

buttle™

Beyond Words:
What Children Tell Us About Our Impact
January 2026



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Introduction

At Buttle, we are committed to understanding our grants, our impact and the lived experiences of our grantees.

We do this through a thorough programme of evaluation surveys, dedicated research projects, and our co-production work. Through these methods, we have constantly built on our understanding of our impact. Importantly, we have worked on expanding the reach and range of voices we incorporate into our work, such as including parents and carers more directly in research, and young people in our co-production activities.

In 2025, we wanted to expand this work further, reaching the most important group that our work supports: the children and younger people who receive Chances for Children grants. In 2024-25, we supported almost 7,000 children in over 3,000 households; this is a powerful group, and we knew that providing a platform for their

voices would help us significantly to understand and improve our work.

However, we also recognised the challenges that delivery of evaluation work at scale, across the entire geographic reach of our grant-making, with young participants, would bring. This report outlines the findings, processes, challenges, and significant successes that undertaking this project achieved.



Aims

The aims of this project can be summarised as:

To understand children and young people's perspectives on the impact of our grants.

To the fullest extent possible, to evaluate our grants against the Theory of Change.

To explore new and different methods of qualitative evaluation for Impact and Evaluation purposes.

To test the practical limitations (cost, time, response rates, methods etc) of contacting children and young people directly.

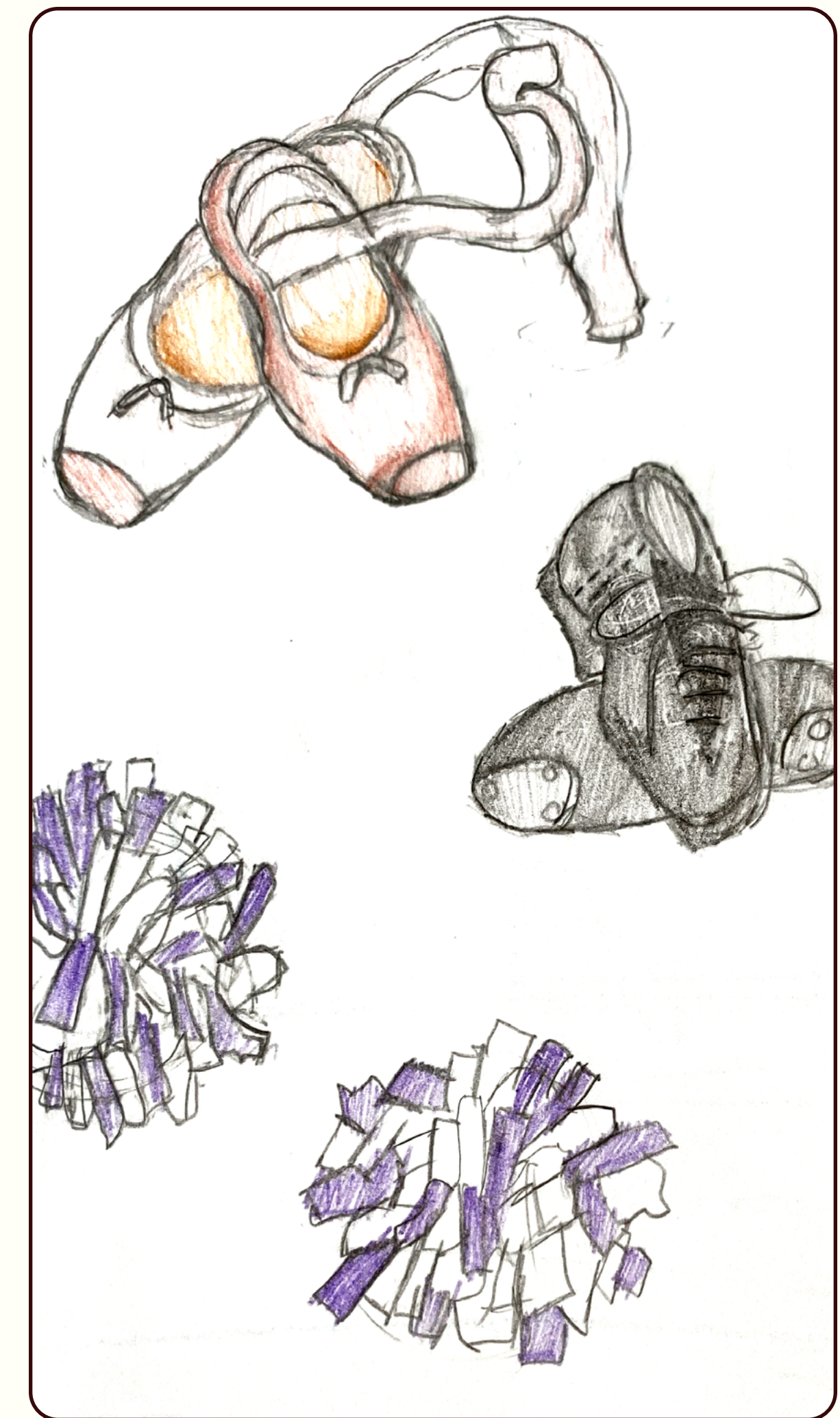
Methods

Our standard methods of evaluation can be summarised as a range of surveys, delivered online, to parents, carers, estranged young people and referrers. Even though our grants are primarily delivered for children, we don't routinely reflect their voices in our understanding of impact. Therefore, the intended age range of this project was to reach children aged between 4 and 19. The methods chosen had to reflect their varying capacities and skills, and the appropriate delivery of invitations to this age group too.

The best approach was decided to be an arts-based project, using drawing as a way of representing lived experience and social realities. Drawing has long been used as a social research method for young participants. It offers agency and voice for participants who might otherwise struggle to contribute to communicate in traditional evaluation methods. It recognises that all views are valuable, no matter how they are delivered and captured.

Therefore, the choice of the methodology was as follows:

- A completely qualitative methodology was used, called draw-and-write or draw-and-tell. This is a prominent technique for elucidating responses from very young participants, in a child-centred approach.
 - This required a template offering a space to draw, inviting recipients to create a representation of any aspect of their grant, supported by a series of simple questions on the back.
 - Three custom templates were designed: one for ages 4-7, one for 8-11, and one for 12-19, with tailored language to suit the ages of the recipients.
- These templates were sent by post to all eligible children in the invited households, along with a set of colouring pencils, a permission slip, and a freepost envelope for return, to ensure that recipients were not excluded from taking part due to lacking resource or capacity.



Learning to dance (age 10)

Respondents

Due to the scale of our grant making, and the exploratory nature of this project, only a medium sample of grantees in 2024-25 were invited. We reached out to 550 households, all of whom had received their grants between three to six months prior to invitation. This cohort was chosen to be representative of different regions and nations across the UK, as well as having proportional representation commensurate with the characteristics of the population we support.

We received responses from 31 families, though only 27 could be included in the findings due to factors such as non-return of the consent form and misunderstanding about the instructions. These factors, as well as challenges with the postal delivery, are explored further in the limitations section of this report. Although we can't accurately predict how many families received their invitation, the response rate is approximately 5%. This resulted in 62 children returning templates filled

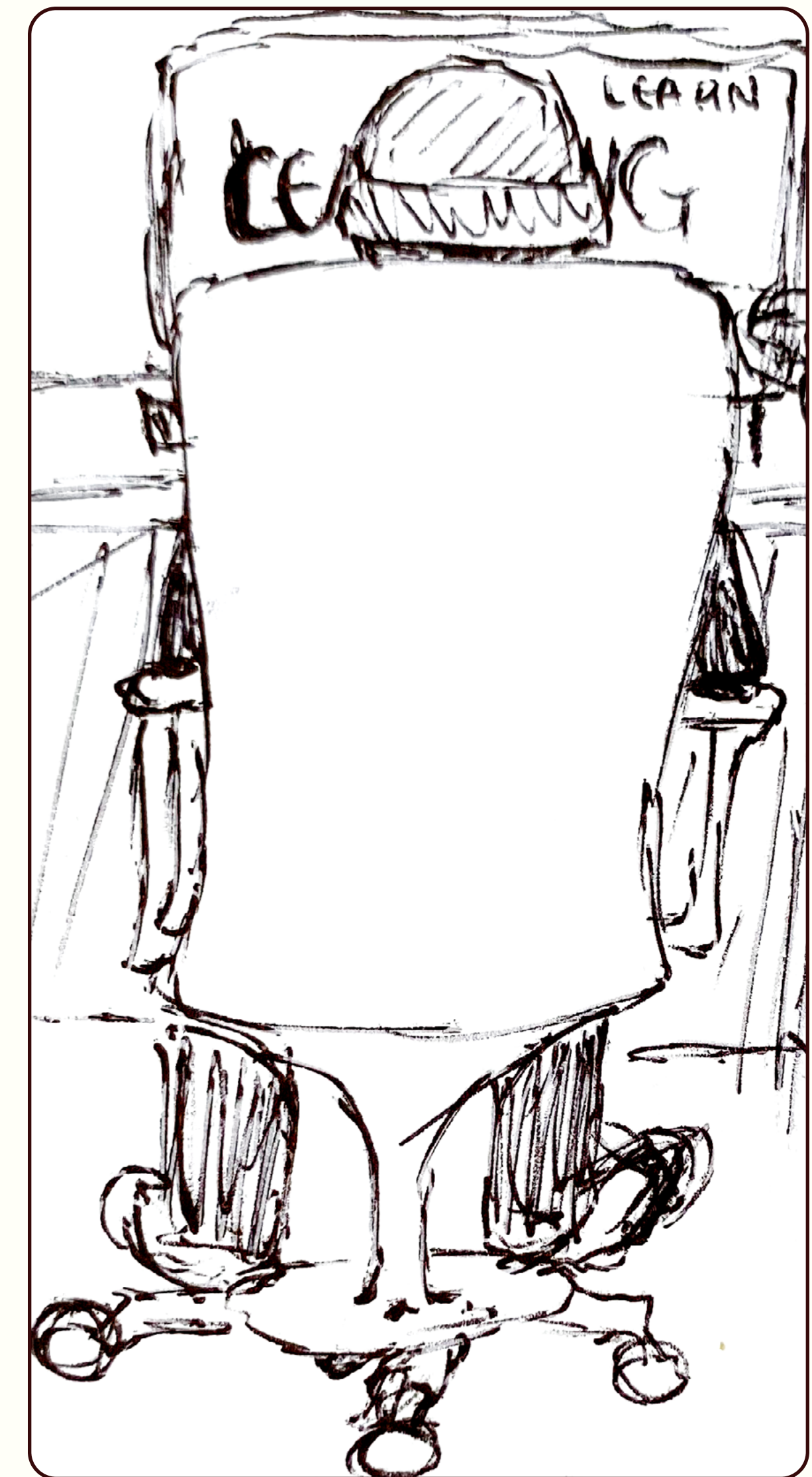
with incredibly rich, detailed data, with a fairly even spread across the invited age groups.

