

ENGAGING WITH FATHERS IN A LOCAL
PROGRAMME SURE START: SOME ISSUES
FOR PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Equality of access is often centred on access to employment, yet it also applies to access to service provision. Early years' and family services have traditionally reached mothers and their children, with little involvement of fathers. The new Sure Start local programme initiative was set up to reduce the barriers to services experienced by socially excluded families but has had little success in reaching fathers in its service provision.

Sure Start Millbrook, Redbridge and Maybush (Sure Start MRM) in Southampton is run by Southampton City Council and employed a fathers' worker to engage with fathers and ascertain what services they would like. This research project was set up to evaluate the work done so far and to find out whether fathers in the area felt included in their local Sure Start. It also investigated the possibility that the provision of a Saturday morning breakfast group may have sidelined fathers into their own provision.

Questionnaires and individual interviews were used to gain quantitative and qualitative data. It was recognised that there were limitations to the amount of information that could be collected in individual interviews due to time constraints and that the experiences of individual fathers would not provide sufficient information to allow generalisations of fathers' experiences to be made.

The results showed that most of the fathers returning the questionnaire were aware of Sure Start MRM and the services available but there was also a lack of knowledge about times, days and venues. Over 50% had been to the Saturday Daddy Cool breakfast group and almost all of these were satisfied with the service. The interviews provided more in-depth information on reasons for not accessing the service, exploring the issues of barriers and enablers, attitudes of staff and other parents and additional services that could be provided.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In many organisations, Equal Opportunities Policies were introduced to counteract the discrimination and oppression that was once an overt feature of our society. With Government legislation against racism and sex discrimination, organisations introduced policies and procedures to ensure that they were complying with the law, particularly with regard to employment practices. Equal Opportunities sought to redress the issue of direct discrimination against groups of people due to their racial origin, gender or disability.

Blakemore & Drake (1996) recognised that as well as addressing issues of direct discrimination, indirect discrimination resulting from “inbuilt patterns of inequality rather than the particular actions of individuals” (Blakemore & Drake 1996:9) also needed to be taken into account. This was reiterated by Denney (1998) who argued that “A pattern of inequality can persist even when an institutional policy of treating people equally exists” (Denney 1998:52). Denney is particularly referring to the legislation on racial discrimination but it could be argued that this is equally applicable to other areas of practice and service delivery.

This idea of inequality was developed further in the late 1990’s when the issue was broadened to include discussion of equality and diversity, where different definitions were used to explore the concept of difference. Equality and Diversity policies moved away from recognition of groups towards promoting uniqueness of individual experience, history and culture.

Various authors have attempted to explore and define the concept of equality and diversity. Thomas (1991) states that

Diversity includes everyone, it is not something that is defined by race or gender. It extends to age, personal and corporate background, education, function, and personality. It includes lifestyle, sexual preference, geographic origin, tenure with the organisation, exempt or non-exempt status, and management and non-management.

This is an attempt to express a more composite picture of a person, as opposed to stating which (one) group they belong to. It strives to identify the uniqueness of individuals which is taken one step further by Dominelli (2002) who believes that our identity and uniqueness is not a static experience but a dynamic one. As Dominelli (2002) states

It is in and through this interaction with others that identities are created, negotiated, recreated and renegotiated. Because identity formation is an interactive process, identity is fluid and changing, with those involved in these social relations emphasising different elements at different points in time. (Dominelli, 2002: 40-41).

Equality and diversity issues are often centred on access to, and terms of, employment. However, the idea of equality also exists in relation to access to services, usually statutory provision but also provided by the voluntary sector. It has been acknowledged that various factors can affect a person's access to, and experience of, service provision, ranging from poverty and social deprivation to age or gender. "In short, a social work practice which does not take account of oppression and discrimination cannot be seen as good practice, no matter how high its standards may be in other respects" (Thompson 2001:11).

Much of our current thinking around issues of equal access to services is informed by feminist researchers who wrote widely about gender issues and the experience of women. Sexism is "a deep-rooted, often unconscious system of beliefs, attitudes and institutions in which distinctions between people's intrinsic worth are made on the grounds of their sex and sexual roles" (Bullock & Stallybrass 1977:571).

Sexist attitudes were responsible for the devaluing of women's experiences against those of the dominant section of society, men. However, Dominelli and McLeod (1989) raise a number of issues in relation to the negative impact of sexism on men, arguing that "the capacity for emotional engagement is restricted and distorted by the emphasis on stereotypical masculine traits" (Dominelli and McLeod 1989:5 quoted in Thompson 2001:58). They believe that sexism not only affects women's experiences but also affects those of men, in that they feel culturally compelled to conform to society's expectations and norms. Thompson (2001) asserts that "Gender is socially constructed rather than biologically determined" (Thompson 2001:53). This reinforces the idea that gender roles are determined within society and expressed within its culture.

This gender-based discrimination can be seen in the ante and post natal services, where the role of the mother is seen as intrinsically more valuable than that of the father. In this sector, the gender bias works against the male in favour of the female. Although males are welcomed into the birthing process, most ante and post natal visits are carried out during the working day, when fathers are traditionally absent from the home.

This is further emphasised in parenting and family support, where the dominance of the mothering role is a cultural expectation. "When we speak of 'good enough parenting', we are more often than not talking of 'good-enough mothering', father remaining relatively invisible." (Harmer & Statham 1988 quoted in Thompson 2001:45)

Lack of equality of access to services is recognised as a major issue by the Social Exclusion Unit. Their definition of Social Exclusion is

Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. Social exclusion happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle. Social exclusion can happen as a result of problems that face one person in their life. But it can also start

from birth. Being born into poverty or to parents with low skills still has a major influence on future life chances.

However, this definition of social exclusion has been challenged by Micklewright (2002) who stated that this was a list of problems that described circumstances that could lead to social exclusion. In itself, it is not a definition of social exclusion.

Social exclusion also recognises that lack of access to services may not be voluntary if that lack of access is as a result of previous history or experience or discrimination. That is to say, although some people may not be explicitly excluded, the culture dominant within that service provision may lead them to believe that they would not be welcome.

Sure Start is a government initiative targeted at the 10% most deprived areas in the country and was created as part of the government's inclusion strategy. Its aim is to redress the exclusion created by multiple issues experienced by those living in areas of high deprivation, where high unemployment, low educational achievement and poverty are the experience of the majority.

Sure Start services are aimed at families with children under the age of five, living within a postcode area to target services at those deemed most in need. However, the experience of those of us working within a Sure Start local programme is that most of the services are accessed by mothers and children, with fathers the exception rather than the rule. For the purposes of this dissertation, the definition of fathers includes any man taking on a father role within a family, whether related to the children by blood or not.

It is possible that Sure Start, although part of an inclusion strategy, is subconsciously excluding fathers and devaluing their role in their families. The provision of services should meet the needs of fathers as well as mothers and children. The services provided by Sure Start need to be relevant and accessible to fathers and promoted as such. Yet, the cultural expectation in society is that mothers, not fathers, access family and early years' services and if Sure Start does not explicitly demonstrate and promote equality of access to fathers, then the dominant culture continues, even if that is implicitly and unwittingly. Sure Start may be continuing the culture of discrimination on the grounds of gender in relation to access to services.

