



Report on Activities with children of International Protection Applicants living in Direct Provision Centres in Westmeath



**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

1



Foreword

Westmeath County Childcare Committee CLG are delighted to be the lead agency in this Longford Westmeath Children and Young People Services Committee Stay and Play initiative with Athlone Accommodation Centre.

Westmeath County Childcare Committee have been pioneering the Stay and Play sessions in previous years work with the Ukrainian refugee children in services located throughout the County. This work included: Co-ordinating Stay and Play sessions in longer-term accommodation centres or in other suitable community-based locations including Family Resource Centres or libraries. Prioritising the identification of Early Childhood Care and Education places and match to children. Supporting the development of additional Early Childhood Care and Education places to meet capacity. Identifying qualified Ukrainian Early Learning and Care staff and encourage their participation in the workforce. Signposting parents to supports including National Childcare Scheme which are the government childcare supports as they become available. Supporting access to Access and Inclusion Model, School Aged Care, and Childminding as appropriate.

This work was replicated in the Athlone Accommodation Centre and developed further to meet the local needs of the children and young people, especially where children were presenting with additional support requirements. The findings and outcomes show the true value of these critical supports for children, young people and their parents/guardians who are living in Direct Provision Accommodation and how important play is for their development and to support healing from post-traumatic events.

The work in Athlone Accommodation Centre was led by Helen Nana Awhinawhi (Westmeath County Childcare Committee), who was to the forefront in developing early years curriculum that convened the diverse needs of the children. Westmeath County Childcare Committee would like to thank Longford Westmeath Children and Young People Services Committee for the funding of this initiative and Athlone Accommodation staff and families for actively participating.

Muriel Flynn

Manager -Westmeath County Childcare Committee CLG

Helen Nana Awhinawhi is a dedicated lecturer in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) at the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), bringing a wealth of knowledge and practical experience to her academic role. Currently pursuing her Ph.D. at Maynooth University, Ireland, Helen is committed to advancing the field through research and innovative teaching methods.

With a solid academic foundation, Helen holds an MSc in Applied Behaviour Analysis from the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), and has completed her studies in Early Childhood Education and Care at the Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). Her academic journey reflects a multidisciplinary approach, integrating behavioural analysis with the practicalities of early childhood education.

Helen Nana Awhinawhi is a dynamic educator, researcher, and advocate for early childhood development, whose work is characterized by a passion for learning, innovation, and creating a positive impact within the community.



Helen Nana Awhinawhi

Activities with children of International Protection Applicants living in Direct Provision Centres

Location: Athlone Accommodation Centre (AAC)

Number of Children Supported: 42 Children

Number of Parents Supported: 11 Parents

Number of Stay and Play Sessions Conducted: Total of 102 sessions

Sessions: 80 Sessions of Stay and Play and Social Club Activities and 22 Sessions of Social Communication supports (Children Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder).

Ethical concerns and obtaining Consent:

It is paramount to acknowledge our unwavering commitment to upholding ethical principles in every aspect of our work. We have diligently followed all ethical guidelines and procedures, ensuring the utmost respect for the rights, dignity, and privacy of every individual involved. All pictures are being shared with prior consent.

Table of Content:

1. Overview: Stay and Play Sessions in the Athlone Accommodation Centre (AAC)
2. Report on the Success of Social Communication Support Sessions for Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through Lego-Based Therapy and Inclusive Fun Activities
3. Stay and Play: Enhancing Early Years Services for Children at Athlone Accommodation Centre
4. Report on the Success of the Children's Social Club: Promoting Fun, Learning, and Community Building
5. Documenting the Interactive Activities in Pictures (Pictures were randomly picked).

Overview of Activities and Impact on Children in Direct Provision Centres:

Introduction: Activities implemented in Direct Provision Centres for children play a crucial role in fostering their well-being, development, and sense of community. This overview highlights the diverse range of activities carried out, their impact on children living in Direct Provision, and the benefits derived from these initiatives.

1. Social Clubs for Various Age Groups:

- **Activities:** For Example, Interactive games, educational outings, creative sessions (crocheting, arts and crafts, jewellery making), cooking workshops, and a birthday celebration.
- **Impact:** Fostered community building, encouraged skill development, provided educational enrichment, and created joyful and memorable experiences.

2. Stay and Play Programme for Ages 0-6:

- **Activities:** Structured early years services with age-appropriate learning activities, inclusive play, and parental involvement.
- **Impact:** Supported the holistic development of the participating children; for example, cognitive and social-emotional development, facilitated language

acquisition, empowered parents, and built a sense of community among families.

3. Social Communication Support: Lego-Based Therapy and Outdoor Play for children diagnosed with ASD:

- **Activities:** For example, Lego-based therapy sessions, outdoor play, snack time, and inclusive interactive play activities.
- **Impact:** Improved social skills, enhanced communication abilities, positive behaviour changes, and positive feedback from parents and caregivers.

Benefits to Children in Direct Provision:

1. Holistic Development:

- All activities contributed to the holistic development of children, addressing their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs.

2. Community Building:

- The activities created a sense of community and belonging, providing children with a supportive network of peers and adults.

3. Cultural Inclusivity:

- Tailoring activities to reflect the cultural diversity of participants fostered an inclusive environment, celebrating the unique backgrounds of the children and their families.

4. Skill Enhancement:

- From creative skills in arts and crafts to cognitive skills in Lego-based therapy, children had opportunities for skill enhancement and personal growth.

5. Joyful Experiences:

- Celebratory events like a birthday party, indoor and outdoor activities contributed to positive memories, promoting emotional well-being and happiness.

Support from Management and Support Workers:

1. Management Support:

- The success of these initiatives was facilitated by strong support from the Athlone Accommodation Centre management, resource allocation, and commitment to creating a positive living environment for children.

2. Support Workers:

- Dedicated support workers played a crucial role in facilitating activities, ensuring the safety and well-being of the children, and providing emotional support.

Recommendations:

1. Sustain and Expand Programmes:

- Continued support and funding for these programmes are recommended to ensure their sustainability and expansion to reach a greater number of children in Direct Provision Centres.

2. Training for Support Workers:

- Ongoing training for support workers can enhance their skills in facilitating activities, understanding the unique needs of children in Direct Provision, and providing effective support.

3. Feedback and Evaluation:

- Establish mechanisms for collecting feedback from children, parents, and support workers to continuously evaluate the impact of activities and make necessary improvements.

4. Collaboration with External Partners:

- Explore partnerships with external organizations, educational institutions, and local communities to bring additional resources, expertise, and diverse perspectives to the activities.

5. Advocacy for Policy Change:

- Advocate for policies that prioritise the well-being and rights of children in Direct Provision, ensuring access to quality education, therapeutic supports, and recreational activities.

Conclusively, the activities carried out in Direct Provision Centres have demonstrated significant benefits for children, impacting their development and overall well-being. The continued support of management, collaboration with support workers, and a commitment to sustaining and expanding these initiatives will contribute to creating a more positive and supportive environment for children living in Direct Provision.

Social Communication Support Sessions for Children diagnosed with ASD through Lego-Based Therapy and Inclusive Activities

Executive Summary: The Social Communication Support sessions for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have proven to be highly successful in fostering social skills, communication abilities, and overall well-being. The incorporation of Lego-based therapy, outdoor play, and inclusive interactive activities has contributed significantly to the positive outcomes observed in the participating children.

Introduction: The Social Communication Support sessions were designed to address the unique social communication challenges faced by children diagnosed with ASD. The programme aimed to create a supportive and inclusive environment that encouraged social interaction, communication development, and the overall well-being of the participants.

Methods:

1. Lego-Based Therapy:

- Structured Lego-based therapy sessions were conducted to provide a structured and enjoyable platform for social interaction.
- Children engaged in collaborative building activities, promoting teamwork, turn-taking, and communication.

2. Outdoor Play:

- Outdoor play sessions were organised to allow children to explore and interact in a natural, unstructured setting.
- Activities such as group games and free play facilitated social engagement and sensory experiences.

3. Snack Time:

- Snack time was incorporated as a casual setting for socialisation, promoting conversation and sharing.
- The relaxed atmosphere during snack time encouraged children to communicate and interact with peers.

4. Inclusive Interactive Play Activities:

- Various inclusive play activities were introduced to promote interaction among all participating children.
- Games and activities were carefully selected to cater to different sensory preferences and communication styles.

Results: The success of the Social Communication Support sessions was evident through several key observations and outcomes:

1. Improved Social Skills:

- Participants demonstrated enhanced social skills, including better turn-taking, sharing, and collaboration during Lego-based therapy sessions.
- Outdoor play contributed to increased peer engagement, with children initiating and reciprocating social interactions.

2. Enhanced Communication Abilities:

- The structured nature of Lego-based therapy facilitated improved verbal and non-verbal communication among participants.
- Snack time provided a relaxed setting for spontaneous communication, fostering language development.

3. Positive Behaviour Changes:

- The inclusive interactive play activities positively influenced behaviour, promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance.
- Participants exhibited increased confidence and reduced anxiety in social situations.

4. Parent and Caregiver Feedback:

- Feedback from parents and caregivers indicated noticeable improvements in their children's social and communication skills at home.
- The positive impact on daily life was highlighted, showcasing the broader applicability of the programme's outcomes.

The Social Communication Support sessions, incorporating Lego-based therapy, outdoor play, snack time, and inclusive interactive activities, have been highly successful in fostering the social and communication development of children diagnosed with ASD. The observed improvements in social skills, communication abilities, and overall well-being underscore the effectiveness of the programme in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for children on the autism spectrum. Continued research and implementation of similar programmes are recommended to further support the diverse needs of individuals with ASD in various settings.

Stay and Play: Enhancing Early Years Services for Children at Athlone Accommodation Centre

Executive Summary: Stay and Play, a specialised programme designed for children aged 0-6 years, has proven to be a highly effective and beneficial initiative at the Athlone Accommodation Centre for children of international protection applicants. This report highlights the nature of Stay and Play and outlines how its implementation has successfully contributed to the well-being and development of young children within this unique demographic.

Introduction: Stay and Play is a structured early years services programme designed to provide a supportive and enriching environment for babies and young children. At the Athlone Accommodation Centre, this programme was tailored to meet the specific needs of children of international protection applicants, offering a holistic approach to their early childhood development.

Objectives of Stay and Play:

1. **Promote Early Learning:** Stay and Play focuses on age-appropriate learning activities that support cognitive, motor, and social-emotional development.
2. **Foster Inclusive Play:** The programme aims to create an inclusive space where children from diverse backgrounds can interact and develop essential social skills.
3. **Support Parental Engagement:** Stay and Play encourages active participation from parents, fostering a sense of community and providing a platform for parental involvement in their children's development.

Implementation at Athlone Accommodation Centre:

1. **Safe and Welcoming Environment:**
 - Stay and Play sessions were conducted in a secure and welcoming space, ensuring a comfortable environment for both children and their parents or guardians.

2. Culturally Inclusive Programmes:

- Activities and materials were selected to reflect the cultural diversity of the participating families, creating a more inclusive and representative early learning experience.

3. Parental Involvement:

- Parents and guardians were encouraged to actively participate in Stay and Play sessions, fostering a sense of community and providing opportunities for shared learning experiences.

4. Qualified Facilitators:

- Trained early childhood educators and facilitators led Stay and Play sessions, ensuring that the programme was both developmentally appropriate and tailored to the unique needs of the children.

Benefits of Stay and Play for Children Aged 0-6:

1. Early Cognitive Development:

- Stay and Play contributed to the early cognitive development of children through age-appropriate activities that stimulate curiosity and problem-solving skills.

2. Social-Emotional Growth:

- Inclusive play activities helped children develop essential social skills, such as sharing, communication, and cooperation, laying a foundation for positive social interactions.

3. Language Acquisition:

- The programme facilitated language development through interactive storytelling, music, and communication-rich activities, supporting children in acquiring language skills.

4. Parental Empowerment:

- Stay and Play empowered parents by providing them with tools and strategies to actively engage in their child's early learning and development.

5. Community Building:

- The programme served as a catalyst for community building, fostering connections among families facing similar challenges and creating a supportive network within the Athlone Accommodation Centre.

Stay and Play has proven to be a valuable and successful initiative at the Athlone Accommodation Centre, addressing the unique needs of children aged 0-6 within the context of international protection applicants. The programme's emphasis on early learning, inclusive play, and parental involvement has resulted in positive outcomes, laying a foundation for the overall well-being and development of these young children. The success of Stay and Play underscores the importance of quality early years services in creating a nurturing environment for children, especially in diverse and transitional living situations. Continued support and expansion of such programmes are recommended to ensure the ongoing positive development of young children in similar circumstances.

Report on the Success of the Children's Social Club: Promoting Fun, Learning, and Community Building

Executive Summary: The Children's Social Club, designed for children aged 6-13, has proven to be a dynamic and enriching initiative. Through a variety of engaging activities, including interactive games, educational outings to the garden, and creative sessions in crocheting, arts and crafts, and jewellery making, the club successfully fostered a sense of community, learning, and joy among participants. This report outlines the diverse range of activities conducted during the club sessions and highlights the positive impact on the children involved.

Introduction: The Children's Social Club was established with the aim of providing a space for children aged 6-13 to engage in fun, interactive, and educational activities. The programme sought to create a supportive environment for socialising, learning, and building lasting friendships among participants.

Key Activities:

1. Interactive Games:

- Various fun and engaging games were organised to promote teamwork, communication, and physical activity.
- Games were carefully selected to cater to different age groups and ensure inclusivity.

2. Educational Outings to the Garden:

- Trips to the garden provided children with hands-on learning experiences about plants, fruits, and vegetables.
- Educational discussions focused on the importance of healthy eating, fostering awareness and positive attitudes toward nutrition.

3. Picnic Days and Outdoor Activities:

- Picnic days offered opportunities for outdoor enjoyment, allowing children to connect with nature and each other.
- Outdoor activities, such as sports and team games, were organised to promote physical activity and social interaction.

4. Creative Sessions:

- Crocheting sessions provided a platform for children to learn a new skill, fostering creativity and patience.
- Arts and crafts activities allowed children to express themselves through various art forms, promoting imagination and fine motor skills.

5. Jewellery Making with Beads:

- Jewellery making sessions encouraged creativity and fine motor skill development, as children crafted their unique pieces.
- The activity also provided a tangible outcome that participants could proudly showcase.

6. Rice Krispies Buns Workshop:

- Cooking activities, such as making Rice Krispies buns, added a culinary dimension to the club sessions.
- Children learned basic cooking skills and enjoyed the fruits of their labour.

7. Birthday Celebration:

- A special birthday party was organized for one of the participants who turned 7 years old.
- The celebration included games, treats, and a sense of community, reinforcing the bond among club members.

Benefits and Outcomes:

1. Community Building:

- The social club successfully created a sense of community, where children could form friendships and support each other.

2. Educational Enrichment:

- Trips to the garden and educational discussions enhanced the children's knowledge of nature, nutrition, and healthy eating habits.

3. Skill Development:

- Creative sessions, including crocheting, arts and crafts, and jewellery making, facilitated skill development and self-expression.

4. Physical Activity and Well-being:

- Outdoor activities and games contributed to the physical well-being of the participants, promoting an active and healthy lifestyle.

5. Joyful Celebrations:

- The birthday celebration showcased the club's commitment to creating memorable and joyful experiences for each participant.

The Children's Social Club has proven to be a resounding success in providing a diverse range of activities that cater to the social, educational, and creative needs of children aged 6-13. The combination of interactive games, educational outings, creative sessions, and celebratory events has contributed to a positive and enriching experience for all participants. The success of the social club underscores the importance of creating inclusive and engaging spaces for children to learn, connect, and have fun in a supportive community environment. Continued support for such initiatives is crucial for the ongoing well-being and development of children in this age group.

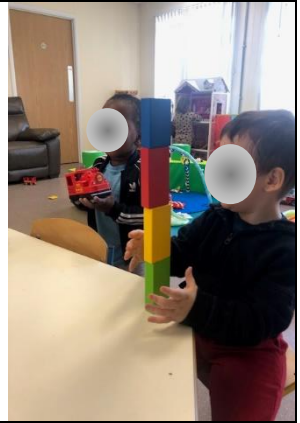
Documenting the interactive stay and play activities in pictures



