Sure Start Leam Lane Evaluation

Report of the Evaluation of the Messy Days Programme

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Acknowledgements

Throughout the research, members of the research team were made welcome at the Messy Days sessions. We are grateful to the Sure Start staff members in particular, who had to endure the watchfulness of participant observers. Perhaps the most important participants in this evaluation were the parents and children themselves. They were willing to talk to us about their experiences of the programme, and welcomed the evaluation team week after week. To all of these, we offer our sincere thanks.

Although the evaluation team was led by Jill Clark, the majority of the fieldwork and data collection was carried out by Caroline McCaughey. Two of our colleagues - Lisa Murtagh and Hanneke Jones - also completed some observational work, and we wish to formally record our acknowledgements and thanks to them too.
Executive Summary

- The University evaluation team was asked to formally evaluate a project within the Leam Lane Sure Start programme – the Messy Days programme. The case study took place between November 2004 and March 2005, and used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was generated and gathered from interviews (both formal and informal), questionnaires, group discussions, participant observation and documentary analysis. Full details of the research design and process can be found on pages 5 to 8 of this report.

- Messy Days is designed to benefit both children and parents (or their carer), and is a creative group where children are given the opportunity to engage in play activities while raising parental awareness of the importance of play. There is no formal referral process, and it is a popular activity which usually has a waiting list.

- The findings of the evaluation are mostly positive, and are presented in this report, alongside recommendations which suggest ways of developing and improving the Messy Days programme further. Eleven recommendations have been made, based on the findings from data analysis, which include issues such as:

  1. Regular review and evaluation
  2. Offering a more focussed Messy Days programme
  3. Embedding the Foundation Stage curriculum
  4. Additional play
  5. Dedicated venue
  6. Planning
  7. Programme length
  8. Reaching the ‘hard to reach’
  9. Staffing
  10. Involving parents
  11. Resources for home.

Full details and the reasons for the suggestions are included in pages 27-29 of this report.
Introduction

The three-year evaluation study is funded by Gateshead City Council, and is being undertaken by staff at the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The overall aim of the evaluation is to enable the Sure Start Partnership to:

- Monitor the services offered.
- Examine and track the Programme in relation to the stated objectives and targets.
- Make changes to the programme as a result of findings and recommendations made through the evaluation.

More specifically, the evaluation aims to:

- Monitor the progress of the Sure Start Partnership in achieving its key objectives and targets.
- Review the work practices through which Sure Start is being delivered.
- Assess whether the services being provided achieve good value.
- Assess whether the Sure Start programme is:
  - Adding value to existing services.
  - Involving parents, grandparents and other carers.
  - Providing links and support to services for older children.
  - Promoting participation of local families in the design and working of the programme.

The first phase of the evaluation was a Baseline Survey which was completed in April 2004, which reported that General awareness of Sure Start was high, with the majority of respondents stating that they had heard of Sure Start and only 7% reporting that they had not (Hall and Clark, 2004). There was strong interest in one particular activity, the Messy Days programme, with more than half of interviewees feeling that they would like to take advantage of this with their children. Those respondents who had actually used the groups were uniformly positive.

The second phase of the evaluation includes a number of evaluative case studies of particular activities, or projects, offered within the Sure Start Programme. This document reports on the evaluative case study of a particular activity within the Leam Lane Sure Start Programme, the Messy Days programme.

The Research Team

The team was led By Jill Clark, the majority of the fieldwork and data collection was carried out by Caroline McCaughey, and colleagues Lisa Murtagh and Hanneke Jones also completed some observational work.
The Case Study Method

Case study research is used to conduct an in-depth investigation of an issue at a specific instance and location. When used in social science research, case studies may help determine the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of groups the researchers wish to examine, as well as describe the interactions among those groups.

The project case study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was generated and gathered from interviews (both formal and informal), questionnaires, group discussions, participant observation and documentary analysis. Fieldwork took place between November 2004 and February 2005, and analysis and writing took place February to March 2005.

The Research Process

*Documentary analysis*

Documentation relating to the Messy Days programme was made available to the research team and included PR/publicity materials, an example of the folder used for each participating child, an information sheet for parents regarding the Foundation Stages, the pre-participation questionnaire, Messy Days Aims and Objectives, Pre-session questionnaire and post-session evaluation questionnaire.

*Interviews*

In order to examine the programme in relation to strategy and overall aims and objectives within the Sure Start Leam Lane programme, we formally interviewed key players including the current Messy Days Sure Start staff member; the future Messy Days Sure Start staff member and a parent volunteer. These discussions took place on a one-to-one basis and we used a semi-structured interview schedule which was designed as a result of our observations of the sessions. In addition, the research team were able to talk with and have discussions with all the parents within the sessions. Although these discussions were completed on an informal basis, they were interesting from a research point of view, as it helped to establish good relations between the evaluation team, and the parents, and the discussions help to design the questionnaire which was given to the parents.

It was our original intention to conduct a formal focus group discussion with the parent participants, where we would explore their views of how the programme is being delivered and managed. Although focus groups are used to obtain opinions rather than describing behaviour and indicate what people think, not what they actually do, such accounts are useful in exploring how people perceive projects and the strengths and weaknesses they identify. However, the timing of the sessions, and the nature of the programme (parents with one or more child under the age of 5) meant that it was difficult to protect time and arrange a group discussion. Parents had to leave promptly following a session (usually to collect older children from school) and arranging a time outside of the session would have put an additional burden (e.g. arranging and paying for childcare). Despite this, the evaluation team were able to have discussions with parents on a more informal basis.
The members of the evaluation team were initially introduced to the group by the Sure Start staff member. However, the members of the evaluation felt that it was also necessary to introduce themselves to each of the parents individually. This helped to break down any barriers and helped the evaluation team form relationships with the parents. This approach worked well, parents spoke openly with members of the evaluation team about their experiences and opinions of the Messy Days programme.

**Observations**

We aimed to observe case study projects wherever possible, and we were able to observe all but one of the selected block of Messy Days sessions. This enabled the research team to gain valuable insight into the day-to-day processes within the programme, and the contexts involved in working with other agencies. The benefits of using such a method were multiple:

- Familiarisation/inception with the locality, the projects, key staff involved, other agencies/services, etc.
- Establishing a rapport with those being researched, particularly the 'users' of the projects being evaluated
- Ease of access to reports, documentation, etc. which may provide evidence of monitoring or evaluation.

The research team took a participant observational approach to the work, and joined in with practical tasks such as setting out the room and preparing refreshments in order to help ‘break the ice’ and establish a rapport.

