

Special needs support programme gets national recognition

Downing St date for SureStart mum

ESLIE JACKSON

SURESTART Staffordshire Moorlands won a National Childcare Champion award for its Special Matters programme. The award was presented to supporter Faith Asplin and parent Suzanne Senn at a ceremony in 11 Downing Street last Wednesday.

Special Matters is a unique combination of parents of children with special needs who meet to help steer professionals to provide a quality comprehensive service for families.

Having gauged interest from an article in the local newsletter about two years ago, a number of families and professionals contacted SureStart.



Suzanne Senn and Faith Asplin with the award won by SureStart Staffordshire Moorlands outside 11 Downing Street last Wednesday.

A meeting was arranged which then prompted a member of the team and

parent of a child with special needs to promote yet more interest from par-

ents. Parents said they felt unsupported and there was a lack of information on services, particularly at the point of diagnosis.

From this the Special Matters project was set up, initially to offer support to families, but very quickly this was extended to other families as the demand grew.

The project currently has two elements.

Firstly a support group, which is made up of parents of children with special needs and facilitated by the SureStart programme, which meets monthly to offer peer support, information and arrange activities.

Secondly an action group which is made up of a range of professionals, agencies and parents who meet every eight weeks to explore various issues in relation to the needs of families and seeks to find ways to improve services.

The support group (parents) steers the action group (professionals) which is the key element to the successful working partnership.

The name of the project Special Matters came from a parent attending the support group.