

## HELEN MILROY

Well thank you for having me. I'll just pay my respect to the traditional land owners of this country, and just to remind us that despite this lovely hotel that we're in there are thousands and thousands of years of Aboriginal history underneath us.

I was asked to talk about how families can shape norms and in particular look at the importance of early childhood and some of you have probably heard me speak before and this might be very similar to other presentations I've made.

I'm absolutely passionate about the welfare of our children because they really are our future. So this talk will be a little bit of a journey and at the end of it if you are still able to hang out by then, because I know everyone is going to be getting ready for lunch very, very soon, I'm going to finish off with a story that I've been working on as part of an Aboriginal parenting program that we're trying to design from the ground up. So we actually have something that comes from us, and our people and our families, and not indigenised programs that are already in the system.

Just by way of introduction, my Grandmother's country is Marble Bar and that's just a picture from her country. It's a very beautiful place and it's meant to be the hottest place in Australia, but if you ever get the chance to go up there it's a very pretty country.

Also just to remind us, this is a painting of my mother's and it doesn't really matter what you think about or talk about or what you try to do in terms of Indigenous issues, that we really do have to have that holistic and balanced approach. It doesn't matter what we do, something else is going to be affected by that and what we want to make sure is that we do everything that affects things in a positive way rather than disrupts something else. So everything's interconnected.

The other point I'd like to make is of course the whole issue around children and families and parenting etc. is that it is generational. That's my Grandmother Daisy holding my Mother, and that's me with my first child. Now certainly some of the things that I grew up with was the fact that both my Mother and my Grandmother brought me up and my Grandmother didn't ever tell me her recipes because she said to me right from day one, you're not going to be a cook, you're going to do something better than that. And the strength that those two

ladies had in terms of holding our family together really with very, very little is an absolute testament to our strength and courage as a people.

The other story I might just tell briefly is that when one of my other daughters was starting school in Grade 1, the teacher asked her what she'd like to do as a career when she grew up. And at that time in my particular family my parents-in-law had just recently retired and were staying home on the pension, so she said to the teacher that she'd like to be a pensioner and get paid to stay home. My other daughter wanted to be a tree but fortunately they both grew up and they're both doing very well.

So I'm just going to start with some concepts around children and babies and all of those sorts of things, and these are paintings and narratives that I've worked on in trying to bridge the two worlds between the world I grew up in with my grandmother teaching the cultural ways and then the world I had to grow up in terms of education and believe me, going through medicine and general practice training and then psychiatry is enough education.

So to try and bring those two worlds together I've attempted to look at it from different perspectives.

The significance about this particular painting is that really the children are our future. So, if we don't look after our babies and our babies' spirits, bring them into the world the right way, then we will dash our future hopes. And the important bit here I guess, there's a whole narrative that goes with these but in view of the short frame I'll just try read little bits. As far as I can see the destiny of the nation will unfold once we can see the potential in all of our children. As parents, as peoples, we are guardians of the future through infant dreaming. Our greatest assets are our children, our greatest achievements bringing about their wellbeing throughout life and development. We can get caught up looking ahead when we should be taking care of the present. Together we must gaze upon the infant with love and understanding, watch the child grow with encouragement and admiration, stand beside our youth with humility and pride. Above all we must respect their fundamental right to live out their story as it should be, protected and nurtured, yet free to dream dreams and achieve brilliance.

This next one is really about trying to highlight the need for both protection and nurturance if children are going to survive in this world. Again, the point we want to make here is that as peoples we have to stand in ??? or cradle with our children and carry them forward into a

brighter future. We have to step in and create a place for our children to grow and have the freedom to play.

In regard to parents, or mothers and fathers as this one is called, I think that, I mean parenting clearly does have a generational flavour to it, and unfortunately a lot of our generations were disrupted through colonisation. But how we are as parents occurs within the context of our own experiences of our parent's communities and the broader society. The best we can hope for is that we will recognise our mistakes, accept support from others, be prepared to let the world just see how remarkable our children really are. We must give our children the best start, the right start in life and development. We all have many stories to tell, many more to share and some yet to be created as we begin our journey as parents gazing upon the wonder that is creation.

I've only got a couple more pictures to go and then we'll get on to some other stuff.

Someone mentioned early on, I'm not sure if it was Noel or someone else about self-determination. I think that there is a lot of myths or misunderstanding about what self-determination really is. But I think the important part about self-determination is really about choice, but also about being in control.

