

Case study: Sure Start (UK)

Sure Start services are delivered through community based local programmes. *Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs)* support children under 4 and their families by integrating services such as early education, childcare, health and family support for those living in areas of high disadvantage. Rather than providing a specific service, **the programme involves changes to existing services**. These changes might include filling gaps in existing services as well as providing existing or traditional services in new and innovative ways. A key objective for local *Sure Start* programmes is to transcend the ‘fragmentation’ and ‘silos’, which constrain the delivery of services for children and families at the local level.

The Partnership Board is the strategic body which oversees the evolution and activity of local *Sure Start* Programmes. *SSLPs* are led by a local programme manager. Almost all partnerships have at least one representative from each main statutory agency, over 90% include community members. Parents contribute to the management of almost every partnership. Some of the board’s core work includes appointing a lead agency; writing the development plans; providing strategic direction, recruiting staff and establishing appropriate management arrangements.

To maximise access to services for those in the local community, programme staff ‘think in the long term’ so a five point continuum of access is in operation; 1) Making initial contact 2) ‘Introduction’ to the service; 3) Self-directed take up of at least one *Sure Start* Service; 4) Self-directed take up of more than one service; 5) Self-directed take up of services, other than those provided by *Sure Start*.

Outreach activity, building trust with parents and signposting to services are some of the strategies employed by the local programmes to make using services easier and better for parents. Services are delivered in a variety of ways, including group and individual based services and centre-based and outreach services. These combinations enable programmes to meet a variety of individual and community needs.

There is considerable effort to develop networks with other agencies in order to facilitate meeting children’s needs in a more holistic way. An evaluation into the roll-out of the *Sure Start Programme* found that the extent of pre-existing positive relationships has tended to determine the degree of success achieved by programmes in working together.

Challenges/Lessons
High levels of commitment to both the principle and the practice of working together, at the level of the organisation and of individual professions.
High levels of funding have clearly been influential in encouraging other organisations to work in partnership with SSLPs.
A clear, shared understanding of purpose between stakeholders is a key factor in facilitating progress in working together.
The role of programme managers is crucial in maintaining programme partnerships
High turnover of programme managers is a factor in undermining the robustness of programmes
The amount of staff effort and financial cost of the work involved should not be underestimated
Generating a sense of equity and mutual respect between organisations is helpful in sustaining partnerships.
Data protection policies and problematic relationships can hamper access to data sources