example: **Collaboration between a SSLP and a group of employment support and training providers**

The SSLP has created an employment and training steering group which for the first time brings together most training and employment providers in the area. It is the first time all training providers in the area have co-operated in this way, and it has provided a valuable networking opportunity.

The group has agreed to publish a handbook for local job seekers, which will include all service providers, transport information, where to turn to for help with regards to employment related issues, etc.

The emphasis of SSLP organised or commissioned courses that have an employability focus generally starts with confidence building and assertiveness training. They then move onto general job preparation training such CV writing, interview skills, etc. Introductory IT courses are also popular, both for vocational reasons and to enable parents to use the internet and email, either at home or at libraries and UK Online centres. The tutors who are delivering the courses play a pivotal role in making this type of collaboration successful both for Sure Start parents and the SSLP. Their role is discussed below in section 3.6.

Many of the SSLPs were involved in collaborative arrangements with colleges and EYDCPs to deliver childcare training to Sure Start parents wanting to work in childcare. In a typical example the college designed and delivered an NVQ Level II course in childcare funded by the EYDCP, with a prospective progression route for local parents to move on to a NVQ Level III course, and for parents to gain employment in the longer term, possibly within the programme itself as its childcare provision developed with the opening of a new nursery. With this measure the programme ultimately aims to resolve the current lack of available childcare provision for working parents while at the same time, encouraging parental employment in the area. Childcare training is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Childcare for parents doing courses also played a major role in parents' ability to access education and training, and it has therefore also impacted on the relationship of SSLPs with training providers. This is explored more fully in Chapter 4. Some arrangements with local colleges include the provision of childcare by the training provider for all courses, while other SSLPs have decided to help parents to access existing facilities either by providing childcare, meeting the costs of childcare, or helping them access other sources of funding. Alternatively, courses might be held at the SSLP or another venue used by the SSLP, which allows the SSLP to provide childcare within their existing provisions while the training provider runs the courses.

3.7 THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT ACTION TEAM FOR JOBS AND OTHER AREA-BASED JOB GENERATION INITIATIVES

Several of the programmes in our study were in areas where Jobcentre Plus Employment Action Teams for Jobs were operating. These teams target disadvantaged areas and aim to tackle the some of the key causes of inequality: poor skills, racial discrimination and poor links between the population in an area and local employers. They help people living in the targeted areas by:

- working closely with employers
- using discretionary funding with imagination and initiative
- targeting areas and groups who need help most, including those from the ethnic minorities
- working in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors, and
- tackling the causes of the different employment rates between white and ethnic minority people.

In other areas there were locally instigated job creation and promotion projects supported by other initiatives, for example the European Social Fund (ESF), New Deal for Communities (NDC) or Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). Some SSLPs had intermediate labour market (ILM) projects operating in the area and were able to refer parents to these as well. Intermediate labour market projects offer work experience placements paying wages within a supported environment. They help people build up confidence and work habits with the idea that after a period of weeks

or months they are able to move into the regular labour market. For a description of how they work and an overview of the evaluation evidence see Marshall and MacFarlane (2000) and Finn and Simmonds (2003).

The role of all these projects is to provide additional help and support to local people generally, including Sure Start parents, who would like to work. Where these projects were operating, they were generally well attuned to the needs of local people and SSLPs were confident about making referrals to them for parents who wanted preparation for work at a more practical level than the SSLP itself was able to offer. Where SSLPs were collaborating with these initiatives there was a general perception of mutual benefit. The employment projects themselves generally had targets for the number of people they had to help, while the SSLPs had the target of reducing the number of children living in workless households. The SSLPs were able to help the employment projects reach well-motivated clients and the employment projects were able to devote more resources to helping parents find work than the SSLPs themselves would be able to do.

However, not all the SSLPs with regeneration initiatives operating in the area were collaborating with them. Sometimes programme managers felt handicapped by their own backgrounds in developing collaborative relationships with regeneration programmes. One, who had a New Deal for Communities programme in her area, and who herself had a social services background told us:

> *"If you are from an education/employment background, then it must be easier because you have all these links to fall back on."*

This support available from local employment projects is generally targeted closely to the needs of the individual job seeker and therefore comes in many different shapes and forms. It can include the identification of any training needs such as gaps in basic skills and signposting parents as to what they can do. It can involve training in searching the web for prospective jobs, helping parents to obtain and complete application forms, making telephone calls to prospective employers, and CV writing. Services may also include mock-interviews, advice on how to dress, allowances for purchasing clothing, grooming or necessary tools. The projects ensure that clients arrive on time for interviews and pay their travel costs.

Example: **Collaboration with a local job regeneration project**

Representatives of the local job generation project introduce themselves to parents by coming to the parents' forum, the play bus, and any other events suitable for advertising their services.

The employment project not only provides advice but also a follow-up service. They come to the interview, and also provide any 'necessary aftercare'.

Initially, they ask people about their barriers that keep them from working. They then seek to address these barriers one by one to get parents to move on. Transport issues may also be addressed.

The employment project will contact the appropriate co-ordinator within Sure Start to see whether they can help and follow up with any parents once they have moved into employment.

The project also provide help if a parent has difficulty getting up and ready in the morning – they will phone to make sure the parent is up.

A member of an Employment Action Team for Jobs described her work:

> *"I assess each individual in accordance with their needs on a one-to-one basis. Often, people tell you all their problems, and you have to bring the time to listen. People tell you all sorts of things, and when you take them on, you take all 'of them on'. You are sometimes invited to weddings, etc."*

Training under this project centres on improving self-esteem. Clients then move onto CV work. They are encouraged to type their own CV, and then someone from the team helps the client to get it right. Clients usually want to have everything done for them, and have only limited knowledge of the world of work and what it is like. They feel that they are better off when they stay at home. The Employment Action Team for Jobs sees its role as breaking that pattern, and encouraging parents to show their children that there is something else.

> *"I usually work with clients by drawing up a list of the pros and cons of going to work. For example I recently had a lone parent who had lots skills but she was insisting on having dinner at 6.00 pm with her son. Sometimes you need to bring back reality, and when parents see it black in white then they are more inclined to make adjustments. Other people may have fantastic expectations. They left school with no qualifications and haven't had a job since, but during the assessment say they want a salary of £20,000. I then have to bring them back to reality."*

Another Action Team for Jobs co-ordinator described her work as follows:

> *"I come from a Jobcentre background but this job is different as I am out in the community. I can work without having to put pressure on people. We change lives, attitudes and behaviour: We have third generation benefits people in this area for whom it is normal not to work. My advice is client led, and can be on anything from job search to CV advice and training opportunities as well as calculating how much better people would be off if they went to work…. I also have a budget I can dip into to make the transition into work easier and help out with transport cost or clothing for interviews. Whatever it is a client needs, I can provide for within reason."*

***Example:* A parent helped by Action Team for Jobs**

The parent had been working as a childminder and had asked a local nursery about the possibility of a job, but they could not afford to take her on.

She spoke to the Action Team for Jobs who suggested that she went on the New Deal 25+. This meant that any employer taking her on could get £75 a week towards her wages.

She reported this to the nursery and they arranged for her to start work with training the following week, with financial support from the Jobcentre and from the childcare training subsidy.

One programme had provided funding for twelve ILM places in childcare in collaboration with another local initiative, but was disappointed to find that it failed to attract any parents. The SSLP had come to recognise that this was because there was no additional support in place (for example to sort out childcare and provide

advice on benefits). It was planning to redirect these resources towards employing a training co-ordinator.

3.8 THE ROLE OF BENEFITS ADVISORS AND JOBCENTRE PLUS

Jobcentre Plus provides help and advice to people who can work and financial help for those who cannot. It brings together what was previously the Jobcentre network of the Employment Service with the work of former local social security offices for people of working age.

Many of the SSLPs we visited had found that a fundamental prerequisite to successfully facilitating parents' movement into employment was the availability of a benefits advisor. SSLPs often arranged for a Jobcentre Plus benefits advisor to have a regular drop-in session in the Sure Start centre. Sometimes benefits advice was provided by an independent agency such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, and occasionally by the local Employment Action Team for Jobs. These drop-ins were usually held once a week/fortnight, and parents were able to book appointments and/or drop by on a casual basis. The advisors were able to calculate for parents their potential entitlement to in-work support including Working Families Tax Credit (now Working Tax Credit) and housing benefit they were to start work. They could then determine how much better off they would be in work and what they could claim. Advice roles were not necessarily confined to merely providing advice on benefits, but might be part of the wider remit of the provider.

There were many advantages of having a benefits advisor located within the SSLP. Many parents still feel apprehensive and uneasy about going into the local Jobcentre for benefits advice. The Job Broker of one Sure Start local programme stated:

> *"… Some people won't access Jobcentres, they don't like to. They will if they have to. They go for their six monthly reviews and they go or they get their benefits stopped, but in between times they won't go near the place. There's a lot of misconception about the Jobcentres. The staff are generally pretty good down there. But they [parents] feel intimidated going down there. The [bad] reputation is built on ten or fifteen years ago, so it's hard to break it down again..."*

***Example:* The work of a benefits advisor (1)**

Parents consult the benefits advisor about more than just their benefits and see her as a trustworthy source of advice about a range of issues. She has more time to spend with them than Jobcentre Plus advisers do.

They ask her to fill in application forms and she is able to do this where people need this extra level of support, particularly where they have never applied for a job before.

Sometimes being available for this kind of help enables her to identify where parents have basic skills problems and can refer them for further help.

***Example:* The work of a benefits advisor (2)**

"I give people advice on welfare benefits and employment rights. It can range from just giving advice on how to manage their money, helping them to write to the bank or whatever, and explaining their circumstances, setting up a reduced payment and all sorts of things like that. I might help them to get debts written off, apply for a grant, that sort of thing. So those are the three main areas. Welfare benefits advice, employment and money advice."

Sometimes the lack of childcare may pose an additional barrier for parents getting to the Jobcentre. Having access to a benefits advisor at the local programme resolves the problem of having to find childcare while meeting with the benefits advisors, since parents could usually make use of the crèche or nursery facilities at the programme centre. Sometimes women from some minority communities were reluctant to visit the Jobcentre, where they could be seen to be mixing with men, but were happy to see a Jobcentre Plus adviser at the Sure Start centre. Some SSLPs did not have centres of their own, and others recognised that a centre visited by a benefits advisor was not always accessible from all parts of the programme area. Occasionally in these cases the Sure Start employment co-ordinator might accompany the parent to the Jobcentre to see the benefits advisor if the parent was uncomfortable about going on her own.

***Example:* A parent's experience of SSLP and benefits advisor support**

The Job Broker at the SSLP helped the parent find her current (part-time) job which pays £90 a week. While she is at work her child is looked after at the (subsidised) Sure Start nursery, so she has minimal childcare costs.

She consulted the benefits advisor who sorted out her WFTC and some other benefits that she did not know she was entitled to. The result is that her income has now gone up to £300 a week.

3.9 THE ROLE OF SURE START EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING CO-ORDINATORS

The active and lifelong learning programmes were distinguished by their employment of staff whose role was to act as a bridge between parents and other service providers, and to provide individual advice and support for parents. These people act as "fixers" and "trouble-shooters" in terms of helping parents access training and job

opportunities, and encouraging employers and education and training providers to remove unnecessary barriers to the participation of Sure Start parents. Their role was akin to that of the more effective personal advisers under the New Deal[5] programmes (Millar 2000, Evans et al 2003) and more recently the Work Focused Interviews for lone parents (Thomas and Griffiths 2004).

Example: **Observation of a home visit by a co-ordinator to a lone parent with four children (aged between one and thirteen) who was looking for work**

The co-ordinator arranged a home visit after a referral from another agency where the parent had expressed an interest in work. The other agency suggested that Sure Start might be able to help her deal with some of her difficulties. The parent wanted part-time work and had already obtained an application form from a nearby large supermarket. She had a history of keeping her older children off school to help her with the youngest one, who was very active. She had also previously experienced domestic violence.

The SSLP co-ordinator suggested that the parent apply for a special needs place for her youngest son, which would both help him and provide her with greater support in terms of learning how to manage him. They filled in the form for this together.

She also encouraged the parent to fill in the application form for the supermarket, but recommended that they should go to the Jobcentre first where they could find out how much better off she would be financially if she worked for 16 hours per week. They arranged an appointment to go and do this together.

She also reminded the parent that she might have to pay for some things such as school dinners that she was currently getting free, and that this might mean that she would be no better off in work. The co-ordinator suggested that if the parent decided not to go to work immediately, she might want to consider a training course to improve her basic skills, or perhaps some other subject.

In different programmes the jobs have slightly different emphases, but the similarities between them are strong. Having someone employed in this role made a difference at two levels. Programmes without someone in this kind of role found it much more of a challenge to develop and sustain relationships with other organisations. This meant that the other organisations were not as well placed to offer services and support to Sure Start parents. But they also made a difference to individual parents. We have quoted above the example of one who accompanies people to the Jobcentre. In chapter 5 we give an example of how another helps parents to find suitable and affordable childcare.

In active programmes they are often called employment co-ordinators, but sometimes they are called community development workers or even childcare coordinators. Their focus is on helping parents who want to move into work to overcome the barriers that they face in terms of confidence, skills, transport, childcare or other personal circumstances. Often the co-ordinators will accompany parents to appointments with other agencies and to initial training sessions. They are essentially “expert friends”. One of them described her job as follows:

[5] New Deal is a key part of the Government’s Welfare to Work strategy and consists of policies aimed at the demand and supply side designed to improve the employability of specific groups. The main New Deals which are relevant to parents in SSLP areas are the New Deal for Lone Parents and the New Deal 25+. Both offer personal advice and support in finding work or training. The New Deal for Lone Parents also offers childcare support.

"Basically my role is like a great big signpost for the parents. Whatever they want, they come to me and I try to access the services that they require. Like the college, like [ILM] type of jobs. I do CV's, if they need CV's and they're going for a job application and they need help setting it out. So, if in future if they wanted to do their own they could do their own. ... Basically we're just one big signpost really."

In lifelong learning programmes the people doing this kind of work are generally called training co-ordinators, and their job is to develop the training directories and to organise all the training SSLPs offer to parents, from child-related training such as child protection, child behaviour management and baby massage courses through to leisure courses and advanced vocational provision. They also negotiate with external providers and help Sure Start parents to access mainstream provision, including helping them with childcare.