Although there is much published research on the positive effects of fathers' involvement in their children's upbringing (Parke 1996, Lamb 1997, Flouri 2004), it has been found that little involvement of fathers occurred in services for families, for instance in family centres. There is also research available on the working patterns of British fathers and their high employment rates (Burghes 1997, Office of National Statistics 2000). Although the Sure Start initiative is fairly new, with the pilot trailblazer programmes set up at the end of the 1990's, there is some early research on involvement of fathers in the programmes (<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk>), which bears out the experiences of family centres. This early research by Sure Start local programmes aims to identify the barriers

experienced by fathers, as opposed to evaluating successful outcomes in working with fathers.

This research aims to investigate the equality of access to family services in the early years as experienced by fathers, with particular emphasis on a local programme Sure Start located in Millbrook, Redbridge and Maybush in Southampton, where Southampton City Council is the lead and accountable body. This programme recognised two years ago that they were failing to involve local fathers in any significant numbers in the services delivered to families. As a result, a fathers' worker was employed in the spring of 2004 with the specific brief of encouraging the involvement of fathers in designing and attending services provided by Sure Start. One of the services set up by the fathers' worker is a Saturday morning breakfast group, where fathers and children can come along to the Sure Start building and enjoy time with their children and get a cooked breakfast, all for no cost to the father. There is also a magazine and telephone support line aimed at fathers. The Daddy Cool breakfast group has now started to engage with around 25 fathers on a regular basis.

I have decided to target my research on which Sure Start services the fathers know about, have accessed and the barriers they have encountered in order to find out whether the work carried out so far has enabled them to access Sure Start services or whether they only access services specifically for fathers outside of the main programme. I am interested in finding out if this Sure Start programme has included fathers in Sure Start services or if they have been sidelined into their own activities which has not encouraged or given them access to the services available to mothers. The research will also attempt to find out if employing a fathers' worker has helped to eliminate some of the barriers commonly experienced by fathers accessing early years' and family services.

The research will involve sending out questionnaires to all the fathers who have given their details to the Sure Start database, as well as giving questionnaires out to families attending services. The aim of the questionnaire is to elicit some information on which Sure Start MRM services the fathers know of, have used and also how many of them have accessed the Daddy Cool breakfast group which runs every Saturday morning and whether they were satisfied with it. The questionnaires will be anonymised to ensure that fathers do not feel vulnerable when answering them, or that they are at risk of having services withdrawn if their comments are negative.

The research will also involve carrying out some one-to-one interviews with fathers who volunteer to be involved in the research. It is hoped that interviews can be carried out with both fathers who access the Daddy Cool services and those who do not to obtain a wider understanding of the barriers experienced. These interviewees will have their privacy respected, with any identifying features removed from the research, ensuring that comments made are not attributable.

I believe that as Sure Start targets include getting families off benefits and into work, then Sure Start services should be provided to meet the needs of both mothers and fathers in work. This may mean that services should be provided

outside the usual hours of 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. This may prove uncomfortable for workers who provide these services who have families of their own. However, those providing services to families need to question whether service provision is about meeting the needs of the families or the workers. Many other services are provided outside of the normal working week and it may be time for family centred services to follow the same example.

I recognise that the fathers may not see the timing of services as of greatest importance; they may feel that the cultural expectations around their role hinder them from accessing services more, or they may identify other barriers. I am interested in finding out if my own expectations and thoughts are evidenced by fathers in this research. I understand that although I already have a perspective on the issue, the purpose of the research is to ascertain the views of the fathers.

If early years and family services wish to promote the benefits of fathers' involvement in the upbringing of their children and encourage fathers to become more involved with services which are provided, it may be necessary for those services to start thinking 'outside the box'. We may also need to think about how those services are perceived by fathers and whether those services have identified and met the needs of fathers.

Research carried out during the last fifteen years, within family centres and Sure Start (Grimshaw & McGuire 1998, Lewis 2000, Ghate et al 2000, Potter 2005), has identified major barriers to fathers accessing services, yet there is little evidence of changes to practice to counteract these barriers. Changing the names of groups (such as Mother and Toddler to Parent and Toddler) without changing practices is not sufficient. Organisations may need to ask some difficult questions rather than assuming that services which have, until now, been designed to meet the needs of mothers and children, will also meet the needs of fathers.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Importance of Fathers

Family life has undergone a major upheaval during the post-war period and the role of fathers has also undergone much change during this period. This cultural shift in the traditional format of families and the resultant expectations of fathers has gathered momentum and recognition in more recent years, leading to research and media interest.

It has been recognised in recent years that fathers play an important role in their child's development. Much research has been carried out into what fathers do with their children and how their involvement will positively affect the child's future (Parke 1996, Lamb 1997, Flouri 2004). Lamb (1997) states "where there is a high level of paternal involvement, by agreement between the parents, the children have increased cognitive competence, perform better socially and academically" (quoted in Ryan 2000:1). He also states that recently there has been recognition that "fathers play complex, multi-dimensional roles" (Lamb 1997:1).

However, the experience of many fathers is that their role is not given the importance and value given to that of mothers and it can be difficult to access the information and support they need. Hawkins (1995) asserts "once the baby arrives, mothers often have numerous social supports to help them adjust to their roles, whereas society provides few supports for fathers" (Hawkins 1995:51).

There are several factors influencing the lack of fathers' involvement in their children's early years. Not least of these is employment and employment practices. According to the Office of National Statistics (2000) 84% of fathers live with all their children under the age of 18. Burghes et al (1997) add that "The employment rate for fathers has been consistently high – estimated at between 8 and 9 out of 10 – since the beginning of the 1980's. Moreover, 9 out of 10 fathers in employment work full time." (Burghes 1997:43).

This is also recognised by the European Commission Network on Childcare (1996) who assert that "the UK is not unusual in having only 2% of employed fathers of young children working part time" (quoted in Burghes 1997:44).

If this is the case, that nearly 90% of fathers of children under 18 are working and 90% of those are working full time, then it is possible to see how difficult it is for fathers to become involved in the services which will support them and their children. Ease of access to information and ease of access to services will depend on those services recognising fathers' commitment to work and providing financially for their family.

Phillips (1995) talks about the media creation of absent fathers and asks "Why do policy makers moan about the influence of absent fathers among the unemployed

without recognising that employment is an even bigger cause of father absence in families with jobs.” (Phillips 1995:11)

However, employment is only one factor in enabling fathers to access services for children and families. As Lamb (1997) states:

One can conceive of motivation, skills and self-confidence, support and institutional practices as a hierarchy of factors influencing paternal behaviour. Favourable conditions must exist at each level if increased paternal involvement and broadened paternal behavior is to be possible and beneficial. (Lamb 1997:6)

Lamb contests that each of the factors listed above must be present if we are to encourage fathers' involvement in early years and family services. Even if a father is motivated to spend time accessing services, and has the skills and confidence to engage with what is culturally considered to be the domain of mothers, our institutional practices can make that access even more difficult.

... childcare and educational institutions have traditionally made little effort to include fathers and have often acted in ways that exclude them or include them only in gender-typed ways. (Lamb 1997:8).

Ryan (2000) states that the need to work with fathers and father-figures applies to all professionals working with children and families. It could be argued that services for families which only work with mothers and children are only engaging part of a family.

