



## Sure Start Weymouth and Portland



## Beach Play Evaluation

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## **Background and rationale**

This report contains the findings of the Weymouth and Portland Sure Start Beach Play survey. This research will contribute to the overall local evaluation of the Weymouth and Portland Sure Start project, especially addressing three of the local evaluation key factors, as highlighted in the Sure Start Weymouth and Portland Plan:

- ❑ Assess whether individual projects and the programme as a whole is meeting the communities agreed needs and expectations
- ❑ Determine the actual impact on peoples lives that individual projects and the programme as a whole is making
- ❑ Determining the extent of community participation

The evaluation will also provide data to assess to what extent Beach Play is striving towards achieving National Sure Start objectives, as established by the government, in particular,

Objective 1: Improving social and emotional development, in particular, by supporting early bonding between parents and their children, helping families function, and through early identification and support of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Objective 3: Improving the ability to learn, in particular, by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promotes early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with special needs.

Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities, in particular, by involving families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty.

**What is Beach Play?** The Beach Play sessions were held on Weymouth beach every Friday from July to September, 10am till 3pm. A section of the beach was fenced off to provide a safe and secure environment in which the children could play. The running of the activity was overseen by three Sure Start play workers. The aims of the project were to encourage children to socialise, interact, share and generally have fun playing in the sand and water. Beach Play is also aimed at providing quality time for parents to play with their children and also to discuss any issues concerning childcare with the play workers. This in turn has offered play workers a greater insight into individual needs of parents and encouraged a better relationship.

## **Aims of the survey**

The principal aim behind this evaluation was to find out how satisfied Sure Start parents were with the Beach Play sessions.

Secondly, the survey was also aimed at enabling parents to provide feedback as to how the sessions could be improved.

Thirdly, the evaluation will contribute towards the assessment of the Weymouth and Portland Sure Start. The research will provide evidence to ascertain to what extent the project, as a whole, is achieving both local and national objectives.

## **Questionnaire development and distribution**

In order to carry out this evaluation a fast feedback questionnaire was devised in consultation with the Sure Start play workers running the sessions. The survey comprised of 10 questions, 4 of which took on a tick box format and 6 were open questions for parents to provide their own comments.

The first few questions were devised to provide general information about the families attending the Beach Play session, these included:

- Which Sure Start area the family lived in
- Were they male or female
- The ages of their children

The remaining six questions were related directly to Beach Play and covered areas including:

- How long they had stayed at Beach Play
- Parents satisfaction with the sessions
- What had been gained from the experience for both child and parent
- Improvements for future sessions

The questionnaire was distributed at the majority of the Beach Play sessions with a view to parents completing and returning them before leaving. This format also enabled parents to query any aspect of the questionnaire with the play workers or the researcher. A copy of the questionnaire is presented in the appendix at the back of this report.

**Ethics:** Parents were approached at the Beach Play sessions and asked if they would consent to completing the survey. Parents were informed at the time that the survey was anonymous and would not be viewed outside of the research team as an individual document, only as part of the overall data and findings

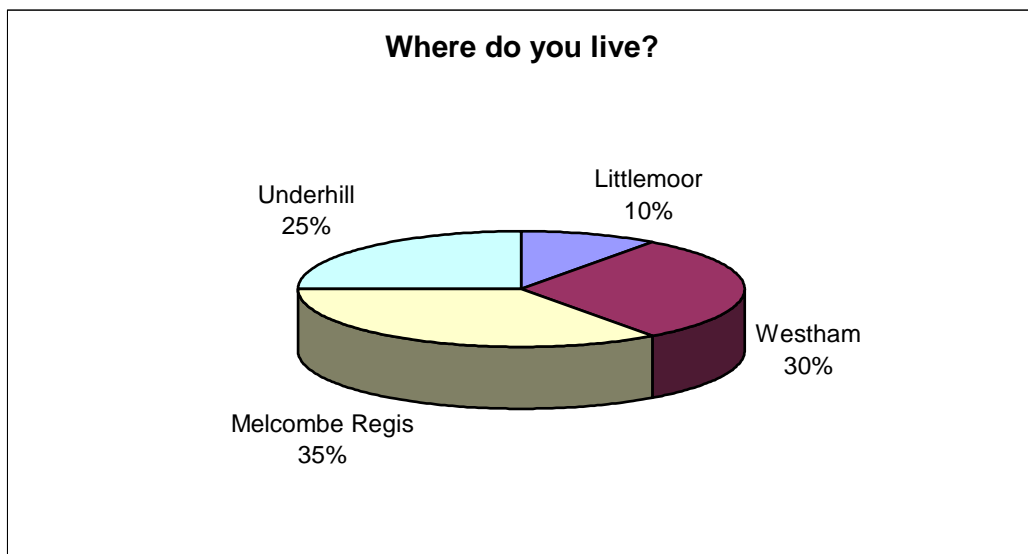
**Sample and Response rate:** The sample for this questionnaire was selected according to the parents attending the Beach Play sessions on the five Fridays during August. The distribution format described above resulted in a one hundred percent response rate of 20 questionnaires. It should be taken into consideration that the 20 questionnaires provide a snapshot of the total number of families attending the Beach Play sessions throughout July to September. The total attendance figure for Beach Play overall was 36 families.