In addition, the research team used a digital camera to collect pictorial data of the venue, room layout, seating plans, etc. Images collected during the research are used illustratively throughout this report. All parents signed a University Consent form to agree to this, with the understanding that the research team would protect the anonymity of all the participants, not use real names, and would not use images of children which showed their faces. All the parents agreed to take part in the research.

**Parent Questionnaire**

A brief questionnaire was designed by the research team to be completed by those parents who attended Messy Days. Parents were asked if they would be prepared to complete a questionnaire before they were administered. The parents were informed of the purpose of the questionnaires at the second session and were promised that their responses would be treated confidentially by the research team. We were anxious that parents would have the opportunity to be open and honest when completing the questionnaires, and so we attempted to avoid the involvement of any Sure Start staff, thus ensuring full confidentiality. By doing this, we were keen to protect the independence of the evaluation, and thus the status of validity, reliability and objectivity. As we were exploring the views of ‘users’ of a service, we felt that it was important that such views were as independent as possible. Unfortunately, one of the completed questionnaires was seen by one staff member and so we, as researchers, failed in our promise to preserve anonymity and confidentiality fully.

All of the parents agreed to complete the questionnaire, and received their copy of the questionnaire at the third session. Four questionnaires were returned to the research team at the fourth session. Unfortunately, no one from the research team was able to attend the fifth session and the sixth session was dedicated wholly to the Christmas
party, which meant there was little opportunity to ask parents directly for their completed questionnaires. Despite this, one further completed questionnaire was returned at a later date, which meant we had an overall response rate of 50%.

The low number of returned questionnaires is disappointing and will not illustrate a clear representation of the parent group. However, the returned questionnaires can be seen as illustrative of the parent group, and we opted to use the questionnaire data to underpin our thematic analysis and writing about the Messy Days programme.

A copy of the parent questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.
The Messy Days Programme

Introduction

The initial idea behind the Messy Days programme was put forward by one of the nursery nurses employed by Sure Start, who worked alongside other Sure Start staff to develop it. The nursery nurse felt there was a gap in the provision of services available to parents and children between those groups aimed at toddlers, and nursery. The Messy Days programme, therefore, was developed to provide a service that would bridge this gap. The nursery nurse visited a number of nursery groups in the local area so she could familiarise herself with services that were available, and to get ideas for the programme. Following consultation with local parents, several ideas were put forward about what kind of service they would like to become available to them.

The Messy Days programme started in September 2003, and, to date, has been run five times in total. Each programme is run over a six week period, with one, one-hour session offered weekly. It is aimed at children aged between 2 and 4 years old, and is not exclusive to mothers. There are usually around ten children in total who attend any one programme, and the child and their carer are not restricted to attendance at one single programme.

Although Messy Days is a structured programme, it is flexible enough to meet the needs of the parents and children who attend the sessions. Messy Days has proved to be a popular programme, parents and children attend the sessions voluntarily (there is no referral process) and there is always a waiting list to attend the programme.

At the first session of the programme we observed, parents were asked to complete a pre-Messy Days questionnaire and bring it with them to the first session. This was the first time that this had been attempted. These questionnaires are designed to give the Sure Start staff member basic information on the child and the parent, such as an indication of their level of knowledge of the Foundation Stage, and amount of time spent each week engaged in creative activities with their child. This questionnaire also gives the parents the opportunity to indicate their preference for activities that they feel their child would enjoy in the forthcoming sessions. Parents are asked to bring the completed pre-Messy Days questionnaires along to the first session, which gives the Sure Start staff member the opportunity to plan the remaining five sessions around parent’s preferences.

Aims and Objectives of Messy Days

In the broader sense, the Messy Days programme is housed under Objective 3 – ‘Improving the Ability to Learn’, which more specifically, states:

> In particular, by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promote early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and through early identification and support of children with special needs (Leam Lane Area Delivery Plan 2001: 85).
The programme is also particularly relevant to one of the specific national targets of Sure Start:

All children in the area to have access to good quality play and learning opportunities, helping progress towards early learning goals when they get to school (Leam Lane Area Delivery Plan 2001: 85).

Messy Days is a creative group where children are given the opportunity to engage in play activities while raising parental awareness of the importance of play. The formal aims of the Messy Days programme are stated as:

1. To raise parental awareness of the Early Years Curriculum/Foundation Stages.
2. To raise parental awareness of the importance of play.
3. To encourage effective parental involvement in play activities.
4. To develop parents’ knowledge of age appropriate activities.
5. To provide a stimulating and social environment in which children are given the opportunity to learn and develop.
6. To provide a non-threatening and social environment for parents to network.
7. To provide opportunities for parental choices for play activities.
8. To provide opportunities for children to prepare for Nursery School.
   (Messy Days, 2004).

It became clear through our research that both the Sure Start staff members involved in the delivery of the programme and the parents involved were aware of the formal aims and objectives of Messy Days. Individual parents, however, whilst also being aware of the aims, interpreted them in a more personal way which was meaningful to them. They reported varied expectations and hopes about Messy Days and what they expected to gain by attending: all of which were positive. One mother reported that her main expectation was to see her child enjoy herself, while another felt that Messy Days helped her to watch and interact with her children and participate in the activities. Our observations of the programme sessions confirmed that all the parents did interact well with their children, and encouraged them to get involved in the activity.
Questionnaire responses to what parents hoped their child would gain by attending Messy Days was significant. Most of the respondents (60%) hoped that their child would become more confident from attending the programme. Children developing social skills, meeting and interacting with other children of a similar age were also important features. One parent mentioned that she hoped her child would “learn to share”. Whilst this is not a formal aim or objective of Messy Days, it is an underlying implicit aim of all Sure Start projects; and it is also a vital social skill and aids the interaction and bonding process. While observing the group it was apparent that a number of parents were aware of the need for their child to share, stressing verbally to their child that “it is not nice to be greedy”.

The Messy Days programme clearly fits well with the national objectives of Sure Start, and in terms of focussing on creativity, it fits well with the Leam Lane Programme, as it offers something fairly unique, particularly for parents:

... it’s not talking all the time, so it’s less intimidating for parents... I think it fits in quite well because it’s less structured than some of the groups, more structured than say a parent-toddler group ... which is sometimes perceived as a bit more of a ‘free-play and coffee morning’ sort of thing. (Sure Start staff member)

Data from our questionnaire survey certainly revealed that Messy Days was attracting parents it aims to, with the majority of parents (80%) stating that they were from the Leam Lane area, with 50% also have family living in the area. The length of time which they lived in Leam Lane ranged from 21/2 to 36yrs, with a mean average of 14 years. 60% of the respondents reported that they “know and socialise” with other people from the Leam Lane area.