A tutor described the difference the work of the co-ordinator made to parents who were doing training courses:

"What seemed to make the difference is the support that they've had from the co-ordinator and the relationship they've had with her. In thinking about employability, I don't think it's about providing this class or that service, it's about making relationships with people and providing them, not so much with ongoing support, but with a point of contact, a person they can contact over a long period of time. They can always go back to that person and get refreshed or redirected, just motivated to go on to the next stage of whatever it is that they want to do."

As well as working with outside organisations and providing a bridge to them for parents, they also work with colleagues inside Sure Start to try and meet the needs of parents where these are multiple and complex.

"Another parent worked with the drug and alcohol worker and she worked with the welfare benefits advisor, [Angela], and she had debt problems, she had issues around alcohol abuse. Six months later after having worked with practically everybody at Sure Start she's now working. She's got her drug issues under control, her debt issues under control. She's got her alcohol issues under control and she's now able to make that next step into a job and she's starting work and that's turned around in about six months. But it's not just one person it's the whole group of people who've worked. They don't come to you with just one issue. It's usually lots of issues".

Another employment co-ordinator's colleague described her work:

"[Jenny] will go out of her way to access things for parents. She'll bend over backwards to help them. You have your job searches and your Jobcentres but they don't have that one-to-one contact. You don't have that intimacy. They've got that one person they can go to and they know that they will do their best. They build up a rapport with [Jenny]. Most of the women I know that have gained employment have been through [Jenny] and I'm really pleased. They've been passed on from us to [Jenny]."

It is important that the people in these roles are knowledgeable about the provision, both in terms of employment and training support, and in terms of some of the other barriers parents face. In the example above, the finding of special needs support for the child was in reality more important than helping to fill in the job application form. They can be more effective if the other agencies trust them, and respond to their suggestions about improvements in their services that can make them more accessible and useful for Sure Start parents.

All the co-ordinators we met appeared to be both pro-active and successful in their roles. They were well thought of by their programme managers, by their colleagues, by parents and by people in other agencies who they dealt with. However, the employment of someone in such a role seems typically to cost Sure Start local programmes at least £25,000 a year. The training co-ordinators' roles tend to be quite wide, and to encompass parenting training, training for board members and volunteers, as well as courses to boost the self-esteem and wellbeing of parents. But the employment co-ordinators' roles are primarily focused on helping parents to find and keep work. As we discuss further in section 4.3 below, part of the reason for their ability to be successful is that they tend to have very small caseloads. But this also means that quite a high level of resource is being devoted to a small number of parents. This does not provide an encouragement for programmes that are not actively engaged in employability work to go down this path.

3.10 MULTI-AGENCY COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE

It often requires the collaboration of a variety of agencies and providers to ensure both that the necessary support packages for Sure Start parents to move into work are put in place and to ensure that each organisation is in a position better to achieve its own objectives by co-operating with others. This collaboration happens at a variety of levels, and we found examples of co-operation directed towards strategic objectives of the respective organisations as well as co-operation to meet the needs of individual parents. Sometimes the Sure Start local programme was the initiator of the collaboration, while in other cases they played a part but another organisation took the lead.

Example: **Collaboration between an ILM project and a SSLP**

Initially Sure Start encourages people to engage in learning and discovering that they can learn how to do new tasks. The focus is on achievement rather than accreditation.

Once they have discovered that they have potential, parents can be referred to the ILM and do more vocational training through them. But there is still a collaborative relationship with Sure Start. In one case, a parent is doing a nail technician course with the ILM and Sure Start is funding the equipment she needs to do the acrylic nails course, which she could not afford herself.

The SSLP has approached the Jobcentre Plus lone parent advisor to get her childcare funded while she is on the course.

One of the critical issues which emerged in some programmes was the issue of funding, and who pays for what. Sometimes relationships could be strengthened by

collaboration over money, and sometimes they could be weakened by disagreements. An example of positive collaboration between a SSLP, a local ILM project and the Jobcentre Plus lone parent advisor is shown in the example below. In this case the ILM provided the funding for the training with support from the European Social Fund, the SSLP funded the equipment and Jobcentre Plus paid for the childcare while the parent was on the training course.

Example: **Multi-agency strategic collaboration**

In Programme K the employment co-ordinator has collaborated with the local Primary Care Trust, which had a shortage of administrative workers in the Sure Start area. The co-ordinator suggested creating training opportunities with good employment prospects for local people in collaboration with the PCT. They agreed on a yearlong NVQ III in administration for eight people whereby the PCT provided the opportunity for one half day a week work placements (e.g. at a Family Planning Clinic) and a guarantee the trainees would be offered a job interview on completion of training. The first five course participants were all local Sure Start parents who were identified by the co-ordinator through his regular employment drop-in sessions, or parents who had undergone previous training courses such as communication skills or IT training, and were ready to move on. In order to bring the group up to eight people, three further trainees were recruited through Jobcentre Plus referrals. Initially, these were recruited under the New Deal 25+. However, this programme limits training funds to £750 per person, which was not sufficient funding for the local adult education college, which was providing the training, to make the course viable. The co-ordinator then worked with the New Deal Lone Parent Advisor and they were able to run this scheme under the New Deal for Lone Parents, thereby releasing further funding.

In addition to the half day work placement, there are three separate training days each week, run by the college and delivered locally with the PCT meeting the cost for the room rental. The intensity of the training led to a childcare challenge because the college does not offer a crèche. Sure Start therefore provides a crèche for the three training days, and has drawn on its own childminder network to cover the half-day training placements. The childminder network was initiated by the SSLP childcare development worker. The costs for childminding are met partly by college vouchers, and partly through the discretionary fund for childcare from New Deal Lone Parents while the SSLP meets the costs for the crèche.

This collaboration has proven so successful that it is going to be run for a second time with slight modifications. The main training will now run under the New Deal 25+ and the New Deal for Lone Parents as an intermediate labour market project whereby clients will be paid immediately they start work at a rate of £8 an hour, rather than taking unpaid placements. The Co-ordinator is currently reviewing the possibility of rolling out this project to other services such as Social Services with the prospect of mainstreaming the project, potentially through the Jobcentre.

Another programme was engaged on planning a fifteen place NVQII in childcare involving both training and work experience under an ILM umbrella, in collaboration with the New Deal for Communities, another local initiative which received European Social Fund funding. Another five people would do the training without the ILM element. The local community college was going to provide the tutors, and the college had agreed to come out to teach in a local location. The longer-term objective for this collaboration is that local people will apply for childcare jobs when

the new NNI opens. It looked as though this project had attracted sufficient applicants, but lining up all five partner organisations and their funding was a challenge.

An example of mutual support at a more strategic level is illustrated in the example of multi-agency collaboration in the box below. Here a training course to address the skill shortage needs of a key local employer (which is also a Sure Start partnership member) is funded by the local further education college, the employer, the New Deal 25+ and the New Deal for Lone Parents. The childcare for the trainees is funded partly by the college, partly by Jobcentre Plus and partly by the SSLP itself.

3.11 THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

While we found many examples of successful collaboration working to the benefit of all the organisations concerned, and of parents, working with different agencies is not without challenges, and we found examples where it was working less well.

One programme manager felt that it had taken time for the multi-agency approach to start to be successful. There were "egos" within agencies and a reluctance to pool resources or to concede influence. In another area someone working in a neighbourhood renewal role felt that there were bureaucratic obstacles to collaboration, which were partly driven by finance, but partly reflected the fact that people did not want to change the way they do things, which is what they have to do when they work with other agencies.

Sometimes other organisations did not see the SSLP as an organisation in its own right, but rather as a loose coalition of mainstream agencies. This could make it more difficult to develop collaborative relationships with employment and training organisations outside the early years field, who could not see the purpose of collaborating with, say, the PCT, with which they seemed to have no common ground. In at least one case, however, this strategic reluctance to become engaged did not extend to relationships on the ground, which were fruitful.

We found several examples where SSLPs reported problems with colleges over the funding of courses. Colleges which are providing courses out of their normal Learning and Skills Council funding are often unwilling to run them for small groups because the funding they receive per learner would not be sufficient to cover the costs. Some SSLPs have solved this problem by offering to part-fund courses for groups that would otherwise be below a viable size. We also found an example where a SSLP funded a second tutor on an EYDCP funded childcare course in order to provide additional support to the Sure Start learners.

There were occasionally other problems with colleges too. Some were reluctant to run courses in Sure Start centres or other venues which were accessible within the area (and which made it feasible for the SSLP to provide on-site crèches for the learners). Others were only willing to deliver standard courses and were not prepared to try and tailor their provision to meet the needs of Sure Start learners.

Most of the programmes in this study reported that parents were unwilling to commit themselves to courses lasting longer than six weeks or so. Colleges sometimes wanted people to sign up for a year. One of the programmes in our study had terminated the contract it had with a local college because it was proving not to be sufficiently flexible. Others reported that they had managed to build relationships with more distant colleges if their nearby colleges were not willing to offer courses on the right terms. However, this can be more difficult to arrange in rural areas and in areas where a single college is the only provider within some miles of a particular type of course.

In an example above we illustrated a successful collaboration between a SSLP and the local Primary Care Trust in its capacity of local employer. However, this collaboration is exceptional, and its success may be due in part to the strategic partnership relationship between the SSLP and the PCT.

Several programmes had tried to work with private employers but had not been successful. In one area a new factory had been opened which was making supplies for babies. But the company had entrusted its recruitment to a private agency which was unwilling to work either with the Jobcentre or with the SSLP.

The only successful collaborations with employers we encountered were with new supermarkets. In four of our twenty-five programmes new supermarkets had opened during the lifetime of the SSLP, and in each case there was an active collaboration between the supermarket's recruitment team and the SSLP or one of its partner organisations, which meant that parents were given support and encouragement in applying for the new jobs, and the SSLP generally provided childcare for people attending interviews.

3.12 WHAT MAKES FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION?

Above all successful collaborations between Sure Start local programmes and other organisations are based on good personal relationships. There were strong suggestions that these relationships were more productive when the SSLP staff member had a background which meant that he or she was familiar with the work of the various agencies providing employment and training support, and knew who to talk to and how to develop shared objectives. We found examples of programme staff (including programme managers) who knew that there were regeneration or similar initiatives operating in their area, but were not sure what they did and were uncertain about how to make contact with them. However, we also found examples where programme managers and co-ordinators did not have a relevant background, but were sufficiently confident and pro-active to be able to develop new links from scratch.

Good relationships at strategic level did not always follow through at operational level and vice versa. Programmes with board level representation from Jobcentre Plus, for example, did not always have operational links with the relevant staff. Similarly,

we found examples of programmes where strategic relationships were poor, but staff at operational level were working together successfully.

It is also important to remember that relationships involve a two-way process, and those in the partner agencies have to be willing to collaborate as well. One programme manager reported that whenever she had tried to make contact with the Jobcentre Plus childcare co-ordinator in her area her calls were not returned. But when someone new came into the post she responded immediately and enthusiastically and a lot more became possible.

Other programmes recognise the importance of all programme staff having good networking skills and a willingness to engage not just with someone's problems in their own area of expertise, but ensuring that they have support in their quest for benefits advice or help with employment and training issues. SSLP staff needed to be aware of and committed to the programmes' wider objectives, and to recognise that parents and children had much to gain from improving parents' job prospects.

The success or otherwise of a particular collaboration does not seem to depend on the contractual form of the relationship. Some successful collaborations operated in an environment of strict service level agreement contracts between the SSLP and its partners, while others operated on a much more informal give and take basis. The attitudes of those involved, a sense of shared purpose, and a willingness to be flexible characterised most of the successful relationships that we found.

CHAPTER 4

ACTIVITIES OF SURE START LOCAL PROGRAMMES DIRECTED TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY ISSUES

4.1 KEY POINTS FROM THIS CHAPTER

- Sure Start local programmes generally rely on links with and referrals to other providers in order to address their objective of improving the employability of parents.

- The main exceptions to this are training courses provided by the programme itself (particularly in lifelong learning and quasi-ILM programmes), and giving priority to parents in employment with the programme (in the two quasi-ILM programmes and in four others.

- Training for parents to take part in the management of the programme and to enable them to act as volunteers can sometimes be used as a stepping-stone to paid employment.

- It is often difficult to engage parents' interest in employment and training opportunities, and confidence building plays an important role. Most programmes, and our own interviews with parents, suggest that mothers who are not already working would prefer not to have paid work until their children are at primary school. This is consistent with strong local traditions related to appropriate behaviour for mothers in respect of paid work and childcare.

- The proportion of parents taking part in employment and vocationally-related training activities, even in the most active and encouraging programmes, is low. Parents often face multiple barriers to work, which need multiple and personalised approaches.

- Those who do take part are almost all mothers. Only one programme had been able to involve more than one or two fathers.

- Some programmes had developed imaginative approaches to helping parents such as a back to work kit.

- Four programmes had had new large supermarkets open in the area or close by and had collaborated with them during their initial recruitment. Otherwise Sure Start local programmes did not work with local employers.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Sure Start local programmes, even those we have classified as active, provide only a limited range of services to parents themselves. The main difference between the more active and the less active programmes is the extent to which they act as a bridge for parents into the education, training and employment support provision of other organisations, rather than in the services they provide directly. This is one reason why expenditure is not necessarily a guide either to activity or to SSLPs' commitment. The other reason is that there are inconsistencies in the way SSLPs classify their expenditure. Thus, one of the programmes that had been selected as having spent money on employability activities had actually spent the money on developing a childminder network, an activity which was related to parental employability, but which other programmes might class as spending under the play, learning and childcare heading. Similarly, some programmes classified the costs of employing training co-ordinators wholly or partly under the employability heading, while others classified them under support for parents. In most programmes which employed training co-ordinators, they organised parenting training and leisure courses as well as vocational or potentially vocational courses, hence the fuzziness about how they should be classified.

In this chapter we discuss the services related to improving employability which are undertaken by Sure Start local programmes themselves. In Chapter 3 we discuss the services provided by other organisations that they help parents to access, and the steps they take to encourage providers to make their provision more accessible (physically and psychologically) to Sure Start parents. To a large extent the success of Sure Start local programmes' efforts to help parents find and keep paid work depends on the nature and quality of the relationships between the programme and other agencies in the area.

4.3 ENGAGING PARENTS IN ACTIVITIES RELATED TO EMPLOYABILITY

4.3.1 Promoting employability activities

The passive and disengaged SSLPs in our study generally took few steps to encourage parents to take part in employability-related activities. They distributed leaflets and put up notices, but did not actively engage with parents or encourage them to take part.

