

beyond words} celebrating life stories

History

The Beyond Words approach was created in the palliative care setting, it builds on the work first developed by Ivan Lichter at Te Omanga Hospice, New Zealand, who invited members of the professional care team to help their patients tell and record their life stories.

Seeing great value in the approach and the potential for community volunteers to contribute, Jenny Kearney OAM, developed the Client Biography Service for Eastern Palliative Care. It succeeded and received a United Nations award for innovation in volunteering.

In 2011, Francis Icasiano, and Jenny Kearney, set up The Biography Program. Francis, a palliative care service volunteer and project manager for aged and palliative care projects, and Jenny, transferred this volunteer-based biography program to the aged care setting as an independent not-for-profit initiative. The organisation was registered at the end of 2011.

In 2012, the organisation received seed funding to run a pilot program whose success led to further funding and the permanent establishment of The Biography Program with Francis as CEO and the recruitment and training of volunteers began.

In 2014, The Biography Program became Beyond Words. During this time, it could no longer afford to employ a CEO and was about to close down. So, two of the volunteer biographers Carol Walker and Wendy Shiels stepped in to continue the program.

Carol became full-time volunteer Operations Manager and Wendy Program Director and Coordinator of Volunteers. They dramatically increased the number of volunteers and the number of biographies being published.

Carol and Wendy's years of service and dedication to Beyond Words set the standard for training biographers and publishing biographies that continues today.

In 2020, the Covid pandemic struck, aged care residences were repeatedly locked down and donations and other funding for Beyond Words dried up. The Board, who had served since 2011, decided it was time to wind things up.

Towards the end of 2020, a group of biographers met to explore ways to revive the program and appointed four biographers to replace the previous board members. Work then began to sustain and develop Beyond Words. These board members can be seen in the Our Team section of our website.

The new organisation continues to build and work in celebrating stories of our elders'. Work that is beyond words.