All the parents who completed our questionnaires were mothers and 80% said they had other children other than the child who attended Messy Days. The children who attended Messy Days ranged between 2yrs and 3yrs of age. These parents reported that their awareness of the Sure Start programme generally varied – half stated that they heard about Sure Start through their Health Visitor, a quarter through friends and a further quarter through “word of mouth”.

The Foundation Stage

A major feature of Messy Days is the relevance of the Programme to the Foundation Stage, and the provision of information of the stage to the parents involved. The Foundation Stage was introduced in September 2000 and was incorporated into the National Curriculum as part of the Education Act 2002. The Foundation Stage is directed at children aged 3-5 years old. The philosophy underpinning the Foundation Stage curriculum is that learning should be carefully planned and structured, with an emphasis on activities that are fun, relevant and motivating for each child

The Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage sets out six areas of learning covering children’s physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. All six of these areas of learning are included in the Profile:
Personal, social and emotional development;
Communication, language and literacy;
Mathematical development;
Knowledge and understanding of the world;
Physical development;
Creative development.

(http://www.surestart.gov.uk/ensuringquality/foundationstage/).

Each stage of learning has a set of related early learning goals that children are expected to achieve or exceed at the end of the Foundation Stage. The Foundation Stage is delivered in a number of settings from pre-school groups to nursery and reception classes.

At Leam Lane, elements of the Foundation Stage are delivered as part of the Messy Days programme. It was observed by our researchers that the Sure Start staff member was unsure of how to deliver the information on the Foundation Stage within the context of the Messy Days sessions. This was, to be fair, mostly due to time restraints and the age of the children who attended the sessions. It was observed that the parents of the older children in the group were more interested in learning about the Foundation Stage. This idea is reinforced by the Sure Start staff member who stated:

*I know it’s one of the targets, but I feel like, it doesn’t lend itself that well and especially when the children … the attention span of two year olds … I think the parents are pre-occupied with that really as well.*

From our questionnaire data, the awareness among the parents about the Foundation Stage was relatively high (60%). However, it is interesting to note that none of the parents reported that they found out about the Foundation Stage through attending the Messy Days programme. 40% of respondents reported that they learnt about the Foundation Stage through ‘study at college’ and 40% did not respond to this question. One parent stated that she was aware of the Foundation Stage as she was a qualified nursery nurse.

Of the 60% of respondents that were aware of the Foundation Stage there was a general consensus that it is important for them to be aware of how the Foundation Stage is linked to the Messy Days programme. One parent reported it was:

*important to know that Messy Days is beneficial in that it aids children with the early learning goals.*

Another parent reported:

*... you want to know how and why children learn through play.*

It became clear through our observation of the sessions that it was difficult for the Sure Start staff member to effectively provide this information formally to parents, due to two main reasons. Firstly, there was insufficient time and space within the sessions for the parents to dedicate their full attention, and secondly, it appeared that the information was felt to be less relevant to those parents with younger children. The Sure Start staff member had tried various methods within the sessions, such as
including leaflets in the children’s files, and by suggesting that two parents stay behind after each session to discuss the sessions. However, these different attempts did not appear satisfactory. After our observations, the evaluation team suggested that information on the Foundation Stage be displayed on posters in the sessions. The Sure Start staff member initially dismissed this idea as she said she had previously tried this approach. She believed this approach took the ‘emphasis of the session away from the children’ as parents wanted to copy the posters and spend time reading them.

However, at one of the later sessions we observed, the Sure Start staff member took this approach on board, and did display posters relating to the foundation stage. These posters were very colourful but the writing was very small and contained a lot of information. The Sure Start staff member made reference to the posters that were displayed, but none of the parents were observed reading the posters or commenting on them.

![Foundation Stage Poster]

Although the relevance of Messy Days to the Foundation Stage is explicit in the overall aims and objectives of the programme, the Sure Start staff member reported that she felt there was too much emphasis on this within the sessions:

_I don’t see that as the focus of the group, I see it as maybe getting ready for nursery yes, but also interaction and bonding, not information about the foundation stages, see that as a priority really._

This Sure Start staff member reported that she found this part of the programme difficult, as her background is not in early years, and she questioned the value of the information to some of the parents:

... I don’t know that level of information, what benefit is it to the parents? Maybe I’m reluctant to push it when I know it’s not, when they’re not really keen to hear it.

If, however, it is to remain an underpinning theme to the Programme, it should perhaps be reviewed. One possible suggestion from the evaluation team would be to...
split the Messy Days programme into two separate age range groups and offer Messy Days for under 2’s and Messy Days for children aged 3 to 4 years. Within this format, the first programme would be more focussed on the interaction and bonding between children and parents, alongside the promotion of play and enjoyment. The programme for the older children could offer a more focussed approach relevant to the Foundation Stage, closely involving parents whom (our research suggested) would find the information more relevant as their children approach school-age. How this information would be imparted also needs to be reviewed, as currently, the information is contained in several photocopied sheets, which are kept at the front of the folders. The same Sure Start staff member (who at the time of the research was just about to take over the running of Messy Days) agreed, and she felt that parents still needed the information, but that it needed to be more condensed and “a little bit less intimidating”.

Through our observations, the research team felt that if the sessions were to become more closely related to the Foundation Stage, then it would be more useful to be explicit at the start of each session about the relationship between the task and what skills could be learnt and developed through each one. At the sessions we observed, each one had a particular task, or theme, and included, painting and printing, sand and water play, collage, play dough and making Christmas cards and calendars. The research team concluded that each session could remain themed, for example, collage, or seasonally focussed, e.g. Easter, but that the relationship to the Foundation Stage could be made more explicit. So, for example, the session would begin by outlining the aims of the session which would include, for example in relation to doing collage, exploring texture, developing fine motor skills, decision making, sharing of materials and working with others to name but a few. This information could be given briefly, and quickly, and would keep the session child-focussed, but with an additional component that would be parent-based also, which would be more about making the link between theory and practice.
**Reflexive practice**

One of the most striking and positive aspects which emerged from our research was that the delivery and format of the Messy Days programme was flexible, and was subject to change based on the experiences of the Sure Start staff member, who told us:

*Messy Days has been a process of trial and error, and learning from mistakes.*

This can only be seen as a positive feature of the programme, and all credit must go to the Sure Start staff member involved. Based on this reflexive practice, we adopted a similar approach to the evaluation, and, based on our observations, we were keen to make recommendations and suggestions that would help the Sure Start staff member and the programme during the research rather than waiting until the programme was completed. However, the Sure Start staff member at the time reported that she would have preferred to receive such recommendations after the programme was completed, as she felt at times that she was not “doing anything right!” Despite this, the evaluation team did make a number of suggestions following sessions with the hope of improving the interaction, and the Sure Start staff member took these on board, tried them and reported that they had, in fact, improved the sessions. Examples included the use of leaflets on the walls outlining the Foundation Stage. It was observed that two boys in the group continually left the activity preferring to do some colouring in and dancing to the music. It was therefore suggested by a member of the research team the possibility of providing extra activities i.e. construction materials (Lego) available for the children. The Sure Start staff member mentioned after the following session that she thought this suggestion was a good idea and had planned to take along some extra activities but unfortunately had forgotten them.

**Venue**

With any programme, a dedicated, identifiable and purpose-designed venue is desirable, particularly with reference to a project that is as ‘messy’ as Messy Days. However, what is desirable is not always practical, and the programme we observed was held in a room in the local church hall.
Before each session, it was necessary for the Sure Start staff member to spend considerable time setting up the room, which was usually divided into two sections. Chairs were arranged in a semi-circle in the middle of the room dividing it into two halves. Only one chair per parent/guardian was left in the room and all the spare chairs were placed in the corridor to create more space. One half of the room had bean bags on the floor for children and parents/guardians to sit on if they wished, and the other half of the room was set up for the activity (e.g. painting, water play, etc.) to take place.

When the activity was particularly ‘messy’, plastic sheets were placed under each table to protect the floor. On such occasions, there was also a small bath of water and a towel for the children and parents to wash their hands.

Both Sure Start staff members admitted that the venue used for the programme at the time of our research was “not ideal”, especially given the specific practical demands of the programme, such as the need for a non-carpet area for water/sand play, a carpet area for singing, a kitchen area for refreshment preparation and an area where children
can sit and eat together. One of the Sure Start staff members echoed this view and said:

we started on the carpeted area and we do colouring in there and have songs there and eat our food there, but then in terms of the tables and paint and water on the floor, you're limited to the lino area, which is not ideal and you want, really you'd want a sink a bit more accessible so that the children could wash their hands, that you can dash in and get change of paint water and this sort of thing.

The venue used for the programme was quite cold and did not have adequate heating. The evaluation took place during the winter months and despite the fact that it is the practise when setting up the room for the programme that the heating is put on up to two hours before the session begins, parents and the researchers commented on how cold the room was. The doors were kept closed at all times, not only to maintain the temperature of the room, but also to ensure that the children do not wander off. This was not ideal, especially when we observed a session where parents and children washed their hands in the bath of water provided, and as the session progressed the temperature of the water in the bath decreased. One parent made specific reference to the room being cold:

It’s a bit chilly due to the heating... the kids have never noticed it really, and I think once they start playing you don’t really notice it yourself...

The Messy Days programme is intended to be housed in the new Sure Start building which is due to be complete in summer 2005. A dedicated space and resources are required for the programme. We would recommend that a suitable space with access to sinks and adequate heating, and appropriate space for ‘messy activities’ to take place alongside an area suitable for children to sit, eat and interact with their parents.

**Structure**

The current Messy Days programme runs for a six week period. Parents were given a pre-programme questionnaire before the first session of the group of sessions that we attended, which they were asked to complete and bring with them to the first session, which is already planned. This questionnaire not only asks about their general awareness of the Foundation Stage, but also asks parents which activities they would like to be included within the programme for the remaining five sessions. Seven options are presented (with two of them normally seasonally relevant, such as a Christmas calendar, or a Mothers Day card) and parents are asked to choose at least five. This not only provides an opportunity for parents to indicate their preference for activities that they feel their child would enjoy, but which also provides the Sure Start staff member with the opportunity to plan the remaining five sessions. However, while examining the list of activities that parents were given they had, in fact, very little choice. Parents were given a list of seven activities, two of which (painting and printing) had been chosen by the Sure Start staff member as the theme for the first session. Therefore there were only five remaining choices for the five sessions. We would recommend giving parents the opportunity to suggest other possible activities that could be included as part of the programme.
One parent did make an alternative suggestion to our researchers:

*Perhaps using empty boxes/egg cartons/toilet rolls to make a model – to show that everyday items can be used to make an activity for your child.*

The programme we observed took place just before Christmas, which meant the final session was dedicated wholly to the Christmas party for the group. Whilst this was rewarding and enjoyable for the children and adults involved, it meant that the programme was five sessions long, and not six. Whilst acknowledging the benefits of the party for the children and carers in relation to the development of social interactions and relationships, the research team felt that this last session split with a session, and would have liked to have seen the party confined to the second half of the session rather than the whole time. Since the research was completed, and during the latest Messy Day programme, the party did not take up the whole session, and the session was focused around Easter activities and time was allotted to the giving out of presents and singing songs.

This led to a further recommendation by the research team in relation to the length of the group of sessions. It was suggested that the Messy Days programme could run over an eight week period instead of six and therefore give parents and children a longer period of time to develop a friendly, relaxed relationship. Although this means that the programme would overlap school holidays such as half terms, the research team felt that this could be a positive feature in that parents and their children could continue to do some form of creative activities at home, and then add any materials made to their folders when they returned to the programme.

At the first session children were given a Messy Days t-shirt which they were asked to wear in order to protect their clothes. The children were given the t-shirts to keep as their own, to wear for each of the sessions. After each session children took their t-shirt home (to get it washed) and brought it along to the following session. In addition to the t-shirts the children were also given a plastic apron to wear over their t-shirts as extra protection.

The aprons were returned to the Sure Start staff member at the end of each session.
All children are given a folder, which contains the written information for parents on the Foundation Stage, which parents are given the opportunity to read during the sessions. The folders are kept by the Sure Start staff member from week to week and are given to the children to take home after the final session. The work that the children complete over the course of attending the programme is put in the folder by the Sure Start staff member, as are any photographs taken of the children carrying out the different activities. The folders seem a very popular idea with both the parents and children. The evaluation team were initially concerned that the children had no real ‘ownership’ of their folders as they were not allowed to take their folders home with them. The Sure Start staff member reported that she had tried this in the past, but that some folders had got lost or the parents forgot to bring the folders back to the sessions. Despite this, we observed the great sense of pride, and eagerness that children and their parents showed when presented with their work and their folders each week. While speaking to the parents it became evident that the parents were in great support of their children’s photographs and work displayed in the folder. One parent remarked:

*...he loves looking at photographs of himself!*  

Another parent remarked:

*Kids love looking at pictures of what they have done.*
This idea was echoed by a further parent who commented on the fact that children see photographs of themselves drawing the picture that is in their folder:

We get to look at the files each week so the children are able to look at the pictures that they did the previous week as well as photographs of themselves drawing the pictures, which I find interesting...

The Sure Start staff member told us that she would consider revamping the folders, as she felt that there was too much information in it:

I think it’s a nice keepsake, there’s a lot of information there that the parents aren’t likely to read, it looks a bit intimidating for the less literate and it’s just time consuming...

Concerns about the literacy levels of parents (or carers) are real, and should be taken seriously. They were always a consideration in our evaluation and in the type of research tools we used. However, we found many contradictions with this particular programme. We were continually told to be wary of low literacy levels within the group, and to avoid using questionnaires, for example, and yet parents were asked to complete a Messy Days questionnaire before the start of the programme and then they are provided with very dense written work as part of the same programme. Certainly with this particular group of parents/carers, it appears that literacy levels were high, and as our questionnaire survey results reported, several of the parents had formal qualifications in child care and nursery nursing. However, this may not always be the case, and continued sensitivity is important.

The Sure Start staff member explained that the idea behind the development of Messy Days was to create a group that was more structured than toddlers groups in an attempt to get children ready for attending nursery. Therefore the Messy Days sessions are fairly structured and the different parts of the sessions do follow the same sequence from week to week.

Each week parents (or their carers) and their children arrived at different times. To keep children occupied whilst this happens, the children have the opportunity to do some colouring in. The Sure Start staff member mentioned that this was the first block of sessions where she had provided this activity and was pleased that the children appeared to enjoy it. We observed that this did work well, as inevitably, parents and children arrived at different times, and so it helped to keep the children occupied.
Once everyone has arrived, the session usually begins with the ‘Welcome Song’ where each child and adult is individually welcomed to the group. Each child is then given a sticker with their name and they are asked to place it on their t-shirts. An ice-breaking activity then follows, for example, singing songs accompanied with actions, e.g. ‘Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses’. The Sure Start staff member then introduces the session, and the activities within it. The activity part of the session is the main section and a large proportion of time is spent on it. Following the activity (which takes place in the non-carpeted area of the room) parents and children return to the carpeted section, where children are given a drink and fruit. When the children are finished eating and plates and beakers are removed there is another song time activity. The children are then given their folders and are asked to show them to their parents. Finally, the session finishes with the Goodbye song. At the final session of the programme, children are given some creative resources, such as splash mats, paints, colouring pencils, as a gift, so that children can continue to do creative activities at home once the programme has finished. This is in response to comments made by parents from the Messy Days pre and post session questionnaires. Parents were asked what prevented them from doing creative activities with their child at home and the main reason given was the lack of resources and materials. This seems an excellent idea which is popular with children and the adults, although the evaluation team would like to recommend that the children are given these resources at the first session of the programme rather than the last, so that children can use the resources at home outside of the Messy Days programme, and build on any skills or activities learnt during the sessions. Children could also add such completed work to their folders, and, which, hopefully, would help to increase their sense of ownership of the folders. One parent, whose child attended a previous Messy Days programme, commented on this:

“That file [folder] is now full as we have added to it since – the pages are all pulled out and we have even had to put new holes. They like looking through it…”

The overall structure of the sessions appears to work, and there seems to be a good balance of creative activities, time for children and parents to socialise and time for relaxation and eating. It must be stressed that all aspects of the Messy Days sessions involve learning (for both adults and children) in many forms. This learning can be
explicit, i.e., in developing creative skills, etc. or implicit, which includes children learning to turn-take and socialise with other children. The benefits, therefore can be quite often less obvious. In this sense, the general scheme, or theme, of each session is not so important – be it a focus on play dough or making Easter cards - what is important are the skills that can be introduced and developed. The Sure Start staff member recognised this, and told us how she had reflected on the experiences of the previous programme and that:

instead of theming it on a medium, we’re doing it on topics, we’re doing mother’s day and we had mother’s day where they made tissue paper flowers, stick on cards, collage teapots, just collage material and I’d done the template of the teapot and then butterfly printing with paint... so it was more sort of focussed on consolidating skills they’d learnt earlier in their block of sessions but also on a feminine and mother’s theme kind of thing, flowers, things like that.

Variation does seem important, however, particularly given that children and their carers are not restricted to attending a Messy Days programme just once, but can attend a further programme. Some of the parents in the programme we observed had attended more than one group of sessions with other children. The Sure Start staff member recognises this and reported how already, she had introduced different activities to the next Messy Days programme:

... things like, they’d done play dough and I introduced cake decorating and biscuit decorating, because rolling out the icing and all that was linked in with that, I introduced that and junk modelling, so collecting cardboard boxes and we’re going to make whatever with those, then obviously I suppose mother’s day and Easter it’s seasonal, so they’re different activities as well.

**Parents and the Messy Days programme**

The Messy Days programme is distinctive in that it is designed to benefit both the children and the adults (parents and/or carers) who participate. It is hoped that parents who participate will also take part in other services in the area. This fits with the general ethos of Sure Start, in that participation in one activity or project will usually result in parents taking part in others. Our questionnaire survey revealed that attendance at other Sure Start projects or activities was high, with 80% reporting that they attend other projects provided by, or through, the Sure Start programme. Only one parent reported that she only attended Messy Days and she explained that this was due to time commitments, telling us that there were – “no others due to times not fitting in with my other children’s needs”.

Parents were asked what other pre-school activities they were using within the area. All the parents reported using other services in the area, one being the Grassbanks Toddlers group, which was a facility which existed before the Sure Start Programme began, but which is now run under the Sure Start umbrella.

With regards to Messy Days, parents were all clear about their role within the programme. All of the respondents saw their role within Messy Days as one of
encouragement and support. There was also a general consensus between parents (80%) who believed that it was important for them to be aware what the forthcoming Messy Days session was about prior to the session. Various reasons for this were given by parents – 60% of parents believing that it was important so they could talk to their child beforehand and prepare them for the activity. Other reasons were related to practical issues, for example, dressing the child appropriately. One parent reported that she felt it was vital to know the content of all the sessions prior to attending in order that she could decide whether the programme is going to be of benefit to the child’s personal development as:

... every child has different needs and just going on a course because its free is not always the right move.

This view was echoed by one of the Sure Start staff members, who also felt that although the aim of attracting parents to activities is a sound one, sometimes it was the same group of parents who participated in many of the Sure Start activities:

I think it’s a good aim in that... trying to meet, trying to sort of capture an audience and meeting the needs of that audience, I just feel that sometimes it’s the same parents turning up to everything and you’re not meeting those most in need.

One parent commented that she hoped to meet other mothers at Messy Days. Therefore, it could be argued that parents are also benefiting socially and making new friendships; another aim of the Messy Days programme. This idea was also echoed by another mother who believed that she may not necessarily make any lasting friendships with the other parents but that:

... it is good to see people you’ve seen there before.

One of the main aims of Sure Start programmes generally is to reach those most in need, or those which can be referred to as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘hard to engage’ groups within the area (see Sure Start, 2002). The definition of such groups can - and do - vary hugely. They can include hidden populations, marginalised groups, vulnerable groups and non-participants. In relation to the Messy Days programme, it could very well be the case that it is not meeting those whom would be regarded (by the above definitions) as ‘most in need’, as inevitably, the ‘hard to reach’ are often unrepresented in the projects. However, Messy Days is a popular programme and there is a constant waiting list and demand. It appears that advertising for the programme is adequate, and parents reported that they heard a great deal about the services offered through Sure Start by ‘word of mouth’ from other parents, or through their health visitors or midwives, and so perhaps no additional formal advertising is needed. Reaching the ‘hard to reach’ group, and ‘new’ parents, however, remains a perennial concern for any programme such as Sure Start, but with the gradual turnover of parents with children who become older, and therefore beyond the remit of Sure Start, there will always be a population of ‘new’ parents and under 5’s who could potentially access the services of Sure Start. It is important, therefore to regularly revisit publicity and PR materials and events. In relation to this, the research team would recommend a one-off (perhaps annually) ‘drop in’ Messy Days session which is open to all parents and their (age appropriate) children in the Leam Lane area.
The main purpose would be to provide a ‘taster’ experience for carers and their children, where they can come along and literally get their hands dirty, with no commitment if they decide they (or the child) do not like it. Different tables/areas of activities could be set up to illustrate the varied activities on offer through Messy days, so that potential carers and their children could gain a realistic insight into what would be available to them. Parents from the current Messy Days programme could also attend, and provide a supportive, and informative medium for ‘new’ parents who are perhaps less confident and a little wary of trying something new. One of the Sure Start staff members agreed with this and told us:

... they’re really good because they’re confident and so can model some of the less confident parents, perhaps.

This would also tie in with the theme which runs throughout Sure Start generally, and within the Leam Lane area specifically, which is the increased involvement and participation of parents within the projects. The Leam Lane Sure Start programme is dedicated to parental involvement, and parents were consulted heavily before and during the development of the implementation and delivery plan, and also represented on various decision-making groups such as the Executive Group. This philosophy extends to specific projects and activities within the area, and the Messy Days programme is one where parental volunteers have been encouraged to take part, and take an increased role in the running of the group. During our evaluation there were two parents who expressed an interest in becoming parent volunteers in the Messy Days programme, but unfortunately, one dropped out. One other parent, however, is committed to becoming involved and has recently gone through the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance to allow this to happen. This particular parent has attended Messy Days previously (with another child) and was attending the observed programme with another child. As this parent is the first parent volunteer to become attached to the Messy Days programme there seems to be some confusion. There is the need for some sort of training package required, but this has not happened as yet. This parent reported that she was unsure whether she would receive any formal training before she could take on the role of parent volunteer. She believes that she could bring a lot to the programme:

I enjoy messy play so I know what I can put into the group. It may just be the case of just being there for the parents and knowing why we are doing different activities rather than doing them because the children like them.

The level of involvement of the parental volunteer did, however, seem a little unclear to us. The evaluation team did observe the need and are aware of the benefits of having an additional adult present at the sessions. The main benefit being, essentially, to have an extra adult who was qualified and confident to supervise the children while the other member of staff could engage with the parents. The Sure Start staff member believed that the involvement of a parental volunteer in the Messy Days programme could vary. She thought the process would be a gradual one:

... it would also depend on the pace that the parent wants to take, but for the first six weeks, to just be assisting... helping to pack up, go around supporting other parents and children and increasingly so become involved in the planning and evaluation process ... sort of with the support of the Sure Start
staff member, ... and then by the end of that six week block, perhaps to have planned and presented one of the groups...

The evaluation team recommends that the role of parent volunteer be formally clarified, alongside a dedicated training package, an outline of the expectations from both the perspective of Sure Start and the parent(s) and, eventually, a genuine commitment to involvement in relation to planning, design, and delivery of the programme.

Exploring impact

The provision of Sure Start generally in the area was viewed as a beneficial service by the respondents in our questionnaire survey. The majority of respondents reported that Sure Start has had a positive effect on their child and family, as well as being beneficial to themselves. One respondent described the benefit that she got from attending sessions run by Sure Start:

> I use to be really quiet and have postnatal depression – it has got me out of the house and involved in groups.

Another parents told us that Sure Start had:

> ... a positive impact on myself, husband and [child]. Good ideas of how to play with [child], making things interesting.

With reference to their experiences of the Messy Days programme specifically, a large proportion of the respondents (60%) commented on the skills that they felt their child has developed as a consequence of attending the programme. These skills included (amongst others) skills which are linked with the six areas of learning that form the basis of the Foundation Stage curriculum. These include communication, socialising, language and creative development. One told us she hoped that attending Messy Days would make her child:

> ... more confident in joining in activities with other children and gain social skills. Learn to share and meet other children his age – prepare him for nursery school and build self-esteem.

Another told us:

> Creative and social skills, meet children his own age. Hopefully this will help bring his poor speaking along.

One of the Sure Start staff members reported that the sessions often allowed for the children to try something new, whilst their parents were present:

> with sort of collage work and things like that, which involves scissors, some parents are a bit more nervous about letting their children use scissors ... then it’s a good opportunity of developing those fine motor skills, in a safe environment...
It is also interesting to note that one parent was mainly interested in the fact that her child was enjoying herself. Increasing the confidence of their children was also stated as being an important feature of attending Messy Days. One parent told us that she hoped Messy Days would help her child to become more experienced creatively and gain a greater experience of individual activities and another reported developing social skills through interacting and sharing with other children. This was echoed by one of the Sure Start staff members who said that children who attended Messy Days would develop:

... social skills, in terms of interacting and sharing with other children of their own age, concentration skills, I’ve seen that sort of increase just within one group, the children are able to focus on one activity longer .... motor skills and sort of .... confidence and exploration, developing an interest in other things....

