

BIRDIE AND THE BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROGRAM

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge those communities that lived through the Black Summer Bushfire disaster, with each person having their own experiences. We acknowledge the resilience, courage and strength which has been shown by communities and the ongoing efforts to maintain and grow this each day.

We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and sea, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging.

Services unite to support children in Bushfire Recovery

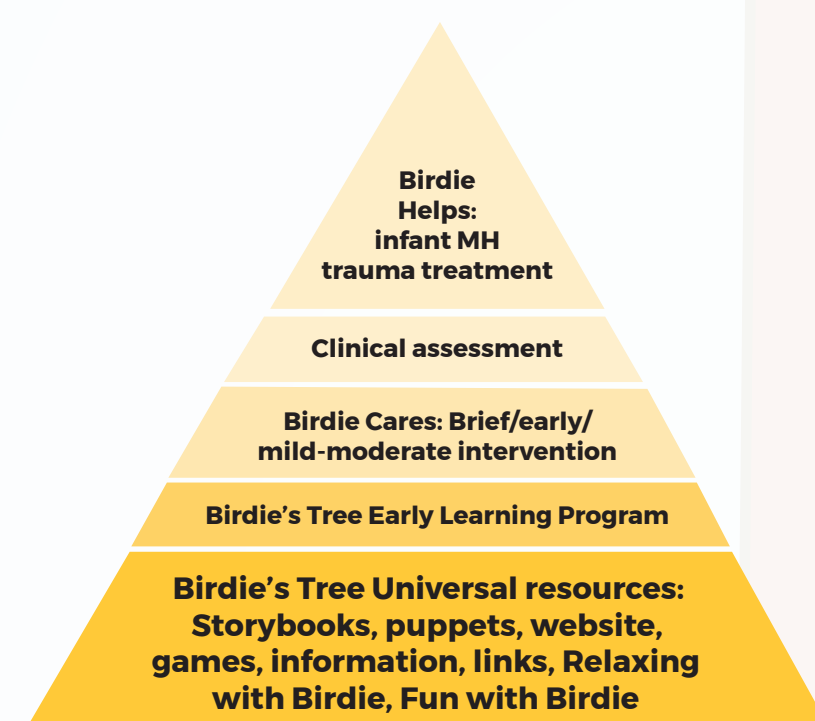
Royal Far West (RFW), a NSW based charity devoted to the health and wellbeing of country kids, partnered with **Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (QCPIMH)** to support children, families and communities impacted by the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019/20.

In designing the Bushfire Recovery Program, RFW teamed up with **UNICEF Australia** to conduct a Needs Assessment, consulting with bushfire impacted families and communities in NSW to determine what psychosocial support their children needed. Adults, including parents and educators, wanted to talk to and support the children they cared for, but were unsure of the best way to do this. Along came a little Birdie who could help...

Birdie's Tree, a world-leading suite of resources created by QCPIMH, helps support expectant and new parents, babies and young children through natural disasters and disruptive events.