However, it has also been recognised that “in some instances, greater involvement presents its own challenges to individual and family well-being” (Hawkins 1995:51). Changes to practice and services can be perceived as a threat to the traditional role of mothers and it could be difficult for organisations to change to meet the needs of fathers, without alienating mothers. Mothers have traditionally seen their role as being that of liaison between home and early years services, with ante and post natal appointments, health visitors, baby clinic and parent and toddler groups all taking place during the working day.

Ryan (2000) states “Surveys in the USA which show that a majority of men want to be more involved with their children also indicate that the majority of women do not want their husbands to be more involved than they currently are.” (Pleck 1982, Quinn & Staines 1979 quoted in Ryan 2000:30).

This role of the mother as a ‘gatekeeper’ to services needs to be acknowledged and, where possible, reframed as a possible positive influence on encouraging fathers to access services. Where the benefits of fathers' involvement are actively promoted to mothers as an additional resource rather than a threat, they may offer the support necessary to persuade fathers to attend groups or clinics, influencing in a way that professionals cannot.

Services and organisations may need to be sensitive and creative in finding ways to identify and meet the needs of fathers, yet continue to involve and engage mothers each without alienating the other.

Within the last few years there has been much media attention on fathers from a negative stance, making much of the existence of fathers who do not contribute to their children's upbringing financially and those who abuse their children. Men are sometimes portrayed as potential abusers and paedophiles, leading to a general distrust of men who look after their children as the main carer.

This is demonstrated in one research report on involving fathers in family centres which stated that "some staff were concerned about possible risks to children, for example from fathers who were known or suspected sex offenders, or even from men in general" (Ghate et al 2000). This media negativity may also be responsible for the continued neglect of the awareness and promotion of the benefits of father-child relationships.

However, the benefit of involving fathers in their children's upbringing has also been the subject of research. A report to Fathers Direct by Lewis and Warin in 2001 showed that involvement of dads with children aged 7-11 predicted success in exams at 16; where dads were involved before the age of 11, children were less likely to have a criminal record by the age of 21; and pre-schoolers who spent more time playing with their dads were often more sociable when they entered nursery school.

2.2 Supporting Fathers

Research into the ways that society can support fathers in their role has started to occur in recent years. In 1998 Grimshaw and McGuire undertook an evaluation of parenting programmes, interviewing both mothers and fathers as well as professionals delivering courses. Although the response to the programmes was good, many of those interviewed had not been aware of the existence of such programmes.

Apart from 'parent-craft' and antenatal classes, awareness of parenting education and support provided by the statutory or voluntary sector was low. However, even among respondents who had not participated in a parenting programme, the majority felt that they would use, or would have used, such a service. The findings also suggested that early access aimed at parents of children under three years of age would best fit parental wishes. (Grimshaw and McGuire 1998)

When parents were asked about their experience of the group, it was reported by one father who had been the only male in the group that the facilitator did not include fathers in her approach to parenting. "A lot of things that she was talking about were all from a female perspective... she kept on saying, 'Oh, and Dads', it was almost like 'Oh sorry, I forgot you were there'." (Grimshaw & McGuire 1998).

A report in March 2000 looked at the ways in which family centres were working with fathers (Ghate et al 2000), in an attempt to identify the barriers and enablers. One of the major barriers appeared to be the female dominated and feminised environment, so that some fathers felt alienated. Activities provided were often based on perceived women's needs and felt by many fathers to be too passive. However, few family centres provided the types of activities which most appealed to fathers.

An important aspect identified by the research was that family centres were more successful in engaging fathers if they had a strategy for doing so. The strategy and the services offered mattered less than the existence of the strategy and a positive commitment from staff to work with men and value them as parents. A proactive and persistent approach to engaging fathers was shown to be important in encouraging them to use the centre.

It was also acknowledged that although having male workers was important in dispelling the feminised environment, fathers felt that

a worker's sex was less important than his or her professional skills and ability to form relationships with users. ... though undesirable, the absence of male staff was not necessarily an insuperable barrier to working with fathers. (Ghate et al 2000)

Lewis (2000) summarised the research to date in a report entitled "A man's place in the home: Fathers and families in the UK". He suggested that the new initiatives being put forward by the government, including Sure Start, "offered an opportunity to raise the profile of fathers within family support services". However, he also reported that "There are major cultural and social obstacles that will need to be overcome before fathers can be fully included in mainstream family services that have traditionally targeted and been used by mothers."

2.3 Fathers in Sure Start

The Sure Start evaluation website reports on all evaluations carried out within Sure Start programmes (<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk>). There are several reports on engaging fathers, however nearly all of these are evaluating the barriers to involving fathers in the Sure Start programme. It was recognised by many programmes that they had not been able to involve fathers in Sure Start activities and that the programme would need to find out why this was. Most of these reports are based on research carried out on consulting with fathers around types of service that they might access.

The research on how to involve fathers has been carried out over the last two years, using a range of methods including questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups to try to identify why fathers were not engaging with the Sure Start initiative. Although many of the samples were small, with programmes finding it difficult to engage fathers in research, similar barriers to accessing Sure Start were identified across a range of programmes in various parts of the country (London, Doncaster, Southampton and Torbay for example). This lack

of geographical difference is also possible evidence of the common experience of fathers. These barriers consisted of practical difficulties, cultural expectations and female dominated environments, similar to the barriers reported in earlier research around family centres.

Many fathers cited the practical difficulties of accessing a programme which was generally available during working hours in the week. Fathers often work long hours due to economic necessity, so that little time is available to them to spend with their children. None of the programmes provided regular activities at weekends and had therefore limited their services to those parents who were able to attend during the working week.

The issue of timing of services is borne out in a report by Singh and Newburn (2005) entitled "Becoming a Father" for the NCT. 800 men were surveyed about their experience of becoming a father with one of the main suggestions from the report being more flexible hours for ante-natal clinics.

The dominant culture in Britain reinforces the idea that childcare is 'women's work' carried out only by mothers, except in non-typical circumstances, i.e. lone fathers. Cultural values and expectations experienced by fathers reiterate that their involvement is not expected, required or valued. In fact, some fathers felt that their motives in being with children were questioned by other mothers as a result of the 'paedophile' image portrayed by the media. The cultural stereotyping of men as providers and breadwinners only, although contradicting the experience of fatherhood in the 21st century, remains powerful.

The feminised environments also felt like a barrier to many of the fathers, with frequent images of mothers and children and an almost entirely female staff. Where men were present, they were often in the role of handyman or caretaker, again reinforcing the culture that men don't look after children. One of the reports concludes with the view that "it is not impossible to engage with men and under certain circumstances men are more likely to be involved". These circumstances included evening and/or weekend events and other men, reiterating findings from earlier research into family centres.

One of only a few reports on the website to evaluate work currently being done to include fathers is that produced by the Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start local programme, Evaluation of Male Inclusion Project Worker. The role of the worker was to engage directly with fathers, and reports on a dads group which had been set up. However the report states that "attendance is currently poor. It has been found that many fathers cannot attend certain times/days because of work commitments". Again the suggestion is put forward that evenings or weekends may be more suitable. The evaluation suggests that the elements needed before fathers can be involved include commitment from the whole of Sure Start in engaging dads, being father friendly and provision on evenings/weekends.