Another parent highlighted the fact that Messy Days is not specifically for parents and their children, when she said:

... [child] loves Messy Days and it gives him one hour each week to spend with his nana.

Another parent commented:

_Messy Days is aimed at all ages – adults can also get involved._

There was a general consensus between respondents that the quality of Messy Days was high with lots of resources available and variation in activities. The respondents were asked if they did similar ‘messy’ activities at home with their child. All of the respondents reported that they did, which is very encouraging as far as the Messy Days programme is concerned. By actively doing similar activities at home with their child parents are encouraging their child to do age appropriate activities and are interacting with their child.

The parents were clear about what benefits they got from attending Messy Days with their child, and they went beyond simply watching their children do the activities. One parent commented that as a result of attending Messy Days, the way in which she views play has changed. Before attending the programme this parent viewed play as something that her child did and enjoyed and that she did not, for example, think about what colours the child was using. Since attending Messy Days, she has realised children learn through play and she admitted that she now talks with her child about the play they both participate in.

One of the Sure Start staff members reported that she felt Messy Days was a good venue for adults to share and socialise too:

_I think because the children are so focussed, there is that opportunity to talk to other, between parents and I certainly encourage that as well ... also there’s a level of humour because the children are just getting messy and so are the_
In addition to the increased confidence in their children, one of the Sure Start staff members told us that she thought parents who attended Messy Days also gained some kind of confidence:

... in themselves because they’ve interacted with their child around people, I suppose not a skill, but a confidence in their child that maybe they’ll be ready, with nursery coming up... come away with knowledge at the Foundation Stages, ... maybe their own sort of arts and crafts ... just give them an opportunity to explore different things as well, maybe they got on really well with other people and all enjoyed some aspects of it and wanting it to lead a group or take on more, go into training, it’s just quite a safe environment to try out different things with children and the parents.

Based on our analysis and findings, and the discussions around these, the final section contains a series of recommendations.

**Recommendations**

In relation to the original aims and objectives of Messy Days, the programme is working well. The programme is popular and is highly regarded by parents who have participated. Parents reported that they were very positive about the programme, with one reporting to us:

we’ve only been for two weeks and so far find it perfect.

Responses such as this are encouraging in that they highlight that parents are happy with the content of the sessions.

As a result of our evaluation we made the following recommendations. We must remember that this report constantly refers to the Messy Days project as it was *at the time* of the evaluation, and with the very nature of the reflexive and responsive way of working which we have highlighted very positively, many things have moved on and developed. Consequently, this final section includes recommendations made by the evaluation team, responses from the Programme to these recommendations, and updates of how and what has changed in the Project since the evaluation was completed.
1. Regular review and evaluation

It is clear that the changeover in Sure Start staff member is an opportunity for a review of the programme. The Sure Start staff member is in quite an envious position of being new to the programme, with the advantage of the distance to stand back and see what has, or what has not been working. The Sure Start staff member who has set up the programme from scratch has done in incredible job, and has helped to sustain a programme that is regarded by all those involved as popular, high quality and rewarding.

Working reflexively and responsively has worked well, and is a quality which should remain throughout future Messy Days programmes. The views of parents in this review process are very important, and ideas suggested by parents could be beneficial.

2. Offering a more focussed Messy Days programme

It may be possible to split the Messy Days programme into two separate age range groups and offer Messy Days for under 2’s and Messy Days for children aged 3 to 4 years. Within this format, the first programme would be more focussed on the interaction and bonding between children and parents, alongside the promotion of play and enjoyment. The programme for the older children could offer a more focussed approach relevant to the Foundation Stage, closely involving parents whom (our research suggested) would find the information more relevant as their children approach school-age. As children can (and as we saw, do) attend more than one Messy Days programme, this could also help to promote some ‘pull through’ of children from a younger age.

Response:
This recommendation was rejected by both Sure Start staff and parents. Staff believed that there were too many practical implications, such as staffing issues. The current Sure Start staff member has a dedicated time allocated to work in the programme area that is completely utilised. In addition, the activities for children under 2 years old are limited due to health and safety and motor development restrictions. Staff and parents also felt that the younger children learn from the older children and that the older children learn from showing and helping the younger children. There would also be implications for parents with children who enter both age groups, and if they would have to attend the group on two different occasions and thus have child care difficulties.

3. Embedding the Foundation Stage curriculum

The current provision of information about the Foundation Stage for parents needs to be reviewed and presented in a less intimidating, and more readable way. In addition, the research team believe that the sessions should become more closely related to the Foundation Stage (and particular elements within it), which should be made more explicit at the start of each session about the relationship – ant therefore the link
between theory and practice - between the task and what skills could be learnt and developed through each one. Our research with parents revealed that only one parent said that this link between the Programme and information on the Foundation Stage was not important, the remaining five parents all reported that it was important to them and helped them to understand their child’s learning.

**Response and update:**

This is the current practise of the Sure Start staff member of the programme. At the beginning of each session, the focus of the session and specific activities are explained in relation to the objectives of the session, the skills focussed on and ways in which the parents/carers can get involved and ways parents/carers can praise and encourage their children. During the fruit time, after the activities, the Sure Start staff member reflects with the parents what they think their child has gained/enjoyed and ways in which these activities can be adapted for home. Parents/carers also use this as an opportunity to share creative play activities they have tried out at home. The theme of the following week’s session is shared and the parents are encouraged to share ideas of activities they would like to try for the first time or have tried out elsewhere and would like to repeat.

4. **Additional play**

It was observed that two boys left the practical activity each week preferring to do some colouring in and dancing to the music. This music was, however, a little loud at times and distracted parents and the researchers from hearing the Sure Start staff member talking. It was therefore suggested by a member of the research team the possibility of providing alternative, ‘quieter’ activities, i.e., construction materials (Lego) available for the children.

**Response:**

This idea was rejected by one parent, who believed that if additional toys were offered, more than two children would be distracted from the proposed activities. The two boys in question were more than happy in their choice to dance to the music and colour-in. The solution to the children wandering away from the session would be to talk to their parents and see if there is an activity that may keep the children’s attention for longer. The children still benefited from the activities whether they spent only a few minutes participating or longer. They also benefited from the opportunity to dance and colour-in.