Age Group	Number of Respondents
12-19 year olds	19
8-11 year olds	21
4-7 year olds	20
Anonymous Responses	2
Total	62

Though the number is small, the rate of return should be considered a success. Analysis of this data using coding and thematic analysis was at the upper limit of our research capacity, and the richness and complexity of the data allowed for significant learning.

For the sake of brevity, from this point onwards the word 'children' is used to include all respondents between

4-19 years of age, though we would otherwise typically categorise older children as 'young people'.



Self portrait with a favourite item (age 15)

Findings

Findings

The findings of this research were extensive. The analysis could be largely divided into two main strands: feedback on specific items and their impact, and a deeper dive into impact without necessarily being linked to a single item or activity. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two distinct sections.

Section 1: Items

1.1 Technology

Technology has consistently been one of the most popular items we grant, both in real terms and in spend. It was by far the most common item that children chose to draw and tell us about, ranging across items such as laptops, tablets, e-readers, phones, and other related items.

Their reasons for enjoying these items of technology were extremely varied, but learning was the strongest theme. There was clear relief at their being able to support their education, home, and much enjoyment in using fun apps and tools for learning.

Younger children were more likely to reference specific skills they were developing, as well as pride where they felt they were achieving better grades.

“My tablet, it helps me learn...[I’m] happy because I am learning”

Child, Age 5

“The iPad because in our school we use it and it helps me learn...before I had them, I don’t know how to type fast but now I do!”

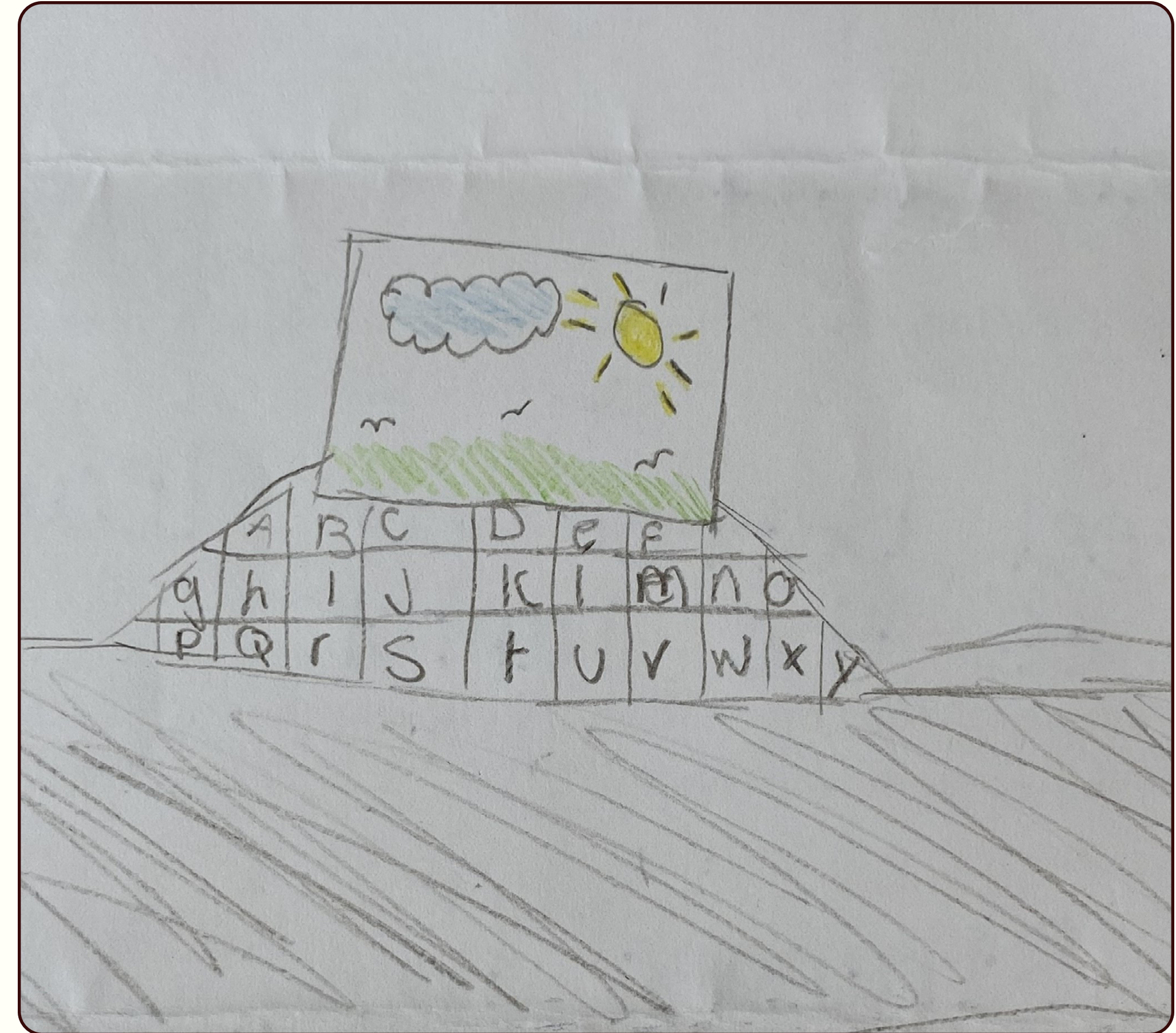
Child, Age 11

“Before I had the laptop, I used to struggle with homework. Now, I can do research and type faster. I even got better grades last term. I feel proud when I submit work that looks neat and clean”

Child, Age 12



Young person at home with their laptop (age 17)



A desk and laptop (age 16)

For older children, their technology items were particularly important for learning and the knock-on effect on their wellbeing and enjoyment. Some told us that having their own laptop meant they were no longer dependent on visiting the library, or relying on tight deadlines for borrowing school resources, increasing their freedom to learn at their own pace and leisure in their home. The benefits of these changes were huge; self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence were all routinely mentioned.

“The laptop and iPad have made home a better place to learn. I don’t have to go to the library anymore just to do my schoolwork. It’s more peaceful and organised now”

Child, Age 12

“The laptop has positive impacts on my feelings, self-esteem and health by increasing my confidence, like having access to a laptop and make more feel more confident in my ability to learn”

Young Person, Age 17

“It made schoolwork and learning way easier and more fun. I can now do research, complete assignments faster, and join online lessons without any issues. It made me feel more confident about school because I don’t feel left behind anymore. I’m actually more motivated to learn now, knowing I have the right tools”

Young Person, Age 15

Children also raved about using their tablets and phones for playing games and communicating with their friends. Sometimes, it wasn't just that they could join in with online activities and share games with their friends, but the act of being like their friends and peers. Where they had previously lacked the resources, they now alluded to happiness and feeling like they fit in. For one 9-year-old refugee from Gaza, feeling able to fit in was particularly important after so much change and uncertainty.

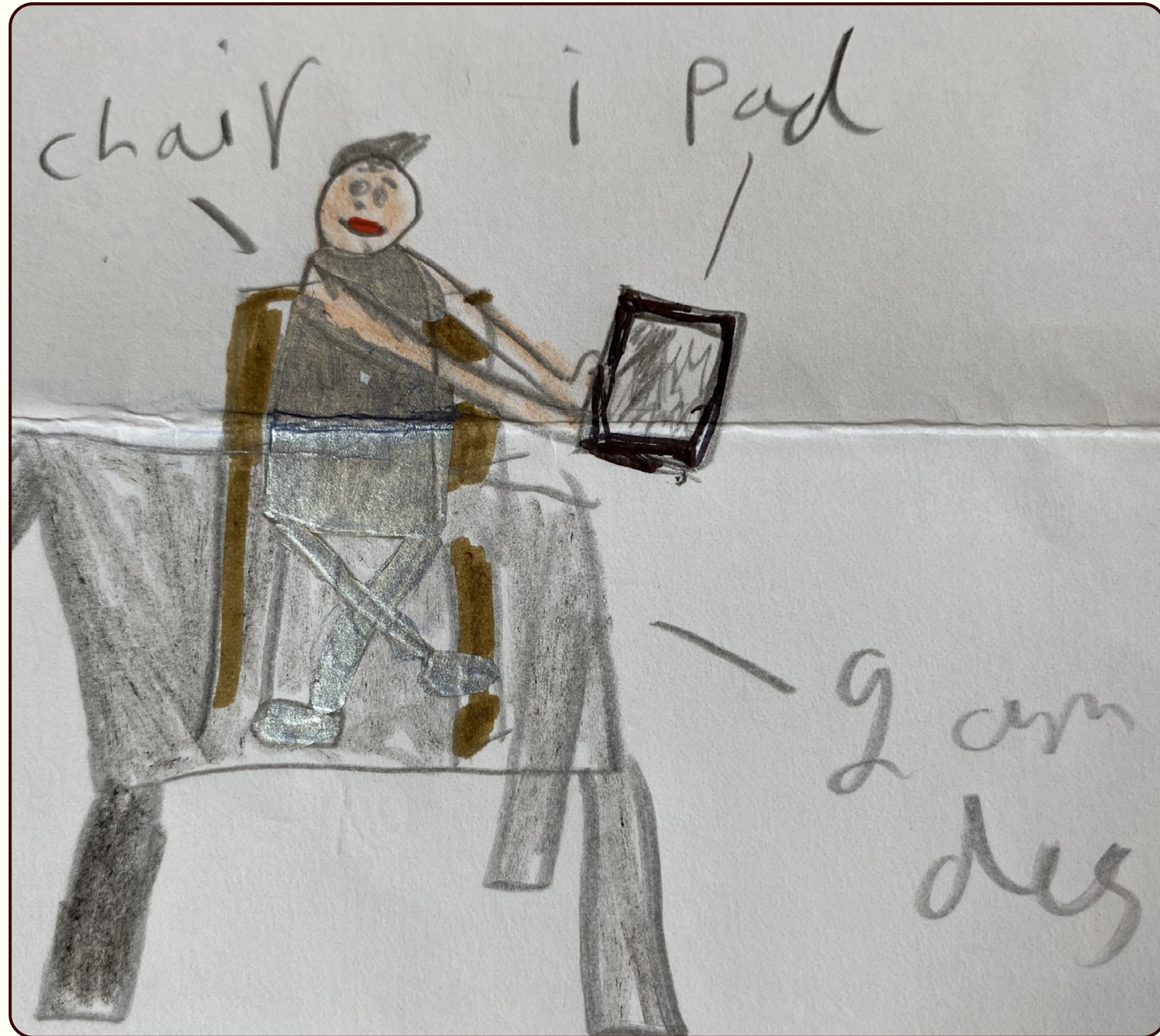
“The tablet, I could catch up on my study like my friends at school”

