

BEDFORDSHIRE VOICES



A POETRY, READING, SANCTUARY AND WELLBEING TOUR FOR BEDFORDSHIRE COMMUNITIES

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**GO
ALL
IN.**

National
Year of
Reading
2026

Bedfordshire Voices is a five-session community programme by NINE RED Presents... (CIC) that promotes unity through shared reading, creative writing, and wellbeing practices.

This initiative supports the National Year of Reading 2026, themed "Go All In."



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WHAT

BEDFORDSHIRE VOICES

IS

At each tour stop, Bedfordshire Voices offers a five-session programme combining reading, storytelling, poetry, spoken word and reflective wellbeing practice. Across the first four sessions, participants explore autobiographical writing, memory, local identity, spoken word and collaborative creation, contributing texts, poems and audio fragments to Our House: Doors into Bedfordshire.

The programme is designed to make reading feel social, modern and meaningful. Shared reading sits at the heart of the work, with participants reading poems, short texts, testimonies, lyrics and local stories together before moving into writing and performance.



“A travelling, community-responsive house of Bedfordshire stories and voices.”

WHY READING IS AT THE HEART

Bedfordshire Voices is not only a poetry and wellbeing programme; it is also a reading-rich offer created as part of the National Year of Reading 2026. Through this pledge, NINE RED Presents is committed to making reading for pleasure, shared reading and reading-aloud visible, inclusive and rooted in real community life.

Every workshop includes space for reading together before writing begins. Participants are encouraged to see all kinds of reading as valid – from poems, stories and novels to recipes, prayers, comics, song lyrics, social media posts and football programmes – reflecting the National Year of Reading message that “it all counts”.

As Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire, Debra (Naz) Knight’s personal pledge is to help people reconnect with reading as something modern, social and healing, especially those often left out of mainstream reading offers.



“IT ALL COUNTS.”

WELCOMING PEOPLE WHOSE
STORIES DESERVE SPACE

WHO IT IS FOR

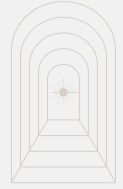
The programme is designed to reach women from diverse backgrounds, young people, older adults and wider community members - including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, who may be experiencing isolation, low confidence or limited access to cultural and wellbeing opportunities. It also creates gentle pathways into more held or specialist support through connected wellbeing strands.

Across the tour, NINE RED Presents aims to reach at least 180 core participants and over 500 wider community members through workshops, reading circles, events and anthologies.



“Every person in Bedfordshire deserves to see themselves reflected in stories.”

HOW THE FIVE



SESSIONS WORK

A structure that builds trust, voice and connection

1. Finding Your Voice – Introduction to poetry therapy, autobiographical writing, “Where I Come From,” shared reading and intergenerational pairing where relevant
2. Stories That Shaped Us – Storytelling circle, oral memory, shared reading, shaping memory into poem and developing spoken word confidence.
3. Poetry as Medicine – Reading reflective texts, exploring emotion safely, meditative writing and gentle links between poetry and wellbeing.
4. Voices Together – Collaborative poetry, performance preparation, BedfordSHARE activity and anthology contributions.
5. Sekhmet’s Sanctuary & Radiant Roots – Grounding, sound, colour and light practices, tea and poetry sharing, intergenerational celebration, closing circle and legacy touchpoint.

Each Bedfordshire Voices stop runs as a five-session programme over five consecutive weeks, with each session lasting around 2.5 hours. The structure gives participants time to build trust, develop creative work and move from individual reflection into collective sharing and celebration

“Reading and listening to others’ words is always the starting point before any writing.”



BEDFORDSHARE & INTERGENERATIONAL READING

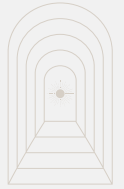
Children, young people and older adults reading together

A central strand of Bedfordshire Voices is BedfordSHARE: Bedfordshire's Poetry Together, which creates intergenerational reading and writing opportunities between children and young people and older adults in care homes and community settings. Participants read, write, learn and perform poetry for one another, turning reading-aloud into a joyful, social activity rather than a school task.

This strand includes paired or group workshops, tea-and-poetry sharing events, support for national Poetry Together submissions and inclusion in local anthologies. It is designed to reduce isolation, build empathy and create a living exchange between generations across Bedfordshire



“Together, they will read, write, learn and perform poetry for one another.”



NATIONAL

POETRY TOGETHER

CAMPAIGN

HOW BEDFORDSHIRE VOICES CONNECT TO A WIDER STAGE

At the heart of BedfordSHARE is the national Poetry Together campaign, which brings children under 18 and older adults aged 70+ together to write, learn and perform poetry for one another. Through Bedfordshire Voices, NINE RED Presents will connect schools, youth groups, care homes and community organisations across the county so that participants can create original poems, learn poems by heart, share them in tea-and-poetry gatherings and submit them to national platforms.

This strand helps address loneliness and isolation, strengthens empathy across generations and creates a lasting legacy through anthology inclusion, recordings and public sharing. It also connects Bedfordshire communities to the National Year of Reading by making reading-aloud visible, relational and celebratory.

“Children and older adults read, write and perform poetry together.”



CULTURE, LANGUAGE & BELONGING

THE OTHER 33

AND

THE COLLATERAL BEAUTY READING

STRAND

For communities with particular cultural heritage connections, Bedfordshire Voices includes The Other 33 Cultural Poetry Lab, which explores Caribbean, African and South Asian heritage, language and contribution to Bedfordshire's story. As part of Naz Knight's National Year of Reading pledge, this strand also celebrates Caribbean languages, dialects, Creole and patois as valued reading and storytelling forms.

The programme also draws on the Collateral Beauty series by Naz Knight, published by NINE RED Presents and framed as A Love Story to Luton (because beauty is in the eye of the beholder). Short extracts from these books, alongside texts by other local and diverse writers, are used to spark conversation about place, identity, Caribbean heritage, belonging and the right to see one's own life reflected in literature.

"People can read, hear and speak in the languages and cadences that feel like home."



SEKHMET'S SANCTUARY

REST, REFLECTION AND INTEGRATION

Session 5 is the closing and culminating space at each tour stop. Sekhmet's Sanctuary creates a calm, permission-giving environment for rest, reflection and integration after the creative and emotional work of the previous sessions.



Held within a gentle sanctuary frame, this final gathering may include tea, optional poetry sharing, intergenerational exchange and local partnership elements such as food, culture or conversation, depending on the venue and community context.

RADIANT ROOTS

SOUND, COLOUR, LIGHT AND GROUNDING PRACTICES

Radiant Roots brings in the practical, embodied element of Session 5 through simple sound, colour and light-based practices designed to support grounding, emotional regulation and gentle release. Rooted in accessible, culturally aware wellbeing practice, it may draw on breath, intention, visualisation, soft lighting, chimes, singing bowls and rhythmic spoken word to help participants settle, restore and reconnect with themselves.

These practices are offered in simple, welcoming ways so that participants can adapt them beyond the session in their own daily lives. Radiant Roots helps people move from expression into embodiment, carrying the benefits of reflection, reading and creative work into sustainable personal practice.





PARTNERS & LEGACY

Partners - libraries, schools, care homes, community groups, faith spaces, heritage venues and grassroots projects - are vital to Bedfordshire Voices. Together, we:

- Host reading-rich workshops and events.
- Share community anthologies and local writing.
- Build sustained pathways into reading and creative wellbeing.

BEDFORDSHIRE DAY 2026-27

The project leads towards a Bedfordshire Day 2026 showcase on 28 November: a multicultural book fair and poetry event with local authors, storytelling and reading circles, a WordWell Corner where poetry and literacy meet wellbeing, Manifest and Move (spoken-word affirmations with movement) and an evening recital foregrounding under-represented Bedfordshire voices.



“The pages are open. The stories are waiting.”



NINE RED PRESENTS... (CIC)

POETRY, STORY AND WELLBEING IN COMMUNITY



Established in 2003, NINE RED Presents... (CIC) is a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service-winning community arts organisation based in Bedfordshire, using interdisciplinary creative practice to transform people, places and spaces through poetry, community arts, wellbeing and cultural events. Bedfordshire Voices is led by Naz Knight, Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire, interdisciplinary artist and CEO of NINE RED Presents, whose National Year of Reading pledge is rooted in the belief that reading can help people feel more seen, more connected and more at home in their own stories.

"This is our year to read Bedfordshire — and to read ourselves — with compassion, curiosity and pride."

Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire

Words chose me long before the title did. Naz Knight

As Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire, I'm building a living, breathing map of the county through community-rooted poetry, creative walks and collaborative projects. From writing circles and intergenerational workshops to movement, meditation and art-medicine, these projects invite you to bring your story, your body and your breath into the picture. Come write, listen, move and rest with us as we grow a web of poems, voices and memories across Bedfordshire.



Meet the Poetry Champion & explore current projects

Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire

A Living Map of Bedfordshire

Bards of Bedfordshire

A welcoming writing circle at Wardown House, Museum & Gallery, nurturing new and experienced poets to tell Bedfordshire's stories in their own voice.

BedfordSHARE: Bedfordshire's Poetry Together

Our county-wide local strand of Poetry Together – a free initiative that encourages schools and older people's communities to connect, learn or write poems, and come together to recite them, share stories and enjoy tea and treats. Together we create an annual "Ballad of Bedfordshire".

Artful Nature – Shinrin-yoku

Forest-bathing-inspired writing sessions and poetry walks that weave together landscape, wellbeing and creative and artistic expression.

Poetry E.Motion

Dynamic poetry and movement sessions using breath, body and voice to explore emotion, resilience, healing and gentle transformation.



Scan to meet the Poetry Champion
& explore current projects

Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Day Book Salon & Poetry Recital Part of the National Year of Reading – “Go All In – Read Bedfordshire”

On 28 November, together with NINE RED Presents... (CIC), we are hosting the Bedfordshire Day Book Salon & Poetry Recital – an intimate, county-wide celebration of local writing and spoken word. During the day, a curated book salon showcases Bedfordshire authors, small presses and community groups through stalls, informal conversations and family-friendly activities. The evening transforms the space into a seated poetry recital for around 50 guests, spotlighting Bedfordshire voices and the community-created “Ballad of Bedfordshire”, with time for networking and book-signing.

Daytime highlights include a multicultural book fair, storytelling and reading circles, “Manifest and Move”, and The WordWell Corner where poetry, literacy and holistic wellness meet.



Bedfordshire Day Book Salon &
Poetry Recital



Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Voices & BedfordSHARE: Bedfordshire's Poetry Together

A five-session programme in six Bedfordshire communities, blending reading, creative writing, storytelling and spoken word. Weeks 1–4 build new poems and short pieces responding to Bedfordshire life, memory and identity, and feed into *Our House: Doors into Bedfordshire* – a travelling installation of “doorway” texts, poems and audio fragments.

Week 5, *Sekhmet's Sanctuary & Radiant Roots*, is a calm closing wellbeing session with grounding, breath, sound, colour and light practices, and an optional celebratory sharing circle. The BedfordSHARE / Poetry Together strand ensures intergenerational voices meet as equal readers, writers and keepers of the county's stories.



Bedfordshire Voices &
BedfordSHARE programme

Poetry Champion for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Voices Community Anthologies

As part of “Go All In – Read Bedfordshire”, we’re inviting submissions to three collections:

- Women’s submissions – poetry and short prose by women and femme-identifying writers shaped by surviving, resisting and transforming difficulty, within clear safeguarding and anonymity guidelines.
- Share Your Cultural Story – work celebrating the many cultures, languages and lineages that shape life in Bedfordshire and beyond.
- Young Writers – poems and short prose capturing how it feels to grow up here and now, including slang, dialect and online language.

• Submission is free, contributors keep copyright, and income from sales sustains NINE RED Presents... CIC’s youth and community arts projects.



Community Anthologies