Appendix 6

Portage Service

Referral stage
• The Portage Service has very strong multi-agency links and relies on a variety of professionals to refer families, especially health visitors who are the usual front line of ‘hard to reach’ families. The Portage Service team leader attends Child Development Centre (PTC) meetings twice monthly, providing opportunities to discuss family needs.
• Once referred, a contact visit is provided to all families. This is crucial in beginning to form a working relationship with parents, which is the key to continued access to ‘hard to reach’ families. At this visit, the advantages of accessing the Portage Service are described and basic information about the service is given. The information is given in a variety of forms to take into account literacy level and home language.
• If parents do not engage at this point, i.e. are not in for their visit, every effort is made to check address/telephone number; contact by letter twice with appointment dates; contact health visitor and other relevant professionals, who may set up the first appointment or a joint visit.

Using these methods, the failure to engage rate is minimal (1% or less)

Contract stage
• If the home visitor’s information indicates the child fits into the Portage Service entry criteria, the Portage Service team leader then arranges to visit to offer the service and contract arrangement.
• Using the previously described methods, the failure rate is minimal.
• Where it is not possible to see a family due to non-engagement, the referring agent and other relevant agencies are then contacted for advice. If non-engagement continues, a letter is sent to the referring agent and relevant agencies to inform them of this situation.

Out of ninety nine new referrals in the last year, no families fall into this category.

Service provision
• A positive working relationship is vital to ensure engagement and is aided by parents seeing results of their work by improvements in child development and behaviour.
• Portage home visitors are trained and experienced in relationship forming and maintenance.
• Consistency of having the same home visitor is crucial to relationship building.
  There has been no staff turnover for the last five years, providing a consistent workforce.
• Key working is an essential area for ensuring continued service involvement.
  Parents who see positive results of the Portage Service working with other agencies for the benefit of their child and themselves, will continue to engage.
  This access to other agencies is vital as often the Portage home visitors are the only service the parents will engage with. The Portage Service then becomes an access passport for these agencies.
• If non-engagement occurs, the Portage Service team leader will visit the family to discuss child and family needs and ways to alter the service to meet the needs whilst fulfilling the Portage Service contract. **Only one family in the last year out of one hundred receiving the service did not continue to engage and full inter-agency information sharing then occurred.**

• The Portage checklist quickly identifies areas of need and this tangible information combined with service provision to decrease need, encourages good partnership working.

• Parents are treated with respect and dignity and their views are valued.

• Parents have a high degree of control and this has proved to be a vital element of success. The service is voluntary; home visits occur at parent convenience on their territory; the activities are of their choosing; the service is tailored to meet individual family/child needs.

• If the child continues to meet the service criteria, then the service provision of weekly visits can be lengthy (up to three years) increasing parent commitment. Transition into school is aided by the team leader and Portage home visitors.

• There are many rewards for families to continue with the service.

**In conclusion,**
The Portage Service is ideally situated to meet the needs of ‘hard to reach’ families due to:

• High quality interagency links to ensure initial referrals and continued follow up interagency work.

• Vital role of Portage home visitors usually being key workers.

• Parents having a high degree control of the service.

• Establishment of quality parent/worker relationship.

• The service quickly producing positive results in terms of child development, interagency work and benefit outcomes.

• Viewing parents as equal partners.

• Keeping child and family needs central.

**Role of the Portage Service in Children’s Centre**

• The Children’s Centres are ideally placed to provide early intervention within their local community.

• The Portage Service has a significant contribution to make to children with additional support needs, and currently work in the community with an essential multi-agency role.

• The Portage Service could be co-ordinated within Children’s Centres. However, the Early Years SEN review and the Integrated Children’s Disability Service role, will lead the way on how the Portage Service can interact with this whole area of work.