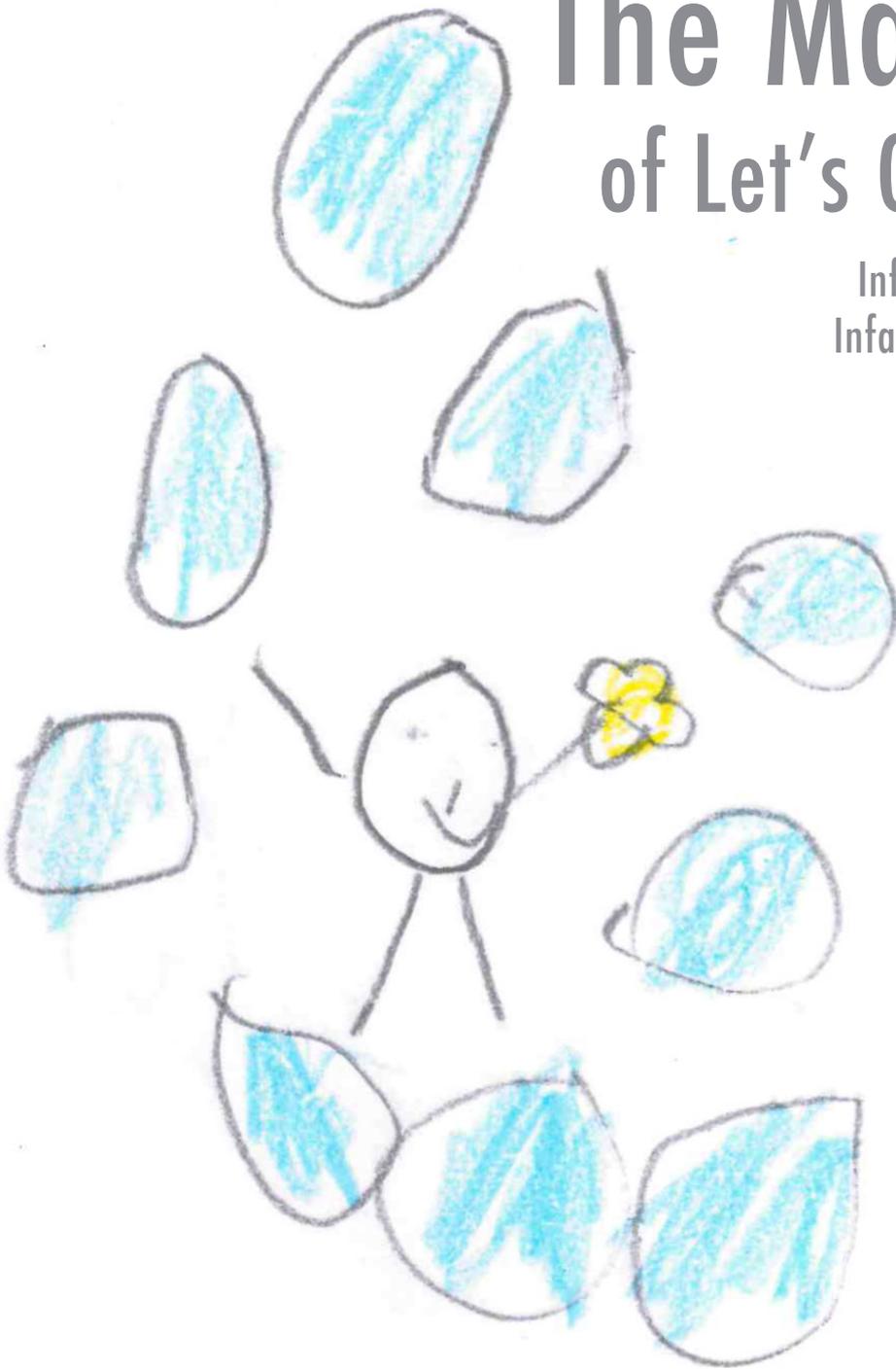
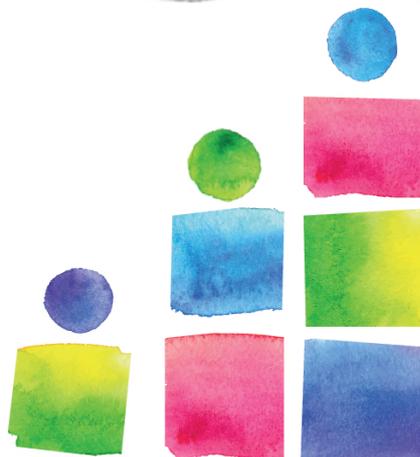


# The Many Voices of Let's Grow Together!

Informing the Let's Grow Together!  
Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG  
Strategic Plan 2021-25



Written by Lynn Buckley



## Let's Grow Together!

INFANT & CHILDHOOD  
PARTNERSHIPS CLG

**“Our communities are places where children experience happy, healthy and thriving childhoods that last a lifetime and no child is left behind.”**



Let's Grow Together! Vision



# Acknowledgements

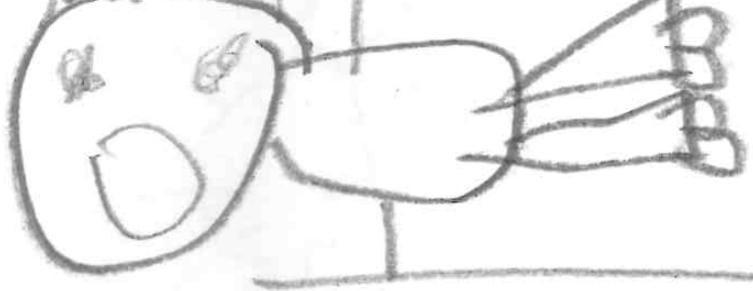
Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG would like to say a very special thank you to the children of St Mary's on the Hill National School in Knocknaheeny for their lovely artwork which has made such a valuable contribution to this document and the Let's Grow Together! Strategic Plan.