I think for our children to fulfil their potential as human beings and contribute to society, they must be able to develop the confidence in knowing they will be valued, respected and autonomous, safe and secure in their development and see their parents and Elders, as important participants and in positions of power within society.

Where does the basis for decision making rest in all levels in society. If we're not included in the key decision making arenas, then we still have this great Australian silence. Self-determination I do not believe is something to be feared, it is something to be embraced. The basic goals of most societies are the same: to live well, and safeguard the future for our kids.

So, I think we have to recognise that there is an Indigenous birthright. That our ideas around children and bringing children into the world is both spiritual and physical. That country gives birth through women and that's part of our connection to mother earth. That children are born to country, not just on country. An identity in culture and country are inextricably linked. I think that's really lovely. I think that some of the notions around Indigenous culture and cultural norms are really lovely for our children to grow up with. There are some things

that didn't exist in Indigenous society and I'll talk about a couple of other things in a little while, but the idea that you are actually attached to country and the universe means that you are never really ever alone. There is always something that you're connected to and I think that's very reassuring.

I think it's also timely just to remember that we were always parents. That was our cultural norm, our social norm. This is a quote taken from 1880 and I think that the important bit is that last sentence. I cannot recollect ever seeing a parent beat or cruelly use a child. We have to remember that. Particularly given the recent revelations.

When we look at our kinship systems and our styles of attachment for those of you like attachment theory, I certainly like it as an actual developmental theory. You know John Bolby?? would have been very proud of our kinship system. It's a very strong, safe, secure attachment system and so concepts like being an orphan didn't actually exist in Indigenous society. That was an imposed concept through colonisation. And the point I want to make about kinship systems and attachment is that it works really well, when the system works really well. And what has happened I think for a lot of our families is that because of the fragmentation and the loss of some of those strong relationships, what we sometimes have is obligation but not reciprocity, and so bits of the system have now started to come apart. But I think that we can still take a lot of very important lessons learnt from that system when it was working well.

Attachment again is a much broader concept. My mother tells me about stories when she was at the orphanage as an only child of having birds come to visit her. Hearing corroboree music even there were no Aboriginal people living in the area and being able to sit down and feel, sit and speak to a wallaby as a friend. So I think that whole notion of attachment and what it means to be embedded within country, within the universe, is actually a part of our resilience. And as much as we talk today about needing to go forward, don't forget some of the things that actually have sustained us over many, many generations.

I think the idea of being attached to the universe as well means that you really are never alone and lost if you're still connected to country and ancestry. It means we're enduring and that's been one of our greatest strengths, is that we are enduring.

We now start looking at the context for Aboriginal children. We know historically that we went through profound trauma and extreme powerlessness, and I think that those are things

that still resonate in some of our communities today. We're not talking about history that happened 200 years ago, we're talking about history that was continuing in terms of the levels of trauma experienced by families right through into the 1970s. That's within the current generation, parents that we have in services today and we know that that trans-generational effect will continue on for some time until we're able to turn families back around and regain that confidence and functionality that we all want. We also have to remember our history is also one of great resilience, survival, compassion, endurance, whatever else you'd like to say. From my experience of my own Grandmother, despite the very traumatic life she had she was still the most compassionate, the wisest woman I've ever met in my entire life. And again, I think the strength of our elders should be recognised.

Presently as you know our indicators are poor and we'll briefly have a look at that and there's still a lot of unfinished business. What are our future prospects in this country? If you're a young black male growing up, what do you see of yourself reflected within broader society? What are your aspirations and what you grow up into?

At the moment most of our role models are footy players or larrikins maybe, musicians, artists. Where are our doctors, our politicians, our lawyers? The centre I work with at UWA is the support centre for Aboriginal medical students of which we have 24 Indigenous students in medicine. Yay! But it's very small figures. And I think we have the only two dental students in the whole of Australia who are Indigenous as well. So again, what are our children going to aspire to when there's still so much debate going on about what the future holds for us as peoples anyway.

There was a study done in the US by a Native American woman looking at reflections in society for Native American youth and basically what the outcome of that study was, was that youth would rather see themselves reflected negatively in society than not reflected at all. So rather to be seen bad than to be invisible. What do our kids see of themselves when they look to broader society, to see their identity? Again we have to have the reality of our demographics. The point I want to make about this population pyramid is that we've got a mob of kids, which is great, but we have very few middle age people who are meant to be the parents and look at the number of Elders we have left. My Mum's turning 80 this year and in her mind she's still waiting to get old, but there's really not many people left around like her.

