

MEDIA RELEASE

Leading childhood trauma expert develops story book to explain foster care experience to young children

Social purpose organisation Life Without Barriers has teamed up with pre-eminent childhood trauma academic and practitioner, Professor Helen Milroy, to launch a storybook to explain the out of home care experience to young children in foster care in an age-appropriate way.

Professor Milroy, a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region, Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health at the University of Western Australia, and former Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, has written and illustrated *A Soft Landing*, which tells the story of a baby willy wagtail who falls from her nest and is cared for by an old kangaroo named 'Big Red' until she can fly on her own.

Big Red and Willy wagtail's family work together to ensure Willy wagtail remains part of her family and learns the ways of the willy wagtail, while also becoming part of Big Red's family.

The story, which is developmentally appropriate for young children, can be used as a metaphor for a child living with a foster carer.

Life Without Barriers WA State Director Jennie Burns said, "We know that sadly children's experiences of being removed from family into out of home care are confusing and traumatic. It can also be difficult to explain the reasons why they have been taken into care in a way that matches their developmental stage.

"Storytelling is one of the earliest forms of teaching and learning for children as well as being a central part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. It is also an age-appropriate form of therapy.

"*A Soft Landing* is a beautiful story where the baby bird's carer ensures that she maintains a relationship with her family and learns all the songs and knowledge of her family until she can fly on her own. Children in care will be able to relate to this story. We are honoured to partner with Professor Milroy who has lent her considerable expertise in childhood trauma combined with her love for writing stories for children," Ms Burns said.

Professor Milroy said, "When children experience trauma, the impact can be profound and affect all aspects of development. It can make children feel very isolated and alone, and impact on the way they see their place in the world and their own personal narrative.

Storytelling is not only an enjoyable activity for children and their carers but it can help children rebuild their story, develop a coherent sense of self and have hope for the future. Storytelling allows a child to think more creatively about themselves and their own situation by learning about

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others through the story. Storytelling is also an important part of Aboriginal culture and remains so today. Some stories stay with us forever.”

A Soft Landing will be made available to children in out of home care with Life Without Barriers across the country. A short reading guide for carers and parents has also been developed, so they can understanding the importance of storytelling and receive some guidance on how best to read the book with children.

***A Soft Landing* will be officially launched at the ‘Hop to It’ picnic for children in out of home care on 3 August 2018.**

Date: Friday 3 August 2018
Time: 10:30am – 2pm, with official proceedings 10:30-11.15am
Where: Len Packham Reserve, 96 Cordelia St, Coolbellup
Who: WA Minister for Child Protection, Simone McGurk
Winthrop Professor Helen Milroy (video presentation)
Life Without Barriers WA State Director Jennie Burns
City of Cockburn representatives
Foster carers and foster children (note that WA law forbids publishing photos of children in foster care)

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About Life Without Barriers: Life Without Barriers (LWB) is one of Australia’s largest not-for-profit social purpose organisations, delivering innovative, community-based programs to more than 18,000 people from diverse community groups across the country. LWB works in more than 440 communities delivering services in family support, disability, out-of-home care, aged care, mental health, youth justice, homelessness, substance abuse, and provides support for refugees and asylum seekers.