

US!

BY THE CHILDREN OF AUSTRALIA

Story created by Jackie French
Illustrations by Elin Matilda Andersson

We thank Jackie French for generously creating *Us!* and Elin Matilda Andersson for her beautiful illustrations. We are also grateful to the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) and Nina Ross for their thoughtful sensitivity reviews, and most importantly, to the children who participated in *The State of Australia's Children 2025* workshops, whose voices helped shape this book.

Us! was inspired by what children told us through *The State of Australia's Children 2025*, a report developed by UNICEF Australia, ARACY and Minderoo Foundation to better understand children's wellbeing and help create a brighter future for every child in Australia.

UNICEF Australia and ARACY acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and communities in which we and our partners work throughout Australia, and recognise their connection to their lands, waters, and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders past and present, and to the children of today who are the Elders of the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Children grow best when they are surrounded by love, stability and opportunity. ‘It takes a village to raise a child’—not just parents and family, but all the adults, communities and services around them.

This book shares the things that make children across Australia feel safe, loved and healthy. The characters are fictional, but their stories are based on the information children told us that’s contained in our report, *The State of Australia’s Children 2025*.

The stories show us what children need—and what all of us can do to meet those needs. Each story introduces a different child, with their own home, family and community. Their lives look different, but the things that help them thrive are the same: reliable, loving relationships with extended families and friends; time to play and learn; nourishing food; safe places; and people and communities who will always show up for them.

Families, education and care services, schools, libraries, sporting groups, clubs, crafts, dance and music—every experience helps children to find who they are, and who they may become.

We hope you enjoy reading this book with the little ones in your lives.

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Hi!
I'm Roo!

What makes kids feel happy
and healthy?
Where do they like to play?
Who makes them feel safe?

Let's find out!


IMRAN
DANIEL
ANH
ADAM
KYLIE
MATILDA



I'm happy when there's lots of us,
all my family, even Russ!
Mum makes a special noodle stew
with lemongrass, beef and ginger too.
Po-po reads to me in bed,
sometimes I read to her instead.

Gong gong tells me to be wise,
Russ shows me brilliant butterflies.
Frank says 'Write your own ballet
where people dance a different way!'



My friends and I play basketball,
I've a chair that makes me tall!
My best friends are Bird and Lu,
if you were here, we'd play with you!

I'm a girl of red soil land,
if you were here, you'd understand.
I love it when the red turns green,
so tall the sheep dogs can't be seen!

The best times are holidays
when my cousins come to stay.
Sometimes we play hide and seek
or catch yabbies down the creek.





Rolling down a sandy hill,
popcorn nights with Uncle Bill.
We need to round the lambs up now,
come on—let me show you how!





Dad explains we're here for mining,
metal houses, roofs all shining.
Mum drives a truck and Dad's a ranger,
now I keep wildlife out of danger!
Last year reading was too hard,
I couldn't read a birthday card!

The lines all wriggled and they'd jump,
the words would bounce and blur and bump.
But with Ms Lee I'm learning fast
and I can read thick books at last!
I love the drums and town choir singing,
Mr Lee keeps our music ringing!



The best time's when it's getting cool,
after work and after school.
Mum and Dad will tell me why
there's so much blue up in the sky.





And then it's time to go to bed...
Yes Mum, I've brushed my teeth, I said!!



We have a garden at our school,
snow peas to pick—it's very cool.
My Mum cooks lemon myrtle cake,
I make wattleseed milk shake!

Health check-ups can't be missed
—I'm going to be an optometrist!
Climbing also makes me strong,
I listen to Country's song.



Saturday is park date day,
with Auntie's sushi after play.
Sorry, I don't have time to stay,
my mob is here—it's time to play!



I'm safe because I've always lots
of people there for the tough spots!
Mum and Fuad are family,
but there is also Dad and Annie.
We stay with them on holidays,
you should see how Annie plays!

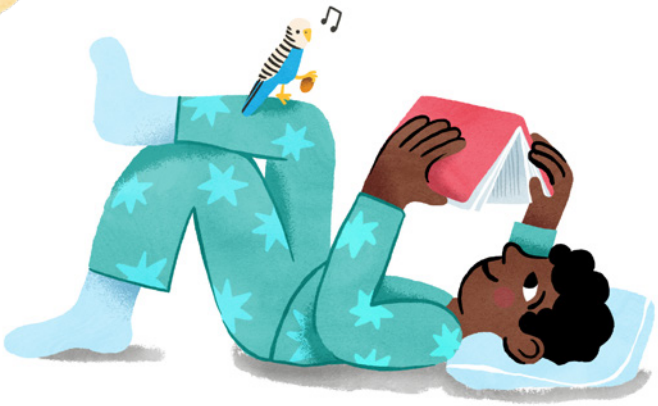
Building forts to stop the sea
or paper plane games just for me!
Fuad sometimes is a bother,
but I'm glad that he's my brother.
My friends are all a happy bunch,
we hang from branches after lunch!

But books can also be a friend,
the kind of friend who never ends.
And maybe sometimes teachers too,
the kind who understand you're you.





I feel safe, and I feel happy...
Yep... I think I'm very lucky!





Our house has me and Mum, and Mumma,
but soon I'll have a baby brother!
I love it best on each Sunday
when all our friends come here to play.
With tables underneath the trees
and leaves that rustle in the breeze.

Mum's friend Pring brings eggplant stew,
she says it's very good for you!
I like Max-next-door's big lamb roast
and home-grown tomato salad most.

Sometimes I worry the Earth's hot
with glaciers melting quite a lot.
But Mumma says humans are clever
when we decide to work together.
We've faced worse than this before
and we can solve a whole lot more.

There's no need to make a fuss,
tomorrow will be made by...





Us!

When every child is loved and cuddled,
and never feel their lives are muddled.
When we all have space to play,
new books and laughter every day.
Delicious food that makes us strong,
time to listen to Country's song.

When we're sad someone will say,
"have a hug from me today."
Lots of people help us grow,
so we can make a great tomorrow!



SOME OF THE WAYS GROWN-UPS CAN HELP



READING TOGETHER

Reading together gives children confidence to read themselves, building skills for life. They discover the 'big' stories they can't read themselves yet, helping them find the books they love. Reading helps children's brains develop, sparks their imagination and creates special moments of connection.



CONNECT TO THEIR WORLD

Ask questions like, "What helps you feel happy or safe?" or "Who helps you learn and grow?" Provide a safe space for your child to share their perspectives and to be heard.



TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU SEE

Talk about what you see now, or what you've both seen during the day. Conversations help children build concentration, language and confidence. What did you see? What did you feel? What questions do you have today?



CELEBRATE DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Explore how people's lives can look different while sharing common needs and hopes. Help your child understand differences while reassuring them that their own thoughts and feelings matter too.



EXTEND YOUR FAMILY

'Family' can include friends, teachers and other caregivers—anyone in your village who has time to talk, play and care. Children feel safest when they know there will always be someone to answer their questions or share their joys.



BUILD LANGUAGE FOR FEELINGS

Help your child name emotions like safe, proud, sad, excited, scared or loved, and talk about when they experience them.



ENJOY TIME TOGETHER

Most of all, make time to be together—talking, sharing, creating, and exploring. Moments of attention, connection and joy help children feel strong, supported and loved.



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