Another report evaluating work carried out by a Fathers' Development Worker in Swindon found that only 40 fathers had had contact with the programme and that most of those were unemployed. Employed fathers were recognised as a 'hard to

reach group', even though a monthly Saturday group was being held. Another finding of the report was that the resignation of the Fathers' Development Worker after eighteen months had negatively affected the involvement of fathers, despite another worker being provided to facilitate sessions. This bears out the need to involve all staff in working with fathers, as opposed to this being the role of just one (male) person.

The Swindon report also identified a problem with image, highlighting the fears of fathers of being seen as abusers if they spent time with their children. This was caused by the fact that the NSPCC had the contract to employ the Fathers' Development Worker and their logo was prominent on all the promotional materials. Many fathers felt that they would be under suspicion attending a group run by the NSPCC, particularly in view of the high level of campaigning which it was undertaking at the time.

Potter from Durham University delivered a presentation to the 'Working with Fathers 2005' national conference on 5th April 2005 entitled "Involving Fathers: A Sure Start Approach" which again backs up previous research that there has to be a commitment to working with fathers at programme management level with a dedicated worker and father/male specific activities.

Research carried out both in family centres and in Sure Start (Ghate et al 2000, Lewis 2000, Potter C 2005) provides evidence that fathers do not attend service provision unless specific arrangements are made for them to do so. This is usually because services are during working hours, are female dominated and men are unsure of their welcome. Cultural expectations lead them to believe that their presence is of little or no value, in the eyes of the professionals providing services.

If we are to increase the life chances of children, as suggested in research on the value of father involvement, then we need to find ways to encourage fathers to be involved in services for families. It may be that this is a matter of reframing the situation so that it is not the fathers who are the problem, but the way in which services are provided. Cultural expectations will be influenced by the overt provision of family services to the whole family, not just those with whom it has been traditional to work. Fathers should see their involvement in their children's upbringing as welcomed, valued and encouraged by professionals.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This chapter will review the purpose of the research, the possible methodologies considered to undertake the research and the reasons for the choices made. It will also present and discuss the ethical issues considered and how these were dealt with.

Methodology refers to the ways in which researchers decide to gather the data they require, which also involves decisions on what data they consider important and that which is not required. Implicit in this decision is a weighing up, or a valuing, of which data is of importance to the researcher. The researcher will also make judgments on how to present the data they have collected, whether this is offering the data as a basis for determining a true picture of the issue researched, or using the information to illustrate one possible point of view.

Some researchers will argue that the purpose of research is to find the ‘truth’ about the subject being researched so that it can be known and understood objectively. This positivist viewpoint holds that if research is undertaken with regard to validity and reliability, the same results from the data will be collected each time the study is undertaken.

Researchers coming from a social constructionist stance assert that knowledge is subjective and there is no ‘truth’ to be found, as researchers have their own histories and culture which will influence their interpretation of the data and the way they collect it, and even the data that they decide to collect. However, the research may provide additional ways of understanding the experiences of the subject being researched and each of these has value.

Before beginning this research it was therefore important to acknowledge that the research is not an attempt to undertake a study from which it will be possible to determine unequivocally how all fathers will be enabled to access services for families and children. The research aims to explore the experiences of some fathers within the Sure Start MRM area in accessing services and it is hoped that this will have value in adding to the understanding of this experience.

The purpose of the research for this dissertation was to ascertain whether fathers in the Sure Start MRM area felt that they knew about and were able to access services provided by Sure Start for families with young children. Previous research suggests that fathers encounter various barriers to accessing services and this Sure Start programme had employed a father’s worker to encourage involvement of fathers in designing and using services. The research aims to find out whether fathers felt that these barriers had been overcome or whether they were still finding it difficult to access services.

In undertaking the research, it has been important to consider the various methods available to a researcher. The literature search had found some studies which tried to examine why fathers were not accessing services and to discover what difficulties they were encountering. These studies had put forward some suggestions for how to engage with fathers and overcome the barriers. There is little research yet available on services in either family centres or Sure Start local programmes where a fathers' worker had been appointed. It was therefore decided that a literature search would not provide sufficient information on the possible experiences of fathers in this Sure Start area.

In order to collect data on services that fathers had accessed and what services they knew about, it was decided that a questionnaire would be the most efficient way to collect this. The questionnaire could be sent out to all fathers on the Sure Start MRM programme database and also given out to all parents attending services, asking them to pass it to the father figure in their children's lives. This would ensure that a larger number of questionnaires could be circulated compared to just using the database, as it also took account of the changing relationships taking place in families where new partners might be taking on a father role, but who would not be listed in the database. It was also acknowledged that it would be costly, time-consuming and inappropriate to send out the questionnaire to every household in this Sure Start area, as many of these would not contain fathers of children under five and the likely response rate would be very low.

In order to encourage responses and return of the questionnaire, it was decided to keep the questions simple enough to answer with a tick in a box. It was hoped that this would help those fathers for whom literacy was a problem and who would not be able to write in-depth answers. The area has been targeted by the Sure Start unit due to the low educational achievement of residents and this needed to be taken into account. The standardised questionnaire will ensure that interviewer bias will not occur although the respondents may interpret questions in different ways. However, this is accepted and recognised, although little allowance can be made for it in analysing the data collected.

However, it was recognised that although this format would provide some information around the numbers of fathers knowing about and accessing services, it would be able to provide little information about the feelings that the fathers experienced or the barriers that they encountered. In order to provide more than just quantitative data, it was decided to undertake a few in-depth interviews with local fathers to gain more knowledge of their experiences. It was hoped that these interviews would provide qualitative data which could give more understanding of the process of involving fathers.

Questionnaires often elicit a low response rate, and it was understood that it could only give a snapshot view of the knowledge of Sure Start services of those fathers who filled in and returned the questionnaire. It was also acknowledged that the questionnaire could only be circulated to fathers on the database and to those families accessing services, thereby missing out on many fathers in the Sure Start area whose families did not access any services. However, although this data was from a very small sample within the Sure Start area, it was

anticipated that some information could be obtained which would prove useful in adding to existing knowledge and understanding.

Approximately 200 questionnaires were either sent or given out during the month of September 2005 and collection boxes were provided at both the main Sure Start base and at another local venue used to provide open access play sessions. It was hoped that this would increase the response rate if fathers were not necessarily required to post the questionnaire back. It was anticipated that the questionnaires would be returned within a four week period.

The letter that accompanied the questionnaire set out the reasons for the research and how it would be used. It also clarified that the questionnaires were anonymous and no identifying marks existed. It was important, on an ethical basis, to reassure participants that the answers they may give to the questions would not affect the quality or the quantity of the service that they received from Sure Start. Many of the families in the area are in a vulnerable position, with some having experience of state interventions in their lives. It was essential therefore that fathers understood that they were free to answer as they wished without fear of repercussions.

In order to recruit fathers for the one-to-one interviews, volunteers were needed from within the sample group. From an ethical stance, it was necessary to maintain the anonymity of the respondents to the questionnaire while also collecting the name and contact numbers of any fathers who wanted to volunteer to be interviewed. Therefore, it was decided to ask fathers to complete a tear off slip on the covering letter rather than on the questionnaire, in case fathers did not tear the slip off and thereby negate the anonymity of the questionnaires. This slip could be returned outside of the envelope containing the questionnaire, even if it was not removed from the covering letter.

Consideration was also given to the way that fathers undertaking the in-depth interviews could have their anonymity preserved within the research. Obviously their identities would be known to the researcher but each interviewee would be allocated a code which would be used when analysing their interview. Any identifying comments or information would be removed before analysis.