So when we're looking at parenting programs or how we're going to rear our children, how we're going to build enterprises, things like that, we don't have a lot of human capital. And it's one of the things that we actually have to grow over a lot of generations as well. In order to restore our population. We're not going to suddenly cure chronic disease. We actually have to grow health kids. Our general health as you know is poor and one of the points I want to make here is that there's a huge link between stress and illness, and if we just take a purely health approach and we don't actually really factor in the whole mental health and well being side of it, then we are missing some of the significant contributing factors to the levels of morbidity and mortality that plague our communities.

Now the problem with our general health is that it means that parents are dying, grandparents are dying, children are growing up in states of grief and loss. If you look at attachment theory then it's thought that if you lose your parent or your carer as a young child, that puts you at risk for greater problems, particularly things like depression or even ill health. Many, many of our children are losing many, many of their carers. And because of the attachment kinship model, the intensity of those losses are greater because they don't just lose one mother, they lose several mothers. So the impact then on our families, and particularly on our children as they develop is quite profound.

Quickly look at psychological stuff, well, we have multiple layers of trauma and those multiple layers of trauma still exist today so we have the historical stuff, we have the new present layers, children live in situations of chronic stress. There's the layers of loss as well as all the difficulties in the Indigenous communities or people feeling a sense of control over anything. And in fact if you look at a lot of our services, even that are doing really well, even their sense of control is quite tenuous at times, given that at a stroke of a pen they can lose their funding and where's the generational planning here so that you get over these hurdles.

Someone also mentioned earlier today, I'm not sure who, about the normalisation of trauma, and I think that that's true for some of our communities as well. You expect everyone to die, you expect everything to be bad, and it's almost like, well that's your lot. And of course that is not a cultural norm, or a social norm, you really need to change that expectation. Of course alcohol and drugs affect parents, so does mental illness and a lot of our families are plagued by these sorts of problems that will have a direct impact then on the psychological welfare of our children. Our parental capacity is another thing we need to look at.

Some of the families I've worked with, I've been amazed at how much the kids have actually seen and witnessed in their young lives. Children as young as 8 having witnessed murders and suicides as well as the levels of violence and other areas of dysfunction. And yet there they are. They're waiting to get better and they're really wanting to get better and every time you teach them how to do something, a strategy for dealing with some of their issues they go straight out and teach all the other kids in the family who have also been traumatised. Amazingly resilient, and a lot of children will actually take responsibility for their own healing. They really can't do it alone. We also have to look at things like emotional regulation, the re-traumatisation that also happens for our kids as they are growing up. And what reinforces their self-worth, their value to society, what gives them a sense of pride, confidence and are they included?

If we look at families they are really the keepers of early childhood. That's where kids are starting to learn about who they are and they may well be quite protected. But then when our children get out into broader society a lot of those notions of who they are and their value are then suddenly knocked on the head.

So we have to try and support them the whole way through development if we're going to actually reinforce the cultural and social norms that we want to introduce right from early in life. Certainly for some of the kids I've worked with if they've been the only Aboriginal kid at the school, they're the one that gets blamed for everything. In fact I remember one boy said to me, well I might as well be bad because I'm going to get blamed for it anyway. At least this way I can enjoy being naughty.

We look quickly at the Western Australia Aboriginal health survey just to look at the number of Aboriginal children at risk. That survey went around the whole of Western Australia. It surveyed about 5,000 Aboriginal kids. Even from very, very remote communities and they found that something like 24% were at high risk of developing social and emotional difficulties or emotional and behavioural problems. And that is much, much higher than a non-Indigenous population which I think sits something around about 14%.

One of the biggest things that was most strongly associated with the poor social and behavioural outcomes was the life stress events. One of my pictures hasn't turned out which was the next slide on life stress events but basically what the data showed was that something like 22% of families were living with something like 7 more major life stress events within

the preceding 12 months. And what we know from that literature is that you're really at risk if you're experiencing two or more. And something like 75% of our population sits under the high risk end of the curve. If you can't process life stress events, if you live chronically stressful lives, you will end up burning out somehow, either through mental health problems, or physical health problems. And that's the state of affairs that are currently plague our communities. The other thing the survey showed is that for those children whose carers have been forcibly removed as part of the stolen generation then they will also be at risk of social and emotional behavioural problems. Other contributing factors were something like poor family functioning, low quality of parenting and then some of the developmental stuff around speech, hearing and vision.