We wish to acknowledge our core funders TUSLA Child & Family Agency. We wish to acknowledge the many voices included in this report; the children, parents, families, Let's Grow Together! Team and Consortium Group. We would also like to thank Dr Shirley Martin, Sinead Donovan and the Let's Grow Together! team for their help with data collection. Finally, we would like to thank all of the babies, children, families, practitioners, inter-agency partners and Board members who have helped us to develop and grow as a programme to date. We will strive to continue to listen to and include the voices of everyone we work with to get every child's life off to the best possible start.

# Glossary of Terms

<b>ABC Programme</b>	Area Based Childhood Programme
<b>IMH</b>	Infant Mental Health
<b>PEI</b>	Prevention and Early Intervention
<b>TUSLA</b>	TUSLA Child and Family Agency
<b>YK</b>	Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme





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# Overview

This document offers an insight into the processes involved in, and the contributors to, the Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG Strategic Plan 2021-25. Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG (hereafter Let's Grow Together!) was established in January 2021 and evolved from the successful journey of the Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme (YK), in operation in the north west area of Cork city since 2015. Let's Grow Together! provides a new governance structure which will oversee the long-term development and implementation of the area-based prevention and early intervention (PEI) work previously implemented by YK. In order to strengthen the development and define the direction of Let's Grow Together!, a consultative process took place in November 2020 whereby children, parents, families, the inter-disciplinary team and members of the Consortium group gave their feedback on the YK journey and experiences to date, and on the direction of the programme moving forward. This document provides an overview of this feedback and highlights the importance of incorporating the voice of the community in plans for the organisation's development and implementation.

## Introduction

Incorporating the Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme, the main objective of Let's Grow Together! is to govern, support and develop area-based prevention and early intervention programming and approaches that support early childhood development, relationships, and environments. Let's Grow Together! aims to set the foundations for infant and child development, learning, wellbeing, and quality of life outcomes, and by doing so mitigate the intergenerational impact of child poverty. The subsidiary objectives are:

1. Respectfully enhancing skills and early childhood development knowledge, of all parents, practitioners, and services.
2. Strengthening and supporting all relationships and environments that are important to every child's early development.
3. Embedding systems and community change to support early childhood development.
4. Undertaking participatory learning and evaluation, documenting and policy development.

This work is underpinned by an innovative Infant Mental Health Framework and draws on best international evidence and practice. The core work of Let's Grow Together! is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and is part of the Area Based Childhood Programme within the TUSLA Child & Family Agency.

## Our Vision

Our communities are places where children experience happy, healthy, and thriving childhoods that last a lifetime, and no child is left behind.

## Our Mission

To work in partnership with everyone important in children's lives, sharing knowledge, skills and resources, empowering families and enabling children through their relationships and in their communities to be nurtured, fulfilled, achieving and learning.

## Area Based Prevention and Early Intervention Approach

The activities of Let's Grow Together! are part of a community-based, prevention and early intervention model which is multi-layered and multi-sectoral: evidence-informed direct service provision (programmes and interventions) within communities with families and in partnership with other services; evidence-informed capacity building (training, education, mentoring, coaching) using a supportive approach with interagency partnerships and childhood services; evidence-informed processes of promotion and awareness at community, local and regional level; and national Area Based Programme Level and policy in partnership with another 11 sites.

## Listening to our Community

A growing body of research demonstrates the link between beneficiaries' perceptions and beneficiary outcomes (Twersky et al, 2013; Stid, 2011). Beneficiary perceptions are useful leading indicators of the longer-term outcomes organisations seek to achieve. Leading indicators are important because they allow decision makers to make improvements while the programme is under way, rather than waiting to make adjustment until after the outcome has occurred (Twersky et al., p.45).

In order to strengthen the development and define the direction of Let's Grow Together!, a high-level strategic plan was developed in December 2020. The strategic plan provided an opportunity, at an early phase, to establish the organisation's mission, vision, and values; address some fundamental questions; and develop medium and longer-term goals with associated objectives. To do this, YK engaged with its main stakeholders; children, parents, families, the inter-disciplinary team and members of the Consortium group. Through various approaches such as focus groups, Google Docs activities, and talk and draw sessions, the voices of Let's Grow Together! were captured.

# Methodology

A working group was established to develop strategic questions to inform the plan, identify the stakeholders and decide on the consultation processes. Questions were adapted appropriately with emphasis on particular areas of interest and relevance depending on the stakeholder group. Stakeholders identified to inform the plan included: children from a local preschool and primary school, families and groups with experience of the services, members of the Parents Forum, YK Consortium and interagency partners, organisation directors and YK staff team. The data received from these groups has been used to inform this strategic plan.

## Stakeholder Groups

**Children:** We consulted with children attending a local preschool and primary school through a mixed-methods focus group with draw and discussion activities.

**Families:** Families linked with the Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Programme were invited to participate in an online questionnaire via Google Docs.

**Parents Forum:** Members of the YK Parents Forum were invited to participate in a focus group.

**YK Team, Consortium and Interagency Partners:** Invited to participate in focus group sessions.

## Questions

### Families and children:

What makes baby happy?

What makes the adults who support baby happy?

How can the community support the baby to grow up and be happy?

### Parents:

How would you, as a parent, like to engage with the programme going forward?

Do you feel it is easy to link with the programme?

Do you feel the service is valuable to this community?

What do you feel are the strengths in the community to allow parents and children to engage with the programme?

What are some of the weaknesses of the programme?

What is the service not providing or doing for families in the community that would be more valuable to parents/children?

What should the programme keep doing? What should the programme start doing?

What should the programme stop doing?

What do feel barriers to parent/child involvement with the service are or could be in the future? (relationships, community ties/links)

What do you think are the 3 main things the programme should keep in mind/consider when working with families and the community?

