

PRESS RELEASE

BEYOND WORDS WIN AWARD IN THE NATIONAL LEARNING DISABILITY AND AUTISM AWARDS.



2nd November 2021

Beyond Words team efforts during the pandemic to support people with learning disabilities to understand coronavirus is recognised with a national Breaking Down Barriers Award.

From the onset of the pandemic, the Beyond Words team realised how terrifying the complex and changing messaging was for people with learning disabilities. People were scared and didn't know how to keep safe. They were six times more likely to die during the first lockdowns than the general population. Nine out of ten people with learning disabilities lost their usual support and activities.

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Registered charity number: 1183942 (England and Wales)



The Beyond Words stories help people who find pictures easier than words to make sense of new experiences. Beyond Words has a tiny team and it usually takes 12 months to develop a new book publishing two annually, but this was an unprecedented crisis, and they knew they needed to help.

Beyond Words founder and editor, Baroness Sheila Hollins, took up the reins and worked with Beyond Words team and as many friends and supporters as they could find to get the first book *Beating the Virus* out within 2 weeks. They went on to publish sixteen Covid 19 related freely downloadable resources and reached at least 150,000 people in the UK alone. The book titles and guidance on how to use the books with people with learning disabilities were translated into 4 languages and are being used around the world.

Within weeks they had also moved all the Beyond Words community book clubs online using Zoom and YouTube video tutorials to show people how to do it. Nine book clubs were meeting weekly, and they became a safe place for book club members to share experiences and worries and to have a way to connect with friends.

The National Learning Disability and Autism Award judges were impressed at how the tried and tested model of the Beyond Words book club has been made more accessible across the country and empowered people during lockdown. They also liked the focus on current affairs topics and bringing people together to share experiences about important issues such as the work Beyond Words has done to support the refugee crisis.

It was a privilege and an honour to get this award. When we were told we won I just felt really excited that I am part of Beyond Words and felt proud to accept it on behalf of Sheila, Hannah, Lucy and the team. We are a really good team!

Amanda Cresswell, co author, Beyond Words

We were all scared and confused with the onset of the pandemic. My son Nigel, who has learning disabilities suddenly lost all his activities and had to follow rules that were hard to understand. We knew it was the same for many people with learning disabilities and we knew we could create something that could really help people understand what was happening through our pictures and stories. Our staff team, artists, volunteers and friends all pulled together to get 16 free books out to people all over the world and countless people have told us how much they have helped. Winning the Breaking Down Barriers Award at the National Learning Disability and Autism Awards is such a lovely way to be recognised for our work.

Baroness Sheila Hollins, Founder, Chair and Editor, Beyond Words

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About Beyond Words

Beyond Words is a charitable publisher that co-creates wordless stories and resources to help people with learning disabilities, autistic people, hearing impaired people, children and non-native English speakers understand the world around them and communicate how they feel.

Working in education, health, social care and the criminal justice system, they work with staff to help them communicate more effectively and open up conversations with the people they work with using visual communication and learning methods.

Beyond Words was founded in 1989 by Baroness Sheila Hollins and her son Nigel Hollins.

For more information contact CEO Nick Wright nwright@booksbeyondwords.co.uk

Download *Coping with Coronavirus* series <https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/coping-with-coronavirus>

Download *A Refugee's Story* <https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/afghanistan>

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