It would have been useful to use the one-to-one interviews to talk to fathers from a wide range of experiences, i.e. with very young children, young fathers, older fathers, those with more than two children, etc. However, because of the anonymity of the questionnaires and the distancing of the tear-off slip giving permission for interview, it was only possible to divide the interviewees into two categories which were identifiable from the Sure Start database. Therefore it was decided to interview three fathers who accessed the Saturday morning dads' breakfast group and three who had never attended in an attempt to identify any differences in their experiences.

It was decided that the in-depth interviews would be fairly structured with a limited number of questions. This would help to ensure that the fathers were asked the same questions and that the interview remained focussed. Unstructured interviews would have led to more data being collected than was

necessary for the purposes of the research and would have taken more time than was available, both for the interview and for the analysis.

The decision to use questionnaires and interviews as the data collection method also reflects similar decisions made in the literature and research currently available. The ability to ask the same questions of many fathers, together with the experiences and stories of a few fathers in a more in-depth interview are techniques echoed across the Sure Start evaluation website. Although this was not the reason for the decision, it is useful to reflect that other researchers came to similar decisions.

It was recognised that the answers given in an interview may be influenced by the researcher and the attitude of the respondent. Some respondents may try to give the 'right' answer to a question and it was important not to convey any indication of what was the expected response. Questions in an interview should be open and invite the respondent to think about their experience without fear of judgement or criticism. It was also for this reason that the option of using focus groups was rejected. It was feared that more assertive fathers might 'speak for' all of the group while those whose experience differed may not feel able to say so. This fear was based on a knowledge of the client group and their possible vulnerability, particularly to an authoritative or assertive figure.

Added to the above is the recognition that the researcher is employed by the programme and, although not a provider of activities at the Daddy Cool breakfast group, is known to many of the families. It was important to recognise the ethical issues that this may raise and to reassure the interviewees that confidentiality and anonymity would be guaranteed.

Neither quantitative nor qualitative data can represent a 'true picture' of the experiences of fathers in the Sure Start programme area. The most that can be obtained is some knowledge of the experience of some fathers within the area as felt by them at the time of the questionnaire and/or interview. These experiences will be unique to each of them, formulated by their history and their cultural influences. It is not possible to extract data from either the responses to questionnaire or the interviews to ascertain the experiences of all, or even most, fathers in this Sure Start area and certainly not generalise on the experiences of all fathers. However, the information gained will add to current knowledge and understanding and may influence the way that services are promoted or delivered within the Sure Start MRM area in the future.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Sure Start Database

The findings detailed below come from various sources, such as the Sure Start MRM database, the responses to the questionnaires and the interviews carried out. The first set of data was obtained from searching the database.

Number of fathers registered on database (completed a joining form)

March 2003 – 36 men (programme started in November 2002)

March 2004 – 109 men (increase of 73 fathers)

March 2005 – 143 men (increase of 34 fathers)

September 2005 – 196 men (increase of 53 fathers)

Session attendance by men at any Sure Start MRM activity

April 2003 to March 2004 – 39 fathers made 119 attendances

April 2004 to March 2005 – 62 fathers made 381 attendances

Attendance by Fathers at Open Access Play Sessions

Soft Play Sessions on Mondays

April 2003 to March 2004 – 13 men attended 27 times

April 2004 to March 2005 – 11 men attended 35 times

Drop In Sessions on Tuesdays

April 2003 to March 2004 – 10 men attended 22 times

April 2004 to March 2005 – 11 men attended 26 times

Attendance at Daddy Cool by Fathers

September 2004 to March 2005 – 18 fathers attended 73 times

April 2005 to September 2005 – 36 fathers attended 117 times

The number of men registered on the database has steadily increased since the programme's inception in November 2002. If the current trend continues it suggests that the year to March 2006 will show the biggest rise, demonstrating an increasing engagement with father figures.

Session attendance figures over the last few years suggest that fathers' attendance at general open access play sessions during the week has barely altered, despite the addition of Daddy Cool services. However, during the second six months of Daddy Cool, the number of fathers engaging with the service doubled with approximately 20 fathers now attending on a regular basis.

4.2 Fathers Inclusion Questionnaire

32 questionnaires were returned out of 200 circulated, giving a response rate of 16%. This is a fairly low response rate, but not unusual when questionnaires have been posted out. It is also indicative of the difficulties encountered in trying to engage with fathers using circulation of written material.

28 fathers said that they had heard of Sure Start while 4 had not. Of these 32, 20 were registered with Sure Start, 10 were not registered and 2 were not sure. It is worth noting that even those who were not registered were, in the main, aware of Sure Start.

26 of the fathers returning the questionnaire were 25 or over, 5 were under 25 with one giving no indication of age. From these figures it can be seen that although the programme has started to engage with fathers, these are mostly from the older age spectrum, with few young fathers or teenage fathers being reached.

Between them the fathers were responsible for 19 children aged 0-2 years and 26 children aged 3-5 years. 13 fathers over the age of 25 were responsible for more than one child, with all other respondents only having one child. None of the fathers were responsible for more than two children.

The fathers were asked to respond to various statements about Sure Start, ticking Agree, Don't Know or Disagree.

	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree
The Sure Start service does not interest me	3	11	17
I have all the information I need to raise my child	5	17	7
The services are only for mothers and children	2	13	14
I would go to events if other men were there	11	16	2
I can go at the times they are open	10	15	4
I know where Sure Start is located	17	11	1
I know Sure Start's opening times	14	14	1
I would like to meet up with other fathers	12	13	4
I would only go to 'male only' events	2	13	14
I would like somewhere nice to go with my children	17	12	0

The majority of fathers returning the questionnaire said that they were interested in the Sure Start service, with approximately one third of the respondents ticking the don't know column. This may indicate that they are unsure of what the Sure Start service is and this is also borne out with at least 11 respondents not knowing if the services were only for mothers and children, where Sure Start is located or the times it is open. These questionnaires were given out to fathers coming to Sure Start activities; mothers attending Sure Start sessions to give to the father figures in their children's lives; and to fathers already on the Sure Start database. It is therefore concerning that so many men are unaware of some basic information about Sure Start.

One of the fathers interviewed who attended the Daddy Cool breakfast group expressed a belief that there should be more information on the outside of the building, giving the days and times of sessions. 'Even potentially have a timetable out there for what's on and when.' He felt that this would promote Sure Start activities within the local community. This was further evidenced by an interviewee who expressed the view that Sure Start activities were not as well advertised as they could be.

12 of the fathers completing the questionnaire said that they would like to meet up with other fathers, yet only 2 specified that they would only come to 'male only' events. This does not reflect the findings presented by Potter in 2005 entitled "Involving Fathers: A Sure Start Approach" which asserted that male/father specific activities needed to be provided.

One explanation for this difference could be that 17 of the respondents to the research questionnaire had attended Daddy Cool breakfast group and therefore felt that they would be open to attending different activities which were open to the whole family. In other words, they already had their specific male/father activity. A further explanation could be that although only 2 respondents said that they would only come to 'male only' events, in reality the other fathers may not attend mixed events if actually invited. A difficulty borne out in much of the previous research (Tower Hamlets – On the Ocean Working with Fathers Report 2004, Swindon – Penhill/Pinehurst Fathers' Development Work Report) has been the difference between expected attendees and the actual number who turn up on the day.