The more active programmes made more positive efforts to encourage parents to take part. For instance, some of them held employability days involving other partner organisations operating employment and training projects. Others involved their outreach workers and home visitors in encouraging parents to take advantage of training and work experience opportunities. Regular leafleting or newsletters were used as well as word of mouth. One programme with a lifelong learning emphasis not

only uses its outreach workers to promoted participation in education and training, and provides booklets with details of education and training opportunities in the area, but also receives referrals from other agencies including Family Therapy and speech and language therapy services.

Other programmes used more general open days to promote employability activities. Programmes often recognised that encouraging parents to get involved in parents' forums was a way of bringing them into the programme as volunteers and potentially later as board members as well. Both of these offer indirect routes into training and employment. They allow parents to develop and practice a portfolio of skills and abilities which can ultimately be transferred to the job market. These skills include softer skills such as confidence building, communication skills and teamwork, through to financial budgeting and presentation skills.

Not all the efforts to attract people via open days and drop-ins were successful initially, and fine-tuning was sometimes needed. In one programme:

> *"The employment drop-ins are held in different venues across the community. Initially, 1300 leaflets were dropped in the area, but only 3 people turned up. It obviously didn't work. Being at different venues regularly every week, and word of mouth had a much bigger impact. In fact, it's what made the drop-ins so popular. "*

Several of the lifelong learning programmes pursued a strategy of asking parents what sort of courses they would like to see available, using questionnaire surveys to all parents. The options included both those related to children (baby massage, behaviour management, healthy eating), those with a mixed role (cookery and sewing), those that were largely leisure-related (aromatherapy, nail painting) and those that had vocational uses (confidence building, interview training, basic skills and IT in particular). They also usually provide the opportunity for parents to put forward their own suggestions. Training co-ordinators then generally develop the options into a directory, and parents are encouraged to put their names forward for a particular course, which will then run when the numbers expressing an interest reach a viable number. The key idea underlying this approach is that parents will have a sense of ownership of the provision, because they will have asked for it. This, in turn, is more likely to lead to a more active engagement with what is available.

The SSLPs that recognised that parents frequently lack confidence often ran taster sessions on a no commitment, come and give it a try, basis. This helped to break the ice and allowed parents to meet other people in a similar position to themselves. For parents who have taken the first steps into learning, tutors play an important role in keeping them interested and encouraging them to go one step further. One tutor described the process:

> *"In [SSLP area] I've got one parent there who did child protection with me last year, and she said 'I'd really like to do what you do' and I said 'Well do it. What's stopping you?' She'd done some access courses previously and I gave her the details of the college to get in touch with and she did. She started a degree in September last year and she's been in touch with me since and said 'I love it'."*

Another tutor (of IT in this case) stressed the importance of keeping parents engaged with the course:

> *"We try to follow up with people who have not turned up, ring them up and ask whether everything is alright, and whether they need any help, and why they did not turn up to class. I keep a copy of all students' work in a folder and/or a disk at the centre so that nothing gets lost. I also keep people's CV's on disk so they know where it is."*

In another area a parent described the negative effect of another tutor's approach:

> *"During the admin course we had a clash with the tutor and people were dropping out and didn't want to come to the course any more. I stood up and talked to her about it and after that, the tutor changed her behaviour and the course is now enjoyable."*

However, dropout was a more general problem. A parent who had done a six-week IT course told us that part of the reason for this might have been that parents did not have a real stake in the courses which were just laid on for them:

> *"There were around twelve people who originally started. Something like six to eight people officially stuck with it, but it was really only two or three of us that actually turned up regularly by the end. Just because it is free does not mean that you can just turn up as and when you feel like it and take the Mickey."*

Another programme had tackled this by encouraging parents to attend regularly and on time. They are expected to ring up if they cannot come to a session or have to be late.

Almost all the programmes we visited, and many of the parents we spoke to, stressed that parents had often had poor experience at school. Previous research has shown that people who did not get on well at school, particularly those who were regular truants, who had left early or had been excluded, generally have poor qualifications (Dolton et al 1999). Those who truant from school are more likely to have special educational needs (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Many former regular truants have language or literacy problems (Lakey et al 2001)

This meant that they would rarely be willing to engage with any activities that resembled school in any way. Which in turn sometimes obliged courses to operate by stealth. Thus, basic skills courses which are labelled as addressing literacy and numeracy problems find it difficult to fill their places, whereas those disguised under the heading good housekeeping or family learning were more popular.

One community education adviser had come up with a novel approach:

> *"We had been finding it really difficult to get parents to do any courses at all. I finally came up with the idea of calling it 'Take a Better Photo' to attract parents in the first instance. This 'course' was designed to encourage parents to take better photos while at the same time promoted the improvement of writing skills by encouraging labelling of photos and comments on them."*

However, one of the quasi-ILM programmes argued that attracting parents to take part in any programme activities, including training courses, was essentially a matter of trust. The programme had no difficulty attracting parents into taking up any of the activities it offered. The programme's ethos was based strongly within a community development framework and emphasised the fact that the programme and the community were operating on the basis of shared values. Programme staff believed that this meant that parents were confident that the training they were being offered by the programme reflected community needs rather than what the programme thought they ought to have. As a consequence they were willing to take part in whatever was on offer.

4.3.2 Level of parental involvement

In most SSLP areas the involvement of parents in looking for work, or in work-related training or similar activities is very low. A typical Sure Start local programme has around 700 families, around half of which have nobody working. There is therefore a potential pool of around 350 families who might want to pursue activities related to improving their employability. One programme (with a lifelong learning emphasis) encapsulated the scale of the problem. It had 500 people registered with it, around 50 are interested in working at some point, and between five and ten are looking for immediate work.

Another programme that had kept statistics of referrals had found that they had referred four parents to a local organisation helping with job search, eleven to a workshop on working with children, five for careers advice, four to a CV preparation course and four to an interview skills course.

In practice, within each Sure Start local programme area childcare for working parents is typically available for between twenty and fifty children, mostly those over two. The number of parents receiving help and support in looking for and keeping work in the most active programmes is generally in low double figures. In some areas only a handful have expressed any desire for help.

In terms of training courses, lifelong learning programmes did appear to have successfully engaged quite large numbers of parents in education and training activities. Some of them appear to have developed a culture where attending classes is part of the social interaction of parents with each other. However, as the training co-ordinator in one of these programmes told us:

> *"Take up for courses is not very high, and drop out is a problem. It's dragging them out that's the problem."*

Some of these parents move from leisure courses into more vocationally related provision, but as classes become more focused, they become smaller. During the course of our study we found several ESOL courses with eight to twelve members, and a number of examples of successful childcare NVQ II courses with fifteen to twenty members. But in general, the more closely related to paid employment and the higher the level of the course, the more likely it was that there would be fewer than five participants.

Sure Start local programmes were prepared to fund small groups in a way that colleges and the Learning and Skills Council would not do, but maintaining the interest of parents requires effort and commitment. One programme told us about a course with two tutors, with ten parents registered initially, of whom seven completed the course. The programme regarded this as a major success, as the parents had high support needs, and the programme had ensured that they got sufficient support. Another programme had brought in a second tutor for a childcare group of sixteen in order to provide them with support in completing their homework assignments.

Similarly, the number of parents seeking help from employment co-ordinators or similar advisors employed by the programmes is also small. This limited workload is what enables them to offer an individualised service. Overall, we would estimate that even in the most active programmes fewer than one in ten parents is engaged in any form of activity that relates to improving employability.

4.3 ATTITUDES TOWARDS PAID EMPLOYMENT

4.3.1 Fathers and mothers

The target SSLPs are working to relates to the employment of *parents.* In all the programmes we visited the activities they were engaged with, even under this heading, related almost exclusively to mothers. Generally, where fathers were present in the household they were believed by programme staff to have jobs already. In the strong labour market areas this was clearly true, but in the other areas it was not clear that the proportion of children living in workless households was driven entirely by children living with non-working lone parents, and there may be fathers who are not working, but who do not think of looking to the Sure Start local programme for support. The themed evaluation on involving fathers (Lloyd et al 2003) showed that SSLPs find it difficult to attract and engage programmes to take part in activities. We asked programmes what sort of work fathers did, and they rarely had more than a hazy idea, since they were not in touch with them directly. This means that as with other SSLP activities, virtually all the employment and training-related activities we found in SSLPs were directed at and used by mothers, both lone parents, and mothers living with partners. Thus, in reality, although we and programmes talk about parents, we and they are talking about mothers.

Only one of our programmes (in fact one that we have classified as disengaged and doing little to address the employability issue) was working with fathers on looking for work, accessing suitable training courses, confidence building and CV writing. In this programme the fathers worker had moved his activities into this sort of support and was considering turning a fathers' group effectively into a job club. But paradoxically, because this activity had been developed by the fathers' worker on his own initiative, it was not part of the programme's more general provision, and was not available to mothers.

4.3.2 Parents' job aspirations

It is important to stress that the vast majority of the 58 parents we interviewed were drawn from the small minority who were taking part in employment and training activities. They are therefore far from typical, and in particular, they are likely to be more strongly focused on work than parents generally. However, even they expressed reservations about how appropriate it was for mothers of young children to be seeking paid employment before their children were at school. Indeed, some of our more positive interviewees were taking the opportunity to improve their skills so that when their children went to school they would be in a position to get a better job than would otherwise have been available to them. Almost all the SSLPs we visited reported that it was rare for parents themselves to want paid work before their younger children were at primary school full-time. Motherhood was regarded as an important role bringing with it key moral responsibilities, and the proper exercise of that role was to devote their time to their children.

As we saw in Chapter 1, most of the areas included in our case studies were classified as having a predominantly homemaker gender role for women. Previous research has shown that In communities where this is the predominant ethos there is a strong sense that the most appropriate behaviour on the part of a good mother is to give priority to the wellbeing of her children, and that that requires her to stay at home at look after them herself. It would be an abdication of her responsibilities as a mother to take paid work and leave her children in the care of somebody else (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Himmelweit and Sigala 2002).

To the extent that parents had an interest in immediate paid work, they generally wanted part-time jobs that they could fit around their families, rather than setting up arrangements for their families which enabled them to take particular jobs. This is in line with previous research which suggests that this is the preferred approach of women whose primary focus is on their role as mothers (Hakim 1996). Lone parents were keen to find jobs of sixteen hours a week or more, in order to qualify for Working Tax Credit. Mothers with partners were more flexible provided they did not lose financially.

The predominant gender role culture among parents was sometimes shared by Sure Start local programme staff. Although most of the programmes included in our study recognised that they were expected to help parents to find paid employment, they varied in their enthusiasm for the idea. Many of the SSLPs in the study shared the predominant view of parents that it was better for mothers to stay at home while their children were young and were supportive of mothers' choices to do so.

As one programme manager put it:

> *"Parents often have enough to do with looking after their children, getting them to different schools, and nurseries. They do not necessarily want to work. In addition, parents have other needs such as health concerns and healthy eating which need to be addressed first before they can move on into employment. Some even need a lot of work before they are ready to attend a group meeting."*

However, the SSLPs expressed some anxiety about the implications for their target of reducing the proportion of children under five living in workless households. The

programmes themselves believe that parents are likely to be better equipped to move into work when children are at primary school (and therefore outside the 0-4 age group in the workless households target) as a result of the input from the programme, but the programme will not get any credit.

Examples: **Parents' aspirations to work**

A lone parent with one child aged 17 months (Programme I):

"I'd like to go back to work but the first thing for me is to sort out some sort of childcare that I'm happy with. Because I don't want to be going to work and be fretting every two minutes, thinking is she alright and I don't want her to be screaming every morning when I take her. I want her to be happy. That's the main priority at the moment."

A married parent with three children (Programme N):

The parent worked part-time when she was younger in a telesales environment but her husband said that it would be better if she stayed at home until all the children are at school.

The parent does not want to go back to work until her children are in full-time school, and is using this time now to find out what she would like to do. She is interested in catering and/or admin work, and would like to go to college when her children are at school.

A female parent with two children aged four and 1 _ (Programme B):

The parent is from Syria, and attended some previous courses in London (e.g. letter writing, basic English, computing, and childminding). Since she has only been in [the area] for a little while, she has not yet attended any courses but has enrolled for an ESOL course in September. She has a degree from her native country but this qualification is not formally recognized in the UK. She would like to work again when her children are older, and learning English is the first step towards doing so.

A *married parent with two children aged four and six (Programme L):*

The parent is currently not working but is in training for an NVQ2 at college. She would like to work once her son goes to school. The parent also volunteers when asked by SSLP staff as and when required and time permitting. Sure Start has made it possible for her to go on a childcare training course. They pointed out to her what was available in the area and what she could do.

A married parent with two children aged five and two years (Programme G):

The parent has a part-time job as a sales assistant. She works 12 hrs. over the weekend when her husband is at home and can look after the children. When her son starts to attend school, she would like to work full-time. She would like to work with people, preferably children, and is looking to do something more 'meaningful' than being a sales assistant. She would like some rewarding work, and to better herself. She is not sure what exactly it is that she would like to do.

Only in the active and the quasi-ILM programmes was there any attempt to challenge parents' views of themselves and encourage them to realise that they had unfulfilled potential. In these programmes, the staff felt that helping parents to find paid work was a way of developing their confidence and their personal skills, and that this would be reflected in their relationships with their children. These programmes saw

no contradiction in the Sure Start philosophy of improving parenting capacity and encouraging parents to take paid work. As one programme manager described it:

> *"I think a lot of the people in the area are happy to go on with the benefit system. It's about talking to them and we say 'When the kids are older the benefit money is reduced right down, like when the kids leave school. It will be enough money for you only. Why don't you look into getting training, skills, qualifications and what not to carry you forward?' So that's the sort of thing."*

The lifelong learning programmes shared the view of the active and the quasi-ILM programmes that parents had unfulfilled potential. However, they concentrated on encouraging parents to spend the time before their children go to primary school in improving their skills. This would mean that when they were ready to go to work they would be in a position to get a better-paid and more responsible job. As one staff member put it:

> *"A lot of parents who come to me have got small children and they are on benefits, and I say to them 'Grab the training then, because then when they're ready to go to school and you're ready to go to work then it'll pay off.'"*

Both parents and SSLPs views were also influenced by parents' limited financial gains from working. Many programmes employed benefits advisors (or drop-in sessions for Jobcentre Plus or CAB advisors). In reality, parents who consulted the advisors rarely found that they would be better off in work. The kind of jobs that are readily available to them are in retail or childcare, neither of which has high wage rates. Even with childcare tax credit they have to make a significant contribution towards their childcare costs. These costs are high for children under school age. Only where childcare is provided by family members or is subsidised are many parents better off in work. This is discussed in Chapter 5. This prevailing attitude among both parents and programmes forms an important backdrop to their provision.