## Findings

The following findings are based on the twenty questionnaires completed by parents who attended the Beach Play sessions during the summer of 2003.

**General details:** The twenty parents who completed the questionnaire were split between the four Sure Start areas (Figure 1). Figure 1 reveals a fairly even attendance from the areas of Underhill, Westham and Melcombe Regis. However, the Littlemoor area was clearly in a minority of only two parents (10%) attending.

Figure 1



Findings also show that the majority of parents bringing their children to beach play were female (85%), with just 3 fathers attending.

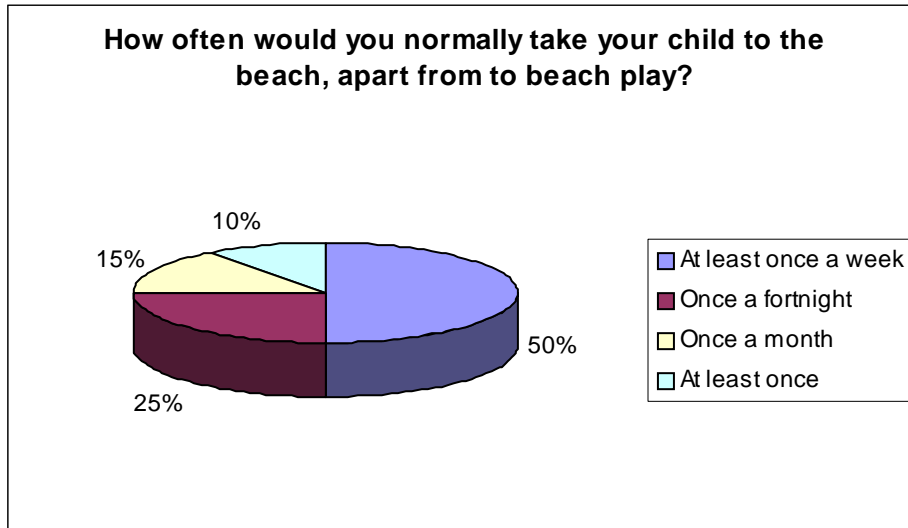
The ages of children attending beach play ranged from 2 months to 15 years, with the majority of children aged 2 years. Figure 2 shows the ages of respondents children.

Figure 2



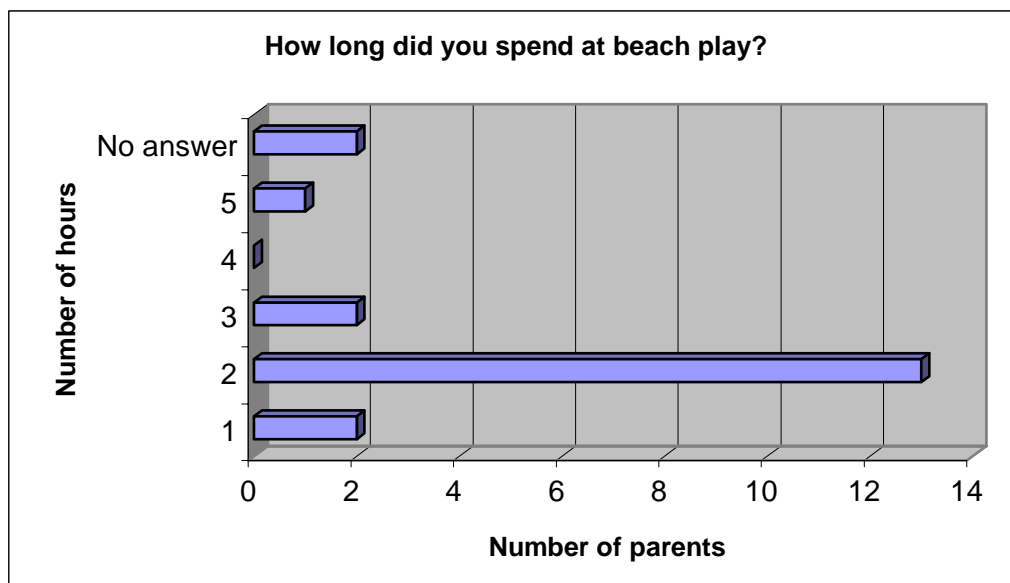
The questionnaire asked parents how often they would normally take their child to the beach, apart from to Beach Play. Half of respondents stated that they would normally bring their children to the beach at least once a week (50%), a quarter said at least once a fortnight (25%), the remainder of parents were pretty evenly split between once a month (15%) and at least once (10%) (Figure 3). The question also included a tick box labelled Never, but no respondent chose that option.

