

Summary of the “My Place to Play” for families living in International Protection Accommodation Project

“My Place to Play” aims to promote the importance of play; increase developmental activities for babies including tummy time and sensory development; and encourage parent-child bonding. It was awarded a “Child Health and Wellbeing Award” at the 2019 Irish Healthcare Centre Awards.

The “My Place to Play” for families living in International Protection Accommodation Project, is a collaboration between Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC) and the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) now located within the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)¹ with support from the Children’s Rights Alliance, the Katharine Howard Foundation and with funding from Oakfield Trust and CYPSC and skilled expertise from the Early Learning Initiative. It builds on the seminal work of Dublin City North CYPSC from 2018-2019 with the Early Learning Initiative. At that time “My Place to Play” was designed and successfully implemented for families with very young children living in homeless accommodations.

Key statistics of “My Place to Play” for families living in International Protection Accommodation Project

- **248 babies/families participated in the Project**
- **248 play mats and resources were distributed as part of the Project countrywide**
- **47 International Protection Accommodation Centres (IPAC) participated in the Project**
- **Three briefing sessions for local IPAC staff and other local service practitioners were provided**
- **52 practitioners registered to attend the briefings**
- **Five organisations collaborated in the project nationally**
- **A full Project Review Report is available from www.cypsc.ie**

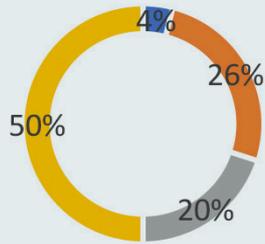
What did participating families, parents and guardians think of “My Place to Play”?



50% of parents/guardians reported using the mat every day and 26% used the mat 1 - 3 times per week

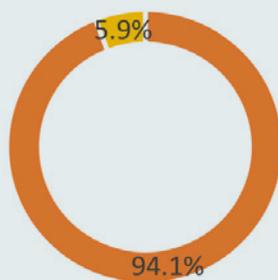
¹ Since the initiation of this project IPAS has been re-located from the Department of Justice and Equality and now sits within the remit of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Frequency of use of play mat



- Less than 1 time a week
- 1-3 times a week
- 4-6 times a week
- Every day

Does the play mat make it easier to play with your baby?



- Agree
- Disagree

94.1% of parents/guardians agreed that the play mat made it easier for them to play with their baby

The most common way the play mat makes it easier for parents/guardians to play with their babies was by providing a clean, comfortable, safe, large space for them to play.

“Carpet is not always clean therefore, the mat provides a cleaner space for my baby to play and sit.”

“Play mat is comfort for a baby to lie, sit or crawl.”

“This (play mat) gives them (babies) their own space to enjoy.”

“It helps him (baby) to be more focused on things he wants and push him to move to get them.”

The next most common way in which the play mat supports parents/guardians play with their babies was encouraging the baby’s development.

“My baby looks at himself in the mirror and he laughs, he sings with the maracas, he looks at the drawings on the mat while talking sometimes he shouts.”

“The toys in the mat help to know their face, to reach, stretch and start crawling. Baby enjoys tummy time on it.”

Parents/guardians found the information they received on tummy time and the importance of play helpful, easy to read and liked the images used in the information materials. Some parents/guardians said the information helped them learn things they did not already know.



My Place to Play Baby Play Mat



- Tummy time is a welcome part of your baby’s daily routine. It helps your baby to have better head control and stronger muscles in their neck, shoulders, arms and back.
- Tummy time is a great way for baby to develop balance and co-ordination.
- Babies love to discover their own reflection so include a mirror.
- Encourage your baby to reach and grasp by placing some toys nearby.
- Spend some time on the floor with your baby, reading to them or playing with their toys.
- As your baby grows, begin to add more age appropriate toys & activities.
- Be sure to stay close when the baby is first introduced to this space to reassure them.
- Provide a safe place away from any electrical sockets & wires, heat sources, sharp corners or large furniture that can tip over.

“It told me stuff I did not know.”

“The importance of the child’s happiness inside the centre.”

“Tummy time helps with baby’s motor skills and prepare her to sit and crawl.”

“I need to make sure that my baby lay down on her tummy at least 15 minutes a day in different times.”

“It helped me because I get time to bond with my baby.”

96% of parents/guardians said they would recommend the play mat to other parents/guardians

“The play mat is your baby’s first place to learn and discover and also help develop their neck muscles in preparation for crawling and eventually walking.”

“Play mat with toys helps the baby to have own space to play.”

“Whenever you see the mat and the toys it will remind you that the baby needs tummy time and play time.”

“That it has been helpful while playing with the kids in this environment.”

What did centre staff think of “My Place to Play?”

Key findings from the survey of practitioners who participated in the My Place to Play Project included:

- 94.4% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that the Project provided valuable learning opportunities for parents/guardians



97.1% of practitioners found the “My Place to Play” briefing for practitioners useful

- 97.3% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that the Project provided more opportunities for parents/guardians to play with their children

“It got them in a routine of playing with the child on a daily basis which was great for both parents and child.”

