

Earlybird



The Champion Centre
Tāmaki Toiora

Children's book launched to support families of 'earlybird' babies

A children's book written to support families of premature babies will be gifted free to any family with a child or children born prematurely, who go through one of New Zealand's six Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU).

Earlybird has been created by The Champion Foundation and published by Kotuku Press, it will be gifted to families with premature babies born from early 2019.

The engaging picture book, written by Julie Burgess-Manning and illustrated by Jenny Cooper, tells the moving story of Peri Pukeko, a baby bird who hatched early, as he gets ready to go home and learns to fly.

Dr Patricia Champion, founder of the Champion Centre, and assistant editor of *Earlybird*, says the book was written to give children born early – and their families – a story about their own precious beginning.

"As a children's story about premature birth, it is unique internationally. Parents of premature babies frequently told me that they did not have a good, or a special story to share with their growing children about their early birth. So we decided to create a beautiful picture book that would help parents support children born as 'earlybirds' to make sense of their early experience," Dr Champion says.

"It's also a great resource for older siblings to help understand why their baby brother or sister isn't quite ready to come home. The book provides a pathway for families to talk to children about their own experiences and captures the realm of emotions through the baby's journey as they become ready to go home."

In creating the book, the Champion Foundation and Julie Burgess-Manning worked closely with a group of parents who shared their experiences of having a premature baby to inform its themes. The team consulted a range of child development experts from New Zealand, Britain and the United States, including neuroscience educator Nathan Wallis, child psychiatrist Dr Denise Guy, Professor Lynne Murray, Child Development Specialist from the UK, to ensure it communicated the right messages.

Earlybird has been praised by experts including neonatal paediatrician Dr Simon Rowley, who called it "a must-read for all children, especially those who have a premature brother or sister".

Dr Lance O'Sullivan, New Zealander of the Year 2014, has also lent his support to the book: "As a doctor and importantly as a father who has health challenges thrown at him, *Earlybird* is a lovely story about seeing what is special in something that can be hard, at the same time. Premature birth often results in emotions like fear, anger, concern, grief and often gratitude and love. *Earlybird* is a great way to remind children and whānau that often out of all this comes a great a story!"

It also received praise from child psychiatrist Dr Denise Guy: "*Earlybird* is an engaging and moving story of a familiar experience for many families that can be difficult to put words to. The book cherishes the early days, weeks and months, parents and siblings have with their premature baby, providing a pathway to the story of that experience for that child...A book to treasure."

The pukeko bird gives the book universal appeal, the bird commonly known as a 'swamp hen' is found throughout the Pacific, with other subtypes in many countries in Europe and Asia.

The Champion Foundation Trust with assistance from the Neonatal Trust and Mainfreight, have distributed the book to the six main NICU centres throughout New Zealand. The book is also available for purchase through the website of the Neonatal Trust shop. www.neonataltrust.org.nz.

Earlybird was officially launched on the 19th November 2018.

The book, which is supported by Wright Family Foundation, The Elizabeth Ball Charitable Trust, Blogg Charitable Trust and CERT, is currently available, with all profits going directly to the Champion Centre.

About the Champion Centre:

The Champion Centre is a charitable organisation that has for over 40 years provided comprehensive, internationally recognised, early intervention services to Canterbury children with significant developmental delays, disabilities and learning challenges, between the ages of 0 and 6 years, alongside advocating for and supporting their parents/whanau.

About the Writer and Publisher – Julie Burgess-Manning:

Julie Burgess-Manning is a registered psychologist, family therapist and children's book author. Julie has herself experienced an unexpected early birth and difficult beginning for her third daughter, and some of this experience informed the writing of *Earlybird*. She currently works part-time for the University of Otago teaching family therapy, living with her family in Christchurch.

As well as 'Earlybird' she has written and published 'Maia and the Worrybug', a book addressing anxiety, after the earthquake events in Canterbury NZ, in 2010/2011. This book was part of a larger package of anxiety resources produced in the partnership of Kotuku Creative, including films and therapeutic resources for families, therapists and teachers.

www.championcentre.org.nz

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The *Earlybird* - kindly supported by:

