



If you love reading to kids then you'll love Story Dogs!

It's a literacy support program mostly aimed at year two children to help them read better. Basically an accredited volunteer and their dog go into a school each week at the same time and the school chooses four children who have reading difficulties for whatever reason.

Each child comes out of class and reads for 20 minutes with the dog one on one, so the volunteer team is probably there about an hour and a half maximum 2 hours at the school.



The other lovely thing is that the children get to know the dog. The dogs are very non-judgemental and the volunteers are trained to reduce the anxiety in the children.

Of course if the child doesn't feel like reading, or they've had a bad day and they're stressed then the volunteer reads and everything is done through the dog.

Story Dogs is a national charity program that started in 2009 in Murwillumbah, in NSW by Jeanine Sigley and Leah Shelton and it's grown phenomenally from there. So we are across Australia now.

I think the biggest thing these days with all the online media that kids have got access to, they're often entertained in a virtual world rather than entertaining themselves by reading.

And we all know that reading is one of the prime things you really need to be able to do even if you're bad at maths!

Each volunteer has a set of books and the volunteers get together at the end of every school term and trade their books around through a local group. Books with rhyme and rhythm and with a lot of repetition are the ones that we usually use to start out with.

For example, I had a year two child recently who really isn't all that interested in reading. But he loves what are called 'Manga' books. Basically, Japanese styled comics or graphic novels interestingly enough!

So drawing cartoons with some reading along with it.

We fly through those. We get really involved, he gets really involved and he's reading. And I don't think he really realises how much he's reading and *that's* the secret.

So for anyone interested in getting involved, basically any dog that is not on the restricted breed list is eligible to be part of the program. What we are looking for is somebody who cares about their dogs but also cares about literacy and children.

We put people through an accreditation process.

Initially, the co-ordinator will meet the dog and the person, and if everything looks really good, then we make arrangements for a third party dogs assessor to come out and assess the dog for suitability, going into school, dealing with lots of children at a time, that sort of thing.

We're looking for people's pets. The dog doesn't necessarily have to have a lot of training, as long as it knows the basics. Sit, stay, leave it. Be quiet and look happy. You don't have to have a 'super dog'.

We're looking for a volunteer who is willing to commit for the school year for roughly an hour and a half to 2 hours per week, because the kids really come to look forward to seeing the dog, in fact the whole school looks forward to seeing the dog. It's really phenomenal seeing schools get behind the reading program.

Anyway I'd love you to check out our website...



<https://www.storydogs.org.au/>

We are a charity and depend on sponsorships and donations and grants if we can get them. But more than anything, it's the volunteers and their dogs that are so crucial that are so important that are truly valued in this organisation.

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