



## **Working with children and families**

*The sure start programme*

### **Lucy**

Well, I'm Lucy, I'm the mother of Georgie who is going to be two tomorrow. I bring him here about three or four times a week, so he can come and play with the children, he enjoys it and has good fun. And I enjoy coming here, meeting other mums and that, so.

### **Tim Robertson**

Sure Start is a new government initiative for families with 0 to 3 year olds. So children who are under their 4th birthday, who live in selected socially deprived neighbourhoods. I'm Tim Robertson, I'm lead officer for Sure Start in the London Borough of Camden, which means I oversee all the Sure Start programmes across the borough. It aims to try and prevent families from coming into difficulties rather than just picking up the pieces once the families have gotten into trouble and it aims to bring the services together in new ways. And there are two main ways that we bring services together in Sure Start. One is in multi-agency home visiting teams and the other is in drop in centres.

### **Tim Robertson**

What we aim to reach at Sure Start drop in that it should have core drop in hours. So there is simply a time when any family with an under 4 can come along, meet other parents have a cup of tea, sit and chat, nice activities for their children to engage in. There would always be one organised activity for the children. That might be a baby massage group it might be some face painting, it might be song and dance, a range of different things.

### **Child Minder**

I'm a registered child minder and this is Talvin who I look after. I like it here it's friendly and there's no pressure. A lot of groups you go to you walk in and everybody stares at you, they make you feel welcome.

### **Tim Robertson**

They'll be a programme of other activities offered on site so a benefits adviser may come in, there may be an employment training person who comes in and does advice sessions. There maybe a parenting skills group that happens.

### **Ulrike**

My name is Ulrike and I come here once in a while with my little boy. It's a very nice atmosphere here nice and bright and friendly. Sure Start offers quite a good variety for people for the mums to chill out with their children.

### **Carina O'Neill**

What did you have for breakfast Rosie? Toast? My name is Carina O'Neill and I'm secretary on the parent's forum committee for St Pancras team. I've got a 2 year old daughter, Rosie and that's how I joined.

### **Tim Robertson**

Every Sure Start drop in is a Sure Start neighbourhood parents' forum. A parents forum is a meeting that happens which is led by the parents so that the parents get to decide how they want that money spent.

### **Carina O'Neill**

What we do is we have a committee meeting which is usually about once every month or six weeks. Decide what we want to do, bring it back to the forum which is basically a day when

anybody is welcome, parents, just members of the forum, new people in the community. We always advertise it really well, so that we can get everybody in the community to come. Sometimes it's packed and you can't move in there and other times it's just nice. But the more people the better, basically. We have like a puppet show, food and sometimes we have speakers in and we advertise it really well so that we can get everybody and then we ask them what they want.

**Janet**

Hi I'm Janet, I'm Treasurer of Sure Start in St Pancras. We have made a lot of difference since we've become a parent forum because we have the money to buy new equipment and new toys for the children which was our main priority. We had new flooring put down because it was all carpeted. There was no room for messy play or anything else and now we've had that put down, it was a lot of money, but it was well worth it.

**Carina O'Neill**

I think we had, I'm not very good, I think it was... last year it was thirty four thousand and I think this year it's just a bit less, it goes down each year. So last year what we mainly done with the money was spent it on the drop in, on equipment and we basically refurbished it we put new stuff everywhere and that was what a lot of our money went of last year and this year it's mainly going on the crèche for the training. The Sure Start team have actually got some money as well so they're paying for some of the training. At the moment there's a community work course, which I'm doing, there's a child minding course and there's also GNVQ level two, childcare course. And it's what the parent's want the most is the training and being able to have the crèche while they're doing the training.

Anybody with skills is swept up basically and parents have unknown skills. There's a bilingual parents, that's another major thing we're going to have in the play group is somebody coming in and teaching the children another language and we've actually got a French lady on our committee and we want her to do it for the children, they know her. It's all sort of getting people together and using their skills to make Sure Start bigger and do what we want.

**Janet**

We're going to have massage sessions and reflexology which we're going to do upstairs and some people on the committee weren't for that saying, 'How's that benefiting under 4's?' and I feel that if the mums are relaxed then the children are relaxed. We haven't any outlandish ideas. So far!

**Carina O'Neill**

Throughout the summer we had about five or six trips and they were very successful and everybody enjoyed them. And the feedback we got was really nice. We went to LegoLand we went to the Aquarium, the London Aquarium, we went to Thorpe Park and they were very successful, it was really, really nice because some parents just never got the opportunity to take their children out basically like that, they just can't afford it, and it brings everybody together.

**Tim Robertson**

Our experience actually is that if you give the families information about the services they want and involve them in decision making they'll be careful, sensible about it, they won't ask for too much they're very realistic. What we found with the parents making decisions is they are much more careful about how they make their decisions that professionals are.