One programme (Programme H) was operating in an area where few children lived in workless households, but where local job opportunities were essentially low paid and low skilled (for both fathers and mothers). Programme staff were concerned that parents in low paid work did not have the opportunity to progress. They were familiar with the evidence relating family incomes to outcomes for children. They felt that although most families in the area had at least one parent in paid work, this was not in itself enough to remove family poverty and they felt that only focusing the target on worklessness alone underestimated the scale of the challenge facing families. However, there are few sources of funding available for training for people who are already working.

4.4 ACTIVITIES DELIVERED BY ALL OR MOST PROGRAMMES

4.4.1 Confidence building

All programmes reported that parents have high support needs, at least initially, and often need their confidence boosting before they are ready to tackle the kind of

training and job opportunities that are available locally. As one member of staff described it:

> *"There are two groups of people. First, there are the ones who are ready and confident, and second, the ones who lack self-esteem and confidence. The health visitor plays a pivotal role in preparing people who are not yet ready to go out in the community to gain some confidence and overcome their fears. Sometimes it has taken three years to just get people to come out of the house to join in some activities with their child… This is also an issue for employment, as there is no way that these people can hold a job. Confidence, self-esteem, and aspirations all need to be raised first."*

Programmes took two broad approaches to confidence building. The quasi-ILM programmes and some of the active programmes took the view that parents' confidence would be boosted by actually doing a job. The programmes encouraged parents to give work a try. They had support systems in place, but based them on the philosophy that doing something real was likely to boost confidence more than anything else.

The second, and most common, approach to confidence building was to take parents forward by gentle steps. Some of the active and quasi-ILM programmes were pursuing this strategy in parallel with the direct approach. Most of the other programmes, including some of the passive and disengaged programmes, were also pursuing this strategy.

The first step in this approach was to encourage them to try and learn something new – aromatherapy, nail painting, birthday cake decoration or baby massage were common subjects in confidence building strategies. Having discovered that they could master new skills, parents were then encouraged to move onto more challenging subjects. Often these included courses which were actually labelled as confidence building. However, all the programmes holding these courses stressed that there had to be some initial gain in confidence and self-esteem before parents could admit that they needed further training to boost their confidence. Having developed their confidence, parents moved onto some of the activities that were more closely related to work (discussed below), or moved onto some of the opportunities available from other providers in the area (discussed in chapter 3). As one programme manager described it:

> *"When you get somebody coming in through the door it's a bit scary to say to them 'Well actually this is going to lead to employment'. So it's very low key to begin with. Even the parents and toddlers, that very often is the first step that people take, and then you introduce the courses. So we do accredited and non accredited courses."*

4.4.2 Training parents to take part in management of the programme

One of the key activities that takes place in most Sure Start local programmes is training parents to take part in the management of the Sure Start local programme itself. All programmes are required to have parents on the management board, and

most of them offer training to parents to enable them to play an effective role in meetings, and to equip them to take part in activities such as recruitment of staff.

The length and complexity of the training varies. One programme we visited had introduced a specially developed training course which lasted a year, with the view that this was a one-off investment in the development of the programme. However, they had recognised that this might not be the most appropriate approach. There was inevitable turnover in the parents who were involved in management. This is partly because children reach the age of four and move out of the Sure Start eligibility range, and partly because parents move into paid work and no longer have time to take an active part in the management of the programme. The general approach is to have modules in taking part in meetings, recruiting staff and general management.

In fact SSLPs frequently told us that parents who have done board member training have developed both skills and confidence and have used these as a stepping stone to paid employment (sometimes with the programme, sometimes outside it) and to further education and training (including in some cases, to higher education). These outcomes were initially regarded as accidental (and sometimes as unfortunate, since it meant that the investment in training was "wasted" and the programme would have to train a new group of parents to take part in the management of the programme). However, since the addition of the target to reduce the number of children in workless households, programmes have come to see that this wastage is actually positive.

One programme has in place an induction programme for board volunteers, which includes development days to tackle: breaking barriers, getting rid of jargon, minutes, and format of meetings. It also holds pre-board meetings for parents only to look at the agenda for the meeting and the minutes of the previous meeting and talk about it. The chair of the board is a local parent who has now trained as a childminder. The confidence she gained from her experience on the board led her to opportunities for training and employment.

It can sometimes be a challenge to engage parents with management training. One SSLP initially had nobody turn up when they first offered training for members of their parents' forum. They then rethought their strategy and finally managed to get together twelve parents, using a new training approach and provider. They were then using the success of these twelve as a way of encouraging others within the community to engage with training. The programme is currently looking at training parents for the management committee. This would include the role of minute taking, the role of chairman, etc. They have decided to approach this sideways on. The programme is aiming to train parents in how to use a computer, and to progress to designing and writing a newsletter for other parents, and from there move to management training.

4.4.3 Training volunteers

Not all the programmes we visited used parents as volunteers, but those which did generally offered them training. This usually covered first aid and child protection together with specific training directed towards the activities the volunteers would be doing. Some of the programmes in the study used Home Start to organise their

home visiting on a volunteer basis, and in these programmes Home Start trained these volunteers.

It is common for parents who start as volunteers to subsequently seek work with the Sure Start local programme (either in an administrative role in the office, or in a front-line role working in a crèche or with families). They use their training and experience as volunteers as a stepping-stone to employment.

> ***Example:*** **Home Start training for volunteers**
>
> Volunteers cannot be matched with families until they have been trained. The training lasts for forty hours in total and takes place one day a week over ten weeks. The training covers the ethos of Home Start, the boundaries of the volunteer role, child protection, child development and equal opportunities. The training tries to prepare volunteers for the unexpected. It therefore covers issues such as domestic violence and how to handle situations in which they might feel uncomfortable.
>
> Home Start also evaluate trainees' suitability to work with families, do a police check and a health check and take up two references.

One programme runs a one-year Community Volunteer course during which parents are able to shadow any employee in the programme. The shadowing experience is also available to any parent who is interested in a training course but would like to see whether they really like it (for example by shadowing a crèche worker, before embarking on a childcare course). Parents have shadowed a wide range of staff in the programme and partner agencies, including midwives. One parent who has followed the course has just been employed on a part-time basis.

4.4.4 Signposting

Almost all programmes provided notices and leaflets about education and training opportunities and about programmes and initiatives designed to help people into work. In the disengaged programmes making information available was as far as things went. In the passive programmes programme staff might help parents to find out more, or might make telephone calls on their behalf, but they did not attempt to influence what the other organisations provided. They might also help parents to find childcare for the times they were attending college.

The lifelong learning, quasi-ILM and active programme staff provided active encouragement and support to parents to take advantage of these opportunities with other providers. Some examples of the kind of activities in more active programmes are given in chapter 3.

In active, quasi-ILM and lifelong learning programmes, all programme staff had a role in signposting parents towards the training or employment opportunities that were available locally, either by referring people to the specialist advisors working within the programme, or by generally promoting the activities supported by the programme. This was one of the key differences with the passive and disengaged programmes, where front line staff other than specialists were not actively engaged in promoting either training or employment opportunities. Rather they focused exclusively on parenting and health issues.

4.4.5 Advice sessions

Most of the Sure Start local programmes in our study had arranged for advisors to hold sessions at Sure Start centres or on play buses. Almost all programmes had sessions with benefit advisors where parents could either see the advisor by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Some of the more active programmes employed their own benefits advisors, and they generally held several sessions a week. One programme reported that the benefits advisor regularly saw up to 70 parents a week. Other programmes had visits from benefits advisors from other organisations (mainly Jobcentre Plus or the Citizens' Advice Bureau).

Other advisors included for example careers advisors funded sometimes by the programme itself, sometimes by another organisation, and in one case by the European Social Fund.

4.5 TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Virtually all Sure Start local programmes offer training courses that are specifically related to parenting such as healthy eating, parent and toddler classes etc. Some of these were accredited, but others were not. These courses tend to be part of parenting support rather than addressing the employability issue, and they are not considered in this report.

Sure Start local programmes with a lifelong learning or quasi-ILM focus placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of giving parents opportunities to develop skills in a wide range of fields, both vocational and non-vocational. SSLPs are able to run courses with group sizes which are smaller than those which are considered viable by colleges or the Learning and Skills Council. This allows them to be more flexible about responding to expressed wishes than other providers are able to be.

Many of the parents we spoke to during the course of the study were those who were engaged in learning. Most of them had had poor experiences at school. They had often been disaffected and had gained few qualifications. Sure Start had given them the opportunity to learn new skills and to gain qualifications at a time when they could see that they needed some qualifications to improve their job prospects. Sure Start had both raised their horizons and given them the confidence to move forward.

SSLPs that were providing a wide range of training opportunities stressed the importance of providing learning opportunities in small chunks. Parents were unlikely to commit themselves to a course lasting a year or more (even if only one or two sessions a week) from the start. Typically they offered a taster session in a particular subject, and then moved onto an introductory course with weekly sessions over about six weeks. Parents who wanted to progress were then offered a second short course, and gradually built up from there.

***Example:* A child development tutor describes how parents progress:**

"When they first come we get a lot of negative vibes coming out of them like 'Oh I'm not bright enough, I'm not clever enough to do this'. We always say 'Yes you are', and give them a lot of confidence building exercises and they always make me laugh because part of module A is that they have to make an educational activity for a child under 5. We give them this right at the beginning and they say 'Oh I can't do this' and at the end they produce some fantastic toys and activities. They have to plan what they have to do, give it to a child, make the child play with it and evaluate what's gone on whilst the child's played with it. They do it, and they do it very well. I haven't had anyone yet who has not managed to do it. Their confidence has grown throughout the ten weeks so by the time they've completed module A they're raring to do module B, and by the time they get to the end of module C they say 'What other courses can we do?'"

A parent in another programme described how the process had worked for her:

> "*First off, I did a parenting course given by [Training Coordinator] and made friends with other people who were mums on their own in the same boat as me. I enjoyed it so much I did it again and started to help out other parents on the course. After that I began to help out at the centre, organising trips and stuff. I then went on a counselling course and [a confidence building course]. Now I'm doing a course in office administration which lasts a year, and a computer course. I've had to do exams for the first time since I left school. I was petrified, but I managed to do it. I am also doing the Community Volunteers course shadowing [the parent participation officer] for four hours a week for a year."*

This parent now works for ten hours a week at the programme as a training administrator. Peer support, which this parent mentioned, was identified as an important element in Sure Start training courses by tutors, training co-ordinators and parents. This is discussed more fully in chapter 3.

4.5.1 Basic skills and ESOL

Many of the SSLPs we visited offered basic skills and courses in English for those for whom it was not a first language. These courses contributed to improving parents' employability, but they also helped the parents in their daily lives, for example in dealing with doctors and following instructions on children's medication. Funding for these courses is available from the Learning and Skills Council. In two cases we interviewed ESOL tutors, one in an area with a high proportion of non-English speakers, and another in an area where they were in a very small minority and were very isolated. Both argued that the courses provided social support to parents by giving them the opportunity to meet others in a position similar to their own, as well as improving their English skills.

As we discuss above in the section on engaging parents, encouraging parents to take part in basic skills courses can be difficult. One partner agency offers a "softly, softly" approach and provides incentives for those attending their courses. This includes a free crèche, free lunch, and free gifts. Initially, parents might enrol on the course because they can have a free lunch but they soon discover that they can learn something. It is the organisation's way of getting people into the programme

which usually runs for 10 weeks. In addition, they run taster sessions initially, and then gradually move parents on to the ten-week programme.

4.5.2 Introduction to IT

Introductory IT courses were also common. All the lifelong learning programmes offered them, as did many of the others, either themselves, or via UK Online or LearnDirect. Typically these courses cover very basic skills such as cutting and pasting and entering data in spreadsheets. Some courses then moved on to cover email and using the internet. Parents were particularly keen to learn these latter skills and one parent expressed frustration that these had not been covered in her course. Those who had older children who had learned these skills at school wanted to be able to understand what their children were doing.

4.5.3 CV writing and interview preparation

Again, many of the programmes we visited, including some of the passive and disengaged programmes, offered courses in CV writing and preparing for job interviews. Often these were extensions to confidence building courses in that they were part of encouraging parents to look at their strengths rather than their weaknesses, and to both think of themselves and present themselves in a stronger light.

4.5.4 "Leisure" courses

Leisure courses were an important part of Sure Start local programmes' strategies in building parents' confidence and encouraging them to engage in learning (and to engage with the programme more generally). Parents often regarded these courses as a break from their families and a way of spending time with other adults pursuing an activity that related to themselves as adults rather than as parents. Thus, the courses also served a respite function.

Among the courses we found on offer were:

- aromatherapy
- nail painting
- toy making
- cake decorating
- making Christmas decorations
- keep fit
- sewing
- salsa
- yoga
- head massage

The courses were extremely popular with parents as an activity in their own right. Programmes regarded them as an important way of attracting parents to come into the centre and get involved with the programmes' other activities, particularly those related to improving parenting skills. Tutors and learning co-ordinators found that they were a way of encouraging parents to build their confidence in their ability to

learn new skills. In communities where husbands were hostile to their wives engaging in outside activities these leisure classes were often seen as permissible activities.

4.5.5 Training course directories and menus

The lifelong learning (and to some extent the quasi-ILM) programmes were distinguished by the extensive range of training courses they had on offer. Typically these programmes offered access to and information about thirty or more education and training opportunities.

The programmes started by asking parents what kind of courses they would like to see (sometimes with a list of suggestions as a starting point). Programmes often had a survey of all parents early on in the programme's life, and then supplemented this with questionnaires for new parents, which were distributed by or completed with home visitors or other programme staff. From these wish lists programmes developed course menus or directories which were distributed to all programmes.

Menus and directories were slightly different. Directories typically included a wide range of mainstream courses from other providers, while menus were usually confined to courses organised by the SSLP itself. In all the programmes offering a menu, parents were asked to indicate which particular courses they would like to do in the near future, and once a minimum number of parents signed up for a particular course, then it would be provided. Thus, some courses (for example cake making or toy making) were very popular and were run on a regular basis, while others were run less frequently once the numbers were sufficient.

4.6 EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING CO-ORDINATORS

Employment and training co-ordinators played an important role in both providing individual advice and support to parents, but also in acting as the key links between SSLPs and other organisations. In essence the role of employment co-ordinators is very similar to that of Jobcentre Plus and similar personal advisers. They provide individually tailored support and advice to parents and help them link with other agencies. Their role is discussed more fully in Section 3.9 above.

