

Integrating services for children and families – some lessons from SureStart in Northern Ireland

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Aims of the session

- To describe the thinking behind the SureStart approach.
- To look at what research and evidence-based practice tells us about effective interventions for young children and their families.
- To tease out some lessons from Northern Ireland ten years on.

Rationale for SureStart

- Comprehensive Spending Review 1998.
- Poverty in the UK among children was widespread and growing.
- Poverty was creating massive differences in the life chances of children measured in health, education and social outcomes.
- 20% of the adult population in the UK were functionally illiterate.
- 70% of school leavers leaving school with a profound feeling of 'not being up to it' – not equipped for life in the 21st century.



Rationale for SureStart

- Services which existed for young children and their families were patchy and unco-ordinated.
- A commitment by the Labour Party Government to end child poverty by 2020.
- A commitment between 1999 and 2004 of £1.4 billion targeted at 33% of children under four.



Major Window of Opportunity for Interventions

- 0-6 age group initiative, independence, responsibility, social preparedness, health, nutrition, integration, attachment.
- 7-10 age group basic academic development.
- 11-13 age group major social adjustment, physical reintegration.
- 14-17 age group integration with self and others.
- 18+ age group adult roles emerge.



Tiers of Intervention

TARGET

- Child
- Maternal health
- Parents/child
- Local environment
- National context/policies

EXAMPLE OF INTERVENTION

Pre-school services, daycare, childminding.

Support during pregnancy, health visiting, counselling.

Informal support such as parent education, parent support mentoring, self-help, open access services, parent/toddler groups, formal support such as family services, daycare services, services for children at risk.

Community facilities, leisure facilities, housing design, child friendly environments, employment and education opportunities.

Tax and Benefit systems; government funding for services which support families and children.

Source: M Smyth and S Baker (1997)

Assets based vs needs based

- Parents should be supported as prime educators of their children.
- Support programmes should be based on positive potential and move away from deficit models of intervention.
- Support services must recognise the competence of parents and the knowledge they have of their own children.
- Professionals should be seen as important 'back room' resources.
- Off the shelf models of intervention have limited success, models of intervention should be sensitive and responsive to local need.



Assets based vs needs based

- Developing a sense of giving as well as taking is essential.
- Parents gain as much from their peers, hence the importance of community networks.
- The process of participation may be more important than the product.

Sources: Paz, Brickman and Bronfrenbrinner



Lessons from Research

- To be effective, interventions should closely match the needs of local families.
- A single intervention is unlikely to produce positive outcomes for families or children over the long term.
- Resources should be targeted at varieties of need in terms of levels of intensity and at various times in the family life cycle.
- Initiatives which are targeted geographically carry the risk of stigmatising but also provide a useful mechanism for reducing poverty in areas of high levels of deprivation.

Lessons from Research

- Self-esteem is critical for securing long-term outcomes for children and families.
- The mother's mental health is a key factor influencing the general level of resilience within families.
- Interventions are needed at both local and national levels.



Criteria for SureStart Projects and Areas

- Target geographical areas where there were approximately 800 children under four.
- Map and build on services already in these specific geographical patches.
- Involve parents, grandparents and carers and build on their strengths.
- Avoid stigma by making sure SureStart Projects are available to all local families.
- Build continuity by linking new SureStart services to other services for the under fours.

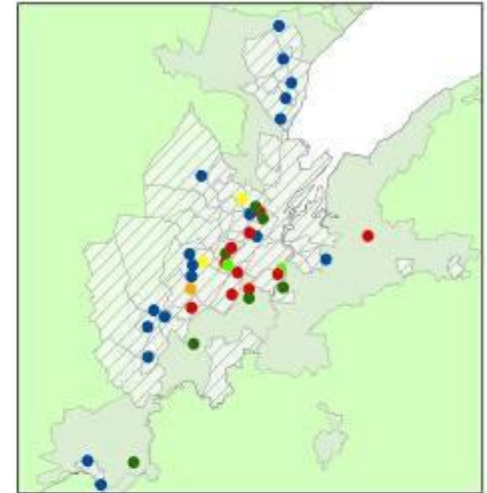
Criteria for SureStart Projects and Areas

- Be culturally appropriate and sensitive.
- Promote the participation of all local families in the design and working of programmes.
- Be based on what local people wanted.
- Have impact on health, social, emotional development, early learning and strengthening communities.
- Be based on partnership between the statutory, voluntary, community sectors. Fundamental was the concept of a partnership with parents who would have a key role in deciding how money would be spent locally within the limits of the SureStart objectives and targets.



Distribution of DE Funded Facilities Plotted against Sure Start Areas within Northern Ireland

Belfast Area



- Creche
- Parent & Toddler
- Daycare
- After Schools
- Irish Language
- Family Centre
- Playgroup
- Main Towns
- ▨ Sure Start Area
- Belfast Urban Area
- Counties



Map produced by the Rural Development Council



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Services and Staff Employed in SureStart Projects

Staff Teams

- Healthcare professionals in the fields of health visiting, midwives, speech and language, occupational therapy and health promotion.
- Early Years professionals in the fields of Play, Early Education Specialists, Daycare and Outreach Family Support.
- Management and administration/Lead and Accountable Bodies from both the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- Community development principles and integrated working arrangements

Impact on Outcomes for Children

- **Focus on six high level outcomes in Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People.**
- **Clear short, medium and long-term outcomes and indicators.**
- **Progress in a number of areas:**
 - improved social and emotional well-being;**
 - improved quality in care and education outcomes;**
 - reduction in referrals to accident and emergency, speech therapy;**
 - reductions in children on the child protection register.**

Reduction in poverty?

SureStart – an important policy instrument

- **Integrated, holistic.**
- **Early intervention.**
- **Engaging, supporting and empowering families.**
- **Evidence-focused and outcomes-driven.**
- **Long-term aspirations.**
- **Non-stigmatising.**
- **Well funded.**
- **“I believe in SureStart for the future is uncertain offshore”**