When asked if there were other reasons why they did not access Sure Start activities, 6 cited work or other commitments, 3 respondents felt that their child was either too young or too old, 1 was too ill and 1 said that they 'don't bother'. The issue of work and other commitments was also evidenced in the individual interviews where the 2 fathers who did not access Daddy Cool breakfast group also gave that response. Services are designed to meet the needs of the majority, although it is recognised by professionals that a 'one size fits all' method of delivery is not true. Sure Start, as much as any other service provider, needs to accept that not all parents of young children will feel that the services have anything to offer them. As 1 father put it so succinctly they 'don't bother'.

A range of responses was received when fathers were asked what type of services Sure Start could offer which would interest them. 3 fathers suggested activities, 2 respondents suggested outings and 2 put forward the idea of courses or education. Other responses were 'not sure', 'wouldn't come', 'the way they have Sure Start at the moment is quite good' and 'anything other than Saturday breakfast/football club'. It is interesting to note that these responses are similar to those found in previous research (Ghate et al 2000) which suggests that fathers prefer activity based events.

The questionnaire then asked some specific questions about the Daddy Cool service. 26 of the respondents had heard of Daddy Cool, while 5 had not and 1 did not answer. 23 of these had seen the Daddy Cool logo which is used to promote the father/male specific services.

18 of the respondents (just over 55%) had been to the Daddy Cool breakfast. 16 of them ticked that they had been satisfied with the service while one ticked 'don't know' and the other did not respond. Although only 50% of the respondents to the questionnaire were satisfied with the service, this represents 89% of those who had attended.

Respondents were asked which of the other Daddy Cool services they had accessed and the answers were as follows:

	Yes	No
One-to-One Support	5	19
Dads Magazine	16	8
Trip to indoor play arena	2	22
Fathers Day 2005 Celebration	10	14
Big Screen Football	4	20
Fathers Day 2004 trip to theme park	2	22
Football Stadium Tour	5	19
Other One-Off Events	8	16

Although only 24 respondents actually answered this section, it would seem that the magazine is being seen by at least 50% of the fathers. The Fathers Day 2005 celebration had been attended by almost a third of the respondents with several fathers accessing almost everything provided under the Daddy Cool banner.

Again 16 of the fathers said that they were satisfied with the service that they accessed, with 2 providing comments on what they thought would improve the service. These fathers offered the opinions that some soft play equipment at Daddy Cool would be nice and that sometimes not enough refreshments were available at family events.

4.3 Individual Interviews with Fathers

My intention had been to interview 6 fathers, 3 who had attended Daddy Cool breakfast group and 3 who had not attended. From the forms returned where fathers were offering to be interviewed, I was able to ascertain from the database that 9 of the fathers had attended Daddy Cool and 3 had not. I therefore selected all 3 of those who had not attended and made a random selection of 3 by doing a blind draw from the nine who had attended Daddy Cool.

I then contacted these 6 and arranged to carry out individual interviews at a time to suit them using the Sure Start MRM programme main base as a venue. The purpose of the interviews was explained and the fathers signed forms to confirm that they understood the process and how to stop it or complain. The interviews were then recorded and the transcripts typed up by me to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

I was able to interview all 3 of the Daddy Cool breakfast group attendees, but I was only able to interview 2 of those who did not attend. Despite confirming an interview time and place, 1 of the fathers failed to attend. Although this was disappointing, it is also a reflection on the difficulty of engaging with fathers. It can take time to build trust and it could be that this father regretted his decision to offer to be interviewed. I have not seen this father at any Sure Start activity so am not able to explain why he failed to attend the pre-arranged appointment.

The first question asked what being a father meant to them. 4 of the fathers mentioned the sense of responsibility, of being relied upon. However, all 5 of the fathers interviewed talked about the joy and laughter that their children brought into their lives and a feeling that they were doing something rewarding. 1 of the fathers commented 'it's not just being there, you're actually achieving something by being there.' This was further echoed by another father who said 'just being there, loving to be there - I don't know how to say any better, it's fantastic.' Each of the fathers demonstrated an enthusiasm for fatherhood and the meaning that it had brought to their lives, as well as a commitment to the wellbeing of their children.

I wanted to find out what the enablers had been that had encouraged the fathers to attend Sure Start. For those who attended Daddy Cool, 2 of the 3 answered straight away with the words 'my wife', confirming previous research (Pleck 1982, Quinn & Staines 1979 quoted in Ryan 2000) that mothers can often act as gatekeepers to services. In this instance the mothers had encouraged them to attend, on one occasion over a long period of time, evidencing that one way of engaging with fathers is through mothers. It also showed that giving out information to mothers may not have an instantaneous effect and that fathers often need lots of encouragement before they try a new service (Potter 2005).

The third father talked about the isolation he experienced being at home with children and the difficulty in attending services traditionally aimed at mothers. He said that even going to the park with his child could be intimidating, commenting 'I will walk into a park sometimes and see a group of young mums and it's quite a daunting experience'. It was the chance to be around other dads and to encourage his son's development that had been the motivator for him to attend on Saturdays.

The 2 fathers who did not attend Daddy Cool were asked what would encourage them to come to Sure Start. Both of them mentioned that weekends were their only free time to do anything with their families or around the house. They felt that this time was so limited it was difficult to fit anything else in. 1 of the fathers also often works on Saturday mornings so he was not able to attend Daddy Cool breakfast group, although he had attended an event that had been held one Saturday afternoon. Time available was the issue which often prevented these fathers taking up services either now or in the past.

I then explored the issue of barriers further with all the interviewees. Apart from the problem of long working hours, 1 of the fathers felt that the entrance to the new main base would put fathers off attending. He felt that because they are large wooden doors, they provided an effective barrier which was intimidating

and unwelcoming. 2 of the fathers also mentioned that they had been nervous and apprehensive about coming, because they were unsure of what they would find. However, 1 also said that he had put up a 'front' so as not to appear nervous to other dads.

One of the barriers noted in previous research carried out by Ghate et al (2000) was the feminised environment, although fathers felt that a worker's sex was less important than their professional skills and ability to form relationships with service users, both male and female. I therefore explored the attitudes of staff and other parents to those fathers who had attended Daddy Cool. The fathers' worker is male but all other staff who work at the Daddy Cool breakfast or support it at various times are female. All three fathers said that they had felt welcome and that there was camaraderie between the fathers who attended. They all also commented that the attitude of staff was good, with one father saying 'Everyone so far ... is just fantastic.'

One of the main points of the research had been to find out whether fathers accessing Daddy Cool breakfast group also felt part of Sure Start MRM as a whole. I was interested to find out whether they had information about, and access to, all the Sure Start services. All of the fathers said that they would know how to access information or services if they required them. Those who had attended Daddy Cool breakfast group said that they would initially approach the fathers' worker and they were confident that he would either provide the information or go away and find it for them. Those who had not attended on Saturdays were also confident that they would be able to access information and services direct from the Sure Start main base or through their wives or partners.

They were all aware of the various services, either through information they had been given, or because they had seen these services at the Daddy Cool breakfast group. Most of the services, such as play services, toy and book library, oral health, podiatry and special needs, have all attended Daddy Cool during the past year. There are also plans in hand for the midwives to attend at least three times a year to promote the involvement of fathers in the ante and post natal periods.