Do you feel the name 'Young Knocknaheeny' properly explains/represents the programme and what we do in the community?

## YK Team:

Since inception in 2015, what has YK as an organisation achieved to date?

What words come to mind that you would like to see in the vision for Let's Grow Together!?

As an organisation, what are the key ways of achieving this vision?

What values would you like Let's Grow Together! to be guided by?

Who are the beneficiaries of Let's Grow Together? Primary and others

Who are YK not reaching right now?

What is the age range of the primary focus for Let's Grow Together?

What are the external influences driving and shaping Let's Grow Together's primary task and direction?

## Consortium and Interagency Partners:

What is 'Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG' most basic objective?

Who are the primary beneficiaries?

What is the age range of the primary focus?

What is the defining model of service delivery/approach?

What is the primary geographical reach?

Does the name 'Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships' reflect the primary task and direction?

What structures, governance, partnerships and otherwise, will support the primary task and direction?

Who are the owners / stewards?

Are these reflected in the Constitution and Articles of Association?

What are the external influences driving and shaping primary task and direction?

What is the vision, mission, values, reach and strategic goals?

What are the strengths to build on and what resources are needed to achieve these goals?

How will the plan be implemented?

How will it monitor, track and evaluate progress and revise the plan as required?

## Tools

**Children:** Mixed-methods group-style draw and discussion sessions. Children from two classes in one Primary School (x1 senior infants and x1 first class) and one preschool room. Children were asked the three main questions, engaged in a drawing session, and then asked to discuss their drawings.

**Families:** Questionnaire disseminated via Google Docs.

**Parents Forum:** Virtual focus group with 7 Forum members.

**YK Team, Consortium and Interagency Partners:** x2 virtual consultation sessions per stakeholder group.

## Data Analysis

Data from various stakeholder groups were analysed thematically by extracting themes and subthemes from focus group transcriptions, online questionnaires via Google Docs, and talk and draw activities. NVivo Pro was used to collate qualitative data for thematic analysis. The Framework Method (Richie & Lewis, 2003) guided the thematic analysis process.

## Ethical Considerations

Parents of children in the participating preschool and primary school were provided with a Parent Information Sheet and consent form. Families were also provided with this information prior to participation in the online questionnaire.

# Results

## Child Feedback

### Theme 1: Love, Family and Siblings

Children's artwork incorporated frequent references to family and siblings in a baby's life. Children consistently referred to family members when explaining what they felt makes babies most happy. When describing their pictures, children described how caregivers and siblings make baby happy, and also how baby makes parents and caregivers happy too.

*'They [parents] love when it's their babies 1st birthday, that makes them happy'*

*'Mammies and daddies love to see big brothers and sisters playing with the baby, this makes them smile'*

*'Playing makes a baby happy, especially when their mammy and daddy play with them or their big brothers and sisters'*

*'Babies are happy when you play with them and talk to them'*

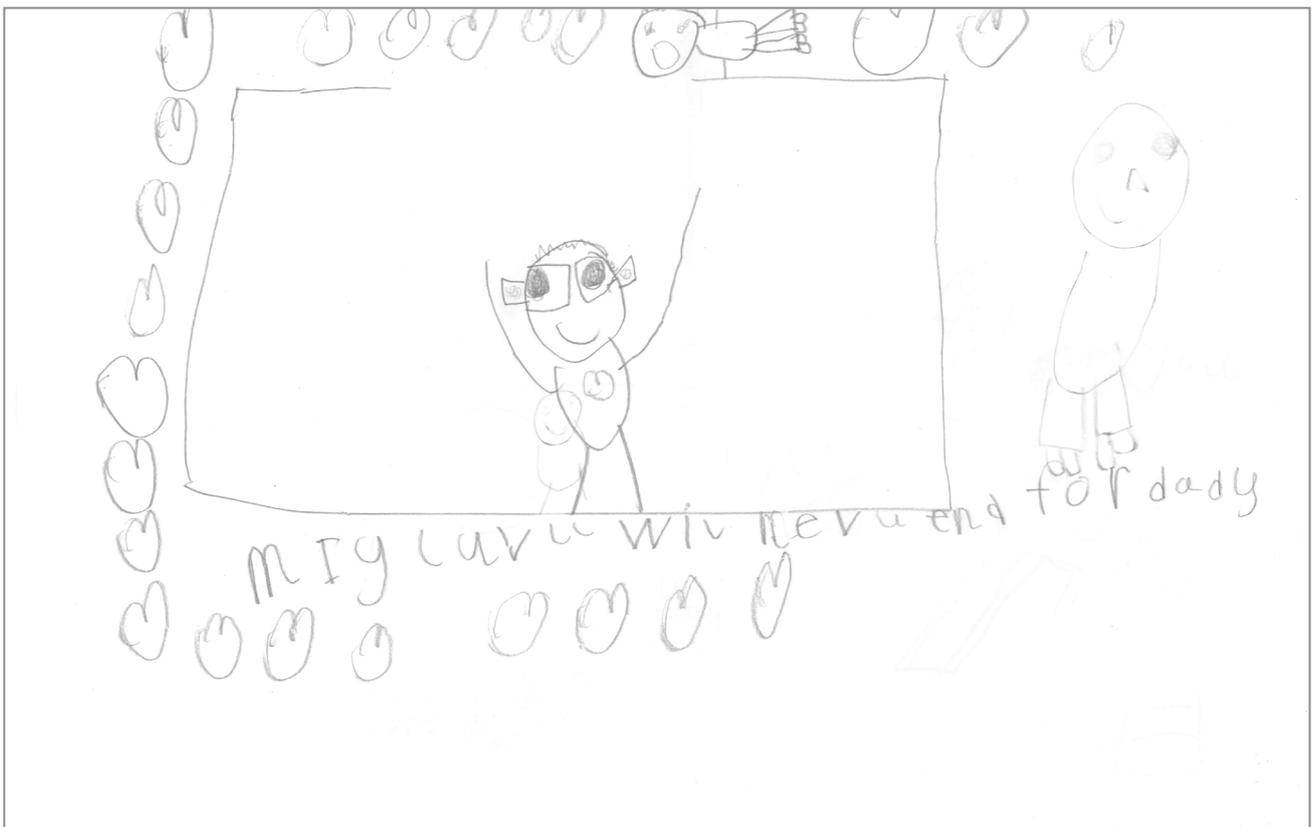


Image 1: Love for a Parent



Image 2: Love of Family

## Theme 2: The Outdoors and the Community

Children's artwork depicted various settings and services within the community that are important in babies' lives. Their feedback highlighted the importance of these services which they described as making baby feel 'safe' and 'happy'.

