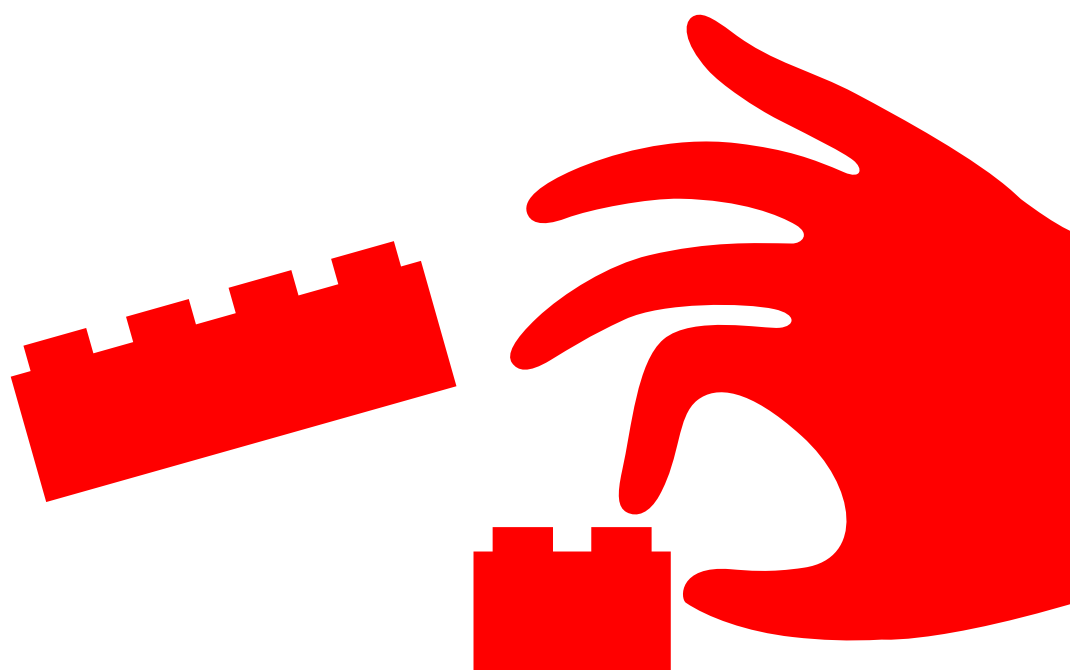


PLAY  
INCLUDED



# Supporting children's emotional wellbeing with the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme

Sinead is a Senior Play Therapist and Clinical Director at The Play Therapies Centre in Northern Ireland. Sinead has been providing children with social, emotional and behavioural support for more than 20 years.

## Reducing anxiety and loneliness

Schools are seeing an increasing number of children with severe anxiety, feelings of loneliness, and developmental differences following the pandemic. Many children are also facing lengthy waits for initial assessments for autism and other developmental disorders. Without these assessments, children cannot access the support that they need to thrive at school.

Many schools are therefore searching for effective programmes to help all their students, no matter their needs, with their social and emotional wellbeing. Sinead recognised that the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup>

programme was “something that schools can offer to children immediately.”

Sinead heard about the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme from a former colleague and contacted Dr Gina Gómez de la Cuesta to learn more. She was drawn to the programme because “It is based on research. Gina and the Play Included team, based in Cambridge, ensure that there is an evidence base behind all they do.” Based on the latest research in neurodiversity and learning through play, and devised by clinicians, Sinead felt that the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme aligned with her own ethics as it was a proven

# PLAY INCLUDED

methodology. She added that “the staff themselves are so approachable and are a lovely team.”

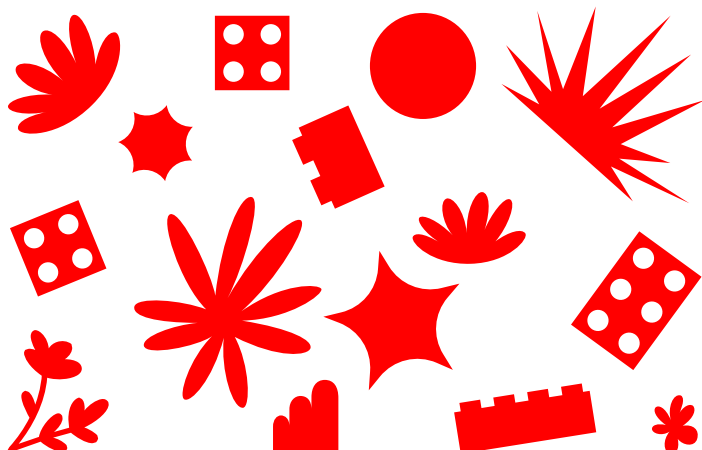
After completing her Certified Facilitator and then Advanced Facilitator training, Sinead began delivering Brick Club sessions at some of the schools she worked with as a play therapist to supplement the support that children were already receiving.

## The approach is flexible

During a period of play therapy, Sinead identified children who would benefit from taking part in Brick Club. Each child in the Club was at a different development stage, and had different needs, but the flexibility of the Brick-by-Brick® programme made it easy to tailor to different children’s unique support requirements because “the concept is so simple” said Sinead.

## Fun and friendships

Sinead often introduces children to Brick Club following one or two terms of play therapy as a follow up to her previous work with them. Once children progress to Brick Club sessions, Sinead often sees a reduction in children’s feelings of anxiety,



# Brick Club

improvements in their confidence, and most importantly: “the sense of joy that children feel at Brick Club. The ethos behind Play Included® is joy, and it is just bringing a sense of joy back into children’s lives.”

Sinead also noted that “I see the friendships flourishing” and that collaborative LEGO® brick play enabled the children to feel more comfortable in their school environment. “Some of the children I work with are too anxious to walk around their school or talk to other children. There is one child who was unable to access their learning because they felt too anxious to attend their school.”

Through a shared interest in LEGO® model building, the children had fun and developed friendships, which helped them to feel less anxious in general:

**“The children enjoy coming to Brick Club and they don’t want to miss it, so they feel more able to attend school, which is a really positive outcome.”**

## What’s next?

Sinead has completed the Brick-by-Brick® programme Trainer training and would like to assist more school staff to develop the facilitation skills that they need to deliver Brick Clubs to scale the support for children in Northern Ireland. Based on the benefits that she has witnessed during Brick Clubs, Sinead would like to see the Brick-by-Brick® programme “rolled out in every school in Northern Ireland!”