It was encouraging to hear that the fathers would be able to access other Sure Start services and interesting to note that for those who attended Daddy Cool, this would be their initial route for information. However, the fathers who did not attend Daddy Cool also felt that they had access to information and services, even if this was through the traditional route of their child's mother.

The final question asked of all the interviewees enquired what Sure Start MRM could do to support them more as a father. This proved to be a difficult question and the general opinion was that Sure Start was doing everything they wanted it to. One father said he wished it had been around years ago, while another suggested, partly in jest, that if Sure Start could pay money to dads so they didn't need to work, then they would be able to attend more often. However, none of the fathers had any specific requests for services, other than those which were currently being provided. 1 father suggested that a fathers' group on a weekday may be useful to fathers who don't work or who work shifts and may have to miss Saturdays from time to time. His comment was 'I'm not sure what day, but

I'm sure if work turned round to me and said you've got to work the next six or seven weeks on a Saturday I'd find it destroying really.'

It may be that it is difficult to devise new service provision if no choices are offered. It can be easier to vote for one service out of several possible services rather than invent one which nobody else has thought of. Positive comments about the services already provided included 'I think the services are really good', 'The support's there if I ask for it, so I don't suppose there is anything more' and 'I find my time really enjoyable when I do come here.'

The view of Sure Start put forward by all of the fathers interviewed was very positive. The fathers who had not attended Daddy Cool had felt quite able to come along to an occasional event when they had time off from work and had felt comfortable and sure of their welcome. As I was only able to interview 2 such fathers, it may be that they are not typical of the fathers who do not access services and it is not right to make generalisations from such a small interview sample.

The fathers interviewed who attended Daddy Cool appreciated the opportunity it offered them to meet up with other fathers and to spend time with their children in a safe place. 2 of the fathers commented on how their children ask each morning if it's a Daddy Cool day which they felt showed how much their children also enjoyed it. 'We don't have a Saturday morning, we have a Daddy Cool morning.'

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

This research project set out to ascertain whether fathers in a local programme Sure Start area felt included in the Sure Start provision. Previous research (Ghate 2000, Lewis 2000, Singh & Newburn 2005) has shown that fathers are not traditionally included in the way that early years or maternity services are provided or the timing of the provision. This has been recognised by many of the Sure Start local programmes but few have yet addressed it, or evaluated any work that they have done towards engaging with fathers.

Sure Start MRM in Southampton took the decision to employ a fathers' worker, whose primary role would be to engage with the fathers in the area and encourage them to use the Sure Start services. Although there were a number of fathers on the database who had registered with the programme, very few actually attended any of the current service provision during the week.

Following early consultation with local fathers, the decision was taken to set up a Saturday morning breakfast group. This group was facilitated by the fathers' worker with support each week from another member of the Sure Start team. The Daddy Cool breakfast group started at the end of August 2004 and it was decided to evaluate this provision one year on.

Using both questionnaires and interviews to obtain qualitative and quantitative data, fathers were asked various questions about their knowledge and use of Sure Start services. They were also asked what Sure Start MRM could do to support them in their role as father.

Only 16% of the questionnaires were returned, giving information from 32 forms. This quantitative data provided some insights into the confusion around the services provided by the Sure Start local programme although most (28) of the respondents had heard of it. At least a third of all respondents ticked the 'don't know' column when asked various statements about Sure Start and the services provided. A smaller number of the fathers either knew about or had used the Sure Start services such as midwifery, health visiting, open access play sessions and book and toy library. The Sure Start local programme may find it beneficial to engaging with fathers if more publicity was available within the community or displayed outside of the main building, preferably by the pavement so that it can be read without having to access the premises. This lack of publicity was also talked about by 2 of the interviewees who felt that insufficient information was generally available in the local community.

Information on Sure Start activities has always been sent to every family on the database but in the summer of 2005 this figure had reached over 600. At that stage, it became too costly and time-consuming to post out the information. Activity calendars continued to be printed but are now handed out to families when they attend sessions or through health visitors and midwives.

However, this does mean that a family who does not have a Sure Start health visitor or midwife may find it difficult to access information on Sure Start activities, including days and times. This also holds true for fathers who may not expect specific activities and therefore not know that they are missing out on information and services.

Although Sure Start activity calendars are also sent to local professionals, schools and pre-schools, it would seem that the information is still not reaching some of the local families. Using local shops, shop windows, and a notice-board outside of the main Sure Start base may reach more families.

The questionnaire elicited the information I was seeking, although the question on services that the fathers knew about, had accessed or would like to know more about did not work very well. The information gained was difficult to analyse as some of the fathers had ticked 'have used' but not 'know about'. This distorted many of the figures with, for instance, more fathers having used Soft Play sessions than actually knew about them. It was difficult therefore to gain any worthwhile information for this question, which I would re-design if I were to ask the question again.

The interviews provided more in-depth responses and, as a female worker within Sure Start, it was interesting to hear about the services from a father's point of view. I was surprised to hear that one father found groups of young mums 'intimidating', and yet I would not have been surprised if a mother had said she found a group of young men intimidating. This illustrates that as researchers, we need to be able to listen to what people are saying and be aware that their views may be unexpected from our own view of the world. This type of comment may also help service providers to understand the experiences of all those who want to use our services, not just the majority.

The qualitative data provided by the interviews was interesting and thoughtful. However, the limitations of the amount of data collected within the five interviews do mean that this data cannot provide generalisations and reliable information. The qualitative data collected during these interviews provides an insight into each person's experience of fatherhood and the services provided by Sure Start. These insights will add to the current knowledge and understanding.

Many of the responses received to the questionnaire were the answers I had expected, with older fathers over 25 in the majority and many of the fathers knowing about the services offered by Sure Start MRM. However, I had expectations that when asked why they do not access Sure Start services, the answers would reflect that Sure Start provides these services during the working week. However, it was interesting to note that the fathers answered that they were too busy or were working. Their cultural expectations are that these services are traditionally provided Monday to Friday so it was their working that was the issue, not the service provision.

During the interviews I was able to explore this further. One father said that alternative provision of a fathers' service during the week would be useful for fathers who do shift work or who work Saturday mornings. This may be an idea

that Sure Start MRM wishes to explore with further research, as this was only put forward by one father. However, for two of the interviewees it was more about the lack of time for everything they wanted to do at the weekends with their families that was a problem.

This may lead to a recognition that, for many families, life is busy enough. Time pressures around working, visiting family, maintaining a home and spending time with the children mean that there is little time left for attending early years' services. It is not necessarily that fathers do not wish to know more about their children's development or spend time with them, it is a personal choice about how to spend the little free time that they have as a family.

For fathers who have accessed Sure Start MRM events and services, the response is mainly positive. Most of the fathers knew about the various services offered and of those who had accessed Daddy Cool, 16 out of 18 indicated that they were satisfied with the service. The regular attendance at the Daddy Cool breakfast group by fathers who value the service is an indication that it is meeting their needs. As most of these fathers also work full time, it is an indication of the value they put on the experience that by personal choice they give up some of their free time to attend.