*'There should be crèches and play groups for the baby to make new friends'*

*'It needs a park so the mammy, daddy and nanna can take have fresh air and go for walks'*

*'It should have enough houses for everyone'*



Image 3: Playgroup

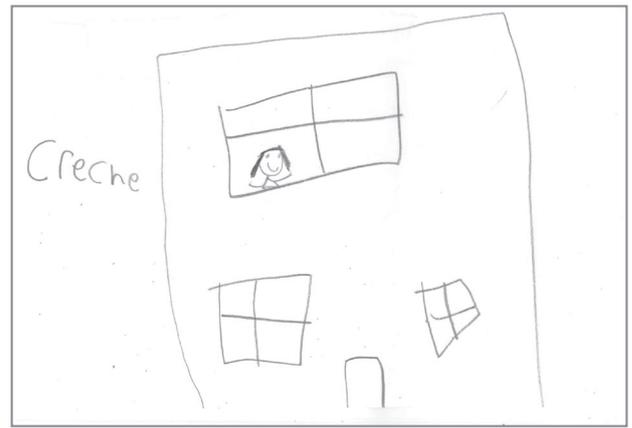


Image 4: Creche



Image 5: The Things Baby Needs



Image 6: Bubbles



Image 7: Swings, slides and green spaces

### Theme 3: Health & Safety

Children's artwork depicts several references to health and safety in the community with traffic lights and zebra crossings featuring prominently, as well as cars, car seats, stairgates, the local doctor and the Community Garda. Fire was illustrated in a number of pictures and referred to in feedback sessions.

