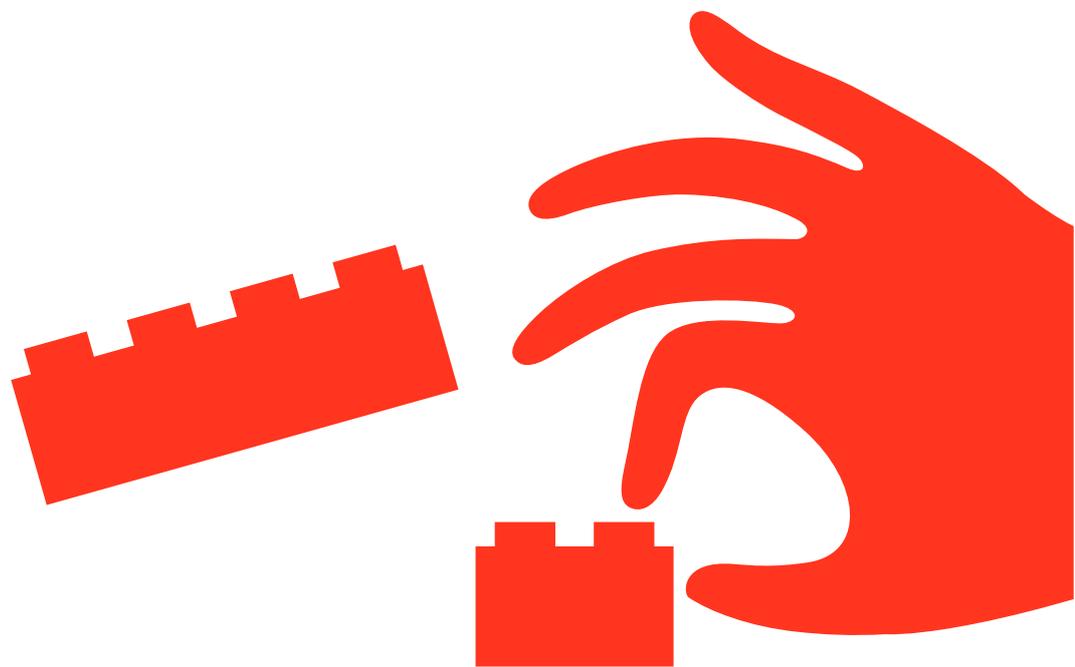


PLAY
INCLUDED



Building emotional resilience one brick at a time

Acorns Children's Hospice Trust is a registered charity, offering a network of palliative care and support to life-limited and life-threatened children and their families across the West Midlands region and part of South West England.

Play can be an important therapeutic tool in a hospice setting, helping children with their social and emotional wellbeing, skills development and emotional regulation.

Jen Bridle, a Sibling Worker and Health Play Champion at Acorns Children's Hospice, offers bereavement support to siblings of terminally ill children aged five to 18 years old on a 1:1 or group basis. Siblings of children with serious illnesses can experience challenges and difficulties throughout their sibling's illness including anxiety, loneliness and emotional distress. Many Sibling Workers are often looking for effective ways to support all of the children and young people they work with to improve their emotional wellbeing.



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Why the Brick-by-Brick® programme?

Play Included® partnered with Starlight, a children's charity, to explore the impact of LEGO® play in a healthcare setting. As a Starlight champion, Jen was approached to take part in the project and, on learning about Play Included's Brick-by-Brick® programme, she recognised that the evidence-based approach of LEGO® brick play would benefit many of the children and young people she supports: "As a registered play specialist working with children and young people with complex emotional needs, I understand the importance of play as a therapeutic tool, which I use daily in my work. Children of all ages and abilities love playing with LEGO® bricks, and so using LEGO play as a therapeutic intervention is perfect for my role."

One of the ways that Jen supports siblings of children at the hospice is through open sibling groups that provide a safe and understanding space for children of all ages and backgrounds to share their similar experiences.

"Elements of the Brick-by-Brick® programme can be incorporated into all of my groups, not just standalone LEGO® brick based therapy sessions. I love how inclusive the Brick-by-Brick® programme is and, because it is suitable for all ages and abilities, it works well for me as I support children from five to 18 years old."

