



How to start your own Beyond Words Book Club



Foreword

We hope this short introduction to setting up a book club will help you get started with building your own local club.

Nigel Hollins was a founder of the first book group using books beyond words, and his mother Sheila Hollins is the series editor and Founding Chair of Beyond Words.

We have over 50 titles and over 20 book clubs with many more due soon.

We hope you will join us with your new group. We would love for you to become part of this network of people having fun, learning, empowering and supporting others.

Sue Carmichael, Book Club Co-ordinator

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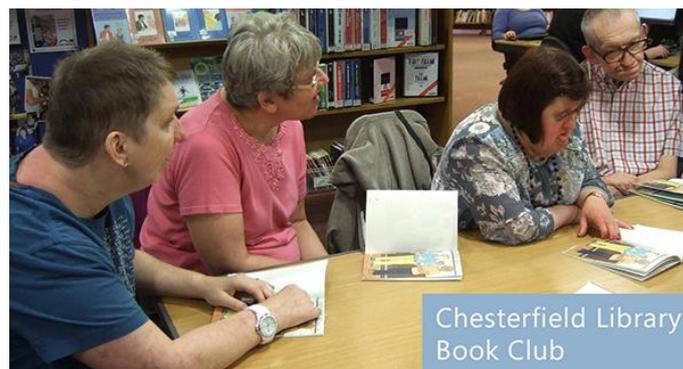
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What is a Beyond Words Book Club?

It's a group who regularly meet to read the Books Beyond Words series.



We read the pictures as there are no words. So we make up the stories between us. We have fun.



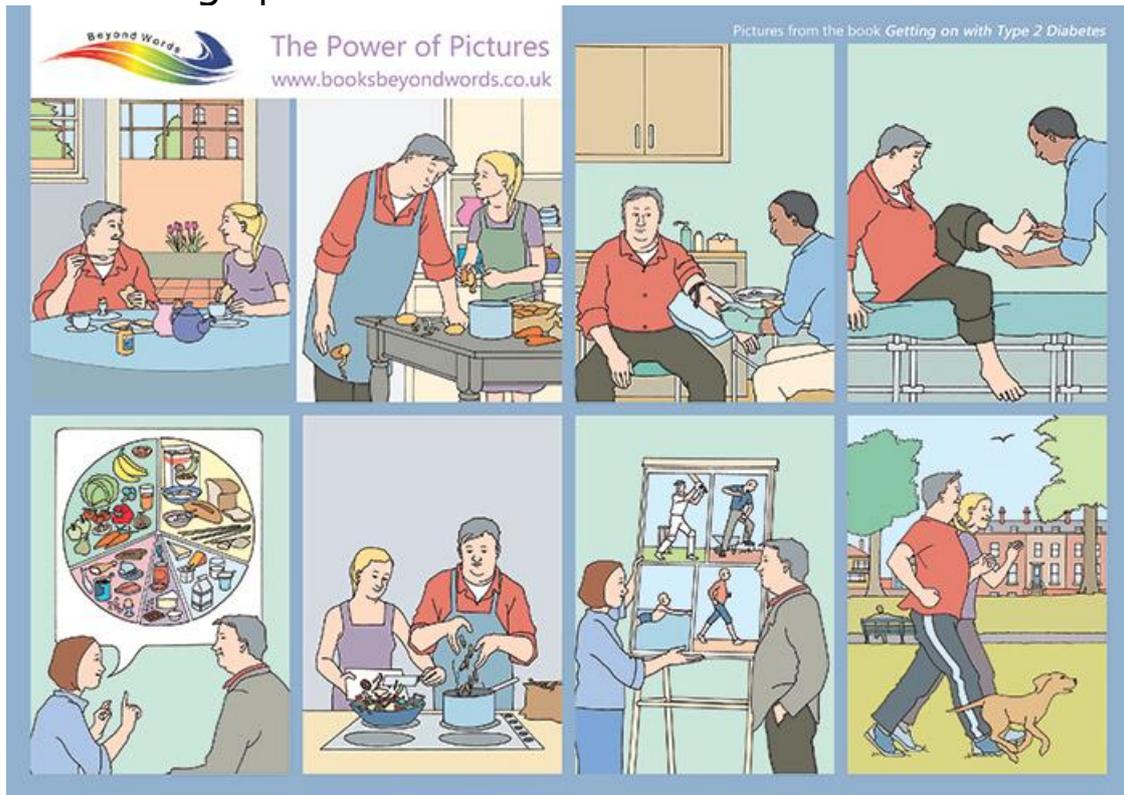
We mostly meet in our local libraries (but you can run them anywhere). Currently we all meet during the day.