Training co-ordinators had roles that were more firmly embedded in the mainstream of the SSLP and its work, as they generally organised training related to parenting and health as well as employment-related and leisure courses.

4.7 EMPLOYING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

As we have discussed in chapter 1, two programmes in our study took a quasi-ILM approach and made job opportunities with the programme itself the centrepiece of their strategy towards promoting the employability of parents. Four other programmes, which were classified in other categories because they offered a range

of activities, also gave priority to the employment of community members within the programme.

There is no doubt that employing community members represents a challenge to Sure Start local programmes, and that overcoming the challenge requires both commitment and effort. The four main challenges are:

- Community members' lack of relevant qualifications or experience
- Lack of experience among community members of the behaviours and disciplines required in paid work
- The recruitment policies of the parent body (typically a local authority or a health trust) prevent priority being given to people living in a particular geographical area
- Concerns about confidentiality when workers drawn from the community acquire information about families in the course of their work

As one programme manager explained:

> *"There are some issues around the employment of local parents. Locally employed parents are approached by local residents with the understanding that they have all the answers. Then there are issues around targets and confidentiality procedures, key competences and supervision of parents, as well as mainstreaming the issues of employing local people."*

While another argued that it was easy to underestimate the greater challenge involved in employing local people:

> *"You have to be aware of the challenges and issues that you are confronted with when employing local people. You need to bear in mind that you might be working with an ethnically diverse group of people and that they may require different types of support. Local people generally need an increased support system compared to fully skilled employees. Then there are the issues around boundary setting: both the community and the workers need to be aware of this. You also have to familiarise local people who have never worked before with normal work ethics such as turning up on time and on a regular basis. A lot of training and time has to be invested in the employment of local parents and it also means that you have to take risks, be controversial. The local authority bureaucracy doesn't allow you to employ local parents so you might just have to work around it."*

Most SSLPs come up against either the lack of qualifications or the parent body's equal opportunities policy and then leave it at that. Their commitment is to provide services using people with appropriate skills and experience, and community members do not fit that profile. They are therefore not employed within the programme.

However, other SSLPs take the view that a central part of their purpose is to strengthen the local community, and that part of that strengthening process is to try and employ local people. This serves three purposes:

- It increases the level of income available within the community
- It helps to build community capacity by improving the skills base

- It gives the community a stronger sense of ownership over the programme

These programmes take the view that none of the three key barriers is insurmountable, and they develop strategies to overcome them. Broadly speaking, the strategies they adopt are:

- To scrutinise jobs very carefully to see how they could be reconfigured to maximise the opportunities available to those without professional qualifications
- To provide more support to community members through the application process, including pre-application training and help with completing forms
- To create jobs within the programme which offer flexible employment patterns in terms of hours of work
- To negotiate with those responsible for the parent body's equal opportunities policy to ensure that they are able to give priority to local applicants
- To develop confidentiality procedures so that workers understand that information about families is not to be shared with others in the community, and sometimes by ensuring that families do not have to deal with a Sure Start worker who they know

One of the two quasi-ILM programmes stressed that from the beginning the programme has placed strong emphasis on employing local people. In order to achieve this the programme had to negotiate with the lead body to bypass their equal opportunities procedures. The local college provided pre-application coaching for local people in how to apply for jobs and how to present yourself.

The programme has developed special pay scales that reflect the fact that local applicants might initially have no qualifications or work experience. They have also divided jobs into bite-sized packages rather than having them all full-time. They have since negotiated with the lead body to be able to offer local people working on a casual or sessional basis the opportunity to move onto fixed-term part-time contracts.

They have devised a flexible training package with modules and options to meet the needs of different individuals. Almost all the programme's staff are from the local community. They do a range of jobs including outreach, childcare, and family support. But once recruited and having received initial training, all programme staff are expected to achieve the same professional standard, whatever their route into the job. The programme seeks to demystify professionals and break down the barriers between professionally qualified and unqualified staff. The aim is to recognise people's contributions based on what they actually achieve, rather than what their qualifications are. Professionalism in outreach requires being good at engaging with families and what they need. It does not necessarily require a community healthcare qualification. But qualified and unqualified staff are expected to reach the same standards of performance. Giving priority to local people in employment is not about short-changing families.

The programme tries to ensure that all the training they offer leads towards NVQs which can be used in subsequent employment, in recognition that the programme's funding will eventually disappear.

The other quasi-ILM programme followed a similar approach. They held a recruitment open day for people living in the relevant postcode areas and talked people through the skills they were looking for in a relaxed and informal way. They changed the terminology used in job descriptions. Instead of "You will be responsible for procurement of equipment" they said "You will have to buy toys".

Following the formal advertising of the posts local applicants were helped to fill out the application forms. Only around three forms were correctly completed, so they decided in any case to have an informal interview with some of the other candidates who had no experience of work or how to fill an application in. (They have since developed a checklist of required attributes which parents can complete.) Some then decided the job was not for them, while others were interviewed formally and recruited on the basis that they would understand the needs of people with young families living in the area.

The next difficulty was concerned with obtaining references and some degree of flexibility was required. Some people had never worked, and did not know whom to approach. If candidates had been involved previously with health workers, play workers or were enrolled in English classes, then these people often acted as referees. Police checks, too, posed a barrier as some parents did not have a passport, birth certificate or drivers licence. Those who lacked these documents were only able to work in posts that did not require unsupervised access to children. Seven people then entered the initial training programme which was aimed at open college qualifications. As one of the trainers said:

> *"It was challenging for all of us and it was challenging for some just on the basis of being employed, having to be somewhere at that particular time and you have to be committed and you can't leave till then and that was quite difficult for some. Also the issue of maybe having been for quite a while on benefits and then trying to be in an employment basis with juggling the finance and housing benefit and things like that. . . . But it worked because we had six complete."*

One of the initial six was on maternity leave but the other five were still working with the programme and were heading towards their second set of qualifications. The programme now employs 30 new staff, of whom half are community members.

In order to tackle the confidentiality issue one of the two quasi-ILM programmes had adopted the policy that families did not have to accept a Sure Start worker they knew (although some parents wanted this), and staff similarly could choose not to work with parents they already knew.

4.8 WORK WITH EMPLOYERS

Very few programmes have done any work with local employers. Sometimes they have tried to work with a new employer opening in their area, but without success. One programme had a new factory making supplies for babies open in the area, but the factory would not liaise either with the SSLP or with the Jobcentre over the recruitment of new employees. One employment co-ordinator had tried visiting local

employers to encourage them to structure more of their jobs into part-time posts, which were more attractive to parents than full-time work, but she reported limited success.

The main exception was supermarkets. Four of our twenty-five programmes had new major supermarkets which had recently opened either within the programme area, or very close to it. In all cases this had provided an important set of new job opportunities for Sure Start parents (both fathers and mothers), particularly for mothers who wanted to work part-time. In most cases either the SSLP itself, or another local organisation the programme collaborated with, liaised with the supermarket to ensure that parents had the opportunity for interviews and for trial placements, where they were available. The SSLPs provided crèches for parents who were being interviewed or having work trials.

4.9 MORE UNUSUAL APPROACHES

Some active and lifelong learning programmes have thought hard about the barriers to work faced by parents and have tried to develop more original solutions to address some of them. One has established parent self-help groups, which meet for social support, but if they decide as a group they want training, then this is taken forward with the group. Several have recognised that references can be a problem for people who have not worked for some time (or even since leaving school.) The programmes will provide people with references based on their contact with the programme, or will encourage parents to seek references from other key figures in the community with whom they have been in contact, such as children's head teachers.

One programme has developed a Back to Work Pack. This recognises that people who have not been working for some time often need quite personal help to ease the transition into work and attending interviews. The pack has a male and female version and is a clear plastic sports bag containing

- soap and flannel
- deodorant
- brush and comb
- alarm clock (to make sure they get up on time)
- calculator
- tie (for men)
- nail grooming kit
- hairdressing voucher

One programme collaborates with a business advisor (who gives his time for free) and holds some funds to enable people to set up their own business. For example, a local parent with a three year old wanted to make party decorations at home. Another wanted to set up a translation business. The business advisor worked with them and helped them to write business plans and fill in the forms to apply for the funding. This went to the parents' forum for decision, and the members of the parents' forum received some training on business start-ups, and how to assess a business plan. Both businesses were awarded £1,000. The Business advisor also

helps applicants to make contacts with other agencies who support the business in the community. The programme aims to help around four people a year to set up businesses.

Another SSLP is currently exploring the possibility of finding a way to develop recognised NVQ qualifications which pull together both the life experience and the learning experience of parents into an accredited package which shows what they are capable of doing. For instance, if someone has developed the skills to negotiate how to deal with debt they could apply these skills in another context if they had some means of showing that they had achieved a particular level of competence. Similarly, working as volunteer in the vegetable co-op run by the programme also provides valuable experience which is useful in other contexts.

What these ideas have in common is a recognition that a one size fits all approach will not work with Sure Start parents. There is now a substantial body of research evidence (see Meadows 2004 forthcoming for a review of some of this) to show that people with multiple disadvantages need support from a range of different agencies if they are to be able to move into work. Not everyone living in a Sure Start area is disadvantaged as an individual, but having poor qualifications and being a lone parent, or not speaking English well are relatively common, and these have a strong influence on someone's ability to integrate into work (see Berthoud 2003).

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF CHILDCARE IN HELPING SURE START PARENTS INTO WORK

5.1 KEY POINTS FROM THIS CHAPTER

- Only a minority of the Sure Start local programmes in the study were providing childcare for working parents, or had any plans to do so.
- One of the key reasons for this is that parents in Sure Start local programme areas are often reluctant to use non-family day care for their children. There is therefore a general lack of demand for formal childcare places.
- This is consistent with previous research evidence that parents want work that they can organise around their families and childcare needs rather than choosing a job and finding childcare to fit with it
- Another problem is the cost of childcare for children under school age. Many parents found that even after taking tax credits into account, they would not be better off working once they had paid their childcare costs
- Only one of the SSLPs in the study gave priority to high childcare subsidies for working parents, however, it was concerned about the level of subsidy involved and the nursery's long-term viability.
- Providing childcare for parents while they are attending education or training sessions is one of the most important contributions that SSLPs make to improving the employability of parents, because the childcare enables them to develop their skills
- Around half the SSLPs in the study offered childcare training, often with a view to staffing future childcare provision, but some programmes had reservations about encouraging parents to enter low paid employment

Good quality childcare for children under three which is suitable for working parents is expensive, and without subsidies is generally not affordable by parents living in Sure Start areas who might want to work. This is coupled with a reluctance to leave their children with other people and a desire to have part-time jobs that fit around their children. Many parents would rather spend time with their children while they

are young, and programme staff often support them in this and reinforce their reluctance to take paid work. As we have discussed in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 1, these attitudes are strongly embedded in local culture, and are felt as moral values which are central to motherhood.

Childcare for training courses did, however, play a crucial role in parents' ability to improve their skills, and was highly valued. This care was usually sessional for a few hours a week and parents felt comfortable with this. It did not conflict with their responsibilities as mothers, and generally was on the same premises as the courses that they were doing. They were therefore on hand if their children needed them.

5.2 CHILDCARE FOR WORKING PARENTS IN SSLPS

Parents (or more accurately in reality, mothers) living in Sure Start local programme areas are constrained in their ability to work, and in their choice of job, by the presence of young children, for whom they either have to care themselves or find substitute care while they are at work. Thus, in terms of tackling the barriers to work faced by parents the provision of childcare by Sure Start local programmes might be expected to play a crucial role. Our study concentrated on the provision of childcare which was intended to help parents to work (or to attend education or training courses). It did not cover the provision of early years education, playgroups, parent and toddler sessions, drop-ins or crèches, all of which were commonly found in Sure Start local programmes and are covered by the NESS themed evaluation on play, learning and childcare. Essentially our study considered the provision of day-care in nurseries and by registered childminders.

We found during the course of our study that that there was not a consensus either among the parents we spoke to or among managers and staff in SSLPs that greater availability of childcare is sufficient, necessary or even desirable as a means of enabling parents to take paid employment. Thus, although one programme had placed the provision of subsidised childcare for working parents at the centre of its strategy, provision in most was patchy, and in around a third of programmes few or no improvements had been made to the pre-existing quality and quantity of childcare.

One of the key reasons for this is that daycare for children under four is expensive to provide and fixed costs are high. SSLPs reported that existing childcare providers in their areas were often finding it difficult to remain financially viable. This is in line with the findings of the recent report by the National Audit Office that around half of all childcare businesses are not financially viable in the longer term (National Audit Office 2004). Staff costs typically represent over 60 per cent of total costs. This means that the filling of one or two marginal places determines whether a nursery will break even or make a large loss. Moreover, the National Audit Office found that these problems tend to be worse in lower income areas (which SSLP areas are) because childcare providers are less likely to be able to charge higher fees to cover contingencies or to insist that parents make a long-term commitment.

The Sure Start local programmes in our study also remained unconvinced that there was a significant demand for childcare among the parents in their areas. They

reported that while parents welcomed respite childcare sessions, and crèches for training courses and other activities they were undertaking as adults, they did not want full daycare places. As we discuss in Chapter 4 above, there is a strong preference among parents who would like paid work for part-time work. But the provision of part-time childcare places can be even more problematic than providing full-time places. Parents can only be charged by the hour or the half day, while many of the costs remain fixed. Moreover, a child attending for half a day may take up a place in the morning, say, which could otherwise be filled by a child attending for the whole day, and paying a full fee. Thus, although there may be a demand for part-time childcare places, these are often prohibitively expensive to provide in the absence of a strong base of children attending full-time who can cover the fixed costs.

5.3 RESEARCH EVIDENCE ABOUT CHILDCARE USE AMONG LOW INCOME FAMILIES

The reports from SSLPs that there was little demand for childcare were not entirely surprising. It is true that extensive research evidence during the 1990s found that the availability (or non-availability) of suitable, affordable and accessible childcare was an important factor in whether or not mothers (particularly lone mothers) were in paid employment (see for example the work of Bradshaw and Millar 1991; Holterman 1993; Callender et al 1997; Millar and Ridge 2001). However, research which probes for the true meaning underlying parents' statements about the lack of childcare, has often revealed that the real position is more complex, and that cost and availability are not necessarily the only factors in parents' choices. As we discuss in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, attitudes towards childcare are also shaped by the meaning attached to motherhood and to the choice of paid work by mothers of young children. As we saw in Chapter 1, most of the areas included in our study were characterised by a strong emphasis on women's role as homemakers rather than as workers. This local culture often leads to an ambivalent attitude towards allowing others (particular people from outside the immediate family) to look after children, particularly those who are not yet at school. This is partly an issue of trust, but it is also a question of individual and community attitudes about what is appropriate (Ford 1996; Finch and Gloyer 2000; Holloway 1998b; Duncan and Edwards 1999; Himmelweit and Sigala 2002).