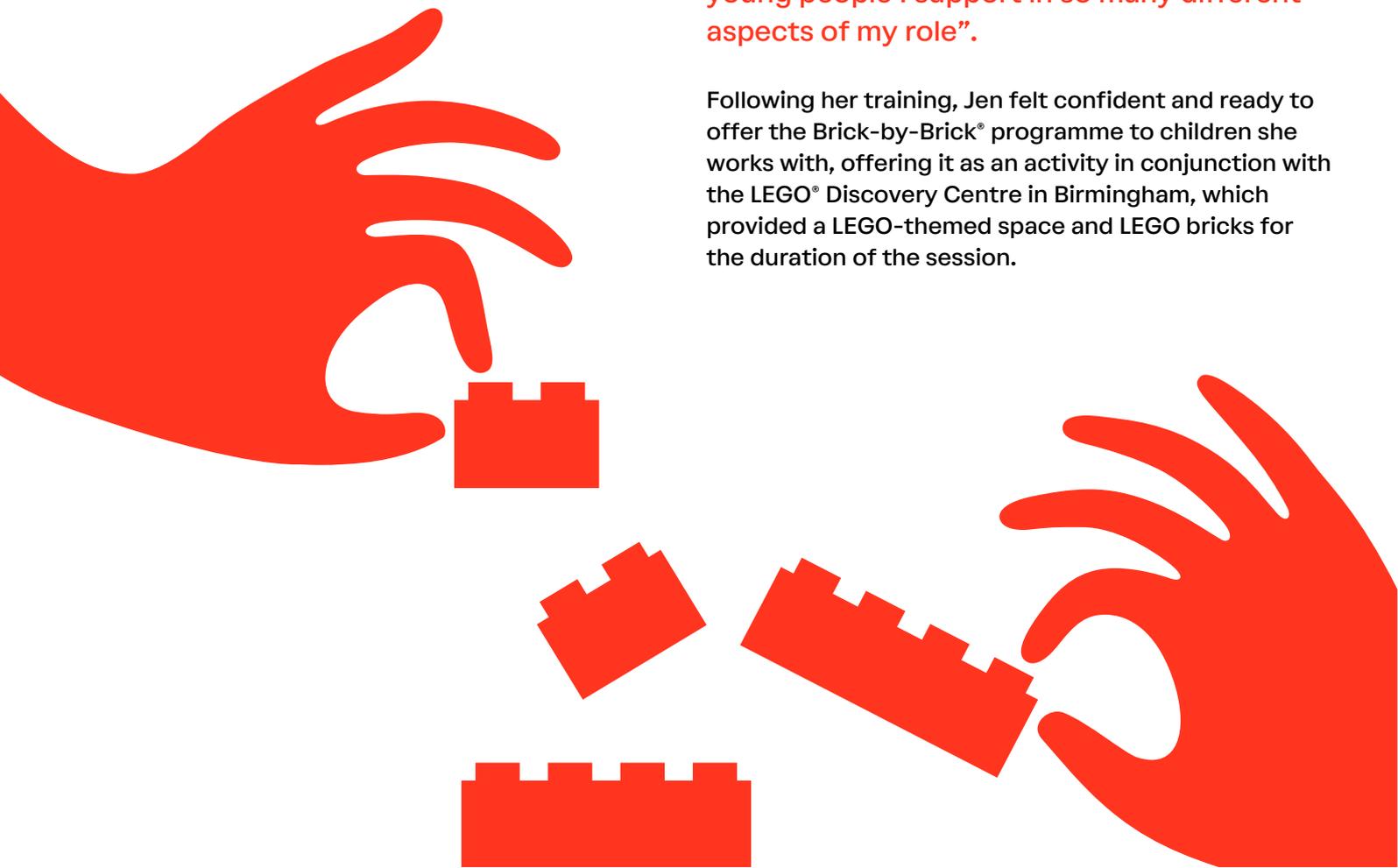
Interactive and easy implementation

Jen completed the online-self-paced Brick-by-Brick® programme Certified Facilitator training in October 2023. "With such comprehensive support and guidance in the training I didn't need to ask for any additional help to implement the Brick-by-Brick® programme with a group of children. The skills and knowledge you gain are invaluable and the course itself is interesting and insightful", explains Jen.

In fact, Jen finds that the techniques and advice in the training course are transferrable:

"I can use them to help the children and young people I support in so many different aspects of my role".

Following her training, Jen felt confident and ready to offer the Brick-by-Brick® programme to children she works with, offering it as an activity in conjunction with the LEGO® Discovery Centre in Birmingham, which provided a LEGO-themed space and LEGO bricks for the duration of the session.



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Improving social and emotional wellbeing

Improving social and emotional wellbeing
“During the group session, the Brick-by-Brick® programme methodology helped children to feel less anxious and communicate with each other through collaborative teamwork. Not only that but those children who are usually quiet and timid found their voices and have formed new friendships. It has been so rewarding to see how engaged the children are with the programme. They take ownership over their activities and want to prove themselves.”

In a 1:1 setting, Jen has also seen a positive impact on the young people she works with, using both the Brick-by-Brick® programme and Play Included®’s free ‘Play at Home’ resources.

“Recently, I used the ‘What makes you happy?’ technique with a bereaved teenager and completing the activity together created a safe, calm space where he could freely express his emotions.”

LEGO® bricks are a popular toy, and a common interest, but they can also be used as a common focus to develop communication and problem-solving skills. Jen explains, “LEGO model building becomes a shared problem that the child and I work together to fix. While we are building, we talk and get to know each other better, which builds trust and the child feels comfortable enough to reveal their emotions to me. Building together in a safe and fun environment supports the development of key communication skills.”

Not only do the children enjoy participating in the Brick-by-Brick® programme but Jen receives positive feedback from their family members, who comment on how happy the children are during and after their sessions.

Future Plans

Looking ahead, Jen shares that she wants to “continue with these sessions and open the opportunity up for more children and young people. Not only that, but I would like to have more focused groups for those who are struggling with certain aspects of their journey”.

