

Collinsville

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Jill Dodd has recreated a host of colourful children's books in the native Birri language, including *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* titled *Dhalgari Ganjgarri Badhal - Plenty Hungry Grub*. Picture: SUPPLIED

Birri language lives on in books

Anna Wall

INSPIRED by her grandfather's Birri language, one woman has translated a host of popular children's books to share and protect the language for future generations.

As a descendant of the Birri (Collinsville area), Wirri (Urannah area) and Kaanju (Cape York) peoples of Central and North Queensland, Jill Dodd said she had grown up listening to the Birri language and wanted to find a way to protect it.

Ms Dodd's brother, Ken Peters Dodd, currently lives on traditional Birri Country at Bogie River and is a well known highly regarded Elder and Aboriginal and environmental activist and caretaker and custodian of our traditional lands and waters.

Ms Dodd said traditionally the Birri language is not written and the "influence, values, beliefs, Aboriginal culture, customs and teachings" of her grandfather Reg Dodd Senior had inspired her to share it with others.

"We can't lose our language and culture, this is for future generations," she said.

"2019 was the year of indigenous languages, so I wanted to promote them and raise awareness of the crucial role languages.

"I was listening to my grandfather's language, he was recorded in 1971 by a professor of linguistics RMW Dixon who is still a professor of linguistics at JCU.

"I had these ideas and drafts about our childhood in the Birri language and then I had the idea to do popular child-

ren's books."

Jill Dodd's grandfather Reg was a strong advocate for aboriginal advancement and a highly-regarded Elder who made indelible contributions to the advancement of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Ms Dodd's first book was *Dhalgari Ganjgarri Badhal - Plenty Hungry Grub*, adapted from the popular classic children's story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and she has since released several others, including *Gawdgara Dhana In The Buljarany Dandula* adapted from *Kookaburra Sits In The Old Gum Tree*.

Ms Dodd said she has had interest in her books from a huge range of childcare centres across the state, who want to help promote the importance of traditional languages.