Thus, even mothers who choose to take paid employment often place restrictions on the type of alternative care that they are prepared to use and the length of time they are prepared to use it for. In particular, rather than find a job and then make childcare arrangements that fit in with that job, parents who are looking for work tend to seek job opportunities which are compatible with the amount and nature of non-parental care that they are prepared to use for their children (Marsh 2001; Millar and Ridge 2001).

These reservations are also apparent in the choice of childcare provider by those who have paid employment. Informal childcare by family members and friends is the preferred choice of the majority of parents. In part this reflects the fact that it is generally free or available for a small charge. But the research evidence suggests that even if formal care were to be free a majority of parents would still prefer

informal care because they feel more comfortable with it and are confident that their children are secure. This preference is particularly strong in the case of grandparents. (Woodland et al 2002; La Valle et al 2000; Finlayson et al 1996; Marsh et al 2001; Thompson 1995; Bryson et al 1998, Ford 1996.) Among couple parents where both work, grandparents provide the care for more than six out of ten families. Among lone parents who have paid work 55 per cent of those working full time and 64 per cent of those working part time use grandparents for their childcare (Woodland et al 2002).

Research evidence shows that the use of formal childcare for children under five (that is mainly nurseries and registered childminders) is concentrated among higher income groups. This is illustrated in table 5.1 below. Although cost is likely to be part of the explanation, attitudes towards childcare use are also important. Parents' reservations about the use of formal care, particularly childminders, tend to focus on their feelings about the safety and wellbeing of their children, and a reluctance to leave their children with people they perceive to be strangers (Ford 1996; Ford and Millar 1998; Millar and Ridge 2001; Halliday and Little 2001; Dean and Shah 2002; Land 2002; Holloway 1998b). However, the use of formal childcare by lower income groups has been increasing recently, but very slowly (Woodland et al 2002).

Table 5.1: Usage of formal childcare* by age of child and income group (percentage of all children in each income/age group)

	0 to 2 yrs	**3 to 4 yrs**
Income up to £20,800	9.2	20.3
Income above £20,800	29.2	40.6

Source: Corlyon and Meadows (2004) based on Parents' Demand for Childcare Survey 1999

Note: * Formal childcare consists of registered childminders, nurseries and crèches and out of school provision. It excludes early education without childcare.

There is some evidence that parents who are unenthusiastic about the use of formal childcare often have only limited knowledge about the nature, availability and costs of formal care. Several of the programmes in our study reported that an important part of the function of childcare co-ordinators and childminder network organisers employed by SSLPs is to introduce parents to childminders and others who provide non-family day-care in order to dispel some of the negative myths that surround them.

5.4 THE GENERAL APPROACH TO CHILDCARE PROVISION BY SURE START LOCAL PROGRAMMES

Thus, the context in which Sure Start local programmes are operating, with predominantly low income families who are likely to have strong reservations about the use of non-family childcare, means that the mere provision of new childcare places by Sure Start local programmes is unlikely to be sufficient on its own to remove the barriers to parents finding and keeping work.

In order for childcare to contribute to employability it needs to meet other criteria as well. In particular, it must be convenient, it must be both wanted and trusted by the parent, and it must be affordable. In practice, none of the twenty-five programmes in our study had found that the *provision* of childcare provided a solution to the needs of working parents without intervention on the other aspects. Moreover, most of the programmes in our study, including several which took either an active or a lifelong learning approach, had taken no active steps to increase the availability of childcare, either because they believed existing provision was adequate, or because they had found or believed that the level of *demand* for day-care from parents was too low for them to justify increasing the supply.

5.4.1 Nurseries

The Sure Start local programmes included in our study varied markedly in the amount and type of childcare that was in place before the programme came into existence, and the extent to which they planned to provide more. However, the most common pattern was for there to be no day-care available currently and none planned. Ten of our twenty-five programmes had no nursery day-care places available to parents in the area, and also had no plans to provide any. One of our programmes was in a rural area where generating sufficient demand for a nursery was not feasible. But the other programmes in urban areas generally took the view that the provision of day-care was not a priority for the programme, not least because it was expensive to provide and there was no demand from parents. Most parents who were looking for work in the immediate future were seeking part-time work and did not want full day-care places for their children. This reflects the findings of earlier research discussed above.

One programme manager summarised the position starkly:

> *"There is a strong ethos among the community that you should not pay for childcare. Usually, children are left with family and/or friends, and you often see older children pushing prams, taking care of younger ones. You first have to break this culture, and get parents used to leaving their children with someone that is paid for this. We are strongly pushed to provide childcare, but this is a major resource which needs to be paid for. It has to be sustainable over the future, and parents need to be made aware that they have to pay for it. A lot of the time parents just want to leave their children somewhere for a few hours to have some time to themselves. Childcare also needs to be affordable. Their £30 WFTC may need to go on childcare, so that they do not gain financially from working. Quality childcare is expensive".*

In four of the areas in our study there were existing nurseries, but they were struggling to fill their places, and the programmes therefore took the view that providing additional places in the area would only add to the problem. Sometimes the EYDCP actively discouraged the programmes from providing any additional day-care places because this would threaten the viability of existing providers. In one of the four areas a new private Neighbourhood Nursery had recently opened, but Sure Start parents regarded it as "posh" and unaffordable. But "poshness" was not the only problem. Other programmes found a reluctance on the part of parents to use existing local authority provision. In one area there was a social services day nursery, but it did not offer full day-care places as there was no demand for them. The programme manager believed that this might have been due to parents' perception that the nursery was for "problem families" which meant that they were reluctant for their children to go there.

These four programmes illustrate the point that childcare does not just have to be available, it has to be accessible physically and psychologically, and it has to be affordable. Parents need to be able to believe that the childcare which is available is suitable for their children and for others like them.

Four programmes had good existing day-care facilities which were available to and used by parents from the Sure Start local programme area. In two of these areas an additional new nursery was planned. For instance, in one large urban area there was both day nursery provision and a number of childminders, with a new children's centre planned which would offer more daycare places. In the other two cases there were no plans for further provision. In one of these, in another large urban area, there was a wide range of accessible and affordable nursery provision largely provided and supported by the local authority (although even here, there were few places for children under the age of eighteen months and few childminders).

In seven areas, where the existing childcare facilities were either non-existent or limited, there were new nurseries which had either recently opened or were about to do so shortly. Most of these were supported under the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative. Thus, with the two programmes that were extending existing provision, around a third of the Sure Start local programmes in our study had developed nursery day-care suitable for and aimed at working parents. Two-thirds had not done so. Since the majority of the programmes in the study were selected on the basis that they were active in pursuing the employability agenda, it is unlikely that a higher proportion of all Sure Start local programmes will be providing additional full-time nursery places.

5.4.2 Childminders

Only two SSLPs reported that there was an adequate supply of childminders in the area, and that no further activity was planned. Another programme which already had a relatively large number of registered childminders was nevertheless actively seeking to recruit more and to improve their skills, in order to increase the number of childcare places available for babies. In this area they already had a network of more than twenty childminders who were qualified to NVQ level III.

The rural programme in our study was also concentrating on recruiting and training childminders, as it was the only form of childcare which was potentially viable in the area. The programme had recruited a childminder network organiser and network members are inspected every six weeks to ensure that quality is improved and maintained. It has also adopted the strategy of asking childminders to run the ad hoc crèches for training courses and other events attended by parents. This means that the parents get to know the local childminders and learn to trust them to look after their children. This approach has the added advantage of making childminding more viable financially. There is a strong demand for after school childminder places in the area, but little demand for all day care for younger children. But childminders find it difficult to manage on after school fees alone, so without some income generation during the school day they tend to drop out of childminding, which exacerbates the problem of the lack of after school places.

Another three programmes also had a strategy to increase the number of childminders in the area. However, two-thirds of the SSLPs we visited did not have the recruitment of childminders as part of their strategy to help parents into work, either by having their own initiatives or by collaborating with the EYDCP and others involved in the recruitment of childminders.

5.4.3 Trust

Several Sure Start local programmes where formal childcare use was low have adopted a strategy aimed at promoting greater trust in formal childcare providers. If this succeeds then they may consider developing more provision because it might then be used.

One SSLP has adopted an emphasis on quality. This means that all playgroups are Ofsted[6] registered, and the ratio of children to workers is limited. All nursery nurses are trained. Childminders and nursery nurses visit parents before the birth of their baby and aim to strike up a relationship. This builds trust and confidence in parents so that later, when they come to leave their children with them, they are not strangers but are known and trusted.

In another area the SSLP is encouraging relatives who are providing informal childcare to register as childminders. This both makes them eligible for payment (discussed further below) but also removes some of the lack of knowledge on the part of parents around childminders and their work. Parents will become more familiar with childminding generally through their contact with informal carers who have registered, with the idea that this will break down resistance to the use of childminders within the community.

More generally, one of the key functions of childcare co-ordinators where they are employed by SSLPs is to bridge the trust divide between parents and childcare providers. They introduce parents to childminders, but they also explain to them what they can do, and what sort of training they receive.

[6] Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department whose main aim is to help improve the quality and standards of education and childcare through independent inspection and regulation, and provide advice to the Secretary of State.

One problem is that parents who are anxious about whether their children will settle and be happy with the new arrangements rarely have a chance to try them out before committing themselves both to a job and to a childcare arrangement (Ford 1996; Holloway 1998a, 1998b). One of the programmes in the study was in one of the areas selected for the childcare taster pilots which are part of the New Deal for Lone Parents. Under this arrangement a parent can try out a childcare arrangement for up to a week before committing herself to a new job or to the childcare.

5.4.4 Cost and affordability

A recurring theme throughout the study was the issue of the cost and affordability of childcare. This is a general issue and is not confined to Sure Start local programmes. As we discuss above, good quality childcare requires high levels of staffing by qualified people. This is expensive to deliver. This in turn means that parents moving into work that is not well paid may not be able to afford the cost of formal care, and instead rely on informal care, particularly family members and friends.

One of the SSLPs in our study had chosen to subsidise childcare for working parents. In all the other cases childcare was available to parents in the Sure Start area on the same terms as it was to other parents. In one of our programme areas there was extensive provision by the local authority, which was already subsidised. Some of the newer provision available to Sure Start parents, particularly Neighbourhood Nurseries, was receiving some initial subsidy, which would enable them to reduce their charges below the full economic cost. But the general principle was that parents who wanted childcare to enable them to work had to pay the full cost. Moreover, where some childcare is provided free for children whose parents are not working, this can be withdrawn when a parent gets a job. We came across the case of a parent whose child's place in a social services nursery was withdrawn when she got a job because this implied that the child was no longer "in need". (The SSLP childcare co-ordinator managed to get the decision reversed, but it took some effort on her part to convince social services that without the childcare the parent would not be able to take the job she had been offered, so the child would continue to be eligible for a free place.)

In essence Sure Start local programmes can provide childcare places on standard terms where parents are charged the normal cost of the place, or they can provide a subsidy. There may be a partial subsidy, but parents are expected to pay the bulk of the costs. Most SSLPs were reluctant to provide high levels of subsidy because of the high cost of childcare compared with other services. To the extent to which they subsidise childcare for children whose parents are working (and are therefore better off than average for the area) they are unable to provide services that can be used by a larger number of children from the rest of the community (including more children from poorer families).

Although parents are eligible for the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (formerly Childcare Tax Credit) if they work for more than sixteen hours a week for modest wages, this only covers a maximum of 70 per cent of childcare costs, up to a maximum eligible cost of £135 a week for one child, or £200 a week for two or more children. A parent paying £135 a week (which is less than the typical cost of a

nursery place in London, although reasonable for much of the country) who received a maximum WTC childcare award would still have to pay £40 a week. Even a part-time nursery place costing say £80 a week would cost a parent £24 a week.

The most common jobs we found parents moving into were retail and childcare, with some taking front line and clerical jobs with the SSLPs themselves. The jobs were mainly part-time and typically had wage rates between £5 and £7 an hour. The residual cost of a part-time nursery place for one child generally eliminates all the potential financial gain from working for these parents. One of the parents we interviewed had seen a Benefits Adviser, and found out that if she started working now she would only be £1.20 a week better off after paying her childcare costs. She was therefore planning to wait until her youngest child was at least at nursery school for part of the day before looking for a job.

There are other aspects to affordability as well. For instance, many nurseries demand a month's payment in advance, while parents may only receive their pay a month in arrears. Thus, parents have to make a large cash payment before their WTC award has come through, while they often have other work-related expenses such as clothes and travel, and while they have little by way of savings. One of the SSLPs in our study was tackling this problem by means of one-off bursaries of up to £500 paid directly to the childcare provider, which parents can apply for when they start work. However, the total annual budget for the scheme is only £5,000. In another area a similar facility is available under the auspices of a local employment initiative with which the SSLP collaborates.

5.4.5 Examples of active approaches to childcare for working parents by Sure Start local programmes

Only a small minority of the twenty-five SSLPs we visited in the course of this study placed a high priority on the provision of high quality affordable childcare for parents who want to work. (However, most programmes provided childcare for parents taking education and training courses, and this is discussed in the next section.) In this section we review the approaches taken by three programmes which are emphasising the importance of childcare for parents who have jobs

Programme F places the greatest emphasis on childcare and has deliberately chosen to subsidise it at a cost of £175,000 a year, a major share of its overall budget. This is for a facility offering 27 places. Even taking account of part-time use, it is likely that fewer than 40 children in total are benefiting from the provision. Thus the SSLP subsidy is around £85 per child per week. This nursery was established under the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, which means that in addition to the SSLP subsidy it has received further setting up subsidies from this source as well. The nursery has undoubtedly been beneficial to the parents who actually use it. We interviewed three parents who were using the nursery and were very enthusiastic about the quality and affordability. The SSLP also reports that parents who want to work are now incorporating the nursery into their plans and are budgeting for the cost when they look for work. Some parents who had been leaving the children with relatives are now beginning to move their children to the nursery as they see the educational and social benefits for their children of attendance.

Example: **Childcare in Programme F**

In Programme F there is a belief that quality and affordable childcare is one of the key issues to moving parents into employment. Prior to the establishment of the Sure Start local programme there were two local authority nursery schools for three- and four-year old children, but no wraparound care and only one childminder. There was thus no childcare provision which was suitable for people who wanted their children cared for while they were at work.

