

“You can see the love for the VI (Visually Impaired) community on these pages. Thank you Living Paintings. These books are so, so valuable to all of us.”



Impact Report 2023

Children Who are Blind or Visually Impaired



Living
Paintings

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Registered Voluntary Charity No: 1049103

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“My son is only just a year old, but had no interest in looking at books with his sighted twin sister.

The books from Living Paintings give him so much more tactile feedback that he now enjoys stories and is reaching to turn pages.

He explores the raised pictures with his fingers, which is helping improve his fine motor skills and laying the foundations for learning braille when he’s older.

I can now read with both of them and they are equally engaged.”

Executive Summary

CONFIDENCE

99%

have improved confidence thanks to Living Paintings; **91%** significantly.

ENGAGEMENT

99%

have an increased interest in learning; **94%** significantly.

WELL-BEING

96%

experienced a positive change in confidence in socialising and making friends; **81%** significantly.

In order to measure the positive impact that Living Paintings has on the lives of children who are blind or visually impaired, we carried out our annual survey amongst our child library members of all different ages. As with previous years, a survey was distributed to parents, carers, teachers and organisations working with children. Our purpose is to measure the difference that receiving our Touch to See Books makes to the lives of our young beneficiaries.

Key results

For those children who are blind or visually impaired who receive Living Paintings service:

99%

benefited from **improved confidence in reading**;

98%

are **more confident in joining in class activities and discussions**;

100%

benefitted from an **increase in shared experiences with sighted friends, family and peers**;

94%

benefitted from a **positive change in their confidence** in taking part in physical activities such as getting involved in playing games;



82% of children use Living Paintings Touch to See books daily or weekly.

What people have to say

Drawn from the anecdotal responses received through this impact survey.

“We discovered Living Paintings through social media and signed up immediately. It was so refreshing to see a charity that **really engaged with partially sighted children**. Etta, our daughter, was so excited when the first book arrived. Since then, we have borrowed a number of books and Etta loves reading them with us and feeling the pictures. The books arriving through the post **feel so special for her** and we really can't thank you enough for creating such a **wonderful** charity. THANK YOU!”



“Living Paintings has given my 1:1 student a love for reading books. To see the **sheer joy** on his face whilst being able to feel the tactile books is just great.”

“Our son really **loves** the tactile images with audio – it allows him to ‘see’ the pictures like his peers do, just in his own way. When doing a topic at school, borrowing the relevant books from Living Paintings allowed Shane to engage with the school topic and **experience it more fully** – like his peers. He was able to feel the paintings, access and appreciate them. We are so grateful for this amazing charity.”

“My child absolutely hated books before we found this service and would throw them out of our hands. But now, she will help to turn the pages and is **learning** to touch and feel the pictures. She **smiles** when we read her stories and will often go to pick up books to flip the pages on her own.”

“Having access to your non-fiction packs with tactile images, gives my son access to information he simply cannot get anywhere else. Thank you so much for the **vital work** you do for young blind people.”



“My daughter was thrilled to receive the King’s Coronation tactile pack from Living Paintings. It helped her to feel **more included** and part of the celebrations we were having at home with friends and family, instead of just listening to TV commentary or our attempts at describing the events. **Her face just lit up** when she was feeling the tactile pictures and they made her feel **special**.”

“The children in our class love your books. They **laugh**, repeat words as they’re listening and rate the books after they read them. Living Paintings is a **fantastic** resource!”

“My son has a dual sensory impairment and as such he can find it hard to engage with the world around him. He is a sensory learner and the resources he receives enable him to engage with books in a way that also facilitates interaction and communication when we share the books together. I have never come across another organisation that provides this service and am extremely **grateful** for access to your **amazing** books. Thank you so much for taking the time to support young people like my son, it **means a huge amount** to us both.”

“Living Paintings has turned books into 3D, visually stimulating stories! It’s not a flat book but an interactive world.”



“No other organisation have books that are as **accessible** and **engaging**.”

“Being able to ‘see’ what a painting is about, by touching an example and then discussing what their thoughts are has been fascinating. Living Paintings has brought these images to life. Our children have a **better understanding** of the world around us and it has made them want to explore more.”

“We are now able to read bedtime stories, which you just assume before you become a parent is a given. But having a VI child throws so many challenges at you, along with all the normal parenting ones. It’s nice just to **feel ‘normal’** sometimes and being able to read bedtime stories **together** does that. Thank you Living Paintings.”

What difference does Living Paintings really make?

“My son will take the books from Living Paintings to other family members and friends to gesture that he would like to read with them. This is something he has previously never done.”



“The books are fantastic. I have used them as a blind Mum with a blind child. We have been home educating for Year 6 and the books have been invaluable. Thank you for all the hard work from everyone involved in running the service.”

“The child I work with had shown no interest in books before introducing Living Paintings’ books to him. Now he will take them to a quiet space to explore. Thank you for providing this amazing service for free!

“This is a very special service. We are grateful that we can access it so easily. I can see my son engaging with the books more and more as he gets older, and recognising that they are special books just for him!”

“Being able to use your resources independently hugely enhances my son’s life. He is able to complete research on subjects of interest and for school topics without outside support, which is extremely beneficial for his self-esteem, his life and career skill development.”

"I can see that Liam's engagement with the books is really high because of his open hands and relaxed body language. This means that his understanding of the wider world is expanded every time he uses a Living Paintings book."

"My student has had a lot of 'light bulb' moments when using the Living Paintings' books. She made connections with what was being taught in general curriculum lessons, and overall it has been a very positive experience."



"Our pupil now reads a story every day and enjoys exploring the pages. He has also begun showing the raised images to others, and encouraging staff to explore with him. His excitement when exploring these pages is very obvious, especially when compared to his passive response to 'normal books'."

"When I take the books into the classroom, all the children are excited. This raises the esteem of the VI child. All the children, sighted or not, love the books."

"It's helped my son talk about his blindness with his peer group, showing his books in show and tell at school and talking about why he has them. He expresses real joy showing them to others around him. He loves listening to the stories, revisiting them often."

"We love to cuddle up on the sofa and read the stories to my son and help him feel the pictures. Wonderful family time."

"The joy and engagement I see from my pupil with your books is priceless. It is unbelievable to me that you remain a free service."

"Living Paintings has made a world of difference to my daughter. Having tactile and braille learning resources helps her feel included in the world again and brings the topics to life for her. She would be completely isolated in her education without these."



"Using Living Paintings has given her the opportunity to 'read' stories in her own way. She loves stories, we read stories daily to her and Living Paintings' books make them more inclusive for her."

"Living Paintings have provided a life-line for our pupil who lost her sight due to an acquired brain injury. She was a really visual child who enjoyed books so much before her illness. Living Paintings provide her with a lovely activity in school and at home. We have incorporated it into her school day and she really looks forward to her book time."



"These books make our student feel the 'same' as the rest of the other children. Words cannot express how extremely important this is."

"Thanks for all the work you do. As a parent, it's so lovely to see your child enjoying books as much as a sighted child, so thank you again."



"The Living Paintings resource about Art and Artists enabled the teaching of Art skills alongside mainstream Art lessons. This benefitted the child, their peers and the class teacher as this allowed the child to get a deeper and more relevant understanding of the topics being taught. It also helped the Art teacher to develop their own skills to include visually impaired children. Peers were able to understand the child's visual impairment better too."

"Your organisation really helped these little girls during their far-too-short lives – they got so much joy from the books, even at the very end. Their parents were very grateful for Living Paintings' continued support, which was so rapid in response for a request for help."

"Sighted peers are very interested in the raised pictures and the braille. This leads to engagement and interactions, which is vital for her mental health."

"My child sometimes struggles to stay engaged in a busy classroom and he can easily become distracted. Living Paintings resources have allowed us to access the curriculum in a way that means he can listen over and over again to a part of the audio to extract the relevant information he needs. They've also encouraged him to begin learning Braille so he can share stories with his teacher and peers."

A Case Study: Matilda

Everyone knows the story of Matilda. Roald Dahl's famous young bookworm would read every novel she could get her hands on from a very young age and stories became a huge part of her life.

Laura Edwards loved the story so much that she named her daughter after the titular character hoping that she, too, would love to read.

Unfortunately, her daughter Matilda wouldn't take to stories as easily as her famous namesake. That's because Matilda is visually impaired.

"When Matilda was born, she had beautiful silvery blonde hair that everyone commented on," says Laura. "It was only when we noticed her eyes wobbling that we realised that her gorgeous hair was a sign of oculocutaneous albinism which affected her sight. It means that her depth perception isn't great, and she can only see outlines but no fine details."

Finding out that Matilda, now six, was visually impaired meant that getting her to engage with books and learning to read would be a huge challenge for the family. Laura and her husband Ryan and two older sons Tristan (12) and Alexander (14) all tried their best with large picture books, but nothing seemed to work.

When Matilda was 18 months old, Laura decided to try something new. Living Paintings specialise in reading experiences for people who are blind or visually impaired. For very young children, these include picture books where the words match up with raised, textured pictures and audio descriptions that can make a real difference to children like Matilda.

"I heard about Living Paintings through Matilda's QTVI (Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired). I registered for the free library, but I wasn't hopeful."

"The first book we received was Spot the Dog. I remember thinking that Matilda wouldn't be interested because we had already tried that book. But, when she felt the raised pictures for the first time, it was a real 'Eureka' moment, and something clicked in her little head. It was wonderful."

Matilda now loves reading as much as the little girl she was named after. The charity has inspired a love of books that may never have developed otherwise.

Matilda is such an avid fan of the Living Paintings library that she now even helps to make the books the best they can be. As a trusted 'VI Editor' Matilda is sent draft versions of new releases and, together with her mum, can offer feedback and advice for improvement to ensure that all children have the best experience.

"Matilda takes her job as a VI editor for Living Paintings seriously and loves being a part of something so special. We're so grateful that we discovered the charity so early on in Matilda's life and we attribute her love of reading and stories as well as her fantastic imagination to those first books that unlocked pictures in her mind. She now wants to help children just like her to have the same experiences and really enjoys working with the team to make sure the books for visually impaired children are approved by visually impaired children."



Methodology

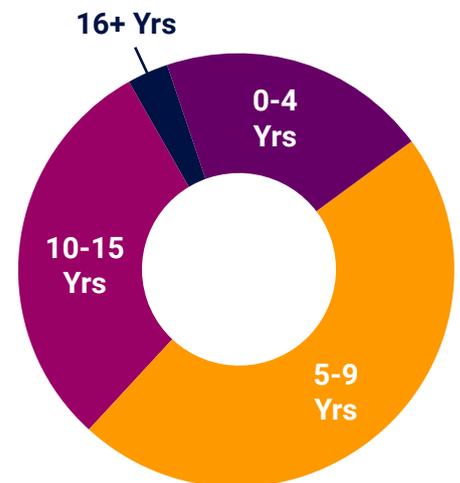
A survey was emailed and/or posted to 856 library members who borrow on behalf of children and young people, including teachers, parents and organisations. The survey was designed to be completed for and on behalf of up to a maximum of three children. Responses to 201 surveys on behalf of 252 Living Paintings child beneficiaries have been received, representing an overall response rate of 23%. 98 surveys received were completed by parents or carers, and 97 were completed by teachers or learning assistants. 25 were filtered under the “other” category which included people such as Grandparents, SENCO’s, QTVI’s, and Sensory Outreach Workers. One did not indicate what capacity they were responding in.



About the survey respondents

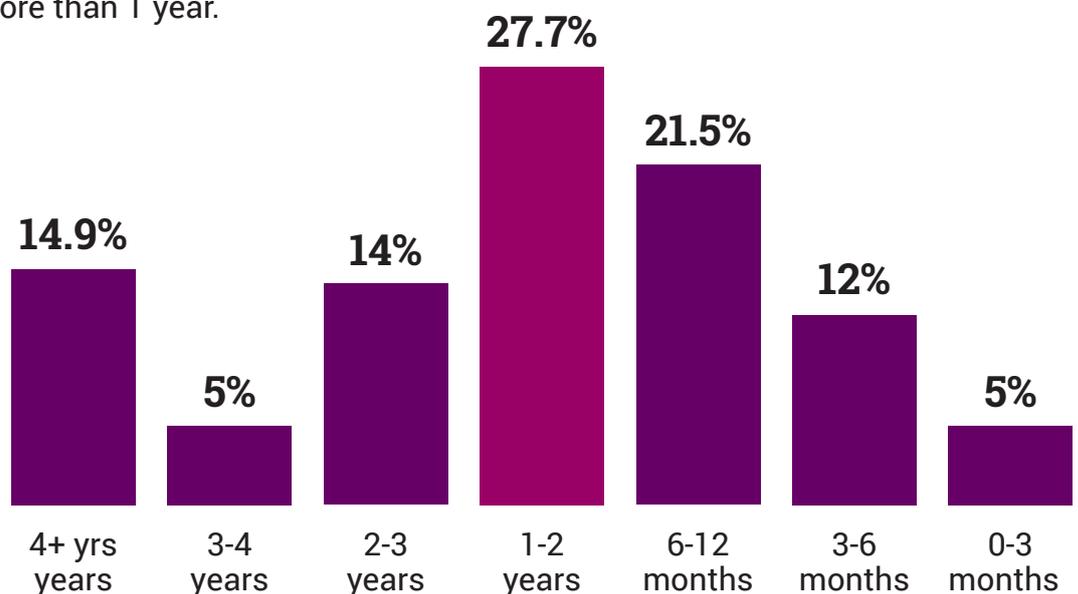
Of those respondents who provided the ages of their children, the results were as follows:

- 0-4 Years 22%
- 5-9 Years 48%
- 10-15 Years 25%
- 16 + Years 5%



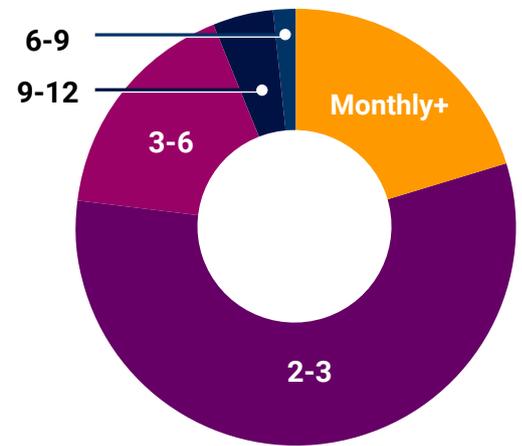
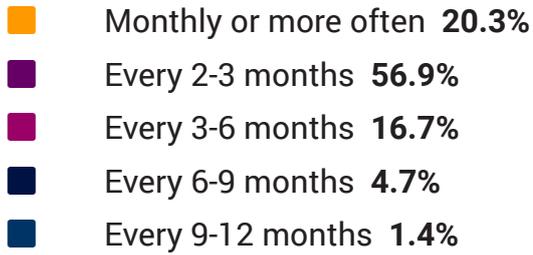
Length of membership

61.6% of the children have been members of Living Paintings Library for more than 1 year.



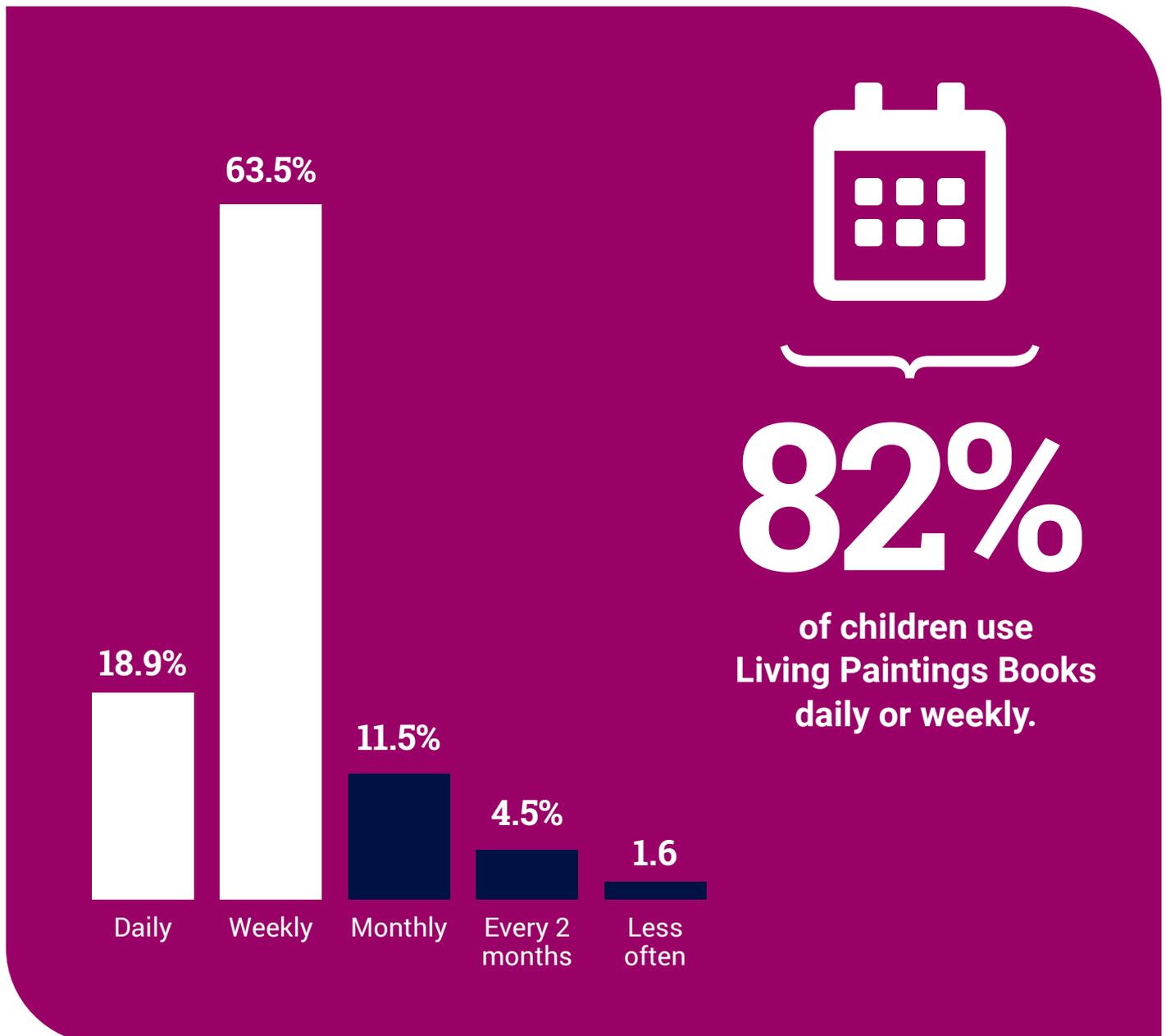
Borrowing patterns

Regularity of borrowing from Living Paintings Library.



NB: The bias towards borrowing every 2-3 months reflects loan periods and pattern of school terms.

Book usage

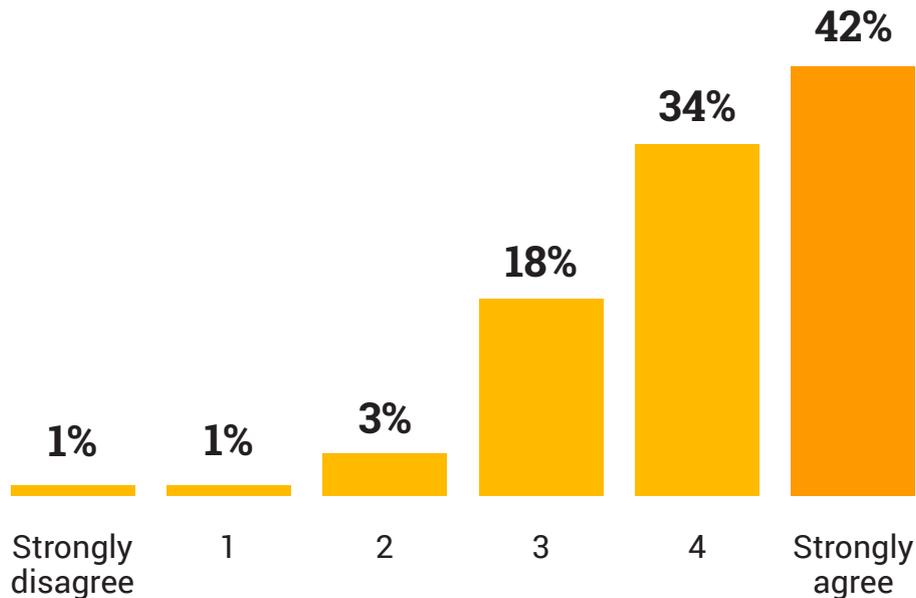


The results

We asked members to answer the following questions on a scale of 0-5, selecting 5 where they would strongly agree with the statement and 0 where they would strongly disagree.

Interest in Learning

*In the last 12 months (or since joining Living Paintings Library) my child(ren)'s **overall interest in learning has improved through using Living Paintings Touch to See books.***



“When we get a book which is the current literacy topic book within her class, she shows so much more interest in the topic and even shows her peers the tactile pages.”

“Thanks to these books we have been able to improve our daughter’s interest in braille reading, as they have the additional audio and touch and feel pages. The combination of all three in the books sustains her interest and gives a more rounded approach to learning braille. The resources are just fantastic.”

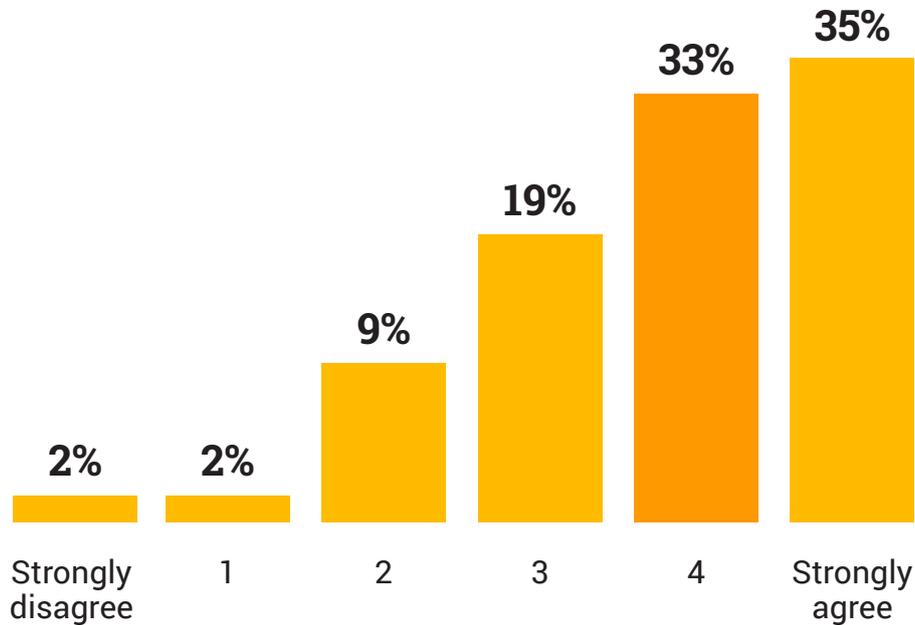
“These books are an integral part of my daughters learning experience. She is steadily learning braille and the books have allowed us to participate in this process, when we are at home, in such a joyous way.”

“I work with two children whose language skills have developed because of their interest in the books we get from Living Paintings. They now engage whilst an adult reads the stories to them and are beginning to copy and use single words and short phrases from their favourite books.”

“The accessibility of the fantastic tactile images and audio descriptions that Living Paintings provide has helped the children that I work with understand concepts which they have never been able to understand before. Because of this new understanding, the children are able to discuss topics with their peers and relate to the discussions.”

Joining in Classroom Activities

*In the last 12 months, or since joining the Living Paintings library if less, my child(ren)'s **confidence has grown in joining in classroom activities.***



"In class the children are learning about bears. The class teacher shared the Living Paintings tactile 'We're going on a bear hunt' and 'The Burpee Bears' books with the rest of the class. They all demonstrated interest and the child with a VI felt especially included and joined in with the discussion because they were using 'her' books."

"I regularly use the Living Paintings books to introduce a book to the blind child that I teach, before it is introduced in class. The audio description and braille enable her to access the books and join in with the rest of class. She is motivated and now able to join in with the class discussion. She often has some of the best comments and observations to share with the class, as a result of the engagement she has had with the books from Living Paintings."

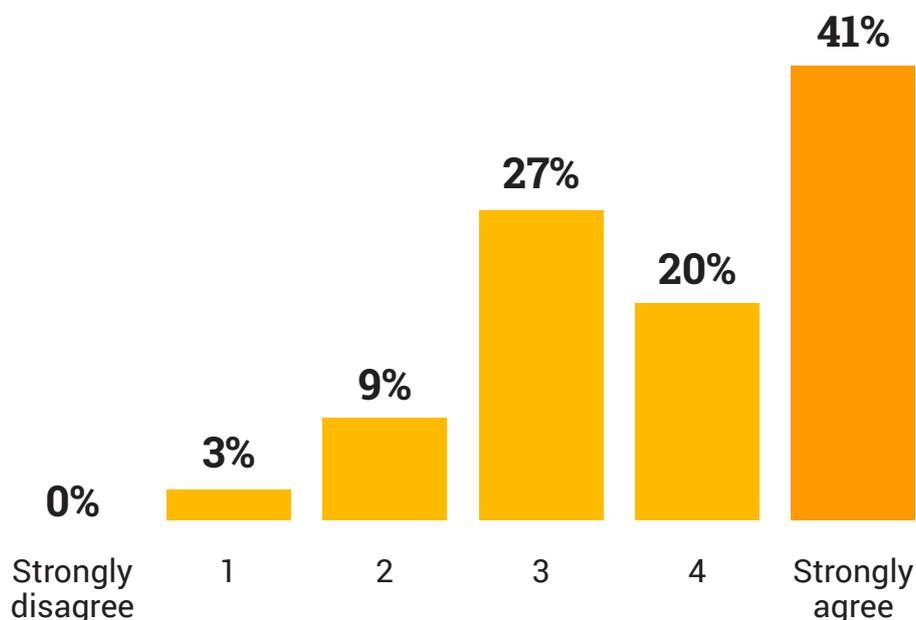
"Before we found Living Paintings the other children would talk about a book - but our VI pupil could not engage. Now she joins in as she also has books!"

"As Etta's vision is limited, having the books from Living Paintings help her to access material in a much easier way. As a result, she can get used to books and stories and this then helps her to join in at nursery and understand more the nature of the story and engage with her teachers and friends."

"My pupil contributed confidently to a class discussion about how the Vikings travelled to the UK after using the Vikings resources from Living Paintings."

Engaging with Sighted Peers, Family and Friends

I have noticed a positive difference in the last 12 months (or since joining Living Paintings Library) in my child(ren) engaging with their sighted peers, family and friends e.g. sharing reading, learning and discussions.



“Sarah is a patient/pupil in a hospital school. Twice a week we get a group of children together from across the wards for a reading/book sharing session. Since having the books from Living Paintings, Sarah has been able to access these sessions. The smile on her face tells us how much she enjoys doing what other children are doing. Some older children have shared the Living Paintings books with her, which she has particularly enjoyed.”

“The books from Living Paintings are valued by all the children in the class. The child with VI will now happily sit with a book at reading time and share with friends, who are as equally entertained by the tactile images.”

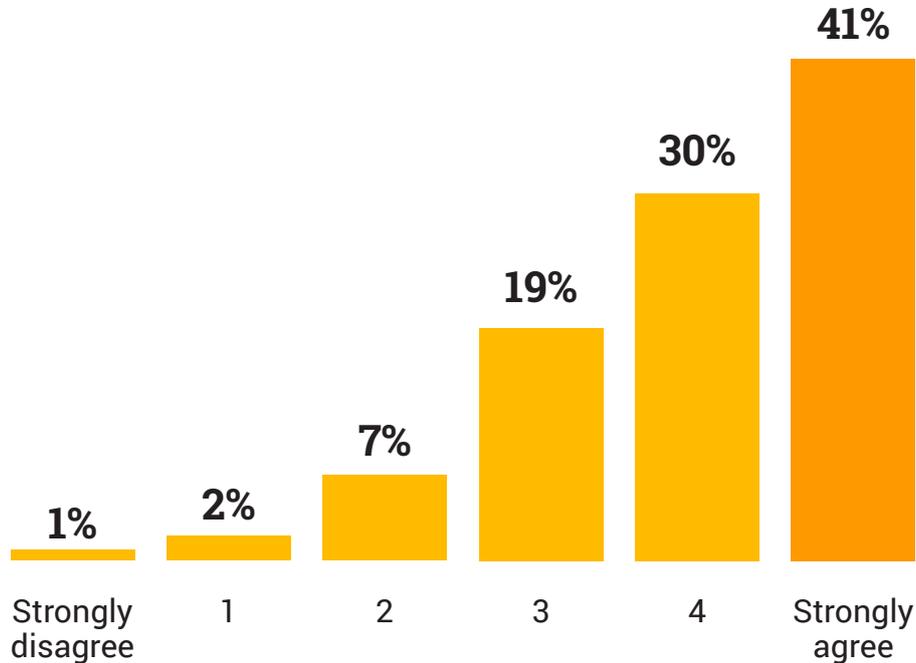
“Our pupil has begun to run a book club at school, to share the Living Paintings stories that interest her. She really enjoys introducing the other children to her books.”

“Our pupil loves to share his tactile Living Paintings books with his peers and be able to retell the story, which always fascinates his friends.”

“I usually leave my son to explore the books by himself, then I join him to talk about what he is seeing/touching. We have great interactions with smiling and giggles as I read the story. He is non-verbal so exploring these books with his hands is giving him a voice in a different way.”

Improved Self-Confidence

My child(ren)'s self-confidence has been positively influenced by using Living Paintings Touch to See Books.



"Thanks to Living Paintings, my daughter is now confident in discussing the stories (with anyone who will listen) and often demands to be quizzed on what she has read/heard/felt. She just loves them!"

"Our pupil is now confident to reach out and touch some of the pages in the books as we read to them. They were extremely nervous about doing this initially. But, with using the book each day, it has enabled him to build his confidence in us that we will not make him touch something he will not like. He feels safe."

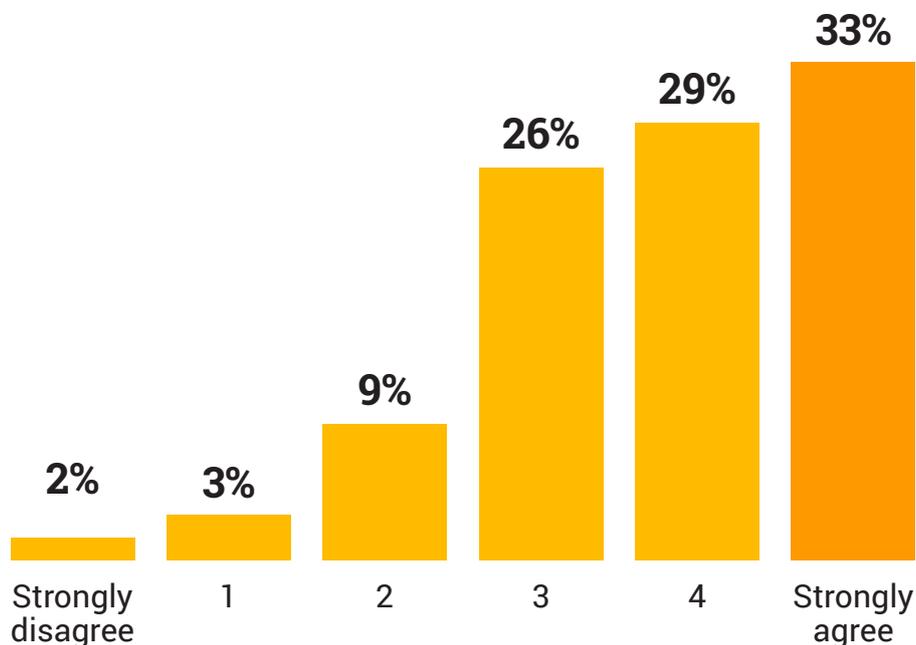
"When I brought the Living Paintings books into the classroom, the child with a severe visual impairment [aged 4] came to the front. His face was bursting with pride that he was responsible for the rest of the class's excitement!"

"After we finish a story we discuss the interactive pictures and talk about the story as a whole. My daughter's confidence in her own opinions has grown and she enjoys sharing these with her peers."

"Over the last six months the Living Paintings books have had such an impact on our son's self-confidence and understanding of the world and his environment. The audio provision in particular has been very helpful. His listening attention time has improved due to this."

Engagement with Reading

*In the last 12 months, or since joining Living Paintings library if less, my child(ren)'s **confidence in reading** has grown:*



"My child loves to show his books to family members, reads with his siblings, and regularly takes his books into school to show his classmates and teachers. Before Living Paintings, he was not interested in books at all!"

"Our student has excelled thanks to these books. They now want to read with their parents, rather than it being a chore."

"As a VI learner my pupil struggles to keep her attention on the time consuming process of reading. These titles have given her a renewed interest and have aided her access to tricky curriculum subjects. She has a better interest in reading as a result. It has impacted her attention levels, ability (spelling, reading etc.) and her overall enjoyment."

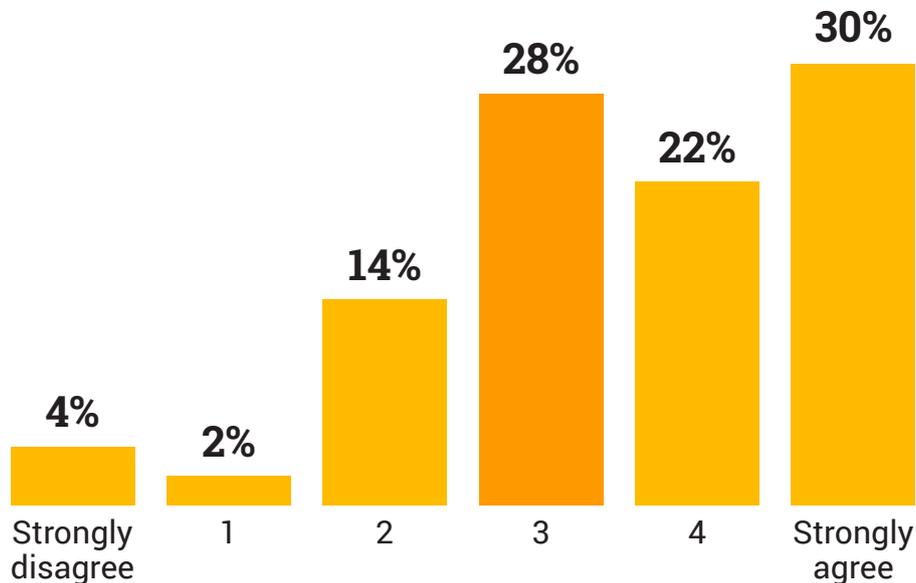
"The child I help can now be involved with books! She has gained a love of books and reading. Before we started using these books, reading was someone just talking. Now she can feel the pictures, putting images to the story."

"These books allow my child to get excited about reading and sharing with others."

"These books have helped my son become much more confident to retell a story, or explain details of stories he's read. He used to be quite passive when reading books, as so much of the detail is in the pictures for a lot of books. He finds it very difficult to process elements of a busy picture, so often didn't engage with that element and just listened to the words. Now he'll tell anyone who will listen about what's in the story and what pictures he can 'see'."

Socialising and Making Friends

*In the last 12 months, or since joining Living Paintings library if less, my child(ren)'s **confidence in Socialising & Making Friends** has grown.*



"My son has been taking the books into his new school (he has just started reception) to share with his new teacher and look at with her and the class. It's really helped him connect."

"My daughters new friends were keen to try out the feely pictures and it was lovely for my daughter to have resources that were accessible to her and had meaning to her."

"The children sat around my pupil have been fascinated by his Living Paintings resources in his History lessons. They have probably learnt as much as him! It has helped him engage with his peers on something that is 'his'."

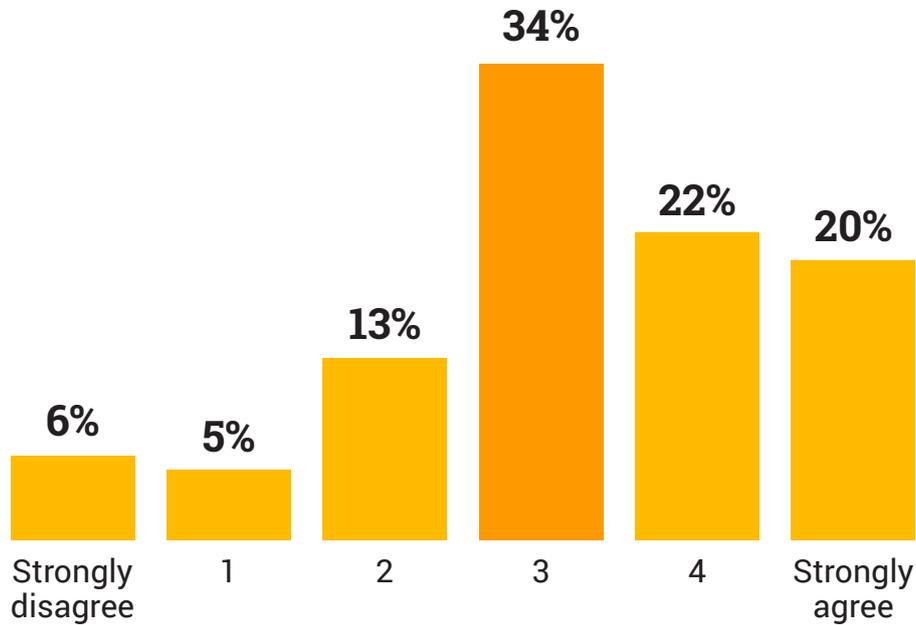
"Now she is able to share books with her sighted friends."

"Both children have enjoyed the sensory experience of exploring the books and are beginning to develop their pre-braille skills. Because the books are so colourful and engaging they have been of interest to the other children in class who have learning disabilities, but have vision. The children benefit from the opportunity to have resources that they can share, with each child getting something different from the experience of exploring and sharing the books."

"The Living Paintings books have allowed our pupil to share stories with her peers. She shows the other children how she can read and they have started talking about the stories together."

Taking Part in Physical Activity

*In the last 12 months, or since joining the Living Paintings library if less, my child(ren)'s confidence has grown in **joining in taking part in physical activity**.*



"My son read some of your books about baking and wanted to try it himself. It was messy, but fun!"

"We recently borrowed the Living Paintings version of 'Yoga Babies'. My daughter's love of the activities is phenomenal."

"We borrowed 'Art Alive' which is fantastic. It has massively increased Amelie's interest (we are using this one several times a week). The crafts to make along-side the learning about artwork is a brilliant idea and has really improved her engagement."

Further anecdotal responses

“Our pupil who uses these resources at our special school is completely blind and has a learning disability. The Living Paintings resources have helped her to develop an artistic side - by using the tactile pictures she has started to produce her own “pictures” using German film and embossing tools.”

Teacher

“My son’s confidence in reaching out to touch objects and explore with his fingers has improved with using the books.”

Parent

“I would like to express my sincere thanks for the service that you provide. The quality of the books that are provided are exceptional and the young person that I work with gets so much out of them.”

Teacher

“Thank you so much for allowing us to borrow these for free, it is hugely beneficial and helps my daughter to be included at school.”

Parent

“My student is currently learning braille using the Lego Braille blocks. These books help the learner to feel the letters as I read, he is able to pick out individual letters from the text, enhancing his learning. These books are having a positive effect on his behaviour which at times is very challenging. He will ask to read one of his books and it helps de-escalate a crisis.”

Teacher

“The Living Paintings books have made him inquisitive regarding the book corner in nursery. I had a parents evening last night and they advised me that his love for books has rubbed off on others!”

Parent

"You all make such a difference. As a school, the Living Paintings books are such an important and vital resource to ensure all our learners can feel included. Thank you for all you do!"

Teacher

"Our son has finally started nursery, only for a few hours a week. Being able to sit and engage with books at home means he's able to replicate this at nursery, making him more involved with his sighted peers - which is amazing."

Parent

"There have been a range of topics that we have been able to discuss with our daughter by using the Living Paintings books, which would otherwise be quite difficult."

Parent

"These books have opened up a whole new world to my student. He is showing so much more interest in the story and asking questions that are relevant, as well as retelling of the story to his friends!"

Teacher

"We really enjoy using Living Paintings books in our classroom. The raised pictures allow the children in our class with visual impairments to access the pictures in a book, along with the rest of their classmates. It is really important for everyone to be able to join in during a group reading session and this is a wonderful resource for encouraging inclusion for everyone."

We also use Living Paintings 1:1 with our children, so they can access the audio descriptions to support the story. Some children can even enjoy these books semi-independently – it can be quite difficult to find resources that allow for independent reading, so this is really valuable! The range of books available is really nice and allows me to choose books each term which support our topic. All of this is really valuable for inclusion, supporting their understanding and optimising each child's ability to engage and learn from a story. We are really grateful to have access to these wonderful resources!"

Teacher

“Our VI pupil now joins in discussions with their peers, unprompted, and is more comfortable relying on them for class and guided support.”

Teacher

“The topic pack that included the ‘Digestive System’ enabled us to do some pre-teaching before class. This enabled the pupil to join in fully with their lesson.”

Teacher

“Since using these books the world has opened up to our son, the same as it is to his sighted brother, they both love to read together in their own way!”

Parent

“My daughter likes to share these books with her sister and often tells her friends at school about them.”

Teacher

“These books allow my child to get excited about reading and sharing with others.”

Teacher

“My son is happy to explore the books with family and friends - but also now explores the books by himself with no encouragement. He is enjoying story time much more with the Living Paintings books.”

Teacher

A Case Study: Lorna and Rex

The simple act of picking up a book and reading it to your child, is something that most parents take for granted. But, for Lorna Davies, it isn't that simple.

Lorna was born with nystagmus and optic atrophy and her sight has gradually become worse. So much so, that picking up a traditional book and reading it to her sons is something she can no longer do without help.

"When I was a baby, my mum noticed my eyes wobbling around the time of my first birthday. My parents took me to the doctor and realised I had optic atrophy – which means my optic nerves are damaged and I was registered as sight impaired. When I was first diagnosed, I was told I'd be partially sighted and so I got through primary school fine by using some digital technology to enlarge the print along with things like sticker-lined paper. My sight was good enough to attend mainstream school with some small adaptations."

It wasn't until Lorna was in her 20s that her vision seriously deteriorated, and she realised she couldn't see things as she used to.

"I remember it was shortly after I gave birth to Rex that I noticed a huge change with my eyes," she says, "Things that I used to be able to read and see clearly were a real struggle suddenly. As I had been told that my eyesight was stable from a young age, it was very distressing and a real shock to find out otherwise. I don't want that for Rex."

Like his mum, Rex - now seven - was also born with nystagmus and optic atrophy and has been registered as visually impaired.

"Rex had the same wobble as I did as a baby, so we knew we had to get it checked out," Lorna says. "He can see but can't take in too many details and it takes him a bit longer to focus on things, especially if you point them out to him. He has fancier versions of what I had at school to help with his learning."

Being a blind mum with a visually impaired child comes with many challenges. But Lorna credits Living Paintings with bringing her the simple joy of reading to her son.

"It's been horrible for me losing my eyesight as I haven't had the same experiences with my children as other parents have. One thing that I always find rubbish is that I can't just grab a book off the shelf and read it. When Rex was little, I would memorise short stories to tell him but it's not the same."

Lorna first discovered Living Paintings through the online blind community and at first was sceptical about the impact it would have on her and her son. *"I learned about Living Paintings when Rex was six and because he had some sight, I wasn't sure it was for us. But the more I heard about them, the more I was interested, and I decided to give it a try. I'm so delighted we did."*

From the very first tactile book, Lorna could tell that it would become an important ritual between her and her son. *"It's so special for me to be able to pick up a book and share it with Rex and not have to call on my husband for help," she says. "Now I can share stories with my son, and I can visualise details that I wouldn't normally be able to, so it's inclusive for us both. My only regret is that we didn't try Living Paintings sooner and that the service didn't exist when I was a child."*



A Case Study: Mia

Becoming a parent is all about firsts. The first time your baby laughs, their first tentative steps and the first time they break into a huge smile upon seeing their mother's face. Alice will never know that particular joy because her little girl, Mia, is blind. Now three, Mia was born with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH) and Nystagmus – a very rare condition that results in vision loss in children. There is currently no cure.

The family initially worried that Mia would not be able to enjoy stories and books because of her lack of sight, but credit Living Paintings in helping her to fall in love with reading.

“Mia loved listening to stories from the very beginning, but the books from Living Paintings transformed her reading experience immediately. From that first book – Fun with Spot by Eric Hill – she couldn't stop smiling and giggling when she was feeling and touching the raised pictures.”

“The second Touch to See book was Superworm by Julia Donaldson and this became her favourite straight away. Before the book, she had no idea what a worm looked like and couldn't really imagine it but as soon as she was able to trail her fingers across the body and visualise it, she understood, and the story made much more sense to her. The braille pages and raised tactile image of the worm unlocked a lot for her. She loved it so much that she wanted us to read it every day together with a glass of milk. It became our special little ritual.

“Mia also loved Hugless Dougless by David Melling, which is about a baking bear. This was the first time she understood what a jar of honey would look like and she liked to hug the bear through the book. The books really spur on her imagination.”

Mia now excitedly awaits new deliveries of books by Living Paintings every couple of months.

“We always leave the box of books in the same place for her so she can tell where they are – she gets so excited when they arrive,” says Alice. “When she knows the box is there, she exclaims ‘that's my Living Paintings box!’ and always tries to open it herself. We like to explore the new books together and then she goes off and reads them herself – she absolutely loves it.”

Mia is a very special little girl. For an almost four-year-old to be such a bookworm when registered blind is a miracle and even though Mia has never smiled at seeing her mother's face, Alice takes great pride in her other accomplishments.



A Case Study: Heather

Bringing the outside world in isn't easy. But to terminally ill children, it can be vital to their happiness and can bring joy into their final days.

Heather Wilkinson is a Qualified Teacher of Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVI). Her work involves supporting families and children who are visually impaired. Living Paintings books have become an important resource for Heather when working with children to bring stories to life, to help with school projects and, sometimes, to bring the outside world in.

For two little girls in particular, it became a way for them to experience the things they loved the only way they could. *"I was introduced to two lovely sisters - aged 6 and 8 - who were unfortunately diagnosed with a terminal illness,"* says Heather.

"I'm forever indebted to Living Paintings as they were so supportive from the very beginning. I remember phoning once to let them know that the younger girl had taken a turn for the worst but really loved unicorns and new books arrived with the ink almost still wet - that's how fast they would work to get the books to these little girls. It's like they worked through the night to deliver them as fast as possible."

The girls' illness involved a gradual decline of their health and Heather was aware that they would eventually lose their eyesight.

"When I first met the girls, the younger one was still able to see and listen and touch and she loved the Living Paintings' books from the beginning - her face used to light up when she saw them and it was magical to see as she'd lost touch with the outside world," she says.

"I could use the audio with the books to begin with. The girls were confined to their home and so these books were the only way to bring the outside world to them and this was vital to their happiness for the remainder of their short lives."

As the girls' health declined, Heather was able to use the raised tactile pictures in the books to allow them to follow along with the stories and help them see things in their mind that they could no longer see with their eyes.

"The girls used to laugh and loved being able to feel the stories. They both loved nature and so I asked Living Paintings for books on the subject," Heather says.

"There was one in particular called A Rainy Day by Anna Milbourne which was about a duckling that goes splashing through rain puddles. When the younger girl had some vision, she used to love the bright yellow in the book and then she moved on to the tactile pictures. Eventually she couldn't do that either and so I used to splash her with water and quack which she thought was funny."



– continued – A Case Study: Heather

Tragically, both girls succumbed to their illness but Heather, along with the girls' parents, credit Living Paintings for bringing joy into their lives in their final days and bringing the world to them.

"When the older sister passed away, the younger one was hanging on. She loved the seaside and so I asked Living Paintings for books on beaches and they sent me all they had. I brought them along with some shells and sand so she could experience a bit of summer from her bed," says Heather.

"I had planned the same for Autumn when the seasons changed and I showed up on the doorstep with an arm full of books, leaves and pumpkins only to be told that she had just passed away. The parents were devastated but I could see a bit of joy in their faces when they saw the books. The parents associated the books with the last few months of their girls being happy, and they hold special memories for them."

For Heather, having a resource that allowed her to match the interests of the little girls with something they could enjoy as their health and eyesight deteriorated, was crucial. The speed and efficiency of the charity was also so important to make sure that no moment was wasted when dealing with terminally ill children.

"Helpful isn't the right word to describe Living Paintings," says Heather. *"Nothing was ever too much trouble, they always responded immediately and they gave those girls something that money can't buy - a connection to their old lives. The girls so looked forward to my visits because of the books and that gave them some normality which really helped their parents too."*

Heather and her colleagues use the service for lots of other children who are visually impaired. *"It's not just story books but we also use Living Paintings for school topics,"* says Heather. *"My colleague works with a very clever little boy who is completely blind and they have provided course work books for him to help with his studies. We also use the books on babies and toddlers and parents are always so thrilled to see their child enjoy a popular book such as The Hungry Caterpillar, just like other children."*

Heather is forever grateful to the support she received when working with the sisters.

"Because of Living Paintings, I was able to bring the world to two little girls who couldn't experience it for themselves anymore," she says. ***"Bringing joy to them in their final months is something that I know their parents will never forget and I'll never forget the excitement on their faces when I showed up with new books to explore. It was so special."***



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