Stay and Play



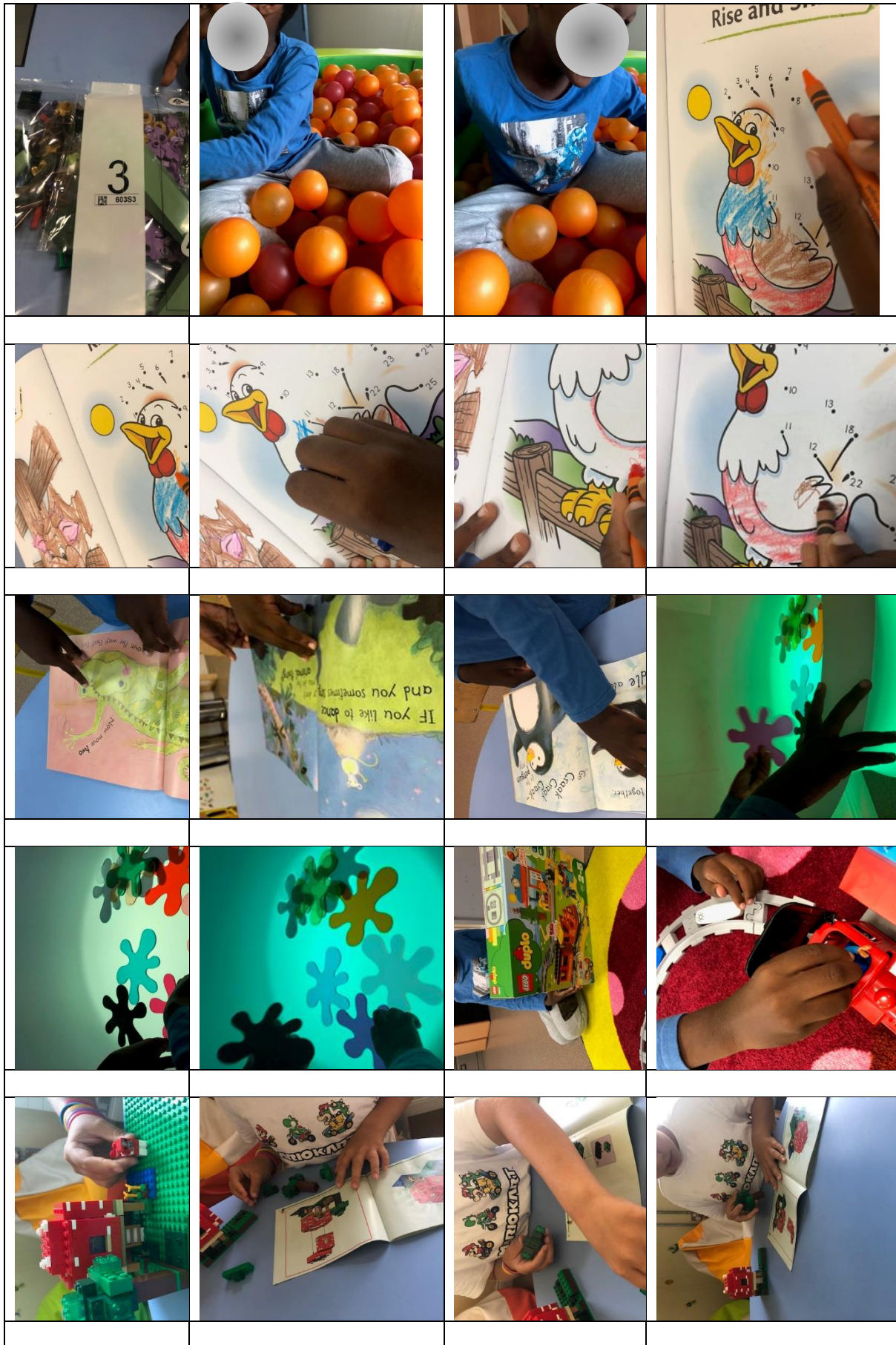


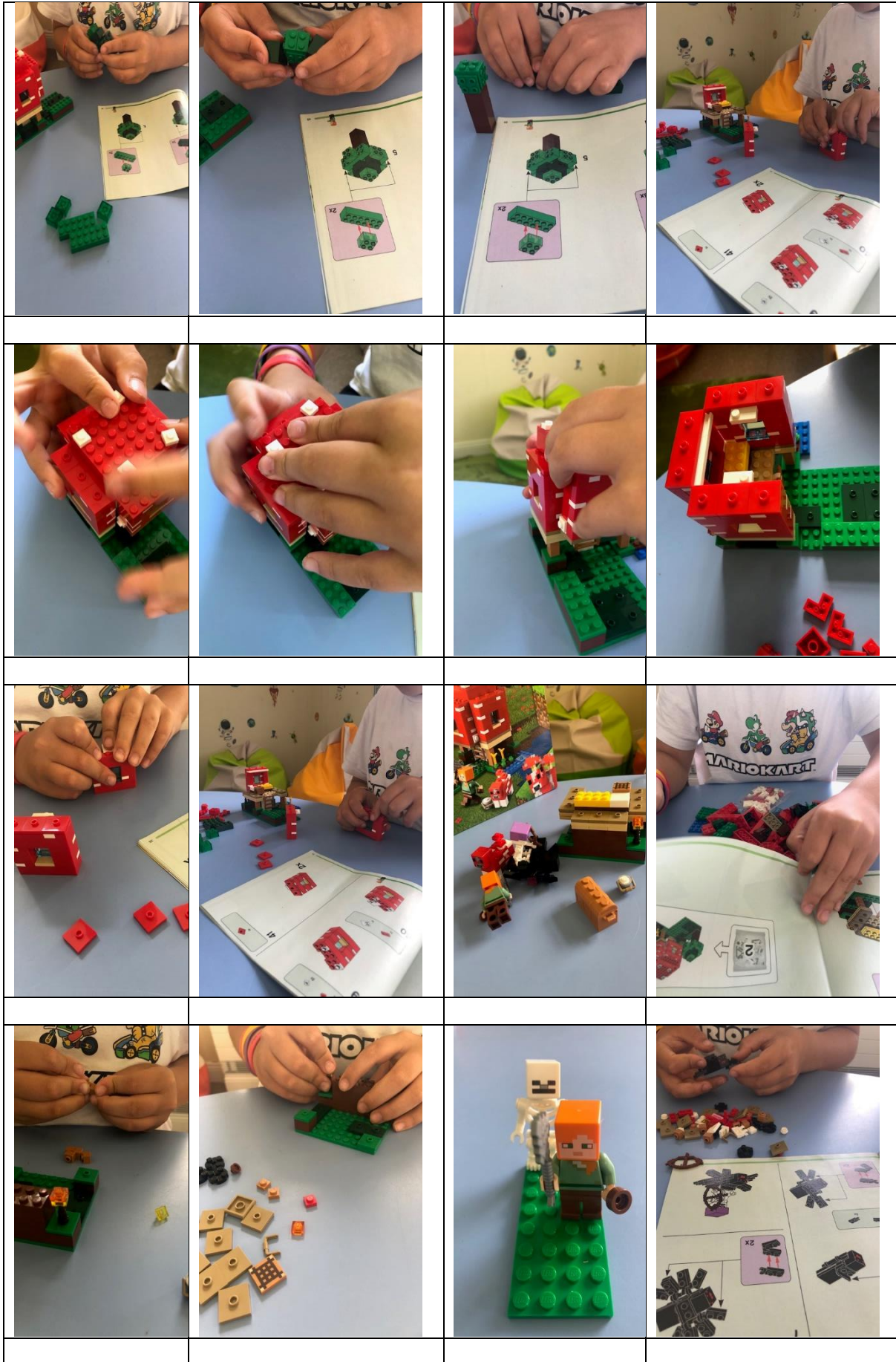