In terms of some of the social factors that impact on our families and our children, of course marked disadvantage, and impoverishment and overcrowding are potential negative impacts on child development. And I just want to highlight this point as well. If you have an impoverished environment, then you're actually going to provide enough stimulation for a child to actually to learn adequately. So you're already behind the 8-ball if you're living in one of those very, very impoverished communities. On the other hand, over-stimulation causes just as many difficulties. So you need to have some sort of balance.

The level of educational disadvantage which we currently are seeing means that we're limiting our children's opportunities for later career development. It's really interesting to see the number of people that we get through our medical program at the University of Western Australia. I mean, medicine is thought to be a pretty high level degree and it's quite difficult. And although we're getting, you know, we're trying to recruit through schools and things like that, we have to make up an incredible backlog of an educational disadvantage for the students to have any success in achieving medicine. Now these are kids that have been going to school. These are the bright ones who are going to school every day and wouldn't miss a day. And their still not being educated at the level that is going to get them through a medical course. So just promoting education is great, but what is education doing in terms of failing our kids when they are there?

The high unemployment obviously also impacts on family resources, the child removals that we are currently seeing. Something like 6 times the non-Indigenous rate then go on and impact on children's development as well. Sometimes when children are removed from families their outcomes aren't any better. We have to be mindful of that. Not that I'm

suggesting you don't remove kids. I work with children all the time that have been traumatised and protecting children is of the utmost importance but how we do it, is also important.

From a spiritual aspect, I think there's a different view around how babies are born from an Indigenous perspective. What their sort of spiritual life is like and certainly from I think some kids that I've seen, they grow up into a situation where there is so much despair right from the beginning of their poor little life. And you wonder how that impacts on their development right from the beginning.

I've also witnessed the discrimination that our women experience in maternity hospitals as well and sometimes the view of staff when they're delivering an Indigenous child into this world is that, oh another problem has been born. We really need to change those sorts of attitudes.

From a cultural perspective we want our kids to know how to identify, we want them to have a strong cultural heritage. We have the oldest living knowledge system in the world. Australia should be very proud of that. And the keepers of that knowledge system are going to be our children. We also have a fantastic technological knowledge system in Australia as well. So if we can put our ancient knowledge system together with the best knowledge that's available in the modern world, we're unstoppable.

Some of the strengths I think have already been mentioned by others, but I'll just quickly highlight a couple of them. We do have a lot of endurance and survival and we are essentially I think a very resilient culture. Inclusiveness and compassion is always there. That sharing and reciprocity when it works, works well. Our secure attachment system was very good. And I'm always amazed at how kids are so clued in to relationships. And even when they come into services they're not interested in what you do, they're interested in getting to know you to decide whether they are going to trust you or not. So they are often very cluey, which is good.

That early autonomy and self-reliance has kept us alive and it has allowed us to survive. However, earlier autonomy and self-reliance is not buffered by a healthy community can end up leading to maladaptive behaviour later on.

So, children need a childhood. That's pretty simple, isn't it? What I want to really highlight here though, is that children learn from their parents and family first and they learn right from the moment of birth. And if you look at the scientific literature now on how infants learn and what infants take in it's becoming more and more important to look at that very early learning child rearing ability and that attachment relationship with the parents and with the carers and with the extended family in those early, early years. Relationships start very early in fact, they start pre-natally. They start with the baby in the womb and possibly even prior to that when we're talking about the spiritual side of conception.

How you model relationships, how you learn, where you fit in the world and how to react to others starts when you're baby and you look up at your mother or your father's face and your mother and your father reflects back on you who you are. We can't wait to educate our kids until they get to school. It's got to start from when they're a bub. Protection and nurturance obviously is essential and the emotional behaviour reinforcement also starts in infancy. One of the jobs really of good parenting, of good attachment, of good secure attachment is that emotional regulation. Being able to read the baby's cues, their behavioural cues. Being able to contain the baby's anxieties. Being able to nurture the baby appropriately. That actually helps the baby set up how they self-regulate. And that self-regulation then becomes a lifelong pattern. The earliest experience can definitely influence the rest of development but there's always opportunity within development to actually, someone said teach someone new tricks. That's true for the whole of development, but the earlier you start doing it, then you're building on a strong foundation rather than having to unlearn things before you re-learn how to do it properly. So there's always the potential for recovery and reorganisation.

I'd like to also highlight the importance of buffering. Because of our abnormal population structure now that absence of buffering is a real problem. We need to support mums and dads to be there with their kids but we were often then buffered by our grandparents that lent support and our aunties and our uncles. And we have to understand how stressful it is for families if they don't have that additional support and how we build that in there because as you see it's missing at the moment in our population.

