



## **Beyond Words' Open Book Project pilot study**

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October 2018 to August 2020

### **Project background**

In 2018, Beyond Words received funding to run a pilot study about **safeguarding for children and young people with learning disabilities and autism. Amid rising mental health needs among children**, and knowing that in 2021 SEMH would become a curriculum area in all schools, we asked ourselves; **in what way could Beyond Words stories become a valued resource for the Social, Emotional and Mental Health curriculum in any school?**

We named our study the **Open Book Project**.

### **Running the pilot study**

The first phase of the project introduced teachers in 21 Special Schools across the country and one Primary School, in a parallel project, to the Beyond Words resources and provided face-to-face training at national and regional events. The training was consolidated with an eLearning Foundation Module. The trained staff then used the resources in class/group reading and storytelling sessions with all their students (218 in total). This phase culminated in a national conference to review and share progress.

Phase 2 introduced a second eLearning Education Module focusing on Beyond Words resources for the Social, Emotional and Mental Health curriculum. Staff from phase 1 cascaded their knowledge and experience, recruiting a second teacher and 2-4 teaching assistants within their school. The additional staff also received face-to-face training and access to the eLearning modules. Staff now used the Beyond Words resources to carry out two terms of one-to-one and small group reading sessions, often dealing with more sensitive subjects such as bereavement and trauma.

Over the course of the project, we engaged with 22 schools, 62 teachers (one third SLT members), 67 TA's, 218 students, collecting 88 case studies. Detailed evidence and feedback were gathered throughout both phases. At the start of the study teacher experience and confidence in delivering SEMH curriculum was lacking. Results show that by the end of the project this had improved greatly:

- 94% were **very likely** to use Beyond Words resources again to support SEMH
- 55% were **very likely** to use Beyond Words resources as a whole school initiative
- 65% found Beyond Words resources **very helpful** for meeting SEMH and EHC plan targets

### **Project outcomes**

Regarding the impact of the project on pupils, staff reported overall improvements measured across 3 key areas:

1. Healthy Relationships
2. Empowerment
3. Staying Safe

### **Key outcomes for pupils**

- Marked positive behavioural changes amongst pupils
- Reading and storytelling sessions offered a way for students to feel comfortable talking about sensitive topics (trauma, bereavement, abuse) contrary to teachers' fears
- Pupil engagement – 18 of 22 schools reported that most or all of the pupils demonstrated full or consistently good engagement in storytelling sessions using Beyond Words resources
- A remarkable growth of pupils' language when describing behaviours and reactions to anxieties and issues (utilising a vocabulary never before heard)

### **Key outcomes for teaching staff and schools**

- Beyond Words' resources proved relevant to pupil needs, tapping into their individual lived experiences
- Clear applicability of subject material for a range of ages from KS1, through KS2 and KS3 to FE/Transition students (in 2 schools)
- Participation motivated schools to improve their safeguarding and SEMH practice
- Feedback uncovered need for storylines for younger, primary aged children - resulting in development of the [Lenny & Lily stories](#), designed in response to children's experiences during the pandemic.

### **Teachers and TA's were impressed by:**

1. How Beyond Words resources have provided a way of accessing pupils' own experiences and supported a reduction of behavioural risk.
2. The insights that their pupils have gained and the behavioural change they have witnessed as a result.
3. The way Beyond Words' resources gave them evidence of participation, attainment and achievement.
4. The flexibility of being able to use printed books (in whole or part), ebooks on tablet, story images projected on to white board and the BWStoryApp for immediate reference on phone.

Teachers and TAs reported that the resources provided an invaluable tool to open-up discussions for further group and individual work, as well as for supporting children to listen, respond and relate better with each other. This became even more important post COVID-19, when the mental health of all pupils was affected to a greater or lesser extent.

### **What teachers said about Beyond Words resources...**

- ✓ Empowering children and young people to take control of their own feelings and behaviour
- ✓ Greater and deeper understanding of self and social context
- ✓ Built emotional repertoire, insight
- ✓ Articulated their own emotions
- ✓ Provided a visual crib sheet
- ✓ Visual interpretation of complex emotional issues

### **Through Books Beyond Words routes to wellbeing are opened**

### **Find out more**

Visit the Beyond Words booth at the Tes SEN Show Virtual (14-16 January 2021) and sign-up for our FREE "[Talking Through the Taboo](#)" webinars to find out more about our pilot study and how your school can sign-up to be part of the **Open Book Project National Roll-out**.