*'It needs to make sure that all the cars have proper car seats'*

*'It needs Gardaí in the area to keep it safe especially from fast cars'*

*'No fires or things that can hurt them'*

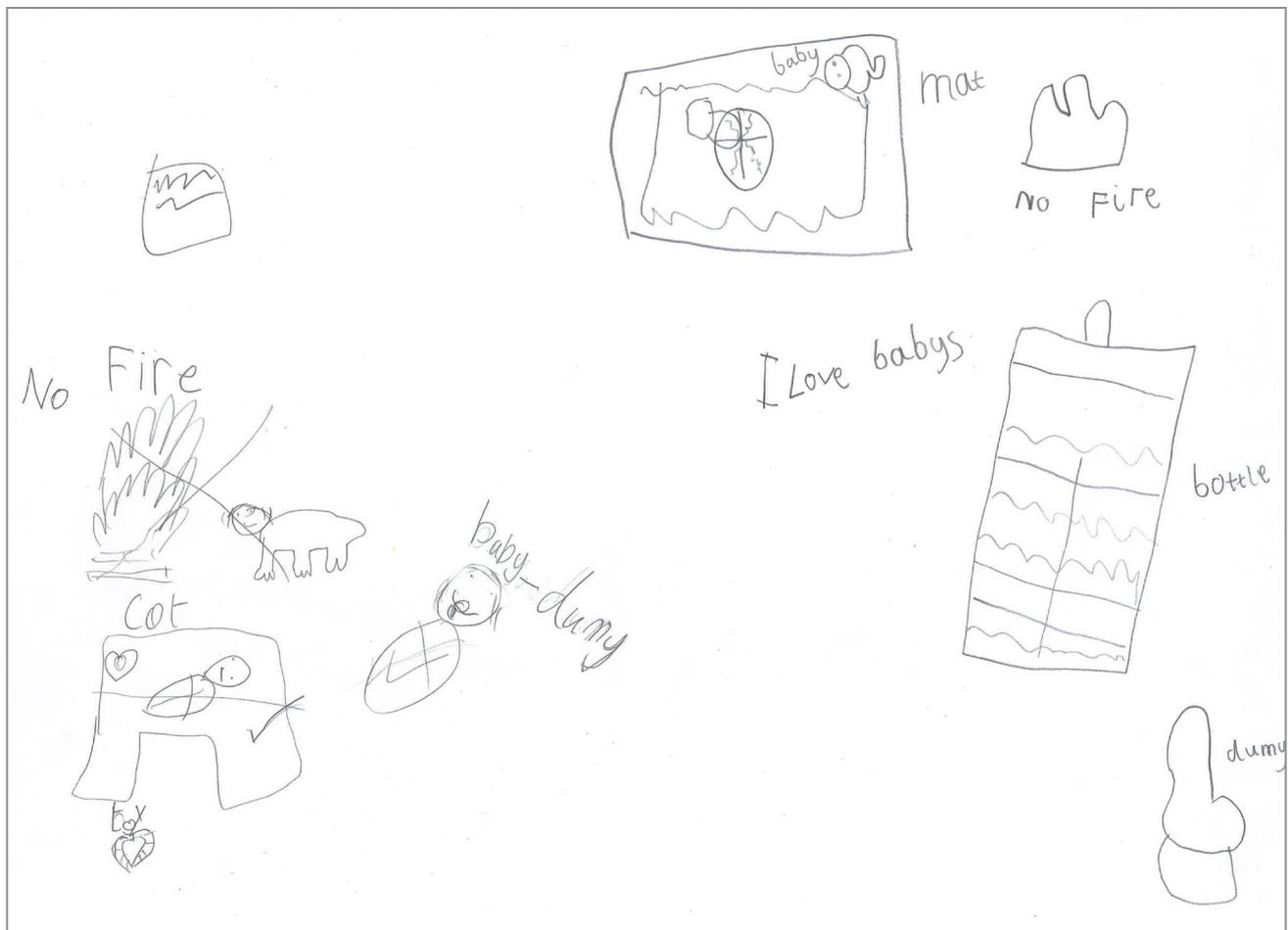


Image 8: Keeping Baby Safe

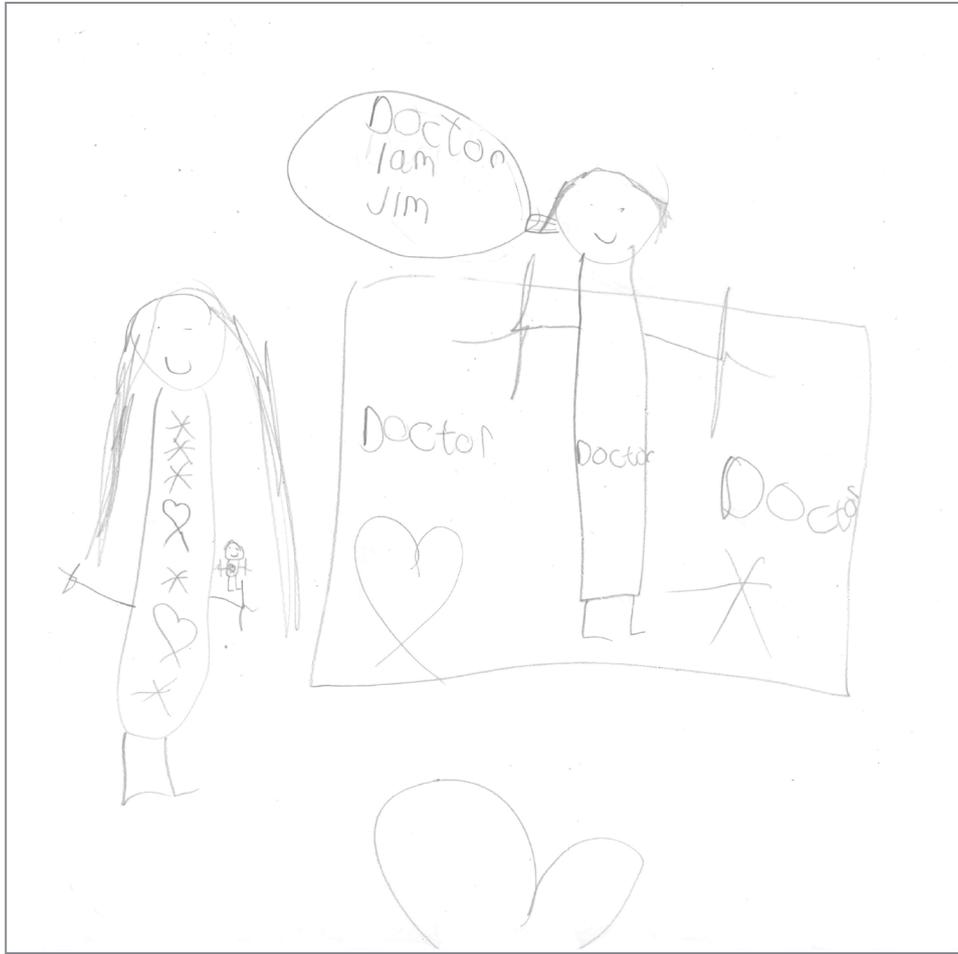


Image 9: Doctor



Image 10: Road Safety in the Community

## Family Feedback

### Theme 1: Love

Love emerged as a strong theme in discussions about what makes parent & baby happy.

*'Knowing that baby loves you and looks up to you for help and support'*

### Theme 2: Supports and Services

Family feedback contained frequent references to the importance of supports and services within the community for all children and families to thrive.

*'Being able to access the information and support for parents and children easily'*

### Theme 3: Safety

Another significant theme that emerged from family feedback was the issue of safety within the community.

*'The community can support babies to grow up happy by making sure that the environment is safe'*

### Theme 4: Health

Feedback contained several references to health and the importance of the basic requirements needed to ensure children and families can grow and thrive.

*'Feeling nourished, having food, being warm and being healthy'*

## Parent Feedback

### Theme 1: Increasing Knowledge

Parent feedback highlighted the importance of providing parents and caregivers with advice and information regarding child development and the different stages of development.

*'Offering advice and information for different stages of a child's development'*

### Theme 2: Visibility and Accessibility

Parents felt that visibility of the programme should be increased and information about the programme should be provided in public areas in the community.

*'Displaying information in places like the library and in Super Valu would be really helpful'*

Based on their own experiences of engaging with the YK programme, parents offered feedback as to how and where to advertise programme information in order to target those that might need the services most, i.e. pregnant women living in the community.

*'Advertise in local GP practice and CUMH... it would have been great to know about YK during my pregnancy'*

Parent feedback highlighted a significant barrier to engaging with and accessing the programme, the lack of a building in the community which parents could visit if they required the service.

*'It would be good to see a building, it's hard not knowing where YK is'*

### **Theme 3: Respect, listening and communicating**

Parents highlighted the importance of increased communication among practitioners and the impact lack of communication has on their experience of engaging with services.

*'We don't want to retell our story again and again to every service'*

Based on their experiences of engaging with various services, parents highlighted their past frustrations with trying to have their voice heard.

*'No one would listen to me, without YK I couldn't have coped'*

### **Theme 4: Inclusion**

Parents noted challenges to programme engagement by fathers in the community.

