

INTRODUCING R.E.A.D.® (READING EDUCATION ASSISTANCE DOGS®) *A Program of Intermountain Therapy Animals*



The mission of the Reading Education Assistance Dogs® (R.E.A.D.®) program is to improve the literacy skills of children in a unique approach employing a classic concept: reading to a dog. Some children already read to their own pets—just for two examples, a charming painting from Victorian times depicts this scene, and the daughter of researcher James Lynch was filmed reading to her dog Rags on “60 Minutes” more than 20 years ago. But Intermountain Therapy Animals is the first to build a true literacy program, with models for schools, libraries and additional settings, around this appealing idea.

The R.E.A.D. program utilizes registered therapy animals, who have been trained and tested for health, safety, skills and temperament. These special animals volunteer with their owners as Pet Partner® teams, offering children an irresistible opportunity to improve their reading in a setting which



has proven not only effective but fun. And fun is a powerful, motivating force for learning that we grown-ups often overlook!

Literacy specialists acknowledge that children who are below their peers in reading skills are intimidated by reading aloud in a group, often have lower self-esteem, and view reading as a chore. But those obstacles melt away when children read to the therapy animals.

Research with therapy animals indicates that children with low self-esteem are often more willing to interact with an

animal than another person. During such interactions they are inclined to turn their attention outward and *forget about their limitations*. There are also physiological benefits to interacting with animals, including increased relaxation, lower blood pressure, and feelings of trust, safety and acceptance. Children thus find reading to an animal less intimidating, a special time for them that is helpful and

(Please turn to the back)

fun and becomes a positive environment in which learning is facilitated.

The focus of the reading is age-appropriate books with animal themes. The therapy animal teams provide a selection of books for the children to read. As s/he advances to the next level of reading, a child is given a book to keep which is "pawtographed" by his 4-footed reading companion.



R.E.A.D.® programs are being implemented in elementary schools, preschools, after-school latchkey programs, healthcare facilities, local libraries, boys and girls clubs, and youth detention facilities. The program demonstrates yet another way that animals make a positive difference in children's lives.

OTHER BENEFITS

Since R.E.A.D. was introduced in November of 1999 at the Salt Lake City, Utah, library, we have seen many benefits for participants, some unanticipated. Besides some dramatic increases in reading levels and increased enjoyment of the reading experience, children are demonstrating improved social skills and self-confidence; decreased absenteeism from school, improvements in other school subjects, and increased completion of other homework assignments.



R.E.A.D. PROGRAM CONTACTS

For more information about R.E.A.D. in your area, please contact:

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