And the other point I think I want to make about is the importance of holding is that when you become a parent you never stop thinking about your kids. No matter where you are - certainly this is my experience as a mother - no matter where I am there's always something in my head that's saying, I wonder if they're ok, I wonder where they are, what are they doing, I

hope they remembered to take their school lunch or whatever. So you hold the child in mind constantly. If you're affected by drugs or alcohol or by despair you're not going to be thinking about the kids. So who's then going to hold those kids in mind. If a grandmother's got 20 kids, it's very difficult to hold them all in mind all at the same time. So it's something we really have to think about.

The other point I want to make about parenting is that we really don't have to be perfect. We just have to be like Winnicott talks about good enough. This comes from the WHO report when they looked at trying to build resilience into those communities where poverty and social disadvantage and other issues really plagued the community and I think that this is a really important point. That the sensitive and responsible caregiving is a requirement for healthy neurophysiological, physiological and psychological development of a child. And the factors that can directly interfere with that mother-child or child-carer relationship, are going to impact on all spheres of development, not just emotional regulation.

Ok, we're getting towards the end now. Wouldn't it be great if all our Indigenous women could experience, healthy stress-free pregnancies? Don't you reckon that would be really good? What do they experience at the moment? Pretty traumatic pregnancies often. They have to travel far and wide for birthing. Sometimes the experiences in the tertiary hospitals are quite discriminatory and they often have poor outcomes. So we want healthy, stress-free pregnancies, and that requires a community approach. We need to have good birth. We don't want babies to be born underweight. If you look at birth weight now, and the studies they've done linking birth weight with other problems, low birth weight is almost a risk factor for everything negative. It can contribute to later chronic disease, poor mental health outcomes and a whole pile of other disabilities. Good nutrition, good attachment and family support are all essential if we're going to get the right start. It's very hard to build healthful social norms if we're actually going to have a disabled population.

The growth and development side of it also needs to be looked at. We need developmental support. We need to really focus on early play and learning. Our mothers and fathers and our grandparents used to know how to do all of this stuff. So somehow we've just kind of lost our way a bit here. My early childhood was filled with stories and play and creativity and imagination. And that equips a young child with the ability to problem solve, show leadership, show care. All of those sorts of things we desire as adults. But it all starts back in that early environment. We need to have safety and security. We need to have a reasonable

amount of stimulation balanced with the ability for the child to be able to switch off and have some peace and rest. If children aren't sleeping at night they're not going to grow. We need to look at that emotional behaviour regulation and the role of parenting in regard to all of that.

The stress burden and development stuff, again children are often silent victims in all of this. A lot of people think oh, they're only kids they don't really know what's going on. If you're a baby, or you're a child and you're watching your parents fight or you're seeing the violence or whatever, it's going in. There's no way children are missing out on that. They're being traumatised right from the moment of birth if that's what's happening in our communities. And it will have an impact. And children who live chronically stressful lives are likely to grow up with chronic disease and later mental health problems. Particularly things like PTSD and depression which are often overlooked in childhood as children growing up.

We need to have a look at the burden of chronic disease and how that impacts on family. Some children I work with, their biggest anxiety is that their carer is going to die while they're a kid. And the reality is that that may well come true. We need that buffering as I talked about before and some generational planning.

In terms of cultural pride and identity, we need to support cultural community, who's going to affirm their identity as they grow up? They'll get it well affirmed in those early years with family. What happens when they get out into broader society? And then as an adult as well. Identity acclamation needs to occur right throughout life.

Recognising strengths would be a good starting point in building those foundations on the things we know work well. The whole issue around cultural renaissance and again just reinforcing that societal mirrors and norms. If you were a young Indigenous person today and you started reading the newspapers you'd think Aboriginal people were just dreadful.

Where's some of the good news stories? Where's some of the emphasis on success? And if we're going to talk about responsibility here, yes I think we should be responsible as parents. We should be responsible for our communities, but society has a responsibility here too. I actually made this comment on a news interview. We're going to have compulsory health checks on our kids, what about compulsory health checks on our politicians because they've displayed incredibly poor vision and loss of hearing, for at least a decade.

And perhaps even a psychiatric examination to examine their poor judgement and loss of insight.