*'Fathers may feel intimidated by an all-female group'*

Parent feedback underscored the importance of adopting a more flexible approach to delivering groups in the community which could increase engagement for parents and caregivers who work daytime hours.

*'Holding out-of-hours groups for mams and dads who work'*

Parents felt that more thought should be given to engaging other individuals involved in the child's life and the child's care.

*'Grandparent groups, a lot of grandparents mind children when parents are at work'*

### **Theme 5: Collaboration**

Parent feedback contained several references to the importance of working in a collaborative approach with everyone involved in the child and family's life.

*'Making sure everyone who is involved with that child are working together and all on the same page'*

## YK Team Feedback

### **Theme 1: Building relationships**

A significant theme emerging from YK team feedback was the importance of building relationships with families, practitioners, and partner agencies in the community. The team felt this was a major achievement of the YK Programme to date and should remain a key activity under the new Let's Grow Together! company.

*'To continue to connect and build relationships to ensure all members of the community, families and practitioners, can reach their optimal potential and get every child's life off to the best possible start'*

### **Theme 2: New opportunities for improvement**

Team focus group discussions highlighted a number of opportunities for improvement going forward under the Let's Grow Together! company. The team felt that efforts should be made to illustrate the work of the service using a developmental approach as opposed to the previous '4 Strategies' approach.

*'The current way we depict and explain the programme does not always reflect the integration of work across the different strategies'*

### **Theme 3: Increased communication and collaboration**

Team feedback also highlighted the need to continue to, and increase, communication and collaboration.

*'To share high quality information, skills and resources to ensure all children feel nurtured, are fulfilled and are healthy in their relationships and in their community'*

The team felt that building on the inter-agency approach already in place and strengthening partnership working with other community organisations, using a child-centred approach, would ensure optimal outcomes for children and families.

*'We need to enhance a shared working approach with our allies to ensure the best outcomes for children and families'*

#### **Theme 4: Inclusion and respect**

The final themes emerging from team feedback was the importance of inclusion and respect, which featured prominently in discussions regarding the values and core principles for Let's grow Together!

*'A respectful and inclusive service working in partnership with children and families to build fulfilled, happy and healthy childhood'*

## Consortium Feedback

### **Theme 1: Changes to the programme**

Consortium members felt strongly that although the name is very important, the programme will thrive once the work itself and those delivering the programme remain strong and faithful to programme mission and values.

*'The work and the people who deliver the work is most important element'*

### **Theme 2: Addressing the needs of children in the community**

Consortium feedback provides several references to the importance of monitoring programme evolution and adjusting the approach to implementation over the course of the next five years in order to adequately address child needs in the community

*'Adopting a Progressive Incrementalism approach of adding elements to the programme as it evolves, keeping the door open to working with children across their lifespan and cycles'*

### **Theme 3: Continued listening and collaboration**

Collecting and listening to the voices of those involved in the programme, particularly children's voices, emerged as a common theme from Consortium feedback. Participants felt this was vital to programme development and success in previous years and strongly recommended that this activity feature in programme evaluation going forward.

*'We found the child participation piece very important in the past with a lot of learning from it so we're looking forward to keeping this on the agenda going forward'*



Figure 1: Main themes emerging from thematic analysis of data

## Incorporating All Voices

Stakeholder engagement implies a willingness to listen, to discuss issues of interest to stakeholders of an organisation and, critically, the organisation has to be prepared to consider changing what it aims to achieve and how it operates (Twersky et al, 2013). By engaging the programme's main beneficiaries, Let's Grow Together! has been able to collect the perspectives of its many stakeholders.

Based on consultation feedback, and incorporated in the Let's Grow Together! Strategic Plan 2021-25, the programme aims to address the main themes which have emerged from the various stakeholder groups. Efforts to increase visibility and access to the service are incorporated within the Plan through developing a programme-wide PR strategy to accompany programme implementation, and through establishing a new premises in the community which families and community partners can access. Collaboration and inclusion will be addressed through continued partnership working with community agencies and partners and through efforts to engage a wide variety of caregivers and all people involved in children's' lives, i.e. dads and grandparents in the community. Let's Grow Together! will also continue to increase knowledge of child development through the implementation of parent/caregiver groups, working with caregivers and children via the IMH Home Visiting

Programme, and through capacity building programmes delivered to practitioners working in the area as well as those working across the city and county. As well as directly providing services to children, parents and families in the community, Let's Grow Together! will also support other services in the community through capacity building training and community consultations with practitioners. Family and parent feedback in particular highlighted the importance of working in an empathetic, respectful and inclusive manner with all members of the community. Let's Grow Together! have developed programme values in line with this. Core values include inclusive, respect, empathy, integrity, openness, collaboration, and a well-governed organisation.

## Conclusion

This document highlights the importance of incorporating the voice of the community in plans for programme development and implementation. At an early phase, these voices helped to develop a strategic plan which established the Let's Grow Together! mission, values and goals, and which will guide the direction of the organisation from 2021 to 2025. By consulting the various stakeholders, plans are now also in place to address the challenges and barriers previously encountered in order to ensure meaningful change takes place. Let's Grow Together! will continue to utilise opportunities to engage with and include the many voices of the community going forward in order to get every child's life off to the best possible start.