The research set out to explore whether fathers felt that they were included as part of Sure Start MRM or had been sidelined into their own activities. The answers received showed that the fathers feel that they have access to Sure Start activities and information, either through the Daddy Cool breakfast group or through their child's mother. As more and more of the Sure Start services are recognising the benefit of the Daddy Cool breakfast group for reaching fathers, so the attendance at the session by toy and book librarians, podiatrist and oral health has increased. It is also now being planned for the midwives to attend three times a year to reach fathers who are expecting a child. This does indeed give the fathers direct access to information and services and is welcomed by them. Those interviewees who had attended Daddy Cool breakfast group all mentioned the staff who had been in to see them, so this was recognised and valued by them.

An unexpected additional benefit of Daddy Cool breakfast group was found from the individual interviews with those who attended the provision. All 3 of them talked about the friends they had made within the group and some of them meet up during the week to play football, the option of table tennis is being discussed and some of them are involved in setting up a fathers' group in a local school to promote the involvement of fathers in their child's education. This has all come from the fathers themselves, with no input from Sure Start. Having the opportunity to meet up on a Saturday has created friendships and promoted outside interests, as well as an awareness of the benefits of fathers' involvement with their children. It is also interesting to note that this has not happened from any of the service provision during the week with activities usually attended mainly by mothers.

The research has provided some expected answers and some unexpected insights. There is the option of further research by Sure Start MRM into additional

provision for fathers who work shifts or Saturday mornings, as well as investigating the attitudes of staff to working with fathers. There has been no evidence of staff concerned about the risks to children from working with fathers unlike the research by Ghate et al (2000), but this was not the focus of this research.

Lack of information about Sure Start MRM activities around times, days and venues was evidenced by both the questionnaires and the interviews. Provision of an information board outside of the main Sure Start building and using local shops to display information may be ways forward to combat this. It may also prove beneficial to ensure that the building is more child-friendly and welcoming to families in the local community. The large wooden doors were mentioned by one interviewee as being a barrier to fathers attending on a Saturday and this may also hold true for families generally.

Although the fathers interviewed did not mention the predominance of female staff as an issue, it could encourage more fathers to attend weekday services if more men were present. As one father mentioned that groups of young mums can be intimidating, it could be the knowledge that the activities will be attended by mainly mothers that is a barrier to more men attending.

Some of the results from the questionnaire and interviews confirmed previous research. Some of the fathers talked about long working hours and the sense of responsibility in providing for their children which bears out the findings from Burghes (1997). With over 80% of fathers in employment, and most of these in full time employment, the opportunity available for family time is limited and fathers are faced with choices about the best use of that time.

Ryan's (2000) research on mothers acting as gatekeepers to services and not wanting fathers to be more involved than they are is contradicted to some extent by the interviewees. 2 of the interviewees, when asked what had encouraged them to come to Sure Start, promptly replied 'my wife', suggesting that these mothers had been willing to allow their husbands to become more involved with their children and to spend time with them.

Ghate et al (2000) stated that family centres that had a strategy for working with fathers were more successful at engaging with men than centres with no strategy. It was having discussed and conceived a strategy that was the important issue, rather than what that strategy was. This local programme Sure Start had decided that their strategy for engaging with fathers would be to employ a fathers' worker and in doing so, they increased their likelihood of success. This is borne out by the increase in fathers on the database and the number of fathers attending the Saturday Daddy Cool breakfast group.

The research carried out previously by other Sure Start local programmes (see <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk>) in such geographically diverse areas as Swindon, Torbay, London and Doncaster suggested that the main barriers were practical issues of timing, cultural expectations and female dominated environments. In providing a weekly Saturday morning breakfast group for fathers, facilitated by a man in the role of fathers' worker, this local programme Sure Start addressed two

of these main barriers. The fathers who attend do not appear to take on board cultural expectations around their role, enjoying spending time with their children. It may be that the cultural expectations are deterring other fathers from attending the Daddy Cool breakfast group, but that is not one of the reasons given by those answering the questionnaire or during the individual interviews.

Potter (2005) stated that there had to be commitment to working with fathers at programme management level and this is borne out within this local programme Sure Start by the decision to employ a fathers' worker. There has also been commitment to the breakfast group from many members of the Sure Start team who have attended on Saturdays to provide support to the fathers' worker and to engage with the fathers.

Sure Start MRM in Southampton has understood the barriers highlighted by other programmes to working with fathers and tried to counteract each of them. This has been successful so far and the programme is now engaging with more fathers. Additional well-placed publicity may also contribute to reaching local fathers together with activities outside of the working week, which for some fathers does include Saturday mornings. Extending the current provision further into the weekend and possibly including occasional evenings may reach more fathers.

It should also be recognised that while Sure Start should do everything to make it possible for families, including fathers, to attend service provision, it is also a matter of personal choice for those families, and fathers, as to how to spend their free time. Sure Start needs to ensure that information and access to services is available when families, and fathers, need it. Children benefit from the involvement of their fathers in their upbringing and Sure Start can help to promote and enable this.

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Interview Questions

1. What does being a father mean to you?
2. What would/did encourage you to come to Sure Start?
3. Why, do you think, you had not come before?
4. How did you feel when you first came to Sure Start?
5. What, if anything, could have made it easier for you to attend?
6. Can you tell me about the attitude of other parents to you?
7. Can you tell me about the attitude of staff to you?
8. Have you had information about and access to all Sure Start services?
9. How would you get information about or access to Sure Start services if you needed it?
10. What could Sure Start do to support you more as a father?

Fathers Inclusion Questionnaire

General Sure Start

- Q1 **Have you ever heard of Sure Start?**
Yes.....
No.....
- Q2 **Are you registered with Sure Start?**
Yes.....
No.....
Not Sure.....
- Q3 **Could you please say whether you are.....**
24 years of age or younger.....
Over the age of 25.....
- Q4 **How many children are you responsible for between the following ages**
- | | <i>0</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Between 0 and 2 years of age | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Between 3 and 5 years of age | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q5

Please tick whether you know about, use or would like to use any of the following Sure Start services (please tick as many as you would like)

	<i>Know About</i>	<i>Would like to know more about</i>	<i>Have Used</i>	<i>Currently Use</i>	<i>Would like to use</i>
Midwifery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health Visiting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nursery Nurse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Portage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Soft Play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drop In	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mad for Music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toy Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Podiatrist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oral Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family Support Workers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q6

If you have not accessed any Sure Start services please tick which of the following, if any, apply

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
The Sure Start service does not interest me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have all the information I need to raise my child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The services are only for mothers and children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would go to events if other men were there	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can go at the times they are open	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know where Sure Start is located	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know Sure Starts opening times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to meet up with other fathers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would only go to 'male only' events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like somewhere nice to go with my children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q7

Are there any other reasons as to why you do not access Sure Start services

Q8 Do you have any suggestions about the type of services Sure Start could offer which could interest you?

Daddy Cool

Q9 Have you heard of Daddy Cool?
Yes.....
No.....

Q10 Have you ever seen the following logo?
Yes.....
No.....
Not Sure.....

Q11 Have you ever been to the Daddy Cool breakfast?
Yes.....
No.....

Q12 If yes, how satisfied were you with the service?
Satisfied.....
Don't Know.....
Un-Satisfied.....

Q13 Have you accessed any of the following Daddy Cool Services?

	Yes	No
One to One Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dads Magazine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trip to Ollies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fathers Day 2005 Celebration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Big Screen Football	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fathers Day 2004 trip to Paultons Park	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Football Stadium tour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other one off events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q14

Were you satisfied with the service offered?

Yes.....

No.....

If no, Please say what you think _____
could have improved the service _____

Thankyou very much for your time