

Programme Name: Sure Start Oswestry
Local Authority: Shropshire
Region: West Midlands
Setting: Children's Centre
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Lead Partner: Shropshire County Council - Children and Young People's Services
Lead Partner Category: Local Authority
Accountable Body: Shropshire County Council

Summary

Oswestry Borough is situated in North West Shropshire on the Welsh border. Sure Start Oswestry is a third wave Programme and is one of comparatively few rural programmes in England. Oswestry was granted early designation for Children's Centre status in June 2003, and plans have now been approved for the construction of a 40-place childcare facility in the town centre, adjacent to Woodside Primary school. The 5 Local Programme Family Centres, and sessions in the Community Centre, Whittington (in partnership with Whittington Under Fives), will operate as satellites of the Oswestry Area Children's Centre.

Shropshire is the largest inland county in England, covering 1,347 square miles approximately. The geographical position of Oswestry contributes significantly to its remoteness from the rest of the county, and to the fragmentation of services provided to its population.

Children's Centre development and Activities offered

The Oswestry Area Children's Centre will comprise a town centre 40 place childcare facility, a base for multi agency teams and childminders, and five purpose-built Family Centres located adjacent to local Primary Schools (three in outlying villages and two within the town). There is also a central office base in the town offering Breastfeeding friendly premises and an Information Point, activities on offer in a village community centre (in partnership with the local Under 5's provider) and a 60-place Neighbourhood Nursery initiative, built in the grounds of the local College of Further Education.

The rural location of the Oswestry Area Children's Centre, coupled with the widely dispersed Sure Start local programme settings, plays a significant part in the requirement to employ a large (core) staff team. The infrastructure for commissioning services is also less developed in Oswestry compared to other parts of the county.

The Sure Start team work from the centres located in each of the 7 catchment areas, in family homes, and in partnership with existing nursery and pre-school providers. The core team also leads the development of a home visiting/family support service in partnership with North Shropshire Home-Start, providing information, advice, specialist support, practical help and befriending.

Several service level agreements are in place with local organisations for provision of further services, and the programme is currently undertaking evaluation of many services to inform partners of mainstream services when discussing sustainability of service delivery. Due to the added complexity of providing services in multiple settings, specialist groups on offer, such as 'Bumps and Babes', the Incredible Years parenting course, Food for Thought (healthy eating) and Bounce and Rhyme, are rotated around the centres to ensure that each village community has access to all that Sure Start Oswestry has to offer.

The Sure Start Oswestry Local Programme and Children's Centre is leading the way on linking services and activities to the 5 key outcomes for children as outlined in 'Every Child Matters'. An Art Competition held recently in partnership with a local primary school invited pupils to 'Get Creative' and design posters around the themes of the 5 key outcomes, and the 5 winning entries – each representing one of the outcomes - are displayed outside the Sure Start Family Centre adjacent to the school.

In Oswestry, the process leading to integration can be described as a journey – one that follow a particular course, but which can swiftly change direction depending on external or internal influences. An interesting analogy might be that of a section of a road map of Oswestry and the surrounding villages, where many roads lead to one point. There are many choices to be had in terms of the route you choose to take – in some cases using trunk roads and in others smaller, undeveloped tracks – but ultimately, with the right determination and the support of others, you arrive at your destination!