Figure 2: Our Values

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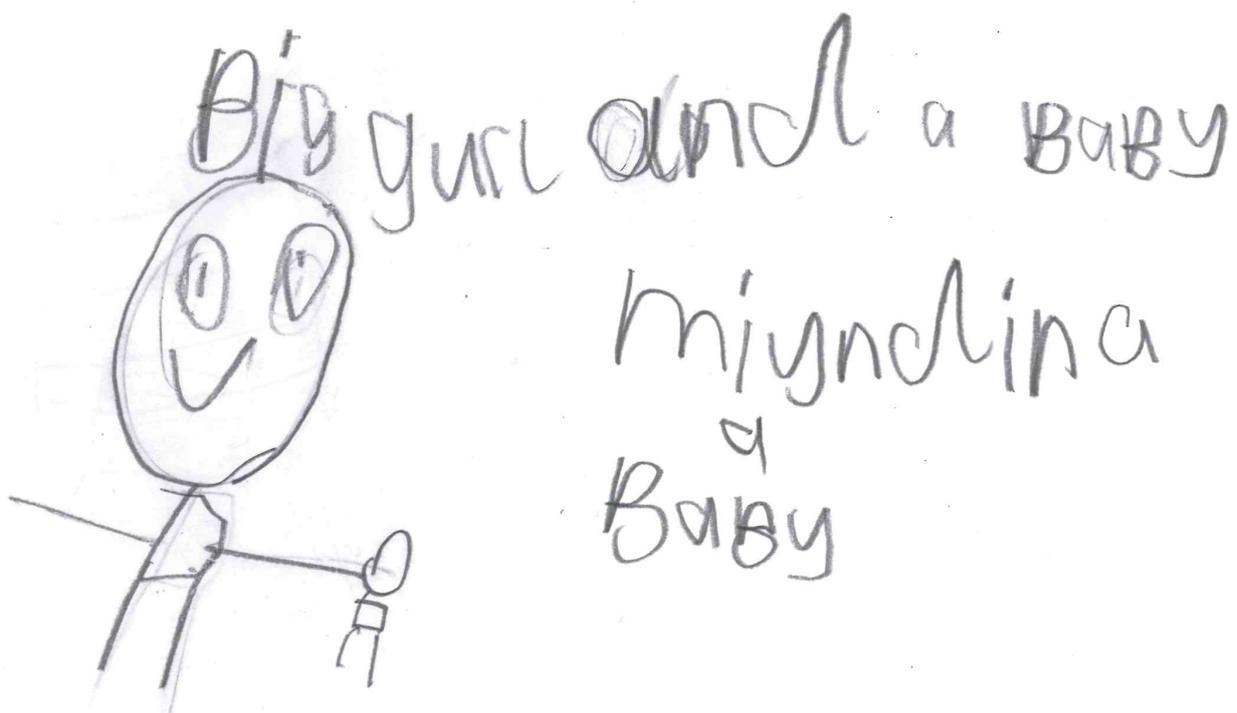
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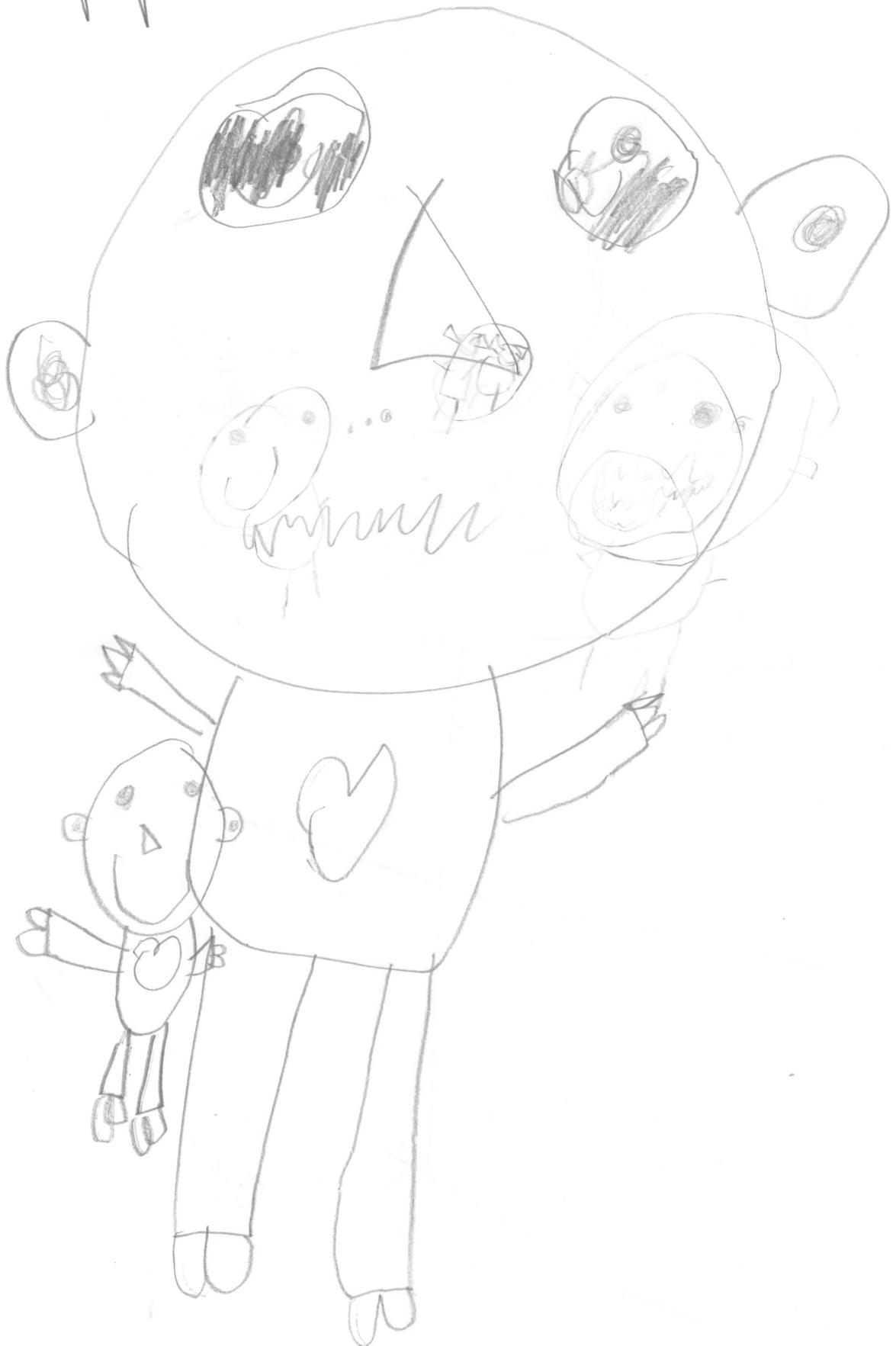
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All of the artwork in this document is by the very talented children of St Mary's on the Hill National School, Knocknaheeny, Cork.

