

# “I feel strong and wonderful (as a) mother”

Building meaningful connections through infant massage classes with mothers who arrived as humanitarian entrants to Brisbane, Australia

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## Introduction

Families from a refugee background are vulnerable to mental health issues due to social isolation, acculturative stress, pre-migration trauma experiences and cultural and linguistic barriers to accessing services. A quality of connection between mother and baby and their wider community, strengthens the well-being of families. Healthy nurturing touch is crucial to baby's brain, social and emotional development.

## Objectives

The program aimed to offer a culturally inclusive, safe and comfortable learning space for mothers and babies from a refugee background. We aimed to build the confidence of mothers to experience nurturing touch and positive communication with their babies, and to build social connections with other mothers.

## Approach

Using a collaborative and early intervention approach, the occupational therapists partnered with a refugee settlement worker to respond to the needs of mothers attending an established midwife community clinic. Six women completed the 'Baby- In-Mind' First Touch program which was over five weekly sessions, each lasting for two hours. Two of the women required a language interpreter to enable participation.

## Practice implications

A baby massage program tailored to the needs of mothers from refugee backgrounds can significantly build confidence as mothers, increase participation and connections in their settlement community, build meaningful friendships and to promote joy in the experience of motherhood.

## Conclusion

Infant massage instruction is a practical program used to support healthy bonding and attachment and well-being for culturally diverse groups. Occupational therapists have unique facilitation skills in creating a sense of place, belonging, connections and a sense of mastery and competence.

## Acknowledgements

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