Child, Age 9

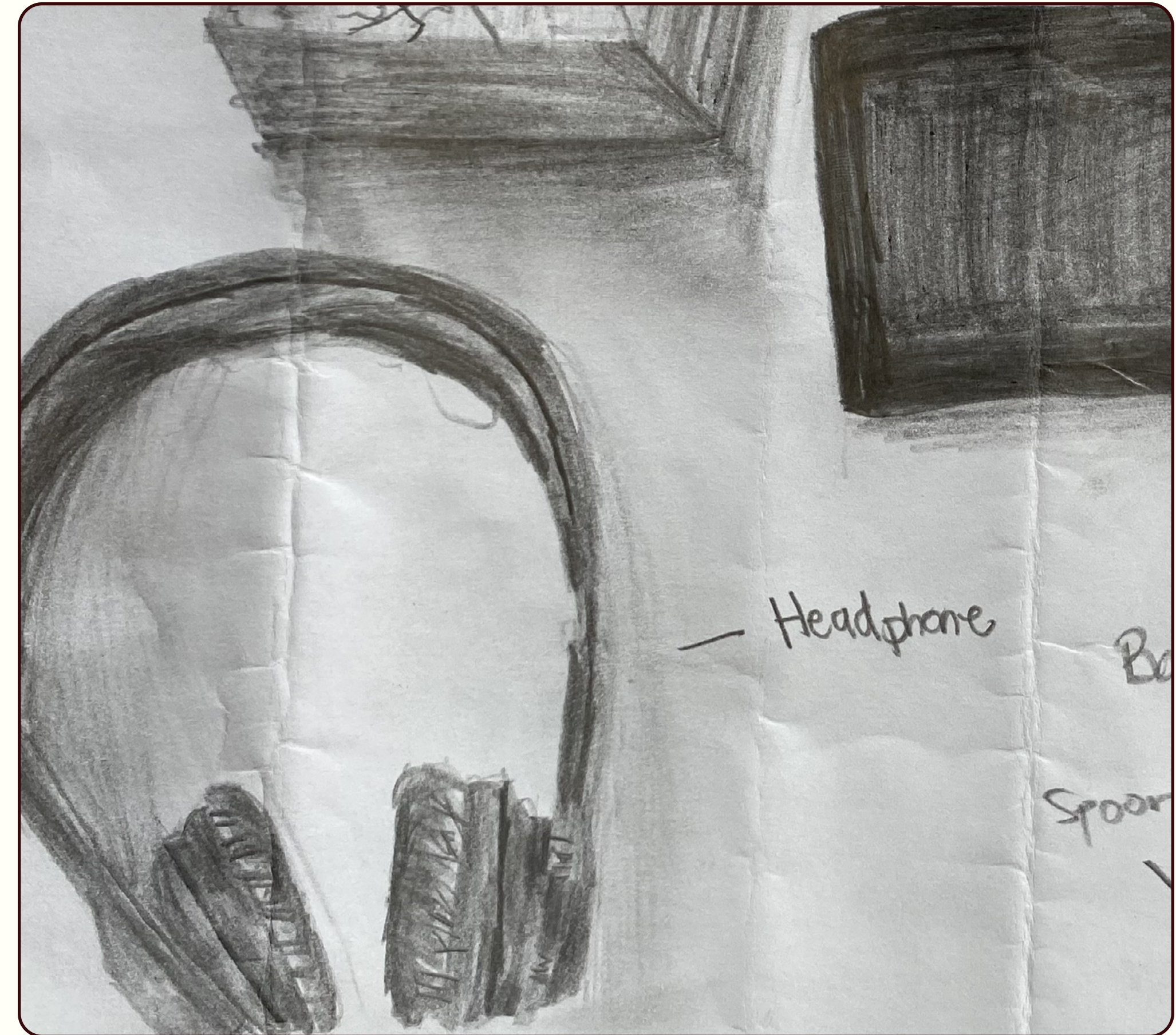
“I feel a lot more happier now, because I get to watch my own programs, and when my friend comes for a sleepover we play on the Nintendo Switch and don't feel that she's bored as there's not much to do”

Child, Age 13





Using a tablet at a desk (age 9)

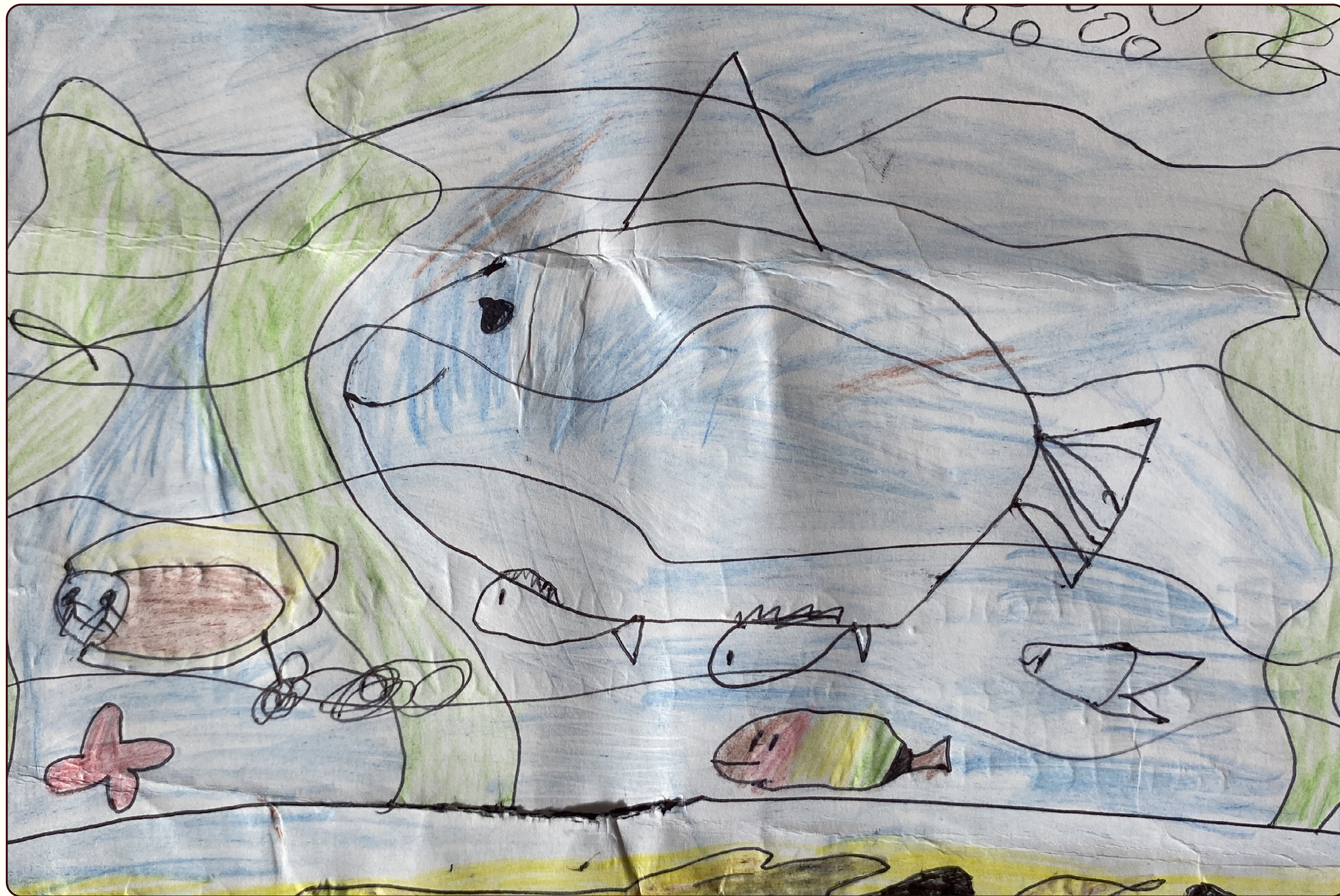


A tablet and headphones (age 15)

1.2 Activities and Days Out

We received many colourful, bright drawings of days out. Children link them to joy, family time, memories and happiness. The zoo was a very common favourite in this cohort, but there were also references to much more diverse trips such as mini golf, aquariums, short holidays, and one-off events. The favourite part of the grant for one young person was simply going to the cinema and getting to see a film with their family for the first time.

It is clear that days out and activities offer chances to get out of the home which can be otherwise limited, and this increases opportunities for bonding with families and friends. We know how important this is for children facing adversity and recovering from trauma. The language used to describe days out was highly positive and joyful.



A family day out to the aquarium (age 8)



A family with all the animals at the zoo (age 10)

“Family trip to Chester Zoo because I love spending time with my family...it felt good, it helped my family and made us all smile”

Child, Age 8



A family trip to the zoo (age 8)

“I feel happy. I love going out with my mum. I won at bowling and I even beat [sister]. I’m the best at it. I loved the lightshow”

Child, Age 5

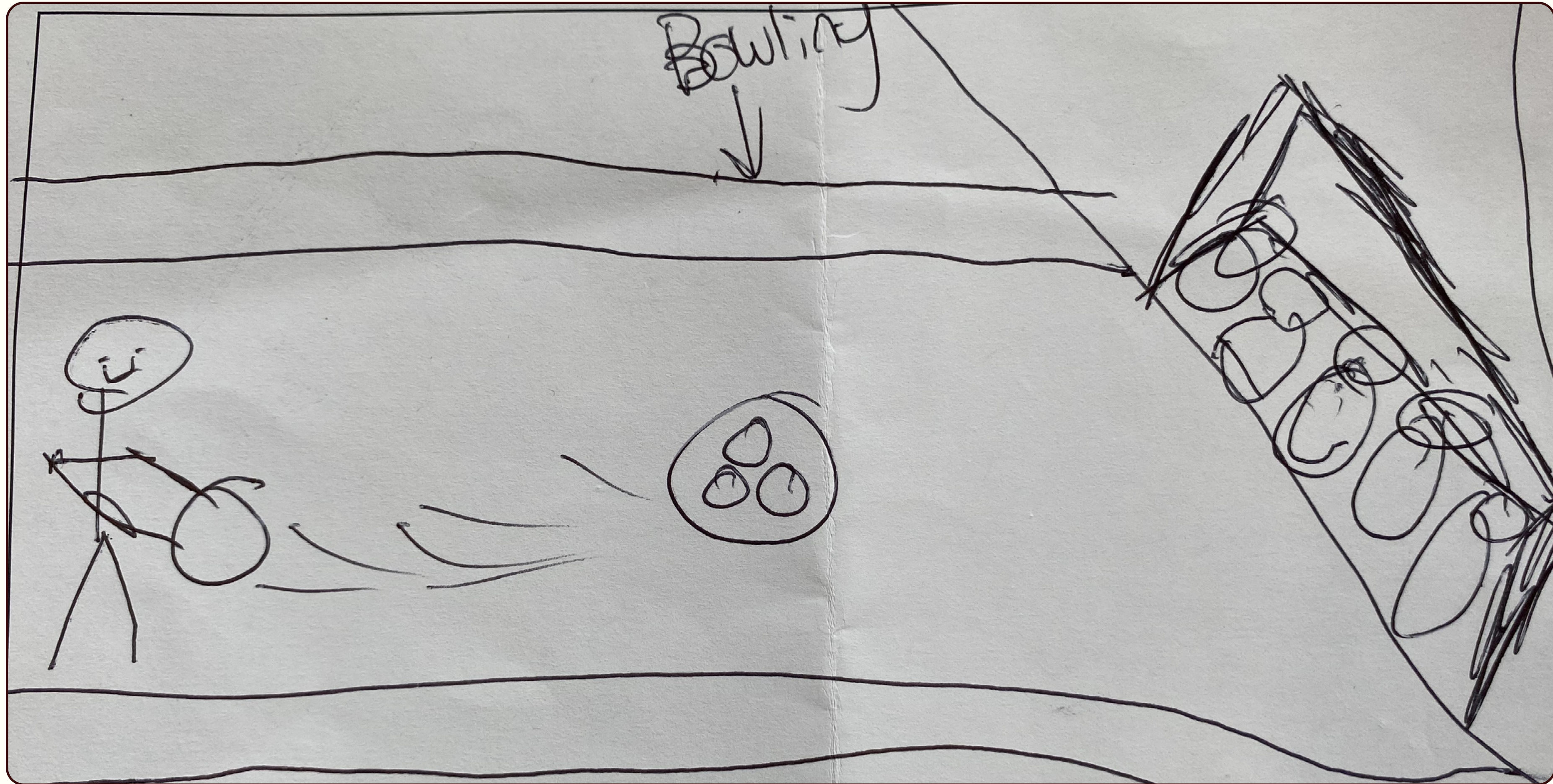
“My favourite was going to Flipout. When we were playing on the trampolines...it made me feel happy so I can spend time with [names of siblings] and Daddy”

Child, Age 7

“My favourite part of the grant was the swimming pool membership because I love swimming, and now I can go regularly. It helps me relax and stay active. It also gave me the chance to make new friends”

Young Person, Age 15





A day out together bowling (age 15)

Children also shared the wider benefits of being able to take part in skills-based activities, such as swimming, boxing and dancing. They told us that being able to take part in these new hobbies had helped them to make friends, often highlighting their pride and enjoyment at their new skills. We also saw responses that alluded to their desire to learn a skill to increase feelings of safety and overcome trauma that preceded their grant.

“Boxing because I love it very much and I want to learn it so that I can become strong and I can protect my mummy”

Child, Age 7

“Swimming lessons - I am learning to swim, I am looking forward to being able to swim without any floats...that will help keep me safe. It's going to be great to be able to swim properly. I am proud to be doing well”

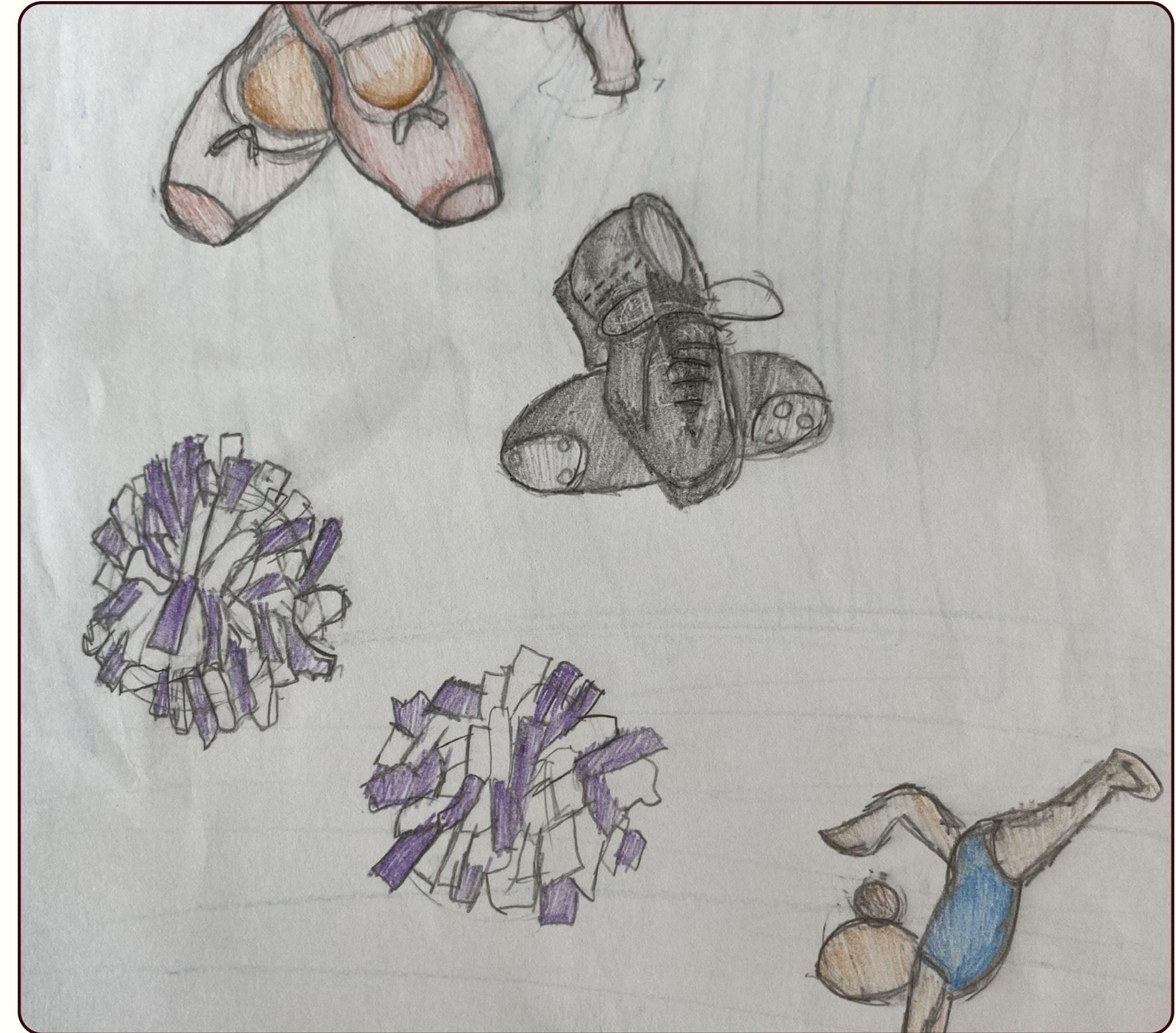
Child, Age 7

“I really love going dancing every week... because I sound like a baby elephant upstairs! I have made lots of friends and I am more confident. I was in a big production at [name of theatre] on the stage. I made my family proud”

Child, Age 10



Learning to swim (age 7)



Learning to dance (age 10)

This feedback is really significant learning for Buttle UK. This is because one of the hardest aspects of our grant delivery is days out and social activities. Previous data analysis and review has shown that these are vulnerable to cancellation from referrers and challenges with payment methods, and we see less feedback from parents or carers about days out. So, it is hugely important that we continue to champion these aspects of our grants, given the clear impact for children.



1.3 Beds

Most grants provide many items for the home environment, encompassing a mixture of furniture and furnishings. Given that they typically represent a fairly high proportion of spend per grant, and benefit the whole household, they were surprisingly underrepresented in responses from children. This in itself is learning about what they consider important, or unimportant.

There were two notable exceptions: beds and desks. While little was written about the latter, they appeared fairly commonly in drawings. On the other hand, beds were not only drawn, but we heard lots about why children loved their new beds and bedding. They were linked to words such as 'cosy', 'comfortable', 'rest' and 'peace'. Young children liked having bedding that reflected their interests and brightened their rooms, as well as having something of their very own. All of these young children told us that their bed was their favourite item, because:

“My bed because I love to sleep on my own bed”

Child, Age 6

“Our bunk bed and beddings. We sleep in our own bedroom. I sleep down and my brother sleeps up!”

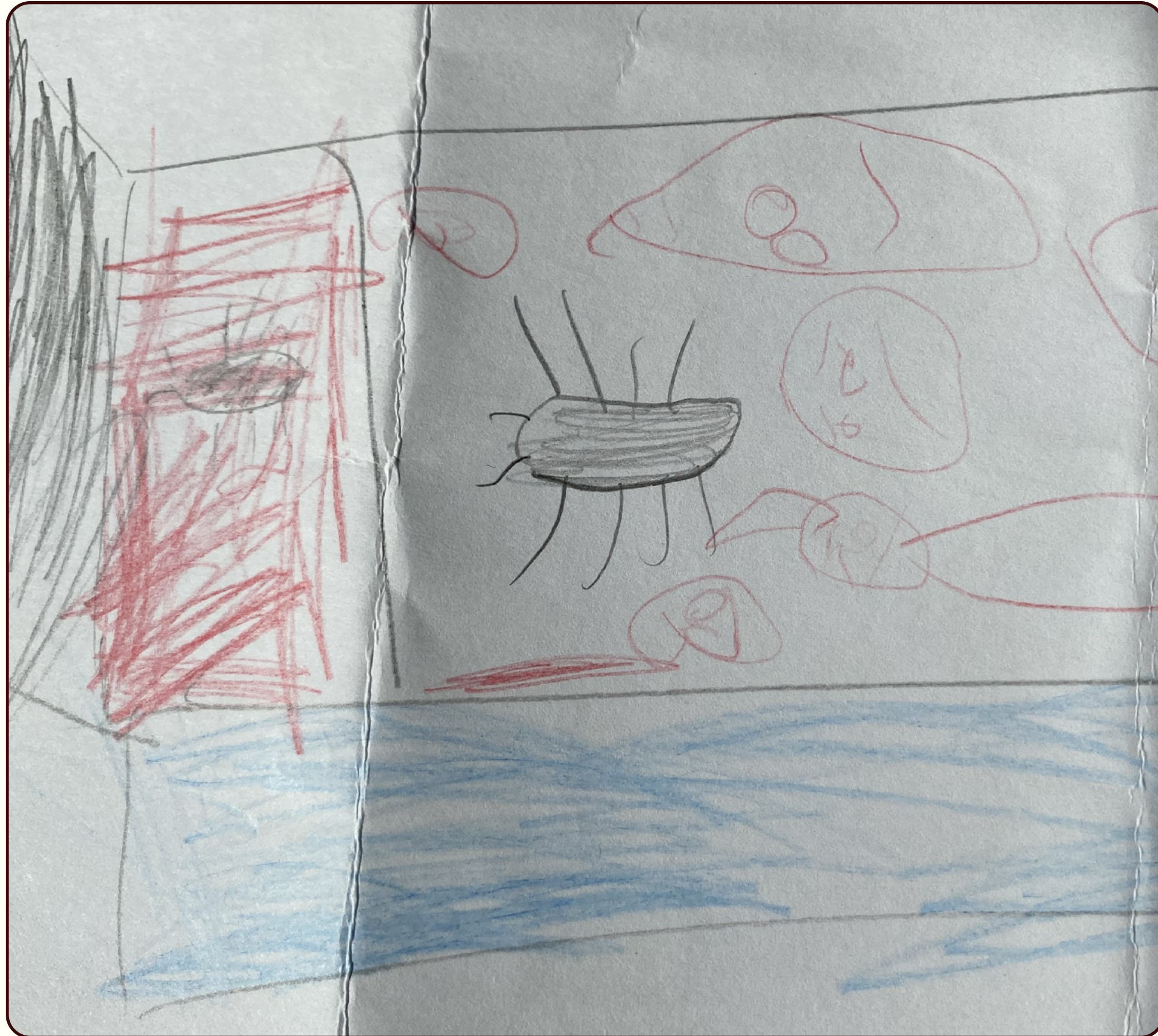
Child, Age 5

“My Spiderman bedding...and my new bed, so I didn't have to sleep in a travel cot, my bed is more comfy”

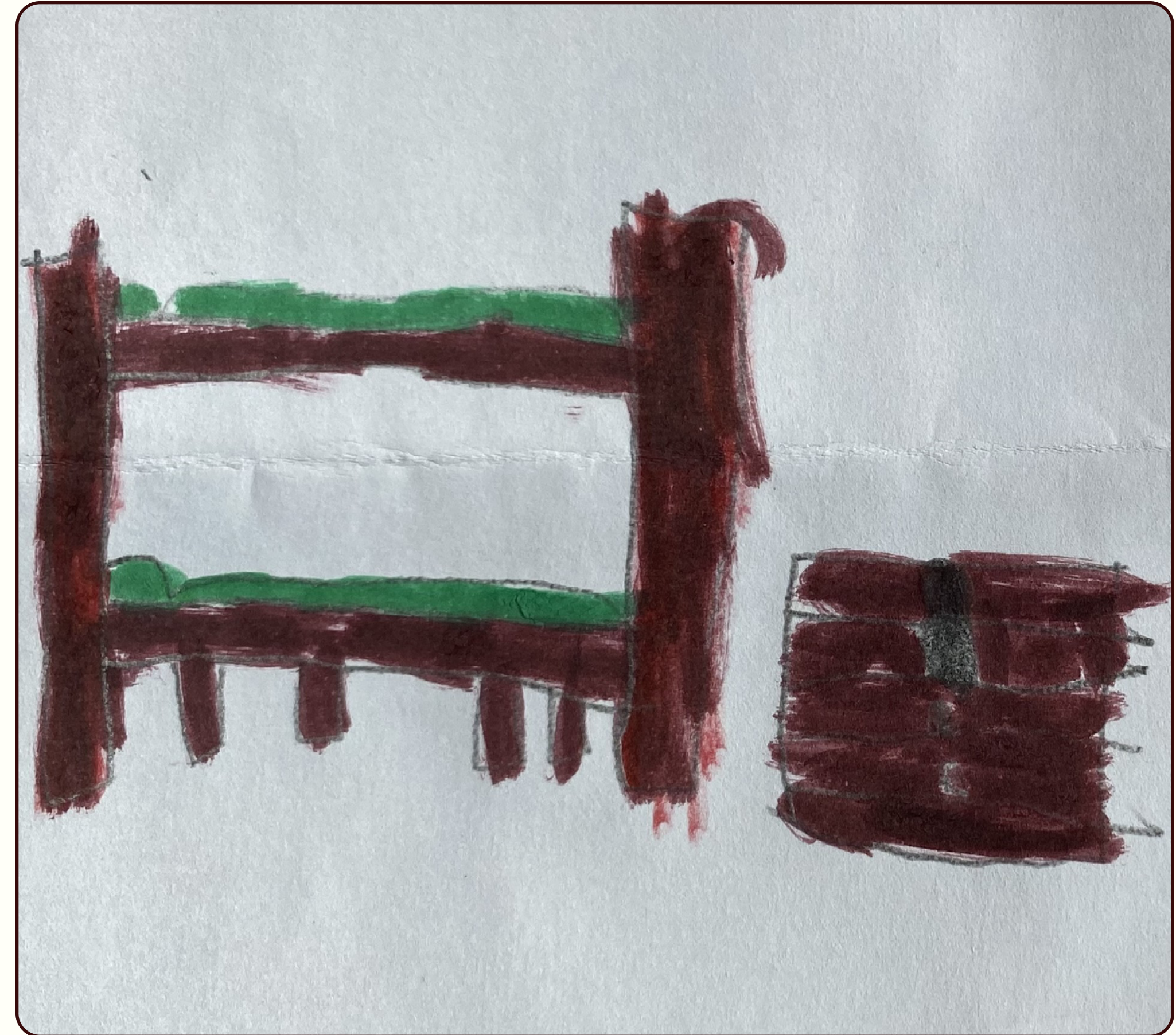
Child, Age 4

“Bed, because I feel cosy”

Child, Age 6



Spiderman bedding on a new bed (age 4)



Bunk beds for two brothers (age 5)

Older children were even more likely to allude to feelings of ownership and improved wellbeing; this was especially linked to how better sleep was helping their capacity to learn, think, and engage in their education. Many responses made it clear that children simply had not had a bed at all, or not one of their own, before their grant. One child had previously had to share a bed with her sister and grandmother, so her drawing was simply of her and her sister in their own separate beds. Young people's feelings about their beds often seemed to improve their overall experience of their rooms, and enjoyment of the space of their own.

