

Mother's fearless tale

By Jo Winterbottom

MOST children have occasional fears of monsters under the bed or being separated from their parents.

Often they can be assuaged with words of reassurance and a hug from mum or dad.

But for Langwarrin youngster Bayley Johnston, anxiety became a paralysing state which his mother Nicky couldn't alleviate.

"It started in prep.

"The transition from kinder to school was very difficult," Ms Johnston said.

"Anxiety prevented Bayley from learning things.

"His fear of making an mistake was so great he couldn't do anything."

Bayley was diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder when he was five and Ms Johnston immediately embarked on a journey to discover everything she could about the condition.

"I was devastated when Bayley showed symptoms of anxiety," she said.

"I found that while there are lots of valuable books and resources for adults, there were very few children's books for children with anxiety."

Employing her talents as an artist and training as a primary school teacher, Ms Johnston produced a picture book for her son.

"I wrote a story for Bayley to tell him how he is my superhero.

"It was never meant to be anything more than a book we read every night."

When Bayley took the book to school, his teachers at Wood-



Mother helper: Author Nicky Johnston with Asher, Bayley and Cooper.

Picture: Gary Sissons

lands Primary School realised its potential to reach a wider audience and Ms Johnston was persuaded to self-publish the book.

Go away, Mr Worrythoughts is a picture book for young children about a boy who is overwhelmed by 'worry thoughts'.

He discovers an inner strength which gives him 'superpowers' to beat Mr Worrythoughts.

The story is based on Bayley's battle with his own Mr Worrythoughts.

"Bayley is now nearly 10 and, while he still has worry thoughts, he is able to manage and control his anxiety on a day-to-day basis," Ms Johnston said.

She said the book had been successful "beyond [her] wildest hopes and dreams" in helping her son overcome anxiety.

"I knew I had got it right

when we got our first copy of the book at home.

"Bayley just looked at me and said, 'Mum, you get it'."

Ms Johnston is selling 6000 copies of the book on her website, www.nickysart.com.au as well as at Robinson's Bookshop in Frankston and Sweet Olde Memories at Gateway Village shopping centre in Langwarrin.

Last week she appeared on commercial radio and was "overwhelmed" by the feedback, including countless phone calls and more than 200 emails from people who felt their story had finally been told.

Go away, Mr Worrythoughts will be launched at Robinson's Bookshop at 1pm on Saturday.

Ms Johnston will display her original illustrations and read from the book.