- 88.9% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that the Project increased parents’/guardians’ awareness of the importance of play
- 94.7% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that the Project provided parents/guardians with increased awareness of the importance of tummy time
- Practitioners generally reported receiving very positive feedback from parents/guardians in relation to My Place to Play Project

“In one family, a Mum said that she would look forward to playing with the two maracas with her baby as it was the first time she heard him laugh.”

“Parents reported that their babies felt happy there (on the play mat), which made the parents happy.”

- 94.4% of practitioners said they would recommend My Place to Play Project to other parents/guardians

- 68.6% of practitioners agreed the Project supported their practice with parents/guardians

“The programme helps me to get to know, reach out and connect with the participants, especially the mothers and the babies.”

“It allowed me to easily open the conversation about the importance of play and tummy time with parents in a positive way. I believe parents did not feel as though I was judging their parenting.”

What did the Project partners say about the experience of collaborating on “My Place to Play”?

Key findings from the consultations with Project stakeholders included:

- The importance of interagency co-operation for the success of the Project
- The benefits of collaboration via CYPSC
- The Project was a positive response that supported families during the Covid-19 pandemic
- The Project was a positive response to families living in international protection accommodation with limited space
- “My Place to Play” can support realisation of the draft National Standards for Direct Provision Centres in particular Standard 4.5: “The accommodation centre has adequate and accessible facilities, including dedicated child friendly, play and recreation facilities.”
- “My Place to Play” achieved positive outcomes for babies, parents/guardians and families, for practitioners and for Project stakeholders
- My Place to Play Project should continue for families in international protection accommodation
- My Place to Play Project merits continuation and adoption by relevant agencies and to be placed on a sustainable footing with funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability,

Integration and Youth and / or other relevant departments such as the Department of Health or it’s designates.

“We have set up a very good standardised package for the Project including the leaflets, design and evaluation so that is there and ready to go and there is a model/pack.”

The Report on the Review of the “My Place to Play” for families living in International Protection Accommodation Project makes the following recommendations:

Future of “My Place to Play”

- “My Place to Play” should be continued into the future for families living in international protection accommodation and can support realisation of the draft National Standards for Direct Provision Centres.
- “My Place to Play” should continue to be replicated for other families living in accommodation with limited space such as families living in homeless hubs and emergency accommodation.
- The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Health or it’s designates should consider funding the project for sustainability.
- CYPSC should have a strategic role in the future running of the project.
- Other relevant organisations for example but not exclusively, IPAS, HSE, Tusla should work in collaboration with CYPSC in the future running of the project at a local level.

“CYPSC have taken the lead and it has worked very well. They know the infrastructure and have the knowledge and they are on the line between policy design and service delivery so it works well and there is a CYPSC in every area in the country.”

Peer support

- The Project should consider engaging parents/guardians who have previously participated in the Project in international protection accommodation to offer peer support and help introduce the Project to other parents/guardians living in the same centre.



- Peer support could be offered by parents/guardians to help other parents/guardians use the play mat on a regular basis, overcome language barriers, complete evaluation forms and generally nurture a self-sustaining support environment.

Follow-on project for toddlers

- A follow-on project to “My Place to Play” should be developed for toddlers.

Final thoughts...

This iteration of “My Place to Play” worked very well and had many positive impacts on babies, families, practitioners and organisations involved in the project. While the aim of the Project is to promote the importance of play, increase developmental activities

for babies, and encourage parent-child bonding, the impacts of the project were more far-reaching.

“My Place to Play” created a safe, clean, comfortable space for babies to play while living in international protection accommodation with limited space. The creation of a familiar space for babies to play not only encouraged play and development, it also created a space for babies which was their own, reassured parents/guardians their baby was playing and developing in a safe and healthy way, helped parents/guardians to interact and bond with their babies, helped parents/guardians occupy their babies and helped relieve stress.

It helped practitioners to engage with parents/guardians about the importance of play and tummy time in an informal and non-judgmental way. It also facilitated the development of positive relationships between practitioners and parents/guardians which enabled parents/guardians to seek information and advice on other child development and family related issues.

The interagency aspect of this Project and the collaboration via CYPSC was very important in relation to its development, implementation and success. The Project demonstrated the evolving role of CYPSC to innovate locally, learn and spread good practice nationally. The Project also highlighted the importance of organisations engaging with children and families living in international protection accommodation and created positive links between organisations which will also be useful for future engagements.

“My Place to Play” is an impactful programme that could offer sustainable mainstream family support to families living in accommodation with limited space such as families living in homeless hubs or temporary accommodation such as refuges. The Project could be adopted by services supporting the development of babies in their crucial formative years and by other services that provide accommodation to families with babies.

With thanks

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Download *A Report on the Review of the "My Place to Play" for families living in International Protection Accommodation Project (2020)* from www.cypsc.ie



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**CHILDREN'S
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