5. **Dedicated venue**

A dedicated space with access to sinks and adequate heating, and suitable resources space for ‘messy activities’ to take place alongside an area suitable for children to sit, eat and interact with their parents is required. This will not only help practically, but will add to the sense of identity of the Programme.

6. **Planning**
As part of the pre-session questionnaire we would recommend that the Sure Start staff member informs the parents about the activity that is planned for the first session. We make this suggestion in response to parent’s suggestions in our questionnaire. Parents thought it was important to know what the next session was about for various reasons such as explaining the activity to the child prior to the session as well as for practical reasons.

7. Programme length

We would recommend that the Messy Days programme could be run over an eight week period instead of six. This would allow adults and children a longer period of time to develop a friendly, relaxed relationship. If the sessions overlapped holidays, this could be a positive feature in that parents and their children could continue to do some form of creative activities at home, and then add any materials made to their folders when they returned to the programme.

Response and update:
The most recent Messy Days block of sessions ran over eight sessions, due mainly to the Sure Start staff member attending training and therefore, having to cancel some of the sessions. It was felt that the block of sessions should be extended over a term so that the parents/carers and children did not miss out. Although this worked well, it is unlikely to be the future practice, as there is an extensive waiting list for the Messy Days programme and school holidays would unbalance the continuity of the group. Although this is the current situation, this may be reconsidered in the future.

One parent reported that she would be happy to attend the group for eight sessions, or in her case, indefinitely, and she made the valid point that often when groups are planned over a long period, the attendance can drop no matter what the quality of the programme.

8. Reaching the ‘hard to reach’

The issue of attracting adults who could be described as ‘hard to reach’ is important. Messy Days is a very popular programme, but it was evident from our research that the parents who were attending the programme at the time of our research were not wholly representative of the standard ‘hard to reach’ stereotypes. It may be that the Sure Start staff could take a different approach, for example, individual community health professionals involved in the distribution of publicity materials with the hope that a greater and wider section of the community are aware of the services provided by Sure Start.

In addition, we would recommend a one-off ‘drop in’ Messy Days session which is open to all parents and their (age appropriate) children in the Leam Lane area. The main purpose would be to provide a ‘taster’ experience for carers and their children, where they can come along and literally get their hands dirty, with no commitment if they decide they do not like it. Different tables/areas of activities could be set up to illustrate the varied activities on offer through Messy days, so that potential carers and their children could gain a realistic insight into what would be available to them. Hopefully there would be some kind of ‘pull through’ of adults who then may be
willing to sign up for the full Messy Days programme. Information packs containing
information about other Sure Start projects or activities could also be provided at the
sessions, to both raise awareness and encourage parents or carers to try other things.

9. Staffing

We recommend that a second member of staff is necessary for the delivery of the
Messy days programme. The support of a second member of staff would take the
pressure of the Sure Start staff member and would provide more opportunity for the
Sure Start staff member to inform the parents about the foundation stage. This second
group leader, we recommend, would ideally be a parent volunteer.

10. Involving parents

The evaluation team recommends that the role of parent volunteer be formally
clarified, alongside a dedicated training package, an outline of the expectations from
both the perspective of Sure Start and the parent(s) and, eventually, a genuine
involvement in planning, design, and delivery of the programme.

Response and update:
A training portfolio has been developed for the parent volunteer involved. It contains
a clear job description of the volunteer, planning material, evaluation material,
itinerary of resources, and information on Foundation Stages. This has been discussed
with the parent volunteer and a programme of gradual take over of responsibilities has
been discussed, based on a rate that the parent volunteer feels comfortable with.

11. Resources for home

At the final session of the programme, children are given some creative resources,
such as splash mats, paints, colouring pencils, as a gift, so that children can continue
to do creative activities at home once the programme has finished. The evaluation
team would like to recommend that the children are given these resources at the first
session of the programme rather than the last, so that children can use the resources at
home outside of the Messy Days programme, and build on any skills or activities
learnt during the sessions. Children could also add such completed work to their
folders, and, which, hopefully, would help to increase their sense of ownership of the
folders.

Response:
This recommendation was rejected by one Sure Start staff member, who believe that
this would perhaps send out the wrong message to the parents/carers about the Messy
Days programme and about Sure Start as a whole. Parents/carers should not need
explicit rewards in order to attend a group; the reward is through the difference they
see in their children and in themselves as parents/carers.
One parent also rejected the idea of supplying resources for children at the start of the Programme, who believed that in a greedy society people may sign-up for messy days for the resources, which would have been spread by word-of-mouth. They may then not return to finish the programme, no matter what the quality. The majority of parents have some resources at home; paper, pencils etc., and what is also noted in the messy days programme is that you do not need lots and lots of resources, and that items found in the home can be very important, i.e., make your own play dough.
Appendix 1

Messy Days Parent Questionnaire

Name ...........................................

Do you live in Leam Lane?

How long have you lived in Leam Lane?

Do you have family in Leam Lane? Who?

Do you know many people in Leam? Do you socialise with people from Leam?

How did you get to know about Sure Start?

Which Sure Start programmes are you and your child/children involved in? Why?

Has the Sure Start programmes had an impact on you/ your children/ your family?

Do you have any other children? Ages?

What age is the child that attends messy days?

Does your child attend any other pre-school activities? (e.g. Nursery, toddlers groups, play groups) If so which ones and where?

What do you know about the Foundation Stage?

How did you find out about it?

Do you think it is useful to know how messy days link with the Foundation Stage? Why?
What do you hope to get from Messy Days personally? Why?

What do you hope your child will get from Messy Days? Why?

What do you think about the quality of Messy Days?

Do you find it useful to know what the sessions are about beforehand? Why?

What do you think your role is during Messy Days?

What skills do you think your child develops through attending Messy Days?

Do you do similar ‘messy’ activities at home with your child?  
If yes: Which ones? Why? How often? How long for?  
If no: What are the reasons that prevent you doing them?

Are there any Messy Day activities you think could be added to the programme? Why?

Thank you for spending time completing this form. All information will be used for research purposes only by the University team. Please note that all information will be treated confidentially and no real names will be used.

Would you mind talking face to face in detail about some of your responses with one of the university research team members? Yes? No?
Appendix 2

References

Foundation Stage
http://www.surestart.gov.uk/ensuringquality/foundationstage/

Foundation Stage Profile Handbook:


Leam Lane Sure Start Area Delivery Plan (2001) Leam Lane Sure Start Programme: Leam Lane, Gateshead.
