

Sure Start Celebrating the Importance of the Early Years

Press Release February 2018

The Childcare Partnerships within the Health & Social Care Board and the Department of Education jointly hosted a Sure Start event in Belfast City Hall to celebrate the Importance of the Early Years for children and families across Northern Ireland.

The event brought together 180 professionals from a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations and elected representatives to celebrate the work of Sure Start and to launch the findings of a Sure Start Parental Survey. Partnership working was highlighted as the root of what makes Sure Start work. Some of the attendees gave the following feedback on the event:

“The evidence now around the benefits of Sure Start was very welcome and feedback from parents reinforced this”

“Excellent event with numerous moving stories showing the great work of Sure Start”

“Outcomes for Children and Family from attending Sure Start are very evident!!!”

There are currently 39 Sure Start Projects across Northern Ireland that work in the top 25% most disadvantaged wards. Sure Start is a programme targeted at parents and children under the age of four living in the most disadvantaged areas. It brings together health, family support and early education services which are designed to support children’s health and well-being with three core aims to improve the ability to learn, health and social development.

31,000 0-3 year olds and their Families are registered with their local Sure Start Projects which is 81% of eligible children. In 2016-17 112,000 Sure Start activities were delivered across Northern Ireland.



From left to right Kevin Duggan, Southern CCP Manager, HSCB, Winnie Kelly LAST Sure Start Manager, Dr Roisin McCooley, Belfast CCP Manager, HSCB, Seana Talbot, Saol Úr Sure Start Manager, Tommy O'Reilly, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Department of Education, Cathy Galway Director of Youth Early Years and Childcare (Acting) Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years, Intervention Programmes Team, Department of Education, Sharon White, Dry arch Sure start Manager

At the event the parent's views were heard through a range of presentations and also the Sure Start Parental Survey Report was launched which had 3505 parental responses.

The level of satisfaction with the individual Sure Start services was very high. Almost all respondents were very satisfied with the Sure Start services they had received, and it was rare for parents to indicate that they were dissatisfied.

94% of respondents rated their Sure Start services as wither Excellent (83%) or Very Good (11%). A very small percentage of respondents thought that the service was average (1%) or Poor (2%).

91% of parents would be extremely likely to recommend Sure Start. In Sure Start relationships were highlighted as the most important for parents-with the Sure Start staff, other parents and for their children. A key part of the Sure Start experience was the friendships they made and the fun and enjoyment experienced.

90% of parents agreed strongly that Sure Start staff were helpful and for most parents the antenatal stage is the beginning of the engagement with the Sure start journey. Many parents highlighted the non-judgemental, supportive approach of staff with qualities highlighted such as friendly, caring, compassionate.

86% of parents agreed strongly that Sure Start postnatal services helped them understand their baby and their babies needs. Feedback centred on the mother-child relationship, bonding and breastfeeding support.

83% of parents agreed strongly that Sure Start helped improve their knowledge of child development with 78% also agreeing strongly that it helped identify issues or concerns.

If you would like to read the full parental survey report, please access the following link:
Sure Start Parental Survey Report – <https://goo.gl/DdTnz>



From left to right: Dr Una Lernihan, Early Years Lead HSCB, Cecil Worthington, Acting Director, Social Care and Children, HSCB, Dr Roisin McCooey, Belfast CCP Manager, HSCB and Kevin Duggan, Southern CCP Manager, HSCsB