**Tim Robertson**

I suppose we're partly a one-stop shop in Sure Start in that there are particular places to go to, but in a way because of our out reach and home visiting, it's more of a one stop person as it were in that your Sure Start home visitor, if you're a family in a Sure Start area, will come and visit you at home or meet you in the park. It's very much a service we take out to families rather than them having to come into use. With Sure Start there will be one sure start worker who can hand hold a family through that process.

**Jane**

If you look at main stream services you've got social services team in one building, you've got health visitors at various health centres and GP's surgeries, you've got the voluntary sector based all over parts of Camden, and Sure Start actually brings work in from all those agencies together in one place. My name is Jane and by background is health visiting, so I'm a health visitor seconded from Camden Primary Care Trust to Sure Start Euston programme.

**Tim Robertson**

One of the key things we found in consulting with families is that they get fed up of getting of pushed from pillar to post when they need help. It is a group of workers who can visit any family with an under four in the area. A level of support is set by the family, what kind of support they want, it may be just a one off visit to go and give them some information, it may be a series of visits, quite intensive visits to help a parent through a period of emotional trauma or difficulty a relationship break-up, a particular housing issue it could be quite intensive support.

**Jane**

And in fact, when we visit families from Sure Start, we don't go with our professional hat on, or our specialist hat on. We actually just go as Sure Start workers. But what we can do though is come back to the office and there is somebody in the office, usually, that has got the expertise that we may not have and parents have direct access to that.

**Jackie Chavaki**

My name is Jackie Chavaki. My role in Sure Start is that I'm a home visitor, but I am the social worker of the team. For me it feels like I am doing a lot more preventative work and a lot more safety work, because I think a lot of the cases where there is neglect and child deaths it's where people haven't let other agencies know. Little things that for one worker to go out on probably thinks 'Oh no, that's nothing', but if you talk to another person who's going out, say a health visitor, you know and they say 'I'm quite concerned', if you get a whole group together and realise the concerns. It could be domestic violence or it could be just be that somebody was smacking their child or ignoring them you know, then that's when you can prevent. It's actually when there's not a sharing of information is normally the cases where there is sadly a child death. So for me I find it quite exciting that that gap that dangerous gap that I think is out there is actually being closed up in working in this way, so.

The other end is that we have got cases that are involved in child protection then what I would do is I can support my workers and go into their first case conferences with them, explain the procedure, you know, because even as a professional your first meetings can be quite daunting. Where all of a sudden you know you're having to vote whether this child is at risk or not

**Jane**

As a health visitor I would visit individual families and I would have pretty much a specific agenda about why I was visiting. So I would be doing a new birth visit when the baby was 10 days old or I would be visiting at 2 to do a 2-year developmental review. As a Sure Start visitor it's much more about going and listening to the parents agenda, so the home visit is parent led and it's very much about them addressing their needs first. I would be visiting a family and I would think they need this support or, you know, I can think of lots of services that would be useful to them but they weren't there. It was very much about me just supporting someone that really struggling to find somewhere that they could go to in the community.

**Ulrike**

I would really like to see more being done, especially for the older children between the ages of 6, well not maybe 6 but 12 to 18 years of age. It seems that they spend a lot of money on children under 5 and they give a good base. But it seems not enough because you see a lot of teenagers in the streets being bored, doing nothing, and why don't they put more money in for that?

**Tim Robertson**

We know from research that the earlier you intervene in a child's development and welfare that impact you can have. With a 14 year old whose got behavioural difficulties you can work with that 14 year old and make some difference, but the likelihood is, is that it's going to be hard work to engage them. If you're working with a 14 month old whose got emotional behavioural difficulties whatever, you can have a big impact that really will sort those difficulties out and have a big effect on their later life chances. But of course, Sure Start is an experiment, we know anecdotally a lot of families have done very well from Sure Start, I write reference who come through got involved in our partnerships gone to training and gone onto university and gone on to get jobs and that's been great. We don't know of course and couldn't know for a lot of years what it's real long term impact is going to be.

**Pauline Harris**

I think if you've got happy families using the service then you must be getting something right. My name's Pauline Harris, I'm a home visitor within the Sure Start Euston Team. I'm seconded by an organisation called KIDS which is a charity set up to help fund a child with a disability. Certainly the families who use the service are very complimentary about us and have very positive things to say but I do wonder about the families who are very hard to reach that we're not getting to and the ones who don't take up the service and maybe they wouldn't be so polite. We have to find a way of asking them really.

**Tim Robertson**

I would like to see Sure Start be an ordinary part of children's services that every family could have because if we can benefit children very young, we can benefit all of those in the longer term. Five hundred million pounds is worth it for Sure Start.