



## **The STEP Starter Sack Home-Play Programme**

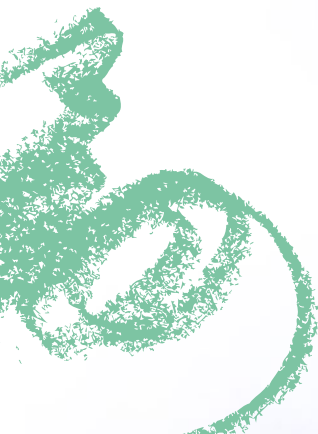
Bringing play-based learning activities into  
the homes of Gypsy/Traveller children

A guide for school and pre-school staff

## About STEP Starter Sacks

STEP Starter Sacks are part of a learning programme for young children from Gypsy/ Traveller families to encourage child-centred play at home. Many Gypsy/Traveller families do not take up the Government's offer of free early learning and childcare and some lack resources at home to engage in shared learning. Without the experiences that

come through early learning, children can be at a disadvantage when starting school. In addition, there are a number of families from the Gypsy/Traveller community who never take up the offer of any school education. STEP Starter Sacks aim to create an initial connection between school education, educators and families.





## What's in the sacks?

The Sacks contain lots of play materials. Some of the contents are particularly relevant to Gypsy/Traveller cultures and include 'counting with pictures' cards created with community members. Each Sack also contains cards with QR codes linking to sections of the STEP website with videos showing fun activities.

Family members can find ideas for setting up, organising and supporting children's play. The QR code approach ensures that families are not prevented from taking part due to literacy barriers. Each term new resources and activities will be distributed to extend the children's learning.



# How can you help families to start to play?



## Make connections between Families and school and pre-school staff

Many Gypsy/Traveller families will have had negative experiences of schooling and may not trust the staff or the system. It will be important to establish good relationships. If possible, provide families with a key contact who will communicate with them about the Sacks. The key person will also be able to share information and answer questions

about pre-school and school. Families will appreciate the contact but will not want to feel that they are under pressure. It may take a few sessions before families feel that they trust the key person or know them well enough. The STEP Starter Sacks can provide a focus for parents, children and staff to connect over learning.

## Encourage home play

You can help by encouraging families to use the Sacks to play together. Some families may view formal education as mainly learning to read and write and are often unaware of the value of playful interactions between adult and child (Sullivan et al, 2018; Myers, McGhee and Bhopal, 2010). And while Gypsy/Traveller parents may recognise the benefits of a school education, they often view pre-school care as

the role of the parent (Scottish Gov, 2018). You can try to share the value of home play. Begin by inviting parents and children to your Centre for a play session to discuss the contents of the Sacks. Ask parents about their children, what their interests are and what they like to do at home. Remind parents that they are the experts on their own children and discuss the different ways that they can help their children learn through play.

## Learn about the community

It is also recognised that staff may have limited knowledge about the Travelling community. An awareness of the Gypsy/Traveller culture is essential to enable staff to understand the barriers that families face and support them

in early years settings (Scottish Government, 2018). STEP can provide information or training opportunities to ensure that all local staff feel confident in their knowledge of the Gypsy/Traveller culture.

# What to do next...



## Reach out

- ✓ Find out if there are Gypsy/Traveller families with young children in your area (ask site managers, health visitors or school staff)
- ✓ Identify the best way to make contact with families
- ✓ Arrange a place where families can pick up the Sacks and get more information



## Develop relationships

- ✓ Make sure families can meet a lead contact and exchange contact details
- ✓ If parents are coming to a school or centre make sure that the environment is informal – offer tea, snacks, toys for younger children
- ✓ Ask families about their thoughts about education or early learning



## Support play

- ✓ Share the contents of the Sacks and how they can be used (familiarise yourself with contents in advance and ensure that you are confident sharing the approach)
- ✓ Set up a laptop, iPad or mobile and demonstrate how to use QR codes to link to the materials on the STEP website
- ✓ Find out about the families' home technology and discuss how it can be used to do activities. You can also put families in touch with STEP for support



## Sustain interest

- ✓ Tell families that more activities will be provided at regular intervals
- ✓ Plan regular events for families to attend such as play coffee mornings
- ✓ Use the Sacks as an opportunity to discuss family plans for children attending early learning /school. Broker relationships between school staff and families
- ✓ You may also ask parents if they have any other educational concerns such as with older children or their own educational development. Involve other staff (adult literacy teams) where they can help





# Choosing a lead person

STEP would like to work in partnership with your school/authority to increase Gypsy/ Traveller participation in early years education. To get started you will need to nominate, a lead person to liaise with STEP. Contact us using the email below.

## The role of the lead person will be to:

- Be the first point of contact for STEP
- Reach out to families and manage information about uptake
- Liaise with STEP over deliveries and distribution
- Maintain contact with Families and support their use of Sacks
- Support local staff including arranging training with STEP



**Get in touch for more information & support**

**STEP contact:**

[step@ed.ac.uk](mailto:step@ed.ac.uk)

**Programme website:**

[www.step.ed.ac.uk/pre-5homeplay](http://www.step.ed.ac.uk/pre-5homeplay)

**Supported by:**

**STEP**



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
[gov.scot](http://gov.scot)