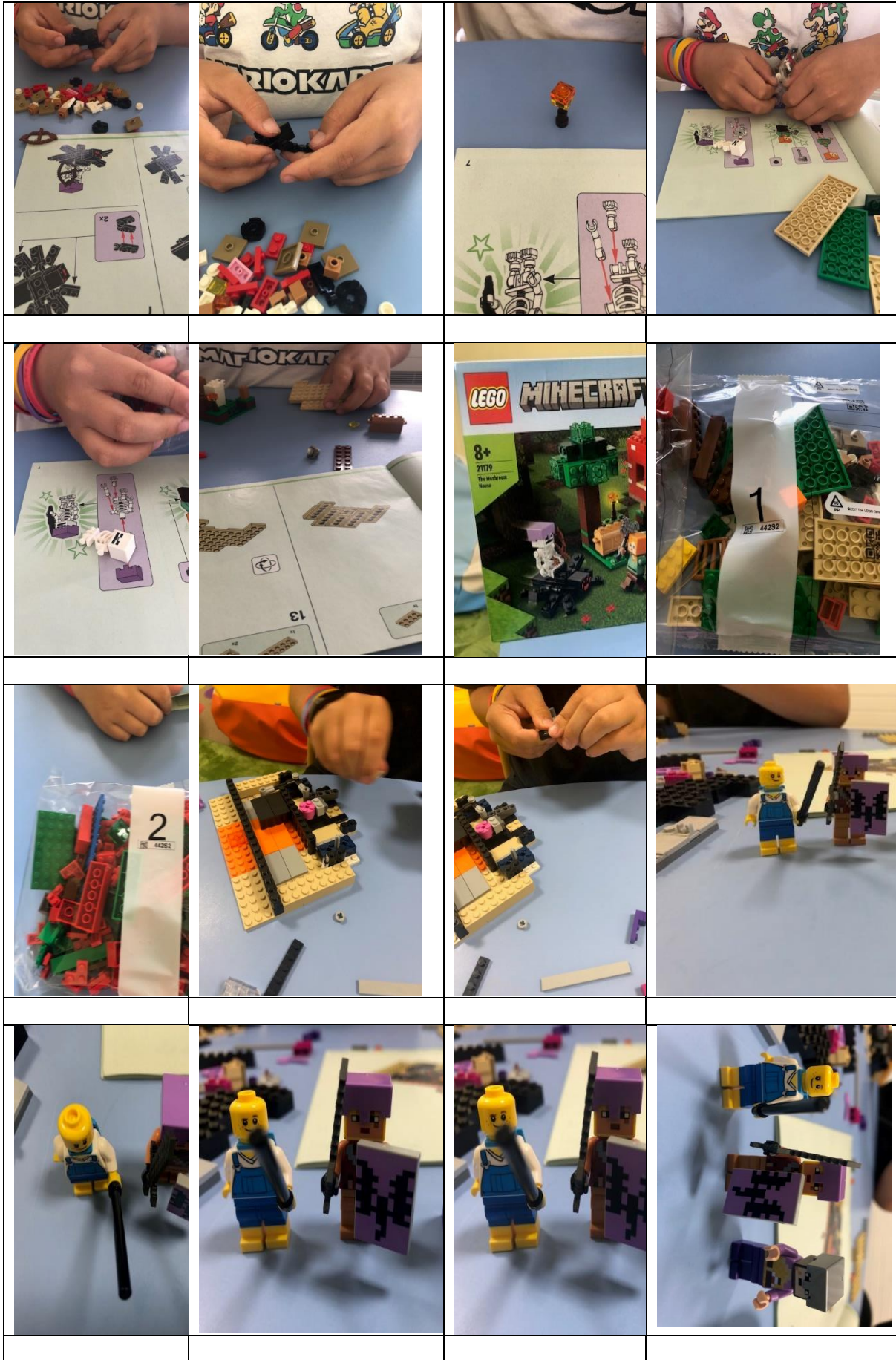


Social Communication Support for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)