So I'm going to finish then, and I'm just going to read you a story that I talked about at the beginning. There's a guy called Boffenbrenner who talked about this at a conference I went to years ago and it's always stuck in my head, that every child needs to have someone who's crazy about them. And it's a bit like your dog when you get home when you know you've had a rotten day and you might even you know, sort of tell him off because he's wagging his tail too loudly or something. But he still comes back and he loves you and he thinks you're just wonderful. Every kid needs that. And I think a lot of our kids completely miss out on that because we've lost that buffering in our communities because of our population structure.

I certainly know from my perspective that I grew up with my Grandmother telling me every day how wonderful I was. And I would like every child to have opportunity.

Now I'm going to read you a story. This story was trying to look at how we use some of our traditional methods to actually develop a parenting program which had meaning from an Aboriginal perspective. So this was just one of the stories we might think about using in one of our early modules it's called A Family Tree.

Tree stood tall and proud just as it had done for centuries. Tree was home to many families but somehow things had changed and tree wanted to put things right but wasn't sure what to do. On one branch lived mother magpie and her 3 children. Magpies are meant to help tree by clearing away the small branches that have broken off so it was safe for children to hop around and play in the tree. However, mother magpie loves sparkly things and is always leaving the nest to change rainbows, hoping to find gold. Magpie even sold her fine downy feathers from her own nest to get more sparkles. It was all she cared about now. Sometimes magpie was gone for so long the kids were hungry and crying and no-one seemed to know where magpie father was.

One day the oldest kid took the other magpie babies and hopped from nest to nest begging for food and stealing worms from other baby birds. There were so many sticks all over the tree the babies kept falling over and nearly fell out of the tree. Grandmother crow watched the little magpie from her nest at the top of the tree and felt sorry for them. She took the little magpies under her wing to her nest and promised to look after them. When the little magpies hopped into the nest it was so full with other baby birds there was hardly any room left. Everyone was pushing and squawking to get a good spot.

Grandma crow was meant to help tree by watching out for the weather and letting tree know when the storms were coming so tree could protect all the nests. Grandmother crow worked hard all day gathering food, cleaning the nest, preening the little one's feathers. She didn't have time to be a lookout any more.

One day a big storm came suddenly and tree wasn't ready, so many nest got destroyed. Grandma crow felt very sad, but what could she do? There were too many little ones to feed. One morning grandma crow was so tired, when she set off to get everyone breakfast she flew into a tree stump and broke her wing. It took hours to walk home and when she arrived at the family tree she didn't have the strength to get back up to the nest.

"What is wrong," asked tree as grandmother crow lay crying on the ground.

"I broke my wing and I can't get back to the nest to feed the children sobbed crow."

"Oh dear," said tree, "I will try and find someone to help."

Meanwhile the lorikeet families on the other side of tree were having a big fight. There was so much noise with feathers flying everywhere tree couldn't think straight. The lorikeets were always squabbling over the nest, the food and other things. Sometimes the dads were so busy fighting they missed out on the best time of day to find food for the family. The baby lorikeets used to hide under their mother's feathers hoping the fighting would stop and nobody ever got any peaceful sleep. Some of the babies were so scared all the time, they couldn't eat properly and they didn't grow their flying feathers. They would never be able to feed their children.

The lorikeets were meant to help tree keep the leaves clean by eating the nectar from the flowers, but instead the leaves were all stuck together in an awful mess and started to make tree lean to one side. There wasn't much tree could do. Tree was worried. The tree roots were lifting out of the ground. All the leaves were turning brown and new branches were so thin they were breaking off with a small breeze.

Finally tree had had enough. Tree started to shake its branches so hard you could hear the leaves rustling for miles. All the birds stopped what they were doing. Even magpie looked up to see what was happening. Tree had never done this before. "This isn't how it should be!" yelled tree. If no-one is going to look after me, then I can't look after you all. I need time to soak up the sunshine and the rain so I can grow big strong branches for you to nest in.

I also need some peace and quiet so my leaves and flowers can grow and feed you all. I need everyone to remember how it used to be when we cared for each other and for ourselves, otherwise our children will not know how to grow solid.

Grandfather owl had been listening on a nearby perch. As one of the tree's oldest and wisest friends. "I think I can help," said owl. "Let's all get together and think and yarn about what is really important."

"Getting my wing fixed would be a good start," cried out old grandmother crow. All the birds giggled as they looked down and saw the old grandmother propped up against tree.

Tree reached down with one of its longest branches and gently scooped up crow and gently put her in the nest. "That's right," said tree "let's get all the children looked after and get grandmother crow well again so she can see what is coming."

Thanks.