Figure 3



The majority of Parents who attended beach play stayed at the session for an average of two hours (13 parents). Figure 4 shows how long each parent spent at the beach.

Figure 4



Parents were asked to reflect upon what they felt they had gained from the session. The majority of parents (just over half) felt that being able to relax knowing that their children were playing in a safe environment was the best aspect of beach play from their point of view. This question allowed parents to select more than one option for their answer. Listed below, with the most common response first, are the most positive components of beach play taken from a parents point of view:

### **What parents gained from Beach Play**

- Relaxing
- Safe environment for children
- Socialising with other parents
- Toys provided so not having to bring them with them, especially when travelling by bus
- Ideas and time for constructive play
- Wouldn't use the beach otherwise

Respondents were then asked to comment on what they felt their children had gained from the session. Just over three quarters of parents stated that interaction with other children was the most beneficial aspect of beach play for their child. Below is a list, with the most frequent response first, of the other comments made by parents:

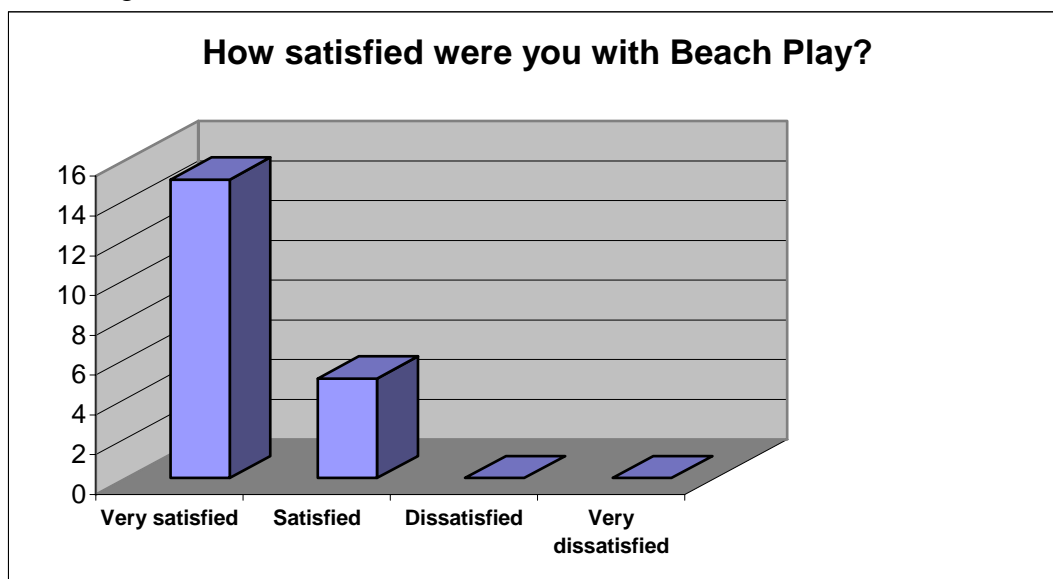
### **What children gained from Beach Play**

- Interaction with other children
- Constructive and imaginative play
- Safe environment in which to play
- Physical exercise
- Different toys to play with



The results of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of parents were very satisfied with the beach play session (15 people) and the remainder were satisfied (5 people), figure 5.

