Paws 'n' Tales in Schools

At PAWS, we believe in the transformative power of bringing dogs and children together through the joy of reading. Paws 'n' Tales is not just a literacy program; it's an innovative approach based on the unconditional love of dogs, aimed at engaging children's interest in reading and books. Suitable for children aged 4-8 years, with adaptability to accommodate various age groups.

What is the program about?

Paws 'n Tales brings dogs and children together for a reading experience under the caring direction of our dedicated volunteer. Our sessions are designed to be fun, relaxing, and non-judgmental, providing a safe space for children to explore the magic of reading alongside our gentle canine companions.

While Paws 'n' Tales is not a replacement for traditional reading programs, it is designed to complement them by offering a unique and alternative approach to fostering a love for reading in children. Our goal is to encourage enjoyment and motivation in reading, and dogs often serve as the motivating force that ignites a child's passion for storytelling and literacy. Through Paws 'n' Tales, we aim to help every child find their own love of reading and storytelling.

Who benefits from the program?

The program is tailored for children typically aged 4-8 years old who may face hurdles in their reading journey due to a range of challenges including lack of confidence, resilience, health issues, disability, or social barriers. We also seek to engage those who may find it challenging to maintain interest or motivation in reading amidst the ever-present distractions of modern technology and social media.

Referrals to the program primarily come from teachers and allied professionals within schools and parents frequenting libraries.

We accommodate children older than 8 years old as well, recognizing that each child learns at their own pace, and flexibility is essential to meet their individual needs.

The advantages of reading to a dog

- Children can engage in safe tactile interactions such as touching, patting, or leaning against the dog while conversing with them.
- Volunteers have the opportunity to foster a trusting bond between the dog and child, enabling the child to take risks and expand their abilities without fear of criticism.
- Dogs serve as motivational companions during reading sessions.
- Children are often motivated to practice and excel in their reading skills to please their furry friend.
- In today's intricate world, offering a fun and soothing environment can significantly contribute to the acquisition of literacy skills in children.

Likely outcomes and added benefits of the program

The primary benefits of the program include increased confidence, enhanced reading skills, and an increased general interest in books. In addition, the program yields several unexpected yet equally valuable outcomes for participants, including:

- Encouragement of pet ownership and animal handling skills development.
- Reduced school absenteeism, increased focus in class and improved pride in academic work.
- Improved hygiene habits as the children are asked to wash or use hand gel on their hands before and after interacting with our dogs.
- Improved social interaction, development of playground friendships and greater confidence in speaking proficiency.
- Greater book ownership.

Financial details

You can enjoy the benefits of visits by a therapy dog team tailored for student's needs, where you only pay $88 per visit, GST included, for the visits you schedule. Typically, one visit per week throughout the school term ensures optimal value and support. A typical visit is between 1 to 1.5 hours in length to ensure the wellbeing of our dog.

Visits are invoiced monthly. Please let us know if an alternative arrangement is required.

Paperwork

Our volunteer teams:

- Have completed the Paws Pet Therapy Course and successfully passed at a PAWS assessment and training day.
- Include PAWS dogs who have been vet approved for health and temperament.
- Have a current Police Check (3-year renewal).
- Have a current WWCC Check (5-year renewal).
- Have been double COVID vaccinated.
- Include dogs who are on a current health regime, are washed within 24 hours of their visit and have current vaccination to the highest standard for their state.
- Are covered by current Public Liability Insurance.
- Will display PAWS signage at the office during visits to denote the presence of a dog.

On enquiry

Much of the success in the program comes from careful planning. On enquiry you will be asked to:

- Complete a Facility Application Form where you are invited to provide any information that will help us meet your student's learning needs. Please provide as much information as possible including your preferred days and times for visits.
- We will then endeavour to find a suitable team for your school.

Prior to commencement, once we have matched a suitable team to your school we will:

- Confirm details of the visit including organising a suitable start date.

- Provide a Statement of Documentation for the volunteer team verifying currency of required paperwork.
- Provide a team photo, Visit Commencement Summary and the PAWS document, Visits to Children's Services for you to read.
- Provide a risk assessment for you to approve and sign.
- Provide our volunteer with specific details relating to your goals and requirements.
- A PAWS representative will give you a call to discuss visit protocols.

Before beginning the visits, we kindly request that you consider the following:

Please note all interactions are controlled by the volunteer handler. These visits are suited to small groups with interactions occurring on a one-to-one basis. The volunteer handler will provide participants with guidelines regarding interacting with their dog safely.

- It is crucial to plan specifics. Please designate a consistent contact person, such as the classroom teacher, establish a set location, and formalise procedures for students to understand expectations and behaviour guidelines.
- Establish ground rules with all students, including discussions on how to interact with the dog, ensuring dog safety, and explaining the purpose of the therapy team's presence at the school. Our document, "Guidelines for PAWS Pet Therapy Visits to Children's Services" will assist you with this.
- Determine where the visits will occur, ensuring a school staff member supervises and maintains line-of-sight during interactions.
- Have reading resources pre-selected for students.
- Identify participating students, outlining their goals and anticipated outcomes. Provide time to relay this information to the volunteer.
- Provide a contact person for volunteers to report to at the office. Communicate sign in and any induction procedures to the volunteer.
- Coordinate visit timing considering assembly schedules, breaks, and other scheduled activities.
- Notify of any allergies, dog fears, or other relevant information volunteers should be aware of.
- Organise an efficient student arrival process for session timeliness.
- Inform the school community about the presence and purpose of the therapy dog.

Upon commencement, we will:

- Arrange an initial visit by the volunteer (without their dog) to discuss induction, ongoing sign-in procedures, visit details, and student requirements as outlined above.

Ongoing

- Visits will continue at the agreed time, on your specified days throughout the school term.

We ask that you inform the PAWS office as soon as possible if you wish to cancel a visit on 0407 325 157.

Coordinated children's programs

We have noticed that school-based children's programs frequently share objectives, with no single program fully addressing all student or group needs. Within school settings, Paws 'n' Tales might be integrated into broader initiatives like Mate@theGate or overall wellbeing sessions. In such cases,

PAWS will offer support and guidance to the school on how to effectively integrate these elements to achieve more comprehensive goals or to fulfill specific requirements.

Let's make reading a 'pawsitive' experience with our furry friends leading the way!