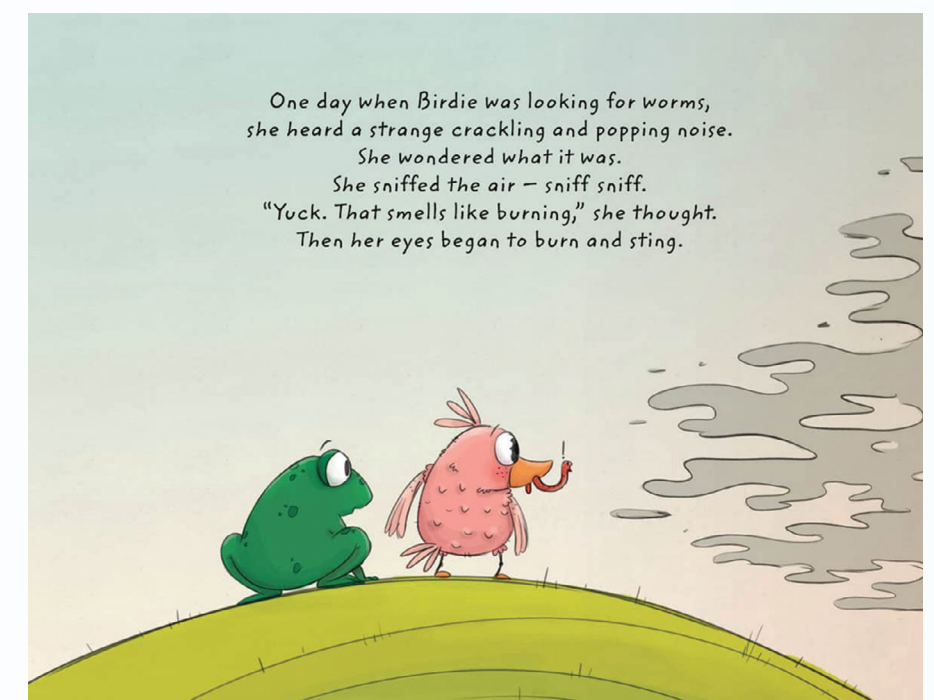
Brianna (Occupational Therapist) and Chris (Social Worker) read *Birdie and the Fire* with a very engaged group of preschoolers. The book is used to initiate conversations with children about bushfire preparedness, response & recovery.



Birdie's Tree Service Model:
Royal Far West focused on integrating Birdie's Tree Universal resources into its Bushfire Recovery Program.

Background of RFW's Bushfire Recovery Program (BRP)

The BRP is a community-based program, delivered through primary schools and preschools, providing support to children (0-12yrs) and key adults around the child including parents/carers, educators, local services and community leaders. The Program, delivered by multidisciplinary health clinicians, has now been rolled out in over 30 communities across NSW, supporting 3,000+ children through group programs and individual therapy, and capacity building workshops with supporting adults. The Birdie's Tree resources have been used in the Program to give children a voice in the recovery process.



An illustration from *Birdie and the Fire*. Birdie's Books are used in the Program to build children's emotional literacy around natural disasters, e.g. "How do you think Birdie felt when she smelt the smoke?"

The Reach:

- 88 Birdie Books**
gifted to families and schools
- 64 Puppets**
(Birdie & Mr Frog) found a new loving home
- 968 Children**
could share their bushfire story by connecting with Birdie and Mr Frog
- 442 Educators**
now have a new resource to share to help build children's emotional literacy
- 1,104 Parents / Carers**
empowered through shared book reading with their child



Birdie's Tree storybooks promote self-efficacy as children can choose when they want to read the book, with some children choosing to read it over and over again.

The Outcomes:

What the children say...

"My favourite part was when Birdie got a new nest. My house got burnt in the fires just like Birdie's" (4yr old boy)

What the educators say...

"The children loved the book. It allowed them to discuss their trauma & feelings from the less confronting aspect of Birdie's experiences" (Preschool Director)

What the clinicians say...

"I never expected to see a parent so empowered by a children's storybook! A mother who previously felt hopeless, worried whether she had said and done the right thing at the right time, was now excited and empowered to revisit and discuss the event with her child". (Occupational Therapist)

Service Collaboration at its Finest:

RFW and QCPIMH quickly realised the many opportunities for collaboration which would ultimately help communities in recovery. These included:



Training in Birdie's Tree universal resources for RFW's Bushfire Recovery Team, provided by Dr Andrea Baldwin.



Sharing opportunities for professional development, e.g. joint training in Teaching Recovery Techniques, Children & War Foundation.



Collaboration to write a bushfire story (Michael's Story) for older children which could be used for the Bushfire Recovery Program.



The RFW Team integrated their multidisciplinary knowledge and skills in delivering Birdie's Tree Resources. This included using sensory equipment (e.g. lycra tunnels, weighted balls and putty) to help children regulate their bodies and calm their minds.



After reading the storybook and talking about their emotions, the children enjoyed going through the "Feelings Tunnel" which they aptly named. This is one of many sensory tools and strategies shared with parents and educators to support children ongoing.



Shared storybook reading helps build a relationship between children and adults, and using puppets can help bring the story to life. Some children used the puppets to help share their experience of the bushfires.