Each club lasts 45 minutes to one hour, and the clubs meet once or twice a month.

What are Books Beyond Words?

They are a series of books. There are over 50 titles about things that happen in people's lives. There are no words in the books. There are just pictures which are carefully prepared to make sure they tell a story clearly. They help to get ideas and stories across through pictures not words.



The books have been used for over 25 years in different ways including one to one therapeutic situations. This is different from the leisure and recreation use in a book group. Book clubs are a more relaxed way of reading the stories in a social space. Although there can, and will, be learning and challenges, it's more about fun and what people are interested to talk about. There are also many longer term benefits including building friendships and understanding, as well as feelings of belonging in groups and community resources.

Who do you need to help you start?

Librarians

In Kent it was important at the beginning to see if Kent Libraries wanted to support this. They did and they have a librarian whose job is about inclusion and diversity and she has been our champion.



In local libraries we always have at least one librarian who is our link and supports the local group. They help with arrangements and can give advice on local groups or individuals who might want to join the club. They also help people who have not used libraries to become familiar with them.

Other locations

If a library setting isn't for you then get creative and see what your local community can offer. You could try a Café, Community arts spaces, bookshops or a leisure centre.

Someone to set up and organise the group

This might be you if you are reading this. In Kent we sometimes looked for a volunteer when there was a library and or a group who wanted to start a club. Sometimes we had a volunteer and we then found them a local library and a group.

Volunteers came from many different backgrounds. They are all different. Some were already volunteers in the library and were interested in helping with a book group. Sometimes it takes a while to find a volunteer and sometimes it is quick. We have volunteers who have disabilities as well as people who have experience from the learning disability world, and people who have no disability experience.



In Kent we have one person who has helped set up and support all the clubs so far. To start with this was voluntary, then there was some money from a Kent based grant giving organisation for a year. This helped us get going and learn what was working for us.

If you just want to start and support one group then this is simpler.

People who want to be book group members

This can be a group of people who are interested, already know one another and are local to the library. You can also advertise the group using the library, word of mouth and having posters or events where people will see and hear about the groups. Sometimes it is all of these and once the group is going then other people hear about it. Sometimes it can be hard to get going and take a while. Our advice is to be patient and keep thinking about what might help people get interested. We have run pop-up book clubs to show people quickly what it is about. Librarians can be a great help with ideas about who might be interested and who to contact. Find someone local, perhaps in an advocacy group or a family member who knows who is about and might be interested.



Who else do you need to involve when you are starting up?

In Kent we spoke to a user led organisation which now hosts 2 of the groups. It depends on your area but you might want to talk to a commissioner, local advocacy organisations, a local Partnership Board (if you have one), the local authority and other groups locally that might be able to help.

At the beginning it is important to focus on getting going rather than talking to everyone. Just talk to the most important people who can help, want to be in a group or who might be a problem later, if you don't involve them or tell them what you are doing.

What else will help you get started?

- Go on a Beyond Words workshop where you can try out the books in a group and talk about and hear about what works



- Visit a book group that is up and running, all our groups like visitors as long as they join in and there aren't loads of them. Just ask and this can be organised.
- Read the books to yourself and with others to get the hang of not relying on words to tell the story.
- Hold a 'Pop-up' book club in the library/meeting place and invite anyone you think might be interested, as a way to introduce the books and the new book club
- Find someone to talk to or email about how things are going. We can organise this or you might want to think about who would be good local support for you.

Running the group

- So now you have a venue, a group (or perhaps just a small group to start which is fine) and have agreed a few dates and times that suit you all.
- You probably have already met the group members doing a pop-up book club, showing them the books as an introduction. Make sure everyone knows how to get hold of you and the library if there are problems.
- You should know where to get the chairs, what you do if you have refreshments, what records you have to keep (don't worry, this is usually just the date and time of the club, how many people there were and how much time you volunteered) The details will be different for each venue but you need to be familiar with what you need to do.

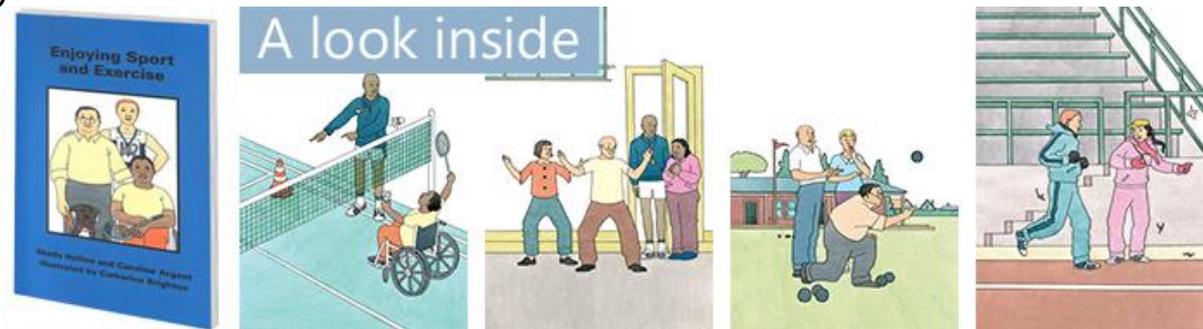


- At the start and end of the club it is good to have plenty of time to say hello and goodbye individually and talk about anything that is important.

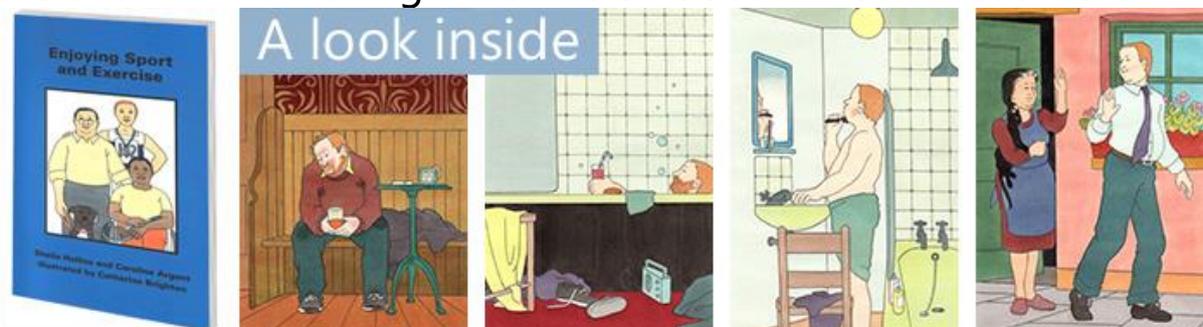
- Some groups have different people who sort some of the jobs out like the chairs, books, keeping a diary of who came and what was read and keep time. This is something to sort out as you go, rather than the first session.

What to start with?

A favourite book to start with is *Enjoying Sport and Exercise* as this has 3 separate stories. It can often take a while at the beginning for people to understand how to read the books. A short story means you can quickly say "we've done it, would you like to do another?"



George gets Smart is another favourite and recommendation from many of the clubs. It is funny and a good read. Often at the very beginning we suggest what to read but then quickly get a range of books out, showing people where they are on the shelves and having a discussion about what to read next.



Falling in Love is always a very popular choice and a great story, but it takes a while so might be done in two or three sessions. The group will have brilliant ideas, just let them lead you.



A book where you write down a few notes after each session will perhaps help you reflect and think about what is working.

Top Tips

- Visit a book group
- Go to a BBW workshop
- Keep a diary
- Keep in touch with other groups
- With permission take photos and use them to publicise the group and celebrate
- Be open and try new things
- Listen carefully especially to things that are not said
- Most important- have fun.



What can you do next?

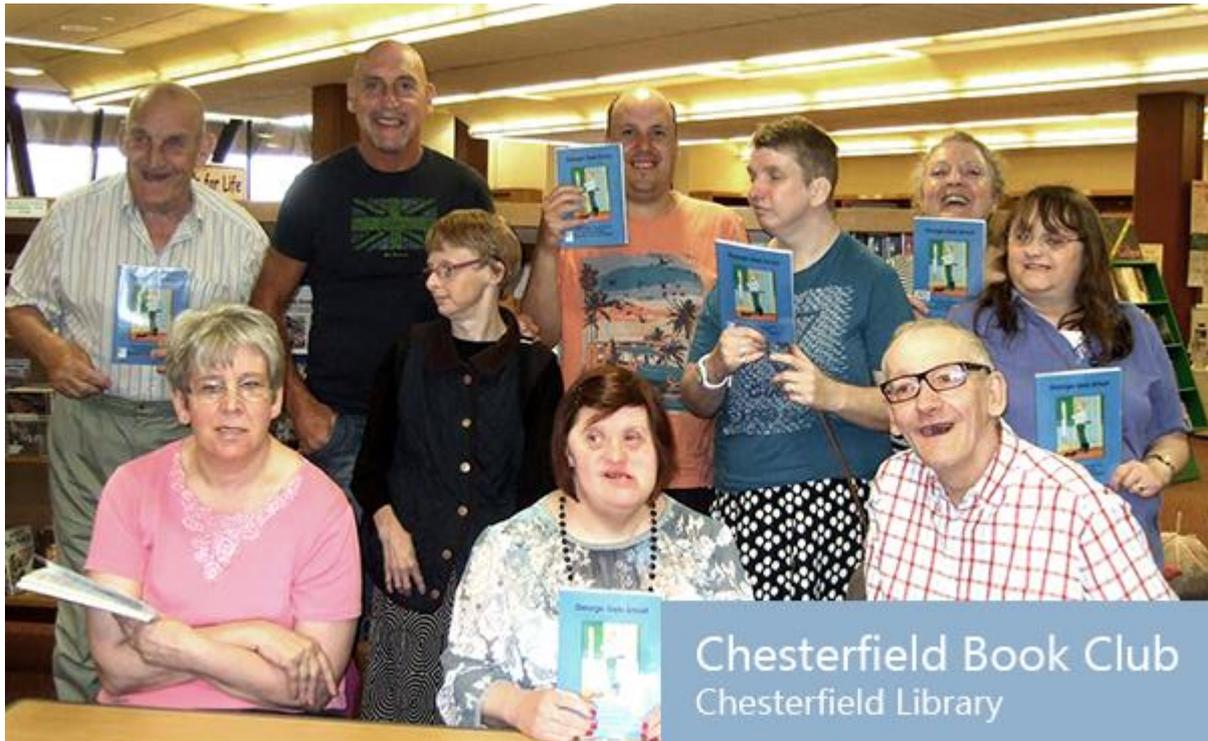
There are plenty of places that this start can take you, you will discover more but here are some more ideas.

- Writing your own stories
- Finding other books, DVDs, computers, groups in the library to use or join.
- Taking the 6 book challenge (this is sometimes available in Libraries and new readers can record-with support their first 6 books. When complete then there is a celebration)
- Having author visits-we have had visits from authors with learning disabilities but the possibilities are endless
- Having parties for whatever reason you decide.
- Having an article about the group in the local paper
- Celebrating International book night
- Going on a visit that links to a book or story
- Invite people that link to the books, the Police or health staff and read the books to them
- Helping train others to be enjoy book groups

This is just a short introduction and there is much more to learn. There are some specific leaflets which also might be helpful:

- An introduction for librarians
- Hints and Tips for being a good supporter

Let us know if you can think of more that would help.



Lots of people have helped with this guide, especially people from Kent. You have seen some of them in the photos and you can see and hear more from them in the video clip on the link below.

A huge thank you to everyone.

Please refer to our YouTube channel for a video showing some of our book clubs in action. This can be found at:

www.youtube.com/user/booksbeyondwords

Also visit the website for detailed information on all things Beyond Words: www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk