WE ARE MORE
We’re doing more.
Believing more.
Demanding more.
We are more.

This year, More Than Words is in full swing. We’re enterprising, innovating, advocating, and doing more than ever to empower our young people, who deserve everything we’ve got, and more.
Dear Friends,

At More Than Words, we are more than a social service, more than a great first job. We are not just training, education, and youth development. We are not helpers, fixers, rehabilitators, or remediators. We are about what youth need and deserve.


We take on goal setting, resume writing, hard conversations, performance reviews, and promotions. We empower young people to create their own program data. We make room for second chances, third chances, and more. We stand with our youth, amplify their voices, and push for legislation and justice in a system not designed to support them.

We are a vessel. A vehicle. A movement.

This year, we grew to be even more and do even more. We expanded our clothing business and e-commerce site and designed a new mobile book truck. We deepened our race and equity curricula for youth, grew the number of alumni in adult staff positions, and expanded critical partnerships in education, employment, housing, and mental health. Our youth earned over $3 million in revenue, and we welcomed community members, customers, and partners into our space for events, shopping, volunteering, and community building.

We are determined, relentless, and deeply hopeful. And we are grateful to you, the community who stands with us in this hard work. When you partner, donate, visit, or shop, you empower us to do more. Together, we are More Than Words.

Jodi Rosenbaum Tillinger
Founder & CEO

John Chory
Board Chair

I am more than a high school drop out, cast away, runaway, and juvenile offender. I am a husband, father of four, retired U.S. Army Master Sergeant, grad school graduate, and member of the Mighty Waltham Team at More Than Words. I am committed to becoming friendlier, more compassionate, joyful, and forgiving. I have become a practitioner of yoga, breath work, and meditation.”

EDI SAUERWALD, WALTHAM SITE DIRECTOR

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This year, you helped us create a meaningful job, a lifeline, a fresh start, and so much more.

314 YOUTH SERVED

67% GRADUATES PRODUCTIVE IN WORK/SCHOOL
30+ HOURS/WEEK

$3.1M EARNED REVENUE

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Youth are on a path to a rewarding, living-wage career. We support graduates with next steps in education and work, conducting check-ins, sending curated job postings, going on postsecondary tours, and investing in whatever youth need to open the door to a living-wage career, whether it is tuition, rent, or food.

**Business Job**

Young people lead shifts, process and ship books, manage the warehouse, run events, handle customer service, and make—working approximately 20 hours/week and gaining work experience and skills.

**Youth Job**

Youth participate in workshops and intensive case management as they set and achieve goals for their education, career, and life. Youth open a bank account, learn their rights, craft a resume, and prepare for interviews.

**Indicators of success:**
- Earn a diploma and continue training
- Secure and keep jobs
- Move toward a living wage

**Stabilizing supports:**
- Affordable, sustainable housing
- Fair resolution to court involvement
- Resources to help ramp up to independence

**Outreach strategies:**
- Advocating for legislation and policy change
- Elevating youth voice to influence systems
- Educating parents and our community

We advance broader change and youth leadership via a youth-led policy agenda focused on juvenile justice reform and ending the child welfare cliff.
For some youth, More Than Words is their first job. For others, it’s the first job that empowers them to succeed. Every day, our youth learn from their peers, more senior youth on the team, and the adult staff who work alongside them. They work hard to achieve meaningful goals that require every team member’s full participation. On each shift—whether it’s handling sales in our stores, sourcing donations, or shipping books around the world—youth practice, self evaluate, and receive feedback on the competencies they need to thrive at work and in life. This is real work, a real business, and a uniquely effective vehicle for training and empowerment.

**SHIFT LEADER**

Each shift is led by a young person, a Partner or Senior Partner who assigns roles, coaches peers on tasks, and checks in on progress towards daily goals.

**CHECK IN**

Youth review the schedule and shift goals, which may include targets for shipping and receiving in online operations, photos taken and clothes sorted, displays built and events hosted.

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)**

As youth work and get trained in new roles, they track their progress toward quantifiable measures on business tasks, seeing their KPIs improve over time.

**CHECK OUT**

Youth generate their own performance data by soliciting feedback on attendance, punctuality, professionalism, engagement, and our core competencies from their peers and managers.

**TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCIES**

- Dependability
- Safety
- Respect
- Teamwork
- Taking Initiative
- Giving and Receiving Feedback
- Problem Solving
- Leadership
- Setting and Achieving Goals

**JAH, PARTNER**

“As a shift leader you have to be on point. If your team sees you slacking off, they might follow your lead. It comes back to you. This job is preparing us for the real world. As a leader you have to focus on the whole team, not just you. You have to be mindful and know the example you’re setting.”
We ask a lot of youth, holding them to a high bar as employees, students, team members, and leaders. We refuse to water down our expectations and instead offer compassionate accountability to help youth grow. At More Than Words, we’ve created structures to guide young people as they set ambitious goals, form more effective habits, navigate workplace dynamics, own and repair their mistakes, and celebrate hard-earned wins. Like all effective leaders, our youth are constantly reflecting, self-assessing, and pursuing the next level of growth.

Our youth do more because we show them how success is created. 

“I am more than a youthful offender. I am a father. I am a leader. I am staff at More Than Words. I am intellectual, curious, funny. I am the change.”

Jarris, Alumnus and Career Services Coordinator

Dear More Than Words Staff,

I am writing this email so that I can return to shifts. I had a no-show incident. Right when I woke up I had an immediate feeling of regret, and the consequence was being suspended. I missed the opportunity to earn income and save up towards a new engine for my car. I wish I showed up that week to help contribute towards our team goals. I have already begun to implement better scheduling into my life to help me with my punctuality. Another step I will take is to be up at least 3–4 hours before to give me time to get ready.

Best regards,

Melissa

Preparing to Move On

Youth support youth to transition professionally and positively to their next steps.

Performance Review Reflection

Name:

Henriz

What are your strengths and growth areas?

I’m consistently showing up on time and always putting in my best effort. I could work on leadership. I’ve put myself out of my comfort zone, but there’s more work to be done.

Staff Response

You take your job seriously. You always come in ready to work hard. You exhibit great customer service skills! I would like to see you take leadership by training others and give more feedback to your peers.

Leading with Data

Youth generate their own data and get comfortable using it to self-assess and advocate for promotions. This year we transitioned to a customized Salesforce database to give youth and staff even more access and provide our team with new systems and dashboards for real-time improvement.
Youth do their part—and more—investing their effort and trust in a pathway toward self-sufficiency. But they are constantly undermined by people and systems outside of our walls and outside of their control. We refuse to see young people pushed into homelessness or left to manage broken systems on their own. So a core part of our model is wraparound support and relentless advocacy, showing up for our youth like a parent would.

ISA, GRADUATE

“The support I got at More Than Words was more than just learning about how to run a business. I noticed that whenever someone from More Than Words showed up to court with me, it felt different. It felt like they were taking me seriously. My experience in court before felt like they were ready to label me a criminal. Having someone show up forced the court to see me as a person.”

HOUSING
Our Single Room Occupancy (SRO) program with Liberty Mutual and Caritas Communities offers free rent, scaffolded savings, deep supports, and a forgiving pathway to independence. We are working with partners on how to scale the model, making it an option for more youth.

HEALTH/MENTAL HEALTH
Using trauma-informed approaches, we create a workplace that is physically and emotionally safe for youth who've experienced more than their share of trauma, and we invest in ongoing training for our staff. For youth with more complex needs, we develop partnerships with the Department of Mental Health and other specialized nonprofits.

LEGAL
We collaborate with District Attorneys and public defenders, and when a youth is in trouble, we show up to all court dates to make sure their interests are represented and that the court knows we have their back. With support from a retired judge and lawyer serving as Access to Justice Fellows, we created training modules to ensure youth have a deep understanding of their rights.

PARENTING
We offer shifts scheduled at childcare-friendly times and tailored case management for young parents on our team. We help youth line up childcare and access supports from partners at the Department of Transitional Assistance.

FINANCIAL
We provide youth with just-in-time resources to help them bridge emergencies, covering necessities like food and transportation. In 2023, we are increasing investments that will help youth access door-opening training opportunities. We will pay for whatever youth need for success.

DAVID LONG
CEO, LIBERTY MUTUAL

“I am more than a CEO. I am also a proud family man and a Liverpool Football Club fan. I am an avid daily crossworder and lover of puzzles. I am caring, giving, and introverted.”

WE ARE RELENTLESS SUPPORT

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Every year, More Than Words youth achieve far more than the world expects.

They overcome hurdles, earn diplomas, and hold down jobs at rates far beyond their peers. They leverage skills learned on the job and through our responsive curriculum, lean into our individualized supports, and build toward the future. They achieve more.

**WE ARE GREAT RESULTS**

- **67%** of graduates were engaged in work or school for 30+ hours/week.
- **81%** of graduates were engaged in work or school for 15+ hours/week.

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SAMIR
MORE THAN WORDS ALUMNUS
AGE 20
I was born in the U.S. but sent to Morocco when I was a baby. I grew up surrounded by love, but we had to make the difficult decision to move me back with my mother. It didn’t work. My mom had her own trauma, and we got into a bad pattern. We’d argue, I’d leave home, the police would look for me, then go to a group home. I can’t remember or count the number of placements I have been in. It was the same story over and over.

In 2018, in the middle of all these moves, I found More Than Words. Work became my escape. But even a positive place couldn’t erase the pattern. When I next returned home, things hit a low and I needed help and time to rebuild myself mentally and emotionally. As soon as I could, I returned to More Than Words. I used the opportunity to make my own money to support myself. I got to do a lot of great things—lead shifts, speak at events, learn new skills. I graduated high school in June 2020 and More Than Words in October 2020. More Than Words has been by my side ever since. They helped me apply to colleges, most of which rejected me because of a low GPA. Ultimately, they fought for me to start at UMass Dartmouth in their College NOW program. I was given just one semester to show I was “college material.” If I couldn’t keep up a 2.0 GPA, I couldn’t stay. School is hard for me, but More Than Words helped set me up to succeed. They fought for me to have housing on campus year-round so I can be independent. They helped me purchase books. They supported me with tutors. I am now in my junior year with a 3.0 GPA! I just went back to Morocco for the first time in seven years. At one point, I didn’t see myself having a life ahead of me. Now, I am on a new path.

“I am more than a juvenile in trouble, a kid with a 1.6 GPA from high school. I am a college student, a hard-working employee, an entrepreneur in the making!”

JENNY KELLY, ROY A. HUNT FOUNDATION

How are you more?
“I am more than my case file or the various labels placed on me. I am a student at Benjamin Franklin Institute. I am an ambassador advocating for change. I am capable of anything I set my mind to.”

JAKE, ALUMNUS AND POWER IS YOURS COORDINATOR

“I am more than a mother and philanthropist. I am also an avid reader and lover of animals, art, and sports. I would rather be outside in nature—wherever that may be—than anywhere else. I love street art, which has taken me down many back alleys and side streets in cities across the world.”
Most of the obstacles our youth face are external, systemic, and unjust.

Supporting individual youth to surmount these hurdles is critical, but it’s not enough. We need to change our systems too. That’s why we speak truth to power through a youth-led advocacy team called The Power Is Yours. Team members identify issues that matter to them, organize their peers, publish their views, host debates, and lead meetings with legislators and public officials.

This year, our youth leaders, staff, and allies doubled down on two high-priority issues: keeping young people out of adult jail and ending the child welfare cliff.

“We need to decriminalize young adult development in our communities, and make the success that we have achieved far more common.”

Emilia Flores Teran, Jacob Robinson, and Luis Pacheco are members of the Power is Yours Team at More than Words.
More Than Words is best known as a bookstore, and we’re still that… but we’ve become so much more!

We’ve turned the challenges of the past two years into an opportunity to innovate and discover untapped needs in our community. Today, More Than Words operates eight unique business lines, each one a vehicle for youth transformation. We’re now a stronger social enterprise than ever, with more varied revenue streams, more skill-building roles for youth, and more ways to connect with our community.

**WE ARE EXPANDING OUR REACH**

A venture that began as a COVID innovation has grown into an integral part of our social enterprise, bringing in $100,000 last year. We now sell premium pre-loved clothing and accessories in stores, online, and wholesale.

Coming soon! We’re developing a mobile book truck that will bring our bookstore into the community to build connections, broaden our customer base, and drive new revenue.

Our revamped, one-stop website offers shoppers a well-stocked collection of books (new and used), music, clothing, accessories, and a range of gifts from other mission-driven vendors—as well as a place to learn about our mission and ways to get involved.

**MORE BUSINESS = MORE OPPORTUNITIES**

More Than Words now operates eight interconnected business lines:
- Waltham Bookstore
- Boston Bookstore and Social Enterprise Market
- Online Book Sales
- Wholesale Books and Clothing
- E-Commerce Site
- Community Event Space
- Mobile Book Truck & Pop-Ups
- Premium Pre-Loved Clothing

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Youth are engines of More Than Words’ success, driving almost half of our revenue from social enterprise sales.

This year, expanded government funding contributed additional fuel to our work.

We have not slowed our investment in our most important resources: youth and staff. In 2022, our youth leaders gathered data-driven feedback and presented a case for wage increases and raises with promotions, which we implemented. We also revised staff pay structure to retain and grow an exceptionally committed team.
We’re doing more and more... thanks to you.

This year, we pushed harder, dreamed bigger, and showed up for youth in more ways than ever. And you—our generous community of supporters—had our back. Your investments allow us to stretch, innovate, advocate, and be there when it counts. We could not be more grateful.

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"I am more than a business person, I am also a father and coach. I am energetic, fun and keep things interesting. I ski, mountain bike, hike, and love the water. I love to cook and try cooking new dishes."

"I am more than a former judge. I am also an aspiring street photographer. I am adventurous, optimistic, and deeply value my friendships. I walk 4 to 5 miles a day. I am a hopeless packrat, but I'm working on it."

GILL LIKOFT, GAINST CASE

"I am more than a wife and mother. I still go to rock concerts and took up dancing as an adult. I read everyday and on Sundays I can't leave the house without doing the New York Times Sunday crossword."
I am more than a single mother. I am a boss. I am strong. I am a single mother.

I am the future!
I am my future

LEE ALUMNAE

AGE 18

When I started at More Than Words, I was very shy and anxious. I struggled with communicating my thoughts. Every day was an accomplishment to me.

I have held this job for almost a year, and I expect to be promoted to Junior Manager soon. I have been accepted to Maud Art in Boston. Art is going to be a big part of my future.
Let’s do more.

We’re giving it our all, and you can too. There are multiple ways to support More Than Words’ growing mission. What more can you do?

Learn more at mtwyouth.org

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