“I have new bunk beds for myself and my sister and don't have to sleep with my sister in a double bed...I can get 8 hours sleep to help me not be tired at school”

Child, Age 8

“My bed because I don't have to share my bed with [sister] and my nanna got her bed back... it helps me sleep so I can think”

Child, Age 10

“I didn't have a wardrobe and now I don't need to share with my sister, I only had a mattress in my room...I am more relaxed now and enjoy spending time in my room as well as with my sisters, it has made us closer too”

Young Person, Age 18



Sisters in their own new beds (age 10)



Relaxing in their own bedroom (age 19)

1.4 Toys

It was fantastic to hear all about the incredible impact that toys have in the grants that we make. Our grants are for households living in serious financial hardship and recovering from traumatic crisis; it could be easy to overlook the significant role that toys have in bringing comfort and fun for these vulnerable children.

Young children in particular were most likely to draw their favourite toys. In their words, they linked these toys to time with their friends, imaginative play, and often simply how much they loved them. This included really diverse items from dolls to magnetic tiles to crafting items. Themes of ownership and happiness underpinned many of their responses, particularly in instances where it appeared that the child may not have had many, or any, toys before.

“My favourite item is the big Barbie Dollhouse because it has 2 floors and a lift and I’ve always wanted one so my best friend can come to my house and play with me and I love it so much”

Child, Age 7

“My toys because I love them”

Child, Age 6

“Minecraft set, it’s the best”

Child, Age 5



A child playing with his Minecraft toys (age 5)



A child with her new toy Birdy (age 6)

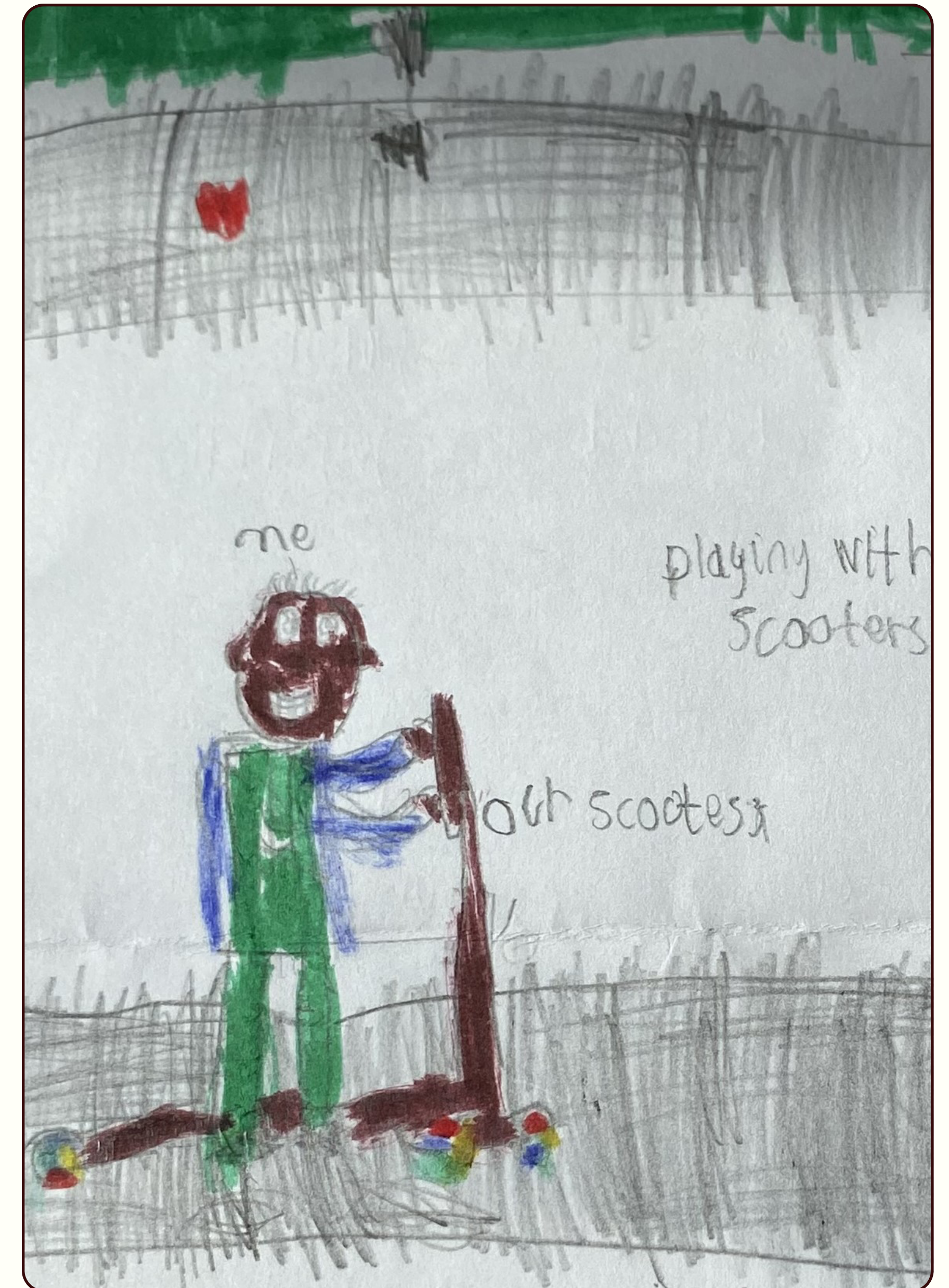
Toys that supported outside play were also popular. Children told us that they liked to get outdoors and play with their friends and siblings. We heard many references to scooters in particular, but also bikes, trampolines, balls, and garden toys. It was rewarding to hear that some toys in particular facilitate their confidence and capacity to get active outdoors, particularly to balance this against the high levels of praise for technology referenced earlier.

“I love going out, riding our scooters racing with my brother”

Child, Age 5

“Scooter, it is my first ever scooter and I enjoy riding it”

Child, Age 9



Brothers playing on their first scooters (age 7)

“I love the scooters...me and my sister can go out and play with our friends on scooters. I feel happy and excited”

Child, Age 9

“The bikes, before I had them, I could not be able to have fun”

Child, Age 11



Learning new football skills (age 5)

Section 2: Impact

2.1 The family, the home, and safety

Children more rarely spoke about items that we, naturally, might not associate with their age and development.

References to sofas, white goods, and most kitchen items barely exist in any of the data from this project, which is almost opposite to the survey responses we receive from parents and carers.

However, when children did mention a part of the grant that related to running the home, it often went hand-in-hand with them being happy to see the impact it had on their parent. In fact, many children alluded to their vicarious enjoyment of seeing their parent happier, more relaxed, or more capable of helping/being helped by the items that support the running of the home.

“My mum is sick and I put the laundry in the washing machine to help my mum. I feel happy because my mum doesn't have money and my mum was very sad”

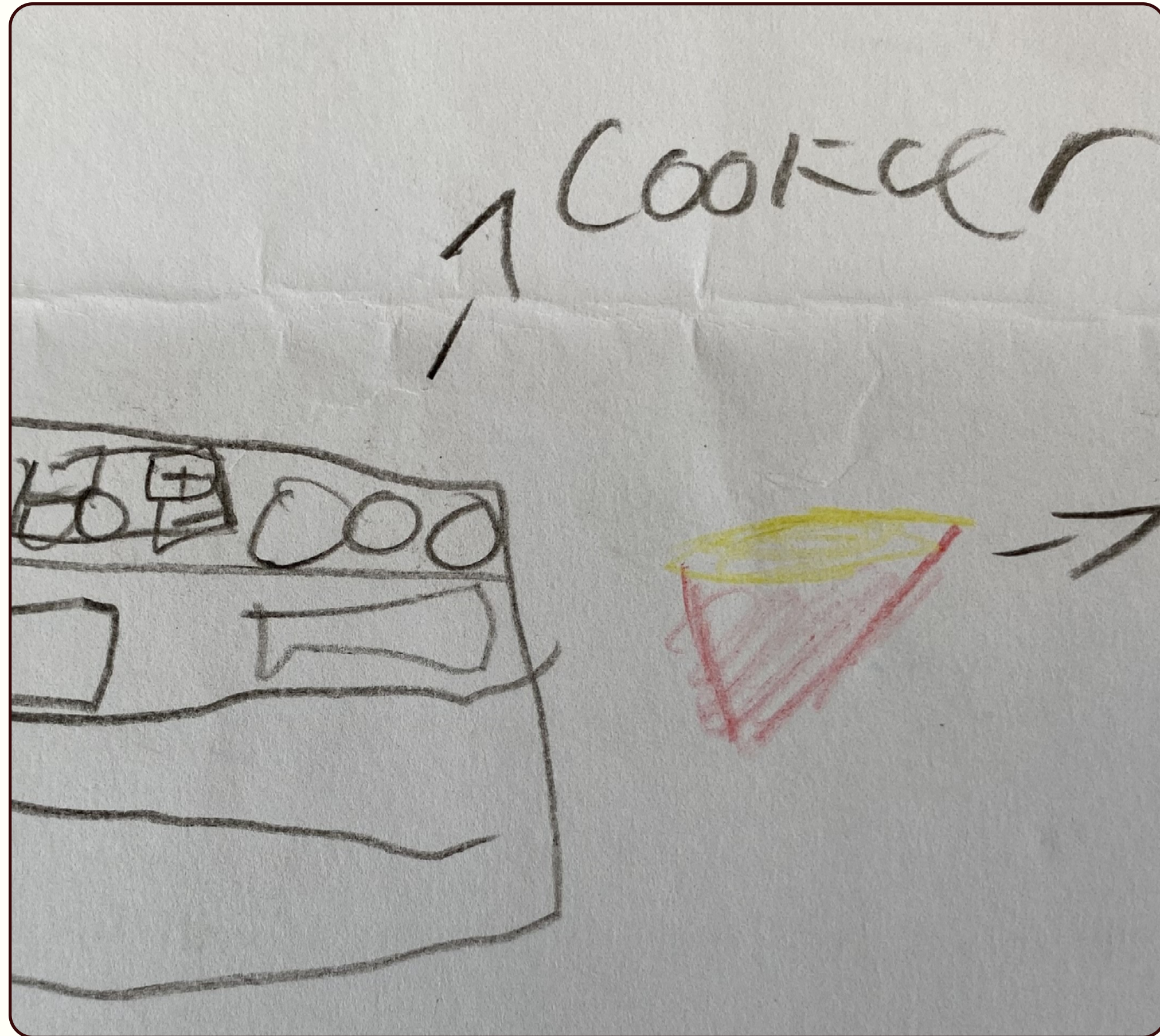
Child, Age 7

“Cooker, our mummy cooks me the best food in the world and bakes cupcakes for our pudding... I love seeing my mummy happy again”

Child, Age 7

“We appreciate this grant, it's helped a lot for my mum and isn't stressed about [when she] can't afford things. It has made us closer as a family too because we're not consistently stressed about things. The future is looking brighter”

Young Person, Age 18



Using the new oven to make food (age 11)



Helping with the washing machine and washing line (age 5)

Many of the written answers talked about family and togetherness, and how the grant allowed them to feel closer. This was represented often by little family units that appeared in lots of the drawings, alongside frequent symbolism of the house and home. Rather than highlighting one particular item, it appeared that the intersection of multiple items was responsible for improving wellbeing, and particularly feelings of homeliness.

“Seeing my sisters happy and active with their scooters also makes home feel more fun and positive, which has been good for my mental health too”

Young Person, Age 15

“We were just moving into a new house without any furniture or essential things. These items really made it feel like a home from day one”

Young Person, Age 17

“I am so grateful for this grant because my mum was always stressed [because] she couldn't afford things, she's happy which makes me happy and reading also makes me happy and I feel I have bonded with my sisters more now”

Child, Age 13



A family at home with their new items (age 5)



A family with their new furniture (age 7)

Building on this, many responses revealed themes of security and safety. We know our grant recipients are vulnerable after having experienced serious adversity, so it is a pivotal piece of learning for Buttle to hear directly from children about the extent of the role of our grants in overcoming trauma. It was clear that occasionally surprising items had a role to play and sometimes it was more about the role of the support itself. When we asked them how their grant had made them feel, we received responses such as these:

“Sad because we are poor but safe to feel like home again”

Child, Age 9

“The grant has made me feel more hopeful about the future. It showed me that there are people who care and want to help which means a lot”

Young Person, Age 15

“Safe it helped me feel like home again”

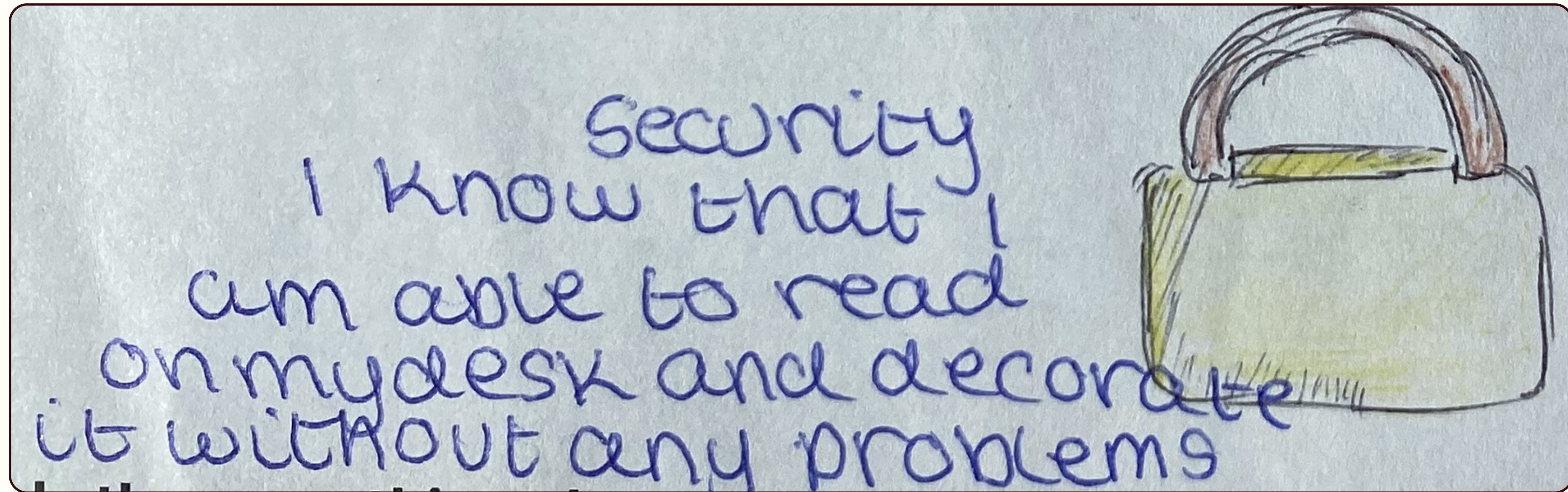
Child, Age 14

“I got candles in my room and it makes it feel like a calming environment”

Child, Age 14

“Having my own room allows me to get away and be on my own when I’m overwhelmed”

Young Person, Age 15



Feelings of safety and ownership (age 12)

2.2 Long-held desire

One major aspect of this project was learning just how often our grants fulfilled deeply held desires, which children often linked to joy and happiness. It provides us with strong evidence that our grants can fill a gap that other support simply can't, due to the holistic nature of the grant packages we give. As described across this report, children repeatedly referred to enjoying being more like their peers and fitting in, which they tied especially to new clothing.

“There were no black shoes and the teacher told me I need black shoes. Now I’m happy with the new clothes because I had used clothes from school before”

Child, Age 7

“I love my trainers and wear them when we go out at weekends and have an extra pair for special occasions”

Child, Age 7

“I go to school with a bag with my name on it and I wear new clothes”

Child, Age 5



New Nike shoes to play football (age 10)



New Crocs and trainers (age 7)

What was frequently very clear is just how often children living in these challenging circumstances have come to understand their precarious financial situation, as well as their lost hope of ever owning what some might call basic items; not even necessarily expensive items, but ones that every child should have. One child raved about a pair of Crocs he had received, while another did the same for his football trainers, both drawing them and telling us how much they had always wanted some. Others said how much they had wanted to try new hobbies or skills, and the grant had allowed them to do so.

“My favourite item is the camera because I’ve always wanted to try photography. Now I can take pictures when I go outside, and it’s become my new hobby. It helps me express myself”

Child, Age 12

“The Barbie Doll house because it was really expensive and I couldn’t get it before...it makes me feel happy because it’s always what I wanted”

Child, Age 7

“The trampoline because I never thought we’d get one”

Child, Age 8

“It makes me feel happy and it’s different because we have good stuff”

Child, Age 11



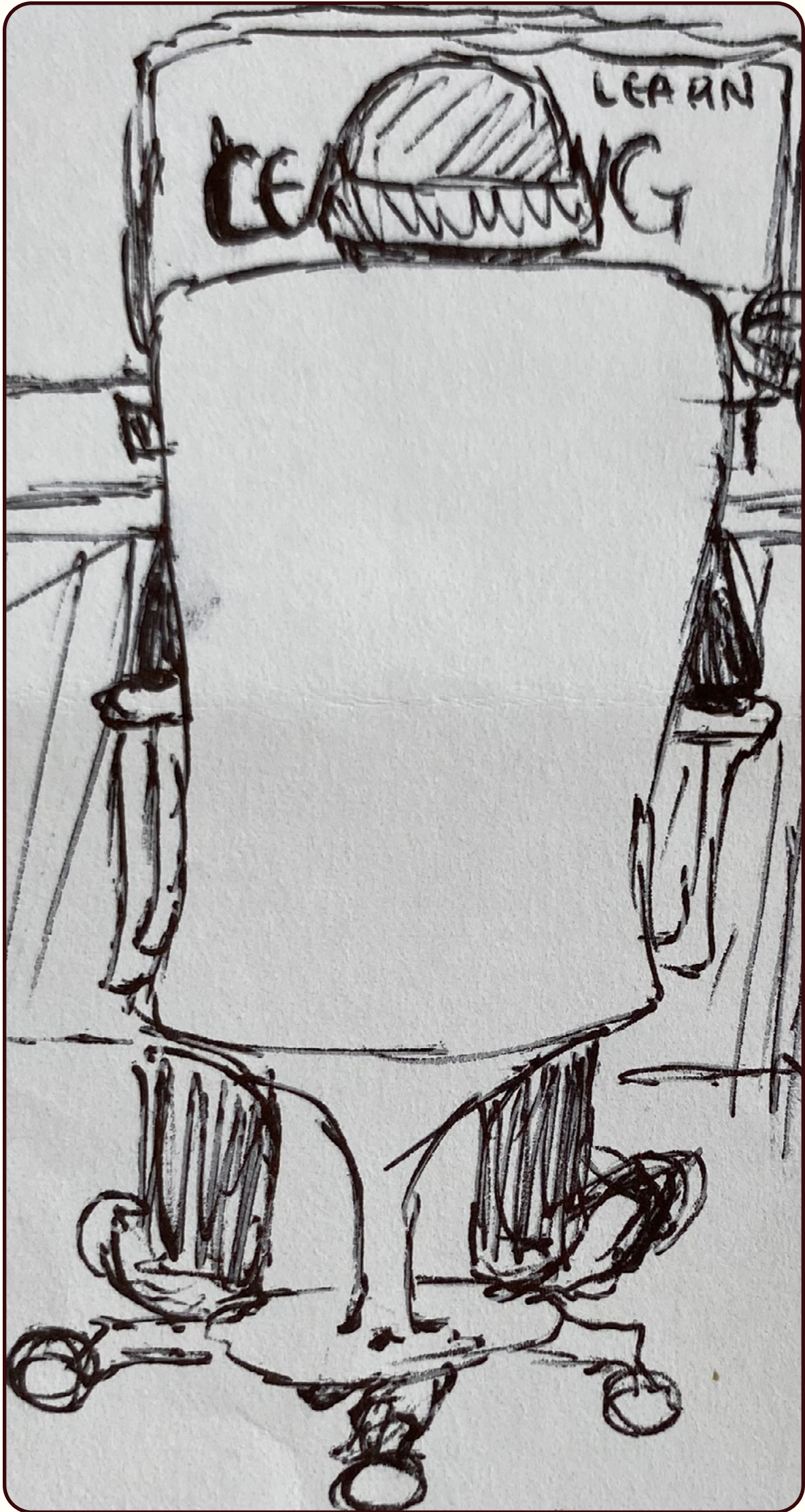
A much-wanted Barbie Dreamhouse (age 7)



A budding photographer's camera (age 12)

2.3 The self

Finally, a fascinating element of this project was in the connections that could be drawn between the grant and the development of the self. In many pictures, children chose to draw themselves alongside their favourite items, or doing the activities they had been granted; we saw every type of self-portrait.



Self portrait with a favourite item (ages 15, 8 and 8)

One of the hardest aspects of our impact measurement is in understanding the long-term impact of our grants. While we don't have a way to look into these children's futures, our hope is always to help them build their confidence and resilience to not just survive, but thrive. Therefore, it was immensely valuable to hear feedback that highlighted positive language about these children's self-identity, and the growth in their self-esteem and self-worth.

“[My favourite item was] My uniform because I look good in my new uniform”

Child, Age 6

“I'm not as shy anymore because swimming helped me build confidence”

Child, Age 12

“The piano, I'm learning how to play because I love to sing. I am very happy. I will be a singer and I will remember how I started learning how to play the piano”

Child, Age 9

Naturally, slightly older respondents were more likely to think about the role of the grant in their lives today and in the future. Their items, and their experience of receiving them, were referenced in answers that related to future aspirations. They were seen as having a role in expanding children's horizons. This was because of factors such as educational items allowing them to study and revise for major exams, and new skills and hobbies unlocking potential paths in their near future. All of these were linked to feeling more hopeful about their prospects as a result of this.

“It’s made life feel a bit more possible. Like I can achieve the things I want to achieve easier”

Young Person, Age 15

“In the future I hope I become who I wish to become and also give out to people”

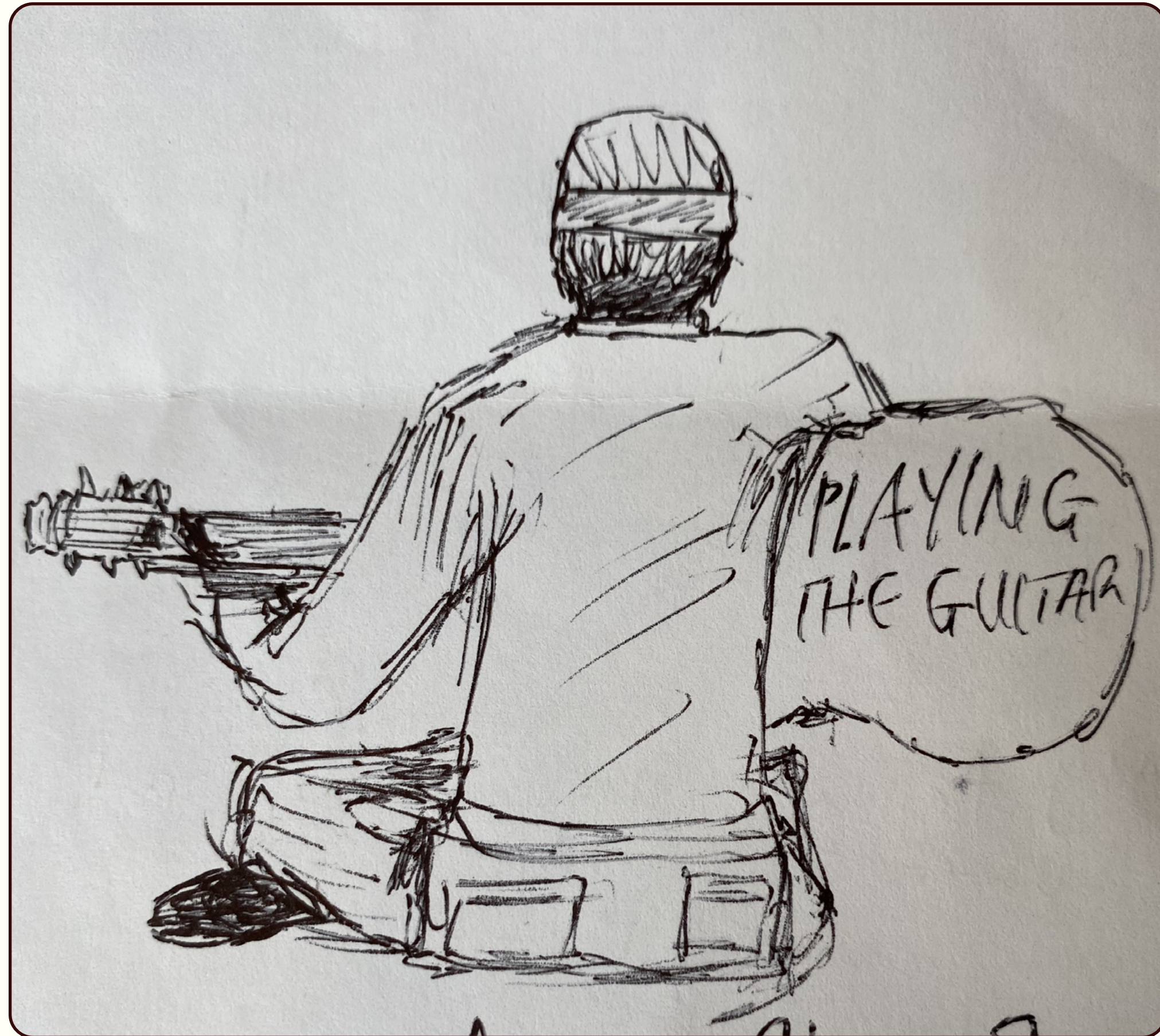
Young Person, Age 17

“I feel more hopeful about the future. I can now learn new skills like photography with the camera and feel like I can achieve my dreams”

Young Person, Age 17

“I didn’t think these things could make such a big difference. But they really do whether it’s reducing stress on little things and also helping you be more independent. Since you don’t have to worry about little things you can focus on bigger things and your future”

Young Person, Age 19



Young person with their favourite item (age 15)



Child with their favourite item (age 5)

Learning

Learning

Limitations & challenges

This project had some limitations, which we are sharing here in the interests of authenticity and transparency. Most are outside of our control but are still a source of learning, as we can test different methods going forwards.

- We know that a good number of households must never have received their packs in the post. This is likely due to failures in the postal system or changes of address; both became known factors when we sent a prompt via text message, which resulted in an influx of responses stating that the packs had never arrived and required resending. Due to their circumstances, we know that our grantees live with high levels of transiency, which is a barrier to taking part in projects delivered like this.
- There were some households where language and literacy acted as a barrier to taking part. This was largely apparent where the adult or child had not been able to complete the task as intended, resulting in submissions that could not be used. For example, one family sent back imaginative artistic drawings that didn't appear to relate to their grants, without any written feedback at all. Some did not send back permission slips, meaning we could not securely use and share the data.
- The quality and depth of the data challenged the staff resource we have to deliver and analyse projects like this. Furthermore, the cost of sending packs by post was significantly higher, with a lower rate of return, than our routine evaluation surveys. However, we stand by the immense quality and value of the data, so we now must consider how to ensure that the cost-to-value ratio is improved, but also to an extent, accepted as par for the course for such valuable child-centred data.
- For the youngest children, or those with delayed learning skills, some of their pictures were simply not possible to analyse where an adult had not written labels or notes for them. Their submissions clearly showed a thought process and narrative (see below), but they represented the challenges of delivering draw-and-tell at scale from a distance; it is much harder to tease out meaning without these labels.



Stars, faces and flowers (age 4)



A smiling family (age 5)

Closing Remarks

Closing Remarks

This project was the first of its kind for Buttle UK. Delving into data to understand and improve our impact is something we do on a daily basis, but this is the first time we have used an approach that is completely centred on capturing and championing child voice. Undertaking a more unconventional qualitative approach challenged us, but it resulted in a project that we are proud to share here.

Reflecting on the aims we set out at the beginning, it is clear that the incredible introspection of our child respondents, both younger and older, made for significant learning. Hearing direct feedback on our grants through the children's authentic voice has helped us to unlock many new and interesting perspectives on our impact. Sometimes, this feedback did not align with previous impact data collected from our evaluation surveys, and that is hugely important for our understanding of what really matters to the people that our grants are for.

Nothing demonstrates this more than the 8-year-old who told us that his favourite item was 'the bath towels, because they are so soft'. While it's easy to hear and celebrate the overwhelming joy children told us about on receiving items big and small, it's even more important to listen to the quiet meaning behind every child's response; what items they have suffered without, what experiences they have missed, and what challenges they have faced. It is with that in mind that we will use the findings presented here to keep delivering the items and activities that work, and work hard to deliver more of the ones that we have only now learnt the value of from children's perspectives.

We learnt a great deal about the power and value of undertaking diverse methodologies to evaluate our grants. In the coming year, as we also launch our 2025-2030 strategy and redesign our Theory of Change, we will consider and plan for how we can

turn this project into a rolling evaluation programme. There are operational and strategic barriers that need addressing, but we are now in a strong position to act on these, thanks to the knowledge gained from undertaking this exploratory project.

We wanted to say a huge thank you to the children and young people who submitted their wonderful drawings and words, and to their families for helping them to take part.



A whole new bedroom! (age 12)

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