The programme therefore established a day nursery with NNI funding with places for 27 children. The emphasis is on quality ("as good as what you would find in a more affluent area" in the Programme Manager's words). It is open from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm and places are available only to parents who are working, looking for jobs or on education or training courses.

The places are means-tested so that the more a parent earns the higher the contribution they make, with a low minimum charge of £1.20 a day. All payments have to be made within two weeks otherwise children are not allowed to come back. The cost to the SSLP is £175,000 a year, so that the programme is concerned that ensuring sustainability in the future will be a challenge.

Programme F Parents

Parent A returned to work as a classroom assistant working sixteen hours a week when her baby was three months old. The nursery workers visited her home to get to know the baby before she started at the nursery. The parent felt that her children experienced the same discipline they received at home when at the nursery. She also welcomed the fact that the nursery team gave her suggestions if she was unsure about how to deal with her children.

Parent B worked at the local hospital in a support role. While at work, she left her younger child in the nursery. Her older child was at nursery school in the afternoons and was looked after by a friend during the mornings. She was pregnant with her 3rd child when interviewed but planned to go back to work after the birth.

Parent C had started to look for work immediately after she registered with Sure Start, having secured the promise of a place for her child at the nursery when she started work. The parent now works for sixteen hours a week as a home care assistant. This is her first paid job as she had her first child 'straight from school' at age 16. In due course she hopes to move into full-time work. The parent likes her job, and in the future, she would like to work full-time.

Programme C has only recently started to focus on childcare. There are three NNI nurseries in the area or nearby. There are fifty places for the children of working parents, including twelve for children under two, although there is unmet need for baby places in the area. The SSLP is addressing this by encouraging childminders to provide more places for babies. There are twenty childminders qualified to NVQ level III who are part of the SSLP's childminder network. The programme has recently recruited a childcare co-ordinator to help parents find suitable childcare, and she supports them in seeking additional funding if they need it. The SSLP offers one-off bridging bursaries to parents who need to fund their childcare when they first start work or a training course.

Childcare co-ordinators were employed by several of the programmes we visited, and they play a crucial role in overcoming some of the barriers to childcare use which

has been found in previous research as discussed above. In particular, they tackle the gaps in parents' knowledge of the main childcare options open to them, and they build confidence and trust in registered childminders. They can also help parents in their negotiations with childcare providers, and with those who are providing funding.

Example: **A line manager describes the work of a childcare co-ordinator.**

"I think when we put [Helen] into post, we knew there was quite an unmet need about childcare, and that's why we wanted the project. I guess what we are realising is that there really are issues around childcare. I suppose it's particularly around supporting parents to let them know what is there and to help them when there are gaps when there isn't any childcare that meets their needs….

It's interesting to see how [Helen's] work has just grown and grown. I am not surprised in some ways but I think it's interesting to know that there are a lot of parents out there who do want to work, or do want to go into training. Not perhaps hundreds that want to work 37 hours per week, but then there are the parents who want to work some of the week, or do something outside the home but for many of them there are huge barriers like finding the childcare, or finding their way around the childcare system. Because the childcare is there in some ways but the parents don't understand it, don't know how to access it. They don't know the difference between a childminder and a nursery. They don't know how the childcare is able to meet their needs. ...

And that's what [Helen's] role does, to talk to people, establish what their needs are, what they are looking to do, and then direct them towards childcare that meets their needs. But it's very much the parents' choice and we don't impose anything on them."

Example: **A nursery gains parents' trust:**

Within the area there was a feeling that parents should not leave their children with people who were not family members, and who were essentially strangers.

In order to overcome the initial barrier the nursery arranged free sessional care. A few parents took advantage of this in order to free themselves to do different things, and they told their friends. Others looked in and saw the facility was being used, so the word spread gradually.

Some positive spin-offs began to emerge in terms of children's social development (for example they learned to sit and eat at a table). The children were also clearly happy to go to the nursery.

There are also examples of parents gaining too. The Early Years co-ordinator described one:

"We have a mother who has gone from not getting out of the home and having a lot of post-natal depression to actually coming a few times with her child, starting to bring her child down there on a regular basis, speaking with staff, speaking with other people. And she said to me one time, 'It's really lovely because you ask not just how my child is but how I am.' . . . And she's now started to go to a gym. Even on her own and she would never go anywhere on her own. So that whole confidence thing. . . .We're talking a few years down the line for this particular parent. She's actually coming out into the world and talking to people, getting her confidence up."

5.5 CHILDCARE FOR PARENTS DOING TRAINING

Most of the SSLPs we visited provide childcare for parents who are doing training courses of all types which are organised by the programme itself. Only one programme (one of those which was taking no steps to improve parental employability) provided no childcare at all. A quarter of the programmes we visited did not provide childcare for all courses, although in some cases this was because they provided such a large number and wide range of courses that it would not be feasible to provide childcare for all of them. An example is discussed below.

Five programmes provided, funded or organised childcare not only for their own courses, but for some or all the other courses taken by Sure Start parents. Several others made a particular effort to encourage colleges and other education and training providers to provide crèches themselves.

The arrangements for providing childcare for Sure Start courses varied. In some cases the courses took place on Sure Start premises and a crèche was provided at the same location. Sometimes these crèches were connected with day-care in the premises, but many programmes without day-care operated crèches. Sometimes the SSLP employed the crèche staff themselves, while in other cases outside organisations were contracted to come in and provide crèches. Some programmes had found that this did not always lead to consistency in staffing, and that parents disliked leaving their children with different people each week. In some cases the SSLPs had modified their contracts to ensure that as far as possible the same staff came for each session of a particular course.

In a few cases the crèches were registered with Ofsted, but in other cases they were not, and were therefore restricted to providing sessions that were no longer than two hours. This was sometimes inconvenient for parents. One parent we interviewed had done an IT course where the course sessions were themselves two hours long. As a consequence she missed the first and last fifteen minutes of each class in order to deliver her child to and collect her from the crèche.

Several programmes made use of mobile crèches for their training courses. Generally these were run by outside organisations and the SSLP contracted with these organisations to provide the crèche facilities. One SSLP in a rural area had encouraged the members of the childminder network established by the programme to provide crèches for training courses. This had several advantages. Childminders find it relatively easy to fill their after-school places, and part-time places for three- and four- year olds, but often have spare capacity during the school day. If they run crèches they come into a centre, get to know parents and have the opportunity to earn more money at a time when they have spare capacity.

The three SSLPs which provided childcare not only for their own courses, but also for courses run by other organisations which Sure Start parents are taking, tried to match their support to whatever parents needed. Thus, for example, if someone was doing a course at a college where there was a crèche for which charges were made, the programme would pay all or part of the charge, or would try and find another source of funding for the charge. Where there was no crèche they would try and find a nursery place either within the programme or elsewhere. In Programme F

(discussed above) places in the programme's own nursery were reserved for those who were working or training.

Several SSLPs provided crèches for training provided by other initiatives in the area (for example New Deal for Communities) or for courses provided by colleges or local Learning and Skills Councils. They did so because these courses were serving parents from the Sure Start area, and contributed to Sure Start objectives of building community capacity. Often these other organisations were willing to part fund the childcare, but did not have the capacity to deliver it, in that they did not have the expertise to ensure quality and they were unable to ensure that it would be financially viable. However, at least one SSLP recognised that there was a danger that Sure Start would just be perceived as a childcare provider rather than a partner, and was keen to ensure that it only provided childcare where the training helped to meet Sure Start objectives.

Two SSLPs (both with a lifelong learning approach) had collaborated with local colleges to develop or expand the childcare facilities at the college. This increased the facilities available to Sure Start parents wanting to take training, as well as improving facilities for parents generally. Several programmes reported that local colleges did not appreciate that people with children under school age might want to take training courses and had never thought of making any arrangements to provide childcare, even at a charge. In one area the local college had refused for a long time to allow the SSLP to provide a crèche on college premises, as its insurance policy prohibited children. It has taken several years of negotiation with the college for it to be persuaded that its insurance arrangements were not an insurmountable obstacle, and that they could be changed.

There were sometimes discrepancies between what SSLPs claimed to provide, and what parents actually found in practice. In one area the programme claimed either to provide a crèche or pay for a childminder for all courses. However, one parent was taking a course where a crèche was not provided because the number of children involved was too small to make it worthwhile, even though he claimed that the programme had staff available to provide it. Another parent in the same area had found in practice that she could only attend a training course when her child was at nursery school, as no other childcare was available.

5.5.1 Examples of active approaches to childcare for parents doing training by Sure Start local programmes

Programmes with a lifelong learning focus were generally the most committed to ensuring that as far as possible parents were not prevented from taking part in education and training activities because they needed childcare for their children.

However, programmes that provided relatively little training had less difficulty in providing childcare for all their courses. It was those that offered a wide range of courses every week that found childcare provision more of a challenge, but these programmes were generally committed to finding solutions which worked for parents. Sometimes these solutions were quite complicated and individualised – for example finding a childminder for someone who wanted to attend a mainstream college course and who had both pre-school and school aged children to be looked after

while the course was taking place. We outline below the examples of Programme R and Programme K, each of which offered a wide range of courses, and which managed to provide high quality imaginative solutions to help parents who were doing them.

Example: **Programme R**

Childcare is central to ensuring that parents generally are able to take advantage of what Sure Start has to offer. The programme does not offer childcare itself, but works with a range of local childcare providers. When they are running a course, rather than have a crèche in a side room for a small number of children run by staff with few or no qualifications, they place the children together with one or more Sure Start childcare workers to maintain the necessary staffing ratios in an existing daycare setting. This area is fortunate to have a good selection of local authority daycare provision in family centres, which makes this option a viable one.

This approach means that both the children and the childcare workers have access to a better quality of experience. The local community college, which provides a wide range of courses, many of which are taken by Sure Start parents, follows a similar approach for its own provision. They buy additional places in the family centres rather than provide their own crèches.

Example: **Programme K**

Providing childcare for training courses has been a great challenge. The programme provides childcare for only half the training courses it runs, but this reflects the fact that it provides an unusually wide range of education and training opportunities for parents (around 56 different courses each week). The programme training co-ordinator has made childcare central to his strategy when negotiating with providers. When the local college first put on training courses, the SSLP training co-ordinator found it was reluctant to provide crèches. Turning to other colleges was not a solution as few of the local colleges have their own crèche facilities.

Under pressure from the SSLP one of the local colleges is beginning to provide childcare vouchers for students, but funds are limited and when they run out there is no alternative. More generally, the colleges have become less hostile to the idea of crèches. Crèches are paid for jointly by Sure Start, and the adult education service. The local early years service has stressed the importance of providing childcare but has not provided any funding. However, the local Early Excellence Centre provides a crèche for some courses.

Where a crèche is not a feasible option, the SSLP holds a budget for a student learner support fund, and parents can apply to the fund for their childcare costs where they arrange this independently. One group doing administrative skills (a shortage area in the local labour market) required three crèche sessions a week and a half day a week cover for their work experience component. The SSLP is providing the crèche sessions and paying childminders for the work experience element.

In addition to their own support for their own parents, several SSLPs pursuing a lifelong learning approach also see it as part of their role to change the attitudes and behaviour of mainstream education and training providers in their areas. Several programmes reported that colleges had told them that they had never had students with children under five. It had not occurred to them that the reason they did not have such students was because they could not attend courses without childcare. The SSLPs had encouraged colleges to see all parents of young children, not just those living in the SSLP area, as potential consumers of education. In at least two of

the areas we visited, local colleges now actually see the provision of childcare as a way to ensure that mainstream courses are able run, because it provides an important way of increasing student numbers. Financial support for students over 18 in further education is available through Childcare Support Funds to help cover the cost of registered childcare or a place in a college nursery. In addition, Jobcentre Plus are able to help pay for childcare for lone parents who are taking training courses.

5.6 TRAINING FOR CHILDCARE WORK

Childcare work is one of the options available to parents who are looking to move into paid employment. Sixteen of the twenty-five programmes in our study had recognised that they could both increase the supply of childcare and improve the employability of parents by supporting parents who want to train for childcare work.

Programmes often reported that parents who had trained under the auspices of Sure Start were employed in childcare settings across the wider area, not just within the programme itself. (Indeed, many programmes felt that this was desirable, and that parents should be working with children from outside their own immediate community, both for the experience, and for reasons of confidentiality.) In two towns the SSLPs in our study collaborated with the other SSLPs in the town to provide childcare training, which enabled them to provide a wider range of work experience opportunities and larger group sizes. Where these arrangements were in operation transport was usually provided for parents to get from one area to another.

Two programmes, which had become frustrated at the inadequacy or inconvenience of local childcare training, had arranged for SSLP staff members to become accredited NVQ childcare assessors, so that the programme no longer had to rely on external providers.

Several of the programmes providing childcare training reported that childcare courses were often over-subscribed and they had to operate waiting lists. Around half the programmes we visited had had some parents going on to qualify at NVQ level III. Two had groups of more than fifteen working towards this level, although most had only a handful working towards level III, but had larger numbers working to level II. One parent who had achieved level II had moved onto teacher training.

Two programmes expressed some reservations about encouraging parents to work in childcare because of its low pay and low status. In one of these areas parents could make more money in the local sandwich factory, and the programme felt this created a potential conflict of interest between the programme and the parents. The programme wanted there to be more people providing childcare, but the parents' interests might be better served by going into other types of work.

Example: **A nursery nurse encourages a parent to train**

The parent had been bringing her child to Sure Start since she was five months old. The nursery held an open afternoon and the nursery nurse mentioned the playgroup, and the parent began to go as a volunteer.

The nursery nurse mentioned that the college was holding an open afternoon for potential nursery nurses and asked the parent if she would be interested. The nursery nurse went with the parent and introduced her to the careers adviser. The nursery nurse went with her to the college on the first day of her course. The parent said:

"[It] was a big help because you can sometimes feel a bit worried if you have to go on your own. It was good support."

Where programmes were not supporting childcare training themselves they generally collaborated with the EYDCP in their planning activities, and in offering work experience placements within the SSLP. However, one of our programmes had found that the EYDCP planning had excluded the SSLP area and the EYDCP was concentrating its childcare training efforts in other parts of the local authority area. The SSLP had had to persuade the EYDCP to offer a Making Choices course accessible to parents in the area, pointing out that the programme was planning to open a 60-place nursery and would therefore need a supply of qualified childcare workers in the near future.

Three of the programmes we visited were involved in intermediate labour market projects providing training and work experience in childcare. These were generally organised in collaboration with other initiatives that had funding for ILM provision such as New Deal for Communities.