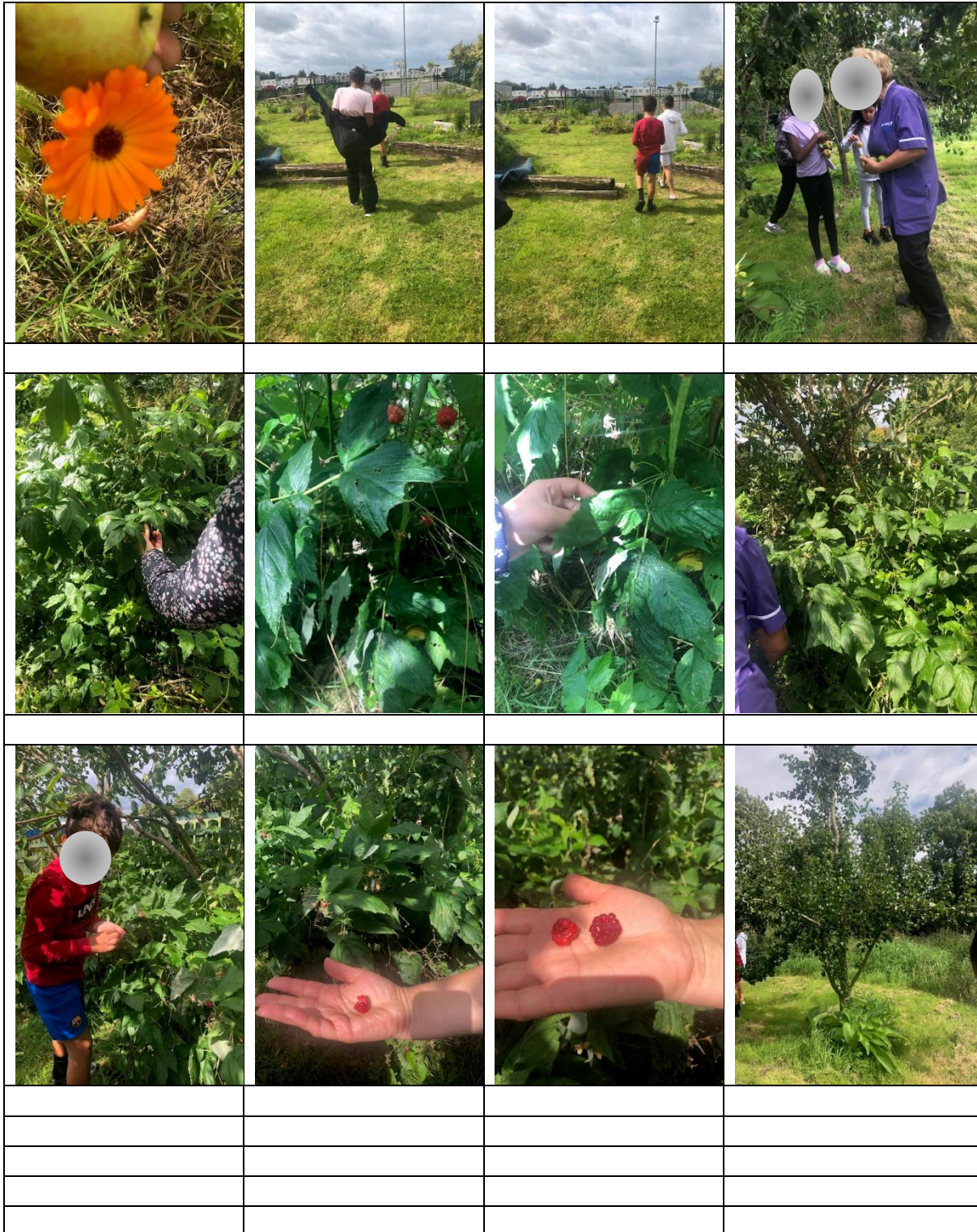




Stay and Play Social Club: Bracelets and Hama Beads



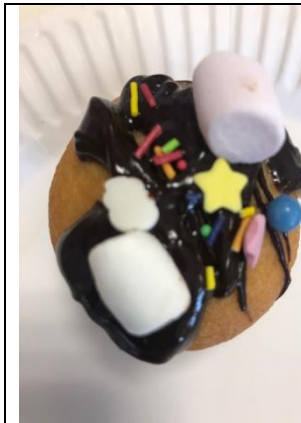
Tending to the Garden







Yummy Yummy in my Tummy



Arts and Craft



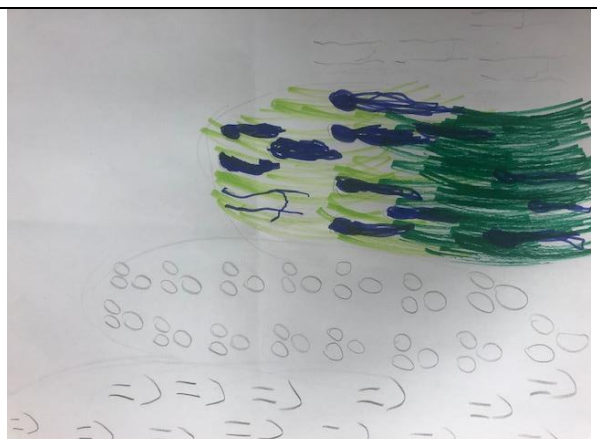
