

‘Squashing it to Fit’



Negotiating National Guidelines in a Local Sure Start Evaluation.

What is Sure Start?

- **A post coded programme for areas with high levels of deprivation, providing speech, health and social support for families – aim s to provide ‘pathways out of poverty’**
- **The government aims to run the programme for a minimum of ten years.**

Aim -

"To work with parents to be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children - particularly those who are disadvantaged - so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children."

Focus of National Evaluation

The national evaluation is ‘outcome’ orientated. It asks ‘Does Sure Start work and has it made a difference in the life chances of the children who use the services?’

Looks at -

- **Implementation – how they implemented/rolled out the programme**
- **Impact – what effect have the programmes had on families and children?**
- **Local Context - what is the local context of each programme?**
- **Cost – Effectiveness – was the intervention effective and value for money?**
- **Support for Local Evaluations - training and guidance**

Focus of Local Evaluation

The local evaluation is about making programmes work better, the ‘how and why’ of programme development.

But national guidelines now state that local evaluations must carry out -

- **a baseline user satisfaction survey (July 2002)**
- **Individual Service Evaluation & cost-benefit/effectiveness evaluation (June 2001)**
- **Evaluation of partnership working and inter-agency collaboration (August 2001)**
- **A clear evaluation strategy, which must be in place within 6-9 months of programme approval (April 2002)**
- **An annual report for each programme and a three year report for each programme (August 2001)**

Models for Local Evaluation

1. Internal –

- Evaluators can be perceived by projects, and workers, as ‘managers’
- Internal evaluators may feel pressure not to be critical.
- Internal evaluators do have easy access to information about the programme
- Evaluators can be tied to ‘performance management’, focus is on ends rather than process

2. External -

- Evaluators not tied to ‘performance management’, evaluation for development
- Evaluators seen as independent and not ‘managers’, room for positive criticism.
- No easy access to information about the programme.
- Workers and users can see evaluators as external ‘judges’ and close ranks.

Our Model of Evaluation

Local evaluation model was formative and utilisation focused -

- **Local Ownership – Workers, parents/carers and programme managers inform the design of the evaluation.**
- **The evaluation aims to leave skills in the community, sharing evaluation skills with programme managers, workers and parents/carers.**
- **Stress is on process rather than outcomes. Evaluation feedback useful to, and used by, the programme.**
- **Stress the importance of the local context and adapt the evaluation to that context.**

What Were the Problems?

- National guidance wasn't in place at the beginning, local evaluation went their own way.
- National guidelines didn't allow for time to 'bed in.'
- User/Parental involvement needs different methods, being 'outside' the programme didn't work.
- Local evaluation and local involvement has to allow for the local context.
- Can be a conflict between different aims in the programme -

**Making Citizens
Local Democracy
Increasing Capacity**

Vs

**Performance Management
Centralised Control
National Political Agenda.**

- Unclear boundaries between monitoring/performance management and evaluation.
- The accountability of local evaluators was not always clear!
- Local people over-researched!

Out of the Impasse?

- **Need to listen to the local context –Accountable but not harassed! Local evaluators not just ‘functionaries’.**
- **May need to stress different kinds of evaluation methods at different stages of the programme.**
- **Need to recognise the time scales involved, involvement may be more time consuming and need different methods.**
- **Need to recognise that aims can be conflicting! May have to make ‘trade offs’.**
- **Local evaluators can have an agenda too!**