5.7 CHILDMINDER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The programmes we visited varied markedly in the availability of childminders from only one (in two programmes) to more than twenty (in another two). Some relied on EYCDP training for childminders, while others had found this unsatisfactory. In one case a local college had been reluctant to provide childcare training (because it had had some difficulty in recruiting tutors of an appropriate standard). In a second area the SSLP provides the training via its childcare development worker, but the local education authority pays the programme via the adult education budget. In a third area an SSLP informant outlined the problem:

> *"The EYDCP run training for childminders. It's held in the city centre, at very unpredictable times, on four full days a week with no crèche. And we just kept saying that the sort of people you might want to recruit as childminders can't give up their whole day, certainly can't come if there's no crèche, don't want to come to a venue in the middle of town where they don't know anybody and feel nervous about going there, can't be expected to phone up to get all the information. … It's about Sure Start saying to the services, this is why your service is difficult to access or there is a barrier."*

Programmes with a reasonable number of childminders in the area were supporting childminding networks as a way both of developing the skills of the childminders, and

thereby improving quality, and also as a means of improving the confidence of parents.

Several programmes recognise that becoming a childminder involves setting up in business, and although the standard introduction to childminding practice course covers the basics of this, they have taken the view that potential childminders from SSLP areas need more support. One programme runs a ten-week course in conjunction with an SRB programme to cover managing a childminding business in more depth. As with childcare work more generally, several programmes expressed concern about the low earnings of childminders.

CHAPTER 6

OUTCOMES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

6.1 OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYABILITY WORK BY SSLPS

As we have discussed in earlier chapters, the number of parents involved in employability activities of all kinds is small. In active programmes having twenty parents involved during the course of a year would be regarded as a significant achievement. In lifelong learning programmes there might be a large number of parents doing courses, but most of these would be leisure or parenting courses, which might lead to improved labour market prospects in due course, but not immediately. Employment co-ordinators generally had individual caseloads in single figures.

Against this background, it is not surprising that few programmes were formally monitoring achieved outcomes. Almost all the more active programmes we visited could tell us stories of people who had started on confidence building courses and had gone on to qualify at NVQ III or were studying to degree level. Most programmes had parents who they had trained as parents' forum members, as board members or as volunteers who had gone on to use the skills and confidence they had gained from the experience to gain employment. But we found little by way of hard data. None of the programmes we visited had chosen to feature their employability work as one of the subjects for their local evaluations, although some were thinking of doing so.

Two active programmes that had close collaborative relationships with other initiatives (one an NDC project and the other an ILM) did have some outcome measures because those initiatives monitored outcomes, and the programmes therefore knew what had happened to people helped by those services. One programme was in the process of establishing a database of families to track progress generally, and had decided to include employment status (and possibly earnings) as one of the indicators they would monitor, so the programme would be able to see whether its activities as a whole might be contributing to community prosperity.

What we can say is that the approach adopted by programmes in the three active groups (active, lifelong learning and quasi-ILM) was in line with research evidence about what works in terms of helping people from disadvantaged groups or lone parents equip themselves for work (see for example Lakey et al 2001, Marshall and MacFarlane 2000, Campbell and Meadows 2001, Campbell 2000, Allen et al 1999, Dabinett et al 2001; Evans et al 2003, Thomas and Griffiths 2004). Moreover, the

personalised approach and the small caseloads reinforce the likelihood that the efforts involved are likely to have positive outcomes.

6.2 SOLUTIONS TO THE PERCEIVED CONFLICT BETWEEN PAID EMPLOYMENT AND GOOD PARENTING

Our discussions with SSLP staff and parents revealed that many parents who were not currently working believed that there was a conflict between paid employment and good parenting. These views are strongly held and reflect community norms and values which are very persistent. Almost all of our case study programmes were located in areas where the gender role norm was for mothers (especially mothers of children under school age) to stay at home.

In some areas programme staff had chosen to challenge these values, and to argue that it was possible to be a good mother and have paid work. In other areas programme staff reinforced parents' own views. This inevitably led to a certain amount of ambiguity about the value of the employability target. Although no programme manager explicitly said so, it was clear that some programmes are effectively ignoring this target altogether.

Some programme managers, staff and board members believe that encouraging parents to work while their children are young, and while the parents themselves prefer to stay at home, means that the programme has conflicting objectives and is sending conflicting messages to families. As one member of staff in a Sure Start programme put it:

> *"Why do parents have to go to work? It's against what the evidence suggests that up to three years, children need to bond with one person. But yet we put our children in day nurseries at six months old, it's a contradiction."*

However, this does not have to be inevitable. There is strong evidence about the value of early education for the development of children, and there is also good evidence about the relationship between child outcomes and family income. Promoting the employment of parents is entirely consistent with the promotion of the wellbeing of children.

The conflict is resolved if Sure Start local programmes start to think about their investment in improving the employability of parents in similar terms to the way they think about investment in children. By stressing the importance of paid work in improving family incomes, and by emphasising that what programmes are doing is giving parents a better range of choices about paid work, they can locate their employability work firmly within the realm of improving child wellbeing. Moreover, improved confidence and skills are likely to play a role in improving child outcomes directly, as well as improving the employability of parents.

The programmes that have most successfully integrated their work in improving parenting, improving child wellbeing and improving the employability of parents are those that have adopted a lifelong learning approach. The number and variety of courses on offer, and the social opportunities they offer in addition to their role in

improving skills mean that these programmes are able to engage the interest of parents and to generate real enthusiasm for taking advantage of the opportunities that Sure Start can offer.

These programmes support parents in their choice not to work, but encourage them to develop their skills so that when their children go to school and their childcare constraints are easier to deal with, they will be in a stronger position both to get a job, and to get a job with better pay and prospects. If parents feel sufficiently confident and empowered to make the choice to go out to work, then the programmes refer them to other sources of help and support, but they do not stress this. They facilitate the choice but do not encourage it.

6.3 CHALLENGING PARENTS AND BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Those SSLPs that are most committed to improving parents' employability (primarily the active programmes) argue that it is an important function of Sure Start local programmes to challenge parents' low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. They argue that one of the reasons they prefer to stay at home is that they have little experience of the world of work, are unsure about what would be expected of them, and lack confidence in their ability to do a job. By contrast their role as mothers is familiar.

These programmes take the approach of encouraging parents to raise their aspirations and to have more belief in their abilities. Every success by a parent creates a role model for others to follow. These programmes do not over-emphasise paid work, but do present it as an achievable option. By raising aspirations for themselves parents are also likely to raise their aspirations for their children.

We found several examples of parents who had gone on to study at degree level after having been encouraged to believe in their own abilities by SSLP staff and course tutors. (None of these parents has yet completed their degree course.) It is unlikely that they would have developed the self-belief that enabled them to take this step without the encouragement they received from Sure Start to reach higher.

Encouraging parents to raise their aspirations and developing their self-esteem is something that all SSLPs can do. In some cases it will lead parents into paid work, but in even more cases it is likely to improve their interactions with their children.

6.4 THE EMPLOYABILITY TARGET

Even so, this presents something of a dilemma. If most Sure Start parents who are involved in employment and training activities are not looking to go into paid work until their children are at school (and our evidence, including our conversations with parents, suggests that this is the case), then Sure Start programmes are getting no credit for this work at all, because the reduction in the number of children living in

workless households as a result of their efforts will occur in children over four, who do not feature in the targets of Sure Start local programmes.

We recommend that the Sure Start Unit should consider amending the target to refer to children aged, say four to eight. Programmes would then be able to take credit for their efforts in improving parents' employability in the years leading up to this point. We also believe that it would provide encouragement to programmes which are currently passive or disengaged. Part of the reason for this is that some programmes believe that encouraging parents into paid work while their children are aged under four cuts across their objective to improve parenting. If they could see employability work as focusing on families' long-term prospects (rather as their work in respect of child development is a preparation for school), they might be prepared to engage with this work more actively and with greater enthusiasm.

6.5 CHILDCARE

What emerged in the course of this study is that the high cost of formal childcare for children under school age makes paid work an expensive choice for many parents. Even with support from the Working Tax Credit, very few parents with children under four (especially those who have more than one pre-school child) have anything to gain financially from paid work. Some would be worse off.

Sure Start local programmes report that demand for formal childcare suitable for those in paid work is low. Existing childcare providers are struggling to remain viable in the face of limited and uncertain demand. Providing more places for working parents without also providing high levels of subsidy for those places is not likely to increase take up. The one programme in our study that is routinely subsidising childcare for working parents is doing so at a high cost, with places available for fewer than thirty children, and is worried about the future viability of the nursery.

However, demand for respite sessional care, and childcare for those doing training courses is high, and there is potentially unmet need in some areas. Providing childcare for parents who are doing training (and encouraging other education and training providers to do the same) appears to be one of the key ways in which SSLPs can both engage parents with the programme, provide a stimulating and socialising environment for their children, and help them to develop their skills and their self-confidence.

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Appendix A

Topic Guide I: Set-up Meeting

Topics to be covered in exploratory interviews with programme managers:

- What activities is the programme doing under this general heading?
  - do you employ a co-ordinator? Does the programme have a staff member who has particular responsibility for employability work, or is this shared?
  - do you offer your own training programmes? What sort?
  - do you provide information and advice?
  - do you refer people to other programmes? Who do you refer them to?
  - What are you doing to equip people to work for the programme?
  - Is your childcare provision open for appropriate hours for people who have jobs and what are the charges?

  Which other agencies (e.g. New Deal for Lone Parents, New Deal for Communities) does the Sure Start programme work with?
  - What does this collaboration look like?
  Does this just involve referral, or does Sure Start also influence the other agency's activities and priorities or does the other agency influence Sure Start?

- What other employment or training programmes are available to parents locally?
  - college provision
  - Early years partnership provision
  - any regeneration programmes:
  - Do you share your boundaries with any of the regeneration programmes, e.g. New Deal?

- How does the Board feel about parental employability? Do you have any Board Members who come from a regeneration or employment perspective and who are driving the agenda?

- Does the programme have a policy about employing parents within the programme generally?
  - Do you provide any special training courses for these parents?
  - e.g. Home visits: by professionals only, or do you train local people (e.g. community mothers)
  - Community cafes
  - childcare provisions: do you train and employ local people for these kind of jobs?

- Does the programme support the training of parents in childcare work?
  - does Sure Start pay the cost of the training? Do you refer people?
  - Which qualifications?

- What is the role of childcare in improving parents' employability and how important is it?
  Does the childcare meet the needs for parents with jobs or who want to work?
  Do you charge for this service?
  - What proportion of childcare of play learning and childcare resources goes on day care suitable for working parents?

- How does the programme measure the outcomes of its employability-related activities?

- Does the programme have any plans to do further work under the employability heading?

- Who else should we be talking to to get a clearer picture of the range of activities supported by and connected to the programme?
  - within the programme
  - in external agencies
  - Board members (if appropriate)

- If we wanted to talk to a small sample of parents who had taken part in employability related activities would this be possible and how would we make contact with them?

- We would probably like to talk to you again in a few weeks time. Would you be willing to see us again when we have spoken to other people?

Appendix B

Topic Guide II: Training Co-ordinators or staff with similar responsibilities

Topics to be covered in interviews with Training Co-ordinators

General / Background Information:

- What is your role? Who decided what your responsibilities should be?
- What is your background? (e.g. training background)
- Who do you work with most closely?
- Do you have a sub-committee or someone on the board who takes an interest in your work?
- How is your role perceived by other people who work on the programme, what do your colleagues think of your work?
- Who takes the initiative (co-ordinator, provider, or parent)? Does the co-ordinator actively engage in outreach and taking initiative with providers?

Information for parents

- Where do you get the information from (to give to parents)?
- Do you hand on material from other agencies? Or do you process it in some way? What sort of format do you use? How do you get it to parents?
- Do you select the provisions which are most suitable for parents?

Courses

- What are the different areas of training you offer?
  - who decides which courses you are running?
  - Do you offer taster sessions?
  - Do you offer training in minority languages?
  - Eligibility criteria: is there a certain set of criteria to be met?
  - How do you decide on timing, both length and time of day/week?
- What kind of courses do you refer people to?
- Where are they?
- How easy are they to get to?
- Do you provide childcare for parents attending courses?
  - is this easily accessible and what ages are children? (age limit?)
- Do providers of courses specifically encourage you to refer people? (active relationship)
- Do you influence what other agencies provide?
  e.g. the place, time, mode, level

What agencies do you work with?

- How does the relationship work?
- Do you work with local employers?

Parents & Motivation

- How difficult is it to get parents to commit to the training?
- Do you deliberately have/offer ‘small steps’ in order to make it less intimidating?
- Do people receive support during training (e.g. logbook)?
- What are the dropout rates?
- How do you monitor attendance?
- Do you provide/encourage any learning/training opportunities for people who hold jobs?
- What are local job opportunities like?

- What kind of training for parents who work within programme do you offer?

- Do you offer training for parents to work in childcare generally?
  or any other professional training? E.g. training of speech therapist assistants

Outcomes

- How do you measure outcomes?
- Do you benchmark against other providers locally/nationally?
- Do you look at jobs and pay?

Appendix C

Topic Guide III: Training Providers/Agencies/Tutors

- What is your role?
- How does the arrangement with Sure Start work?
  - do you get referrals?
  - do you do outreach with Sure Start parents?
  - do you provide special courses for SS parents?

- Do Sure Start parents need additional support to cope with your programmes?
  - transport
  - ongoing advice
  - childcare
  - peer support
  - avoid drop out

- Does the programme provide this sort of support?
- What would you like Sure Start to provide for parents in order to help them benefit from your own provision?

- How do outcomes for Sure Start parents compare with your client group generally?

- Do you monitor your outcomes?

Appendix D

Topic Guide IV - Parents:

- How many children do you have?
- How old is your youngest child? And the oldest?

- Have you worked at all since having a family?
- Are you working at the moment?
  if so, what are you doing? / How many hours / What about childcare?
  do you claim working families tax credit (wftc)?

- If not working:
  - have you applied for any jobs recently; if so, where do you look
  - do you intend to work in the future?
  - What sort of jobs locally do you think you could do?

- What sort of help do you think Sure Start should provide for parents who would like to work?

- How did you get on when you were at school?

- How did you find out about Sure Start?
- What difference has Sure Start made?
  Probe: - confidence
    - ability to deal with paperwork
    - ability to relate to people
    - basic skills (reading, maths, etc.)
    - job specific skills (eg. NVQ in childcare)

- What do you think you would have been doing now without Sure Start?

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