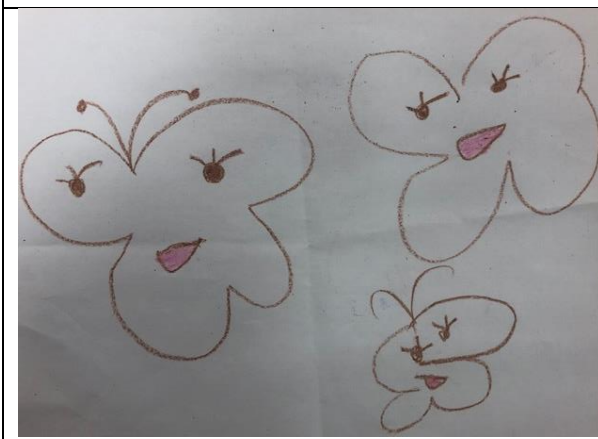
Tidy Town Initiative



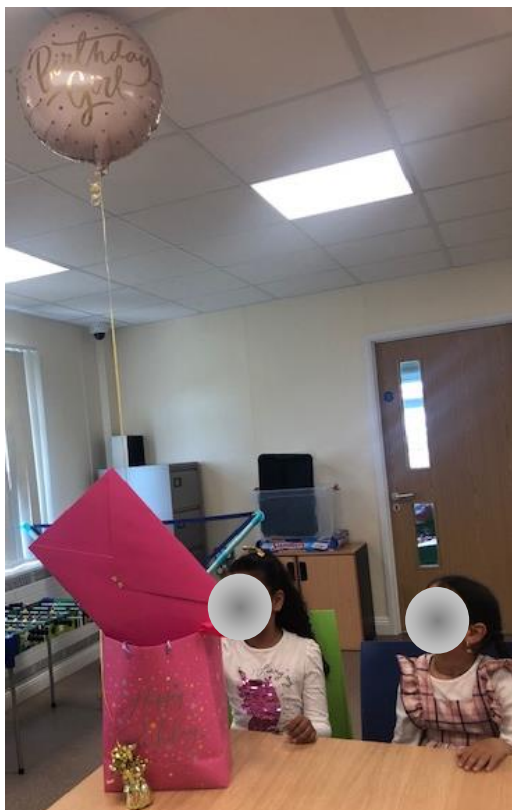
Planning Session



We Love to Draw



Birthday Time





**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth