

## About Beyond Words

Beyond Words is the UK's national charity for visual literacy and emotional wellbeing. Everyone knows pictures can be more powerful than words.

Our picture story-telling began over 30 years ago, working with people with learning disabilities at St George's Hospital medical school in London to co-create picture stories and resources that would help them understand and navigate the world around them. But we quickly realised that it is not just people with learning disabilities who can benefit from the power of pictures.

Nurturing visual literacy – our ability to read meaning in images – can unlock everyone's ability to connect with their feelings and improve their mental health and wellbeing. When we build our mental wealth we all thrive.

**PLEASE JOIN US ON OUR JOURNEY AND HELP TO ACHIEVE OUR AIMS, YOU WILL BE A WELCOME PARTNER**

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# More than Words

Improving mental health and wellbeing through visual and emotional literacy



*Visual images have the power to bring our senses together simultaneously and to impact viscerally our emotions.*

BRIAN KENNEDY

**MORE THAN WORDS / OUR FIVE YEAR STRATEGY**

# Visual and Emotional Literacy

**VISUAL LITERACY** is the ability to recognise and understand ideas conveyed through pictures, such as people find in our word free books, in art, film or television.

**EMOTIONAL LITERACY** is the ability to understand our emotions, to express one's own feelings confidently, to listen to others, and to empathise with them.

**BEYOND WORDS** unique approach is to tell word free stories in ways that bring visual and emotional literacy together. All of our stories are about the different ways in which we relate to people and how this makes us feel.



## Beyond Words stories have a profound impact on peoples' lives

- **CHILDREN** are learning to find words for their feelings and beginning to understand and resolve difficult life experiences through our work in schools
- **PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES** are understanding healthcare procedures better and becoming confident enough to have treatment without fear
- **MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** are helping people with learning disabilities who have been struggling with grief and trauma to heal and move on
- **BOOK CLUBS** are helping isolated people meet others and make new friends
- **REFUGEES** have benefitted from space and time to process their experience and seek mental health treatment.



MORE THAN WORDS / OUR PRIORITIES

# 1 To work towards visual and emotional literacy being an integral part of the education system

According to an NHS England survey, 1 in 6 children between 6-16 years old in the UK experience mental health problems. We aim to improve significantly the mental health of all children by embedding visual and emotional literacy in education, including, but not only, those with learning disabilities and other communication difficulties.

We want all children to be able to learn, identify and discuss feelings and experiences so that they understand themselves and others better and grow up into emotionally literate adults.



MORE THAN WORDS / OUR PRIORITIES

# 2 To establish Beyond Words book clubs across the UK and train book club facilitators

We want to see online and face-to-face book clubs that include all members of our communities that help isolated people connect to others and make friends. We will train book club facilitators in visual and emotional literacy and the Beyond Words approach.

We will work with GPs, teachers, libraries, refugee groups and other community organisations to understand visual and emotional literacy and how Beyond Words book clubs can improve the mental and physical health of those who take part.



MORE THAN WORDS / OUR PRIORITIES

# 3 To ensure visual and emotional literacy is understood and used by mental health professionals

We want all people to be able to communicate what is important to them and to learn and understand what is happening in the world around them, including being able to access psychological and other talking therapies in a way that is meaningful and effective for them.

We will work to educate healthcare and social care professionals that work with adults and children who struggle to understand and communicate their feelings, to invest in approaches to visual and emotional literacy to support better understanding and therapeutic outcomes.



## Sonia's Feeling Sad

Sheila Hollins and Roger Banks  
illustrated by Lisa Kopper



MORE THAN WORDS / OUR PRIORITIES

# 4 We will make more word-free books available that include the stories of people who are excluded from wider literature

We will continue to produce more stories and images that reflect the lives of people with learning disabilities, autistic people, refugees and others who are excluded by the written word.



## Mugged

Sheila Hollins, Christiana Horrocks,  
Valerie Sinason and Nigel Hollins  
illustrated by Lisa Kopper