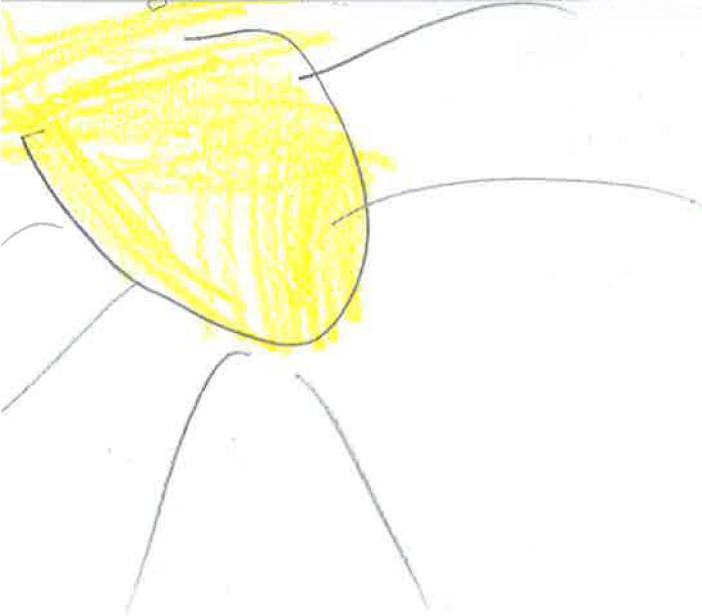
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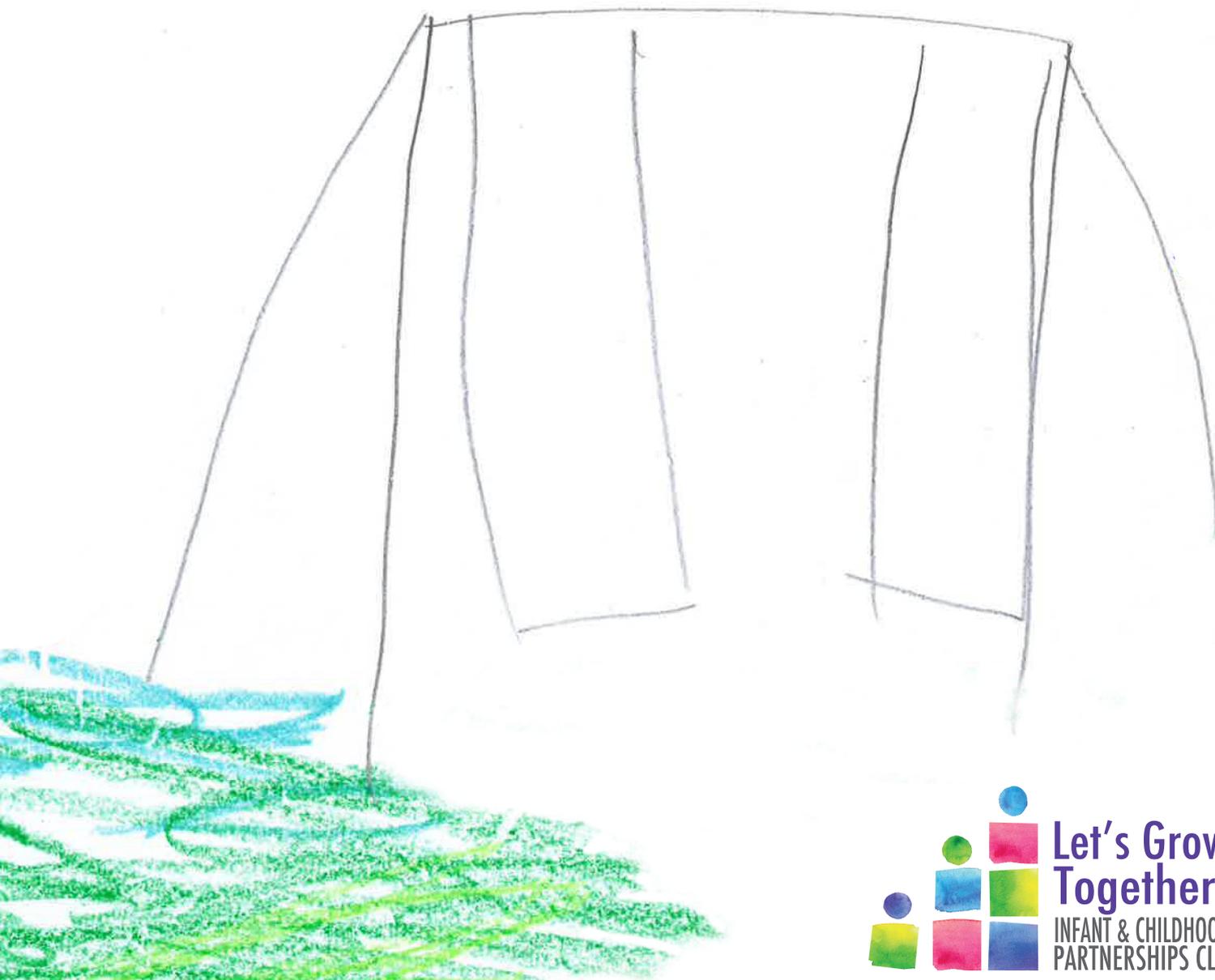


me and dad



Baby Dreaming about Playing with Big Brother





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