

Book gives shelter during life's storms



BY Paul Bibby

THE *Life of Tree* looks like an ordinary, colourful picture book.

The story of Jack and his friend "Tree" unfolds with beautiful Aboriginal artwork.

But between the lines there's a deeper story about bad things happening in Jack's home and how he deals with that.

Someone reading the book might think the storm in the story is about a fight between Jack's mum and dad.

Or that it's about Jack's dad having too much to drink and getting angry and violent.

Above, Bradley Ganambarr, 10, with the book his mother, the artist Christine Burrawanga, illustrated. Right, Lucy Van Sambeek, the author, left, and Christine Burrawanga with her children, Bradley and Calvin Winungui. Bradley is not the boy quoted in this story.

PHOTOS Glenn Campbell

When the sun comes out again and Jack's house is fixed, the reader might think it's about Jack being strong and happy again.

This is because *The Life of Tree* is a special book to help Indigenous kids talk about violence at home.

HELPING KIDS OPEN UP

It's meant to be read by a child and an adult. The adult can ask questions to help the child talk about how he or she feels.

"A lot of kids find it really hard to talk about family violence and trauma," says the author, Lucy Van Sambeek, a social worker from Darwin.

"They often feel guilt or shame or fear about what's happened and they blame themselves.

"The book is about helping kids to open up about what's happened to them or what they've seen happen to someone else in their family."

HOW THE BOOK CAME TO LIFE

Unlike a lot of kids' books, *The Life of Tree* was made without help from a publishing company.

Ms Van Sambeek and Christine Burarrwanga, who did the illustra-

If you or someone you know is living with violence in their family home:

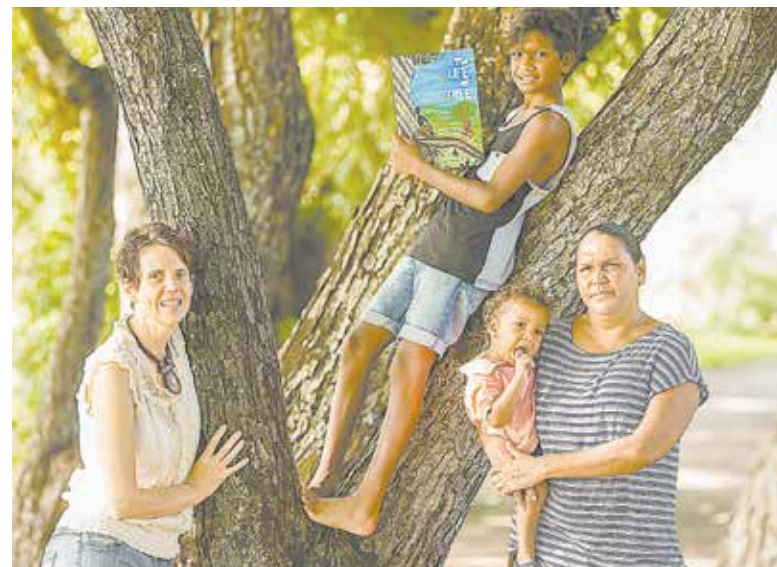
- ▶ Work out who you can trust to talk to. This might be a neighbour, teacher, counsellor or trusted relative. If that person doesn't listen, find another person;
- ▶ You can call the police on 000 if you are in danger or if you are worried about someone getting hurt;
- ▶ Don't put yourself in danger by trying to stop the person being violent. It is better for you to find a safe place when the violence is happening. You might also want to think about a way to get away quickly and where you could go.

You can call Kids Helpline on **1800 55 1800**, 24/7.

Remember that it's not your fault and that there is help available for you and for your family member.

It can be better!

Crinkling News child psychologist Margot O'Brien



How a story helped a boy

The Life of Tree has only just come out so not many kids have read it yet.

But Ms Van Sambeek has helped lots of kids through storytelling, including one seven-year-old boy from the Tiwi islands.

Here he talks about the violence at home.

"Sometimes my dad gets angry with me or my mum. If I want to feel safe, I know I can go to my special hiding places.

"My favourite place is the mango tree. I feel happy there. I go there every day. I climb up and eat the mangoes.

"My dad got angry recently and hit me over the head with a cup. Someone helped me tell the police.

"I used to get angry too. The anger was like a volcano which lived in my tummy.

"The volcano got hot and angry when kids at school threw rocks at me or teased me.

"I know how to make the volcano cool and calm, when the hot one tries to bubble up.

"Eating fried rice, having a shower or sitting in the air conditioning, having a cold drink of water and saying sorry helps it stay cool and calm."

TRAGEDY IN WILD WEATHER'S FLOODWATERS

THE death of an 11-year-old boy who had been riding a body board in floodwaters has shocked and saddened his community.

Wild weather hit NSW in mid-March, closing roads, uprooting trees, cutting off communities, and flooding homes.

Ryan Teasdale was playing in heavy rain with lots of other kids at a park in Unanderra which is near Wollongong, south of Sydney, on March 16, NSW police said.

But by 4.30pm his older brother couldn't find him. Ryan's family went out to search for him and called the police to help.

REMEMBERING A LOVING BOY

The search ended the following morning. But Ryan had not survived. Friends turned out to lay flowers near where he was found.

On a website page set up to raise money for his family, Ryan was remembered as "a credit to his family".

"He was funny, crazy and he was so independent and loving. He will be missed."

Police are still investigating what happened.

'STAY OUT OF FLOODWATERS'

The NSW State Emergency Service has reminded kids and adults not to go into floodwaters because they can be very dangerous.

Some children were seen jumping into floodwaters from a bridge in Bellingen in northern NSW, the SES said on its Facebook page.

"Floodwater is filled with disgusting and dangerous things and can kill," the post read.

The SES had thousands of calls for help from people in NSW while the rain pelted down. They also had to rescue people whose cars got stuck

when they tried to drive across flooded roads.

Below, flooding near Unanderra public pool on Thursday, March 16 and, right, Lavenders Bridge crossing the Bellinger River in northern NSW was closed because of flooding. PHOTOS NSW SES