Figure 5



Respondents were invited to raise any negative feelings concerning the Beach Play sessions. Only three aspects were highlighted as problems by three different parents. The first one is linked to the positioning of the Beach Play area on the beach. The parent explained:

*“I feel very strongly opposed to the beach play area being situated in the section of the beach allocated for dogs to use. Especially when so many dog owners are so irresponsible to clean up after their dogs and the sand is just raked over. Not a pleasant thought when your child is digging in the sand”.*

The second issue was the need to cross a busy road to reach the nearest public toilets.

The third negative response to beach play was made by one of the three fathers who attended the sessions, he stated:

*“feeling a bit left out with other parents being mums”.*

The final question gave parents the opportunity to suggest ways in which Beach Play could be improved for the future. Just under a quarter of respondents suggested more group activities and organised games, the remainder of the ideas in the following list were put forward by individual parents.

### Ways in which Beach Play could be improved

- ❑ More group activities and organised games
- ❑ A gate at the entrance so that children can't get out
- ❑ Better access to toilets
- ❑ Large paddling pool
- ❑ More buckets and spades
- ❑ Not situated in the allocated dog area
- ❑ Situated closer to the sea



## Conclusions and recommendations

To conclude, the data collected and presented in this evaluation illustrates that overall parents were very satisfied with the Beach Play sessions. The majority of comments made by respondents were very positive, with only a few negative issues being highlighted.

Parents felt that the sessions provided their children with the chance to interact with other children, whilst taking part in constructive and imaginative play. All of which parents concluded were executed in a safe and relaxed environment. Parents also appear to have gained as much from the experience as their children with the chance to socialise with other parents and just relax knowing that their children are safe.

The results of the survey clearly show that Beach Play is meeting the Sure Start National Objectives of providing a stimulating environment in which children could socialise, interact, share and experience quality, constructive play. The sessions are also fulfilling the aim of providing parents with a chance to relax, socialise and play with their children. Through these achievements Beach Play is managing to meet the Sure Start national objectives 1, 3 and 4.

One interesting point that emerged from the parent surveys was that Beach Play was encouraging parents to bring their children to the beach and to enjoy the stimulating surroundings. One parent stated, *“I wouldn’t come to the beach if Beach Play was not here”*.

The one issue that does negate the objective of the Beach Play to provide a safe environment for children to play, is that the council had allocated a site in an area of the beach designated for dogs. There is clearly a health issue attached to this matter and it did undermine some parents enjoyment of the sessions. Also several parents raised the issue of there being no gate at the entrance to the beach play area and were concerned that children would wander off and dogs could gain access.

**Recommendations:** As a result of the Beach Play questionnaire there are several recommendations that could be implemented to improve the sessions for parents in the future.

Firstly the sessions were accessed less by families living the greatest distance from the venue. Parents from Littlemoor accounted for only 10% of the overall attendance figures during the sessions when the questionnaire was distributed. It would be useful to try and understand the reasons why so few families from that area attended Beach Play. Sure Start is aware that transport is an ongoing issue for parents living in Littlemoor and will investigate options to remedy this problem in the future.

Secondly, the issue of the location of the Beach Play sessions on the beach needs to be addressed. This matter has already been raised with the Weymouth and Portland Sure Start Programme Manager at a recent evaluation meeting. Hopefully future sessions will be allocated a more suitable site on the beach. A gate controlling the entrance to the beach play area should also be considered.

To conclude, some useful insights have been gained due to the willingness of parents to share their views. Weymouth and Portland Sure Start have managed to implement

a valuable and enjoyable service. By addressing the two recommendations raised, the service can be further improved.



## Appendix

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SURE START BEACH PLAY EVALUATION

**1. What Sure Start area do you live in?**

Littlemoor  Melcombe Regis  Westham  Underhill

**2. Are you?** Female  Male

**3. What are the ages of your child/children attending beach play?**  
(Please write in age)

**1<sup>st</sup> child**      **2<sup>nd</sup> child**      **3<sup>rd</sup> child**      **4<sup>th</sup> child**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4. How often would you normally bring your child/children to the beach in the summer, apart from to beach play?**

At least once a week  Once a fortnight  Once a month

At least once  Never

**5. What would you say you have gained from the session?** (e.g. time to relax, ideas for play, sun safety information ....)

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**6. What do you feel your child/children gained from the session?** (e.g. meeting other children, constructive play .....

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**7. How long did you stay at beach play?** \_\_\_\_\_ Hours

**8. How satisfied were you overall with the beach play session?**

Very Satisfied  Satisfied  Dissatisfied  Very Dissatisfied

**9. Is there anything you didn't like about beach play?**

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**10. Have you any ideas on how beach play could be improved?**

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