

Therapeutic Reading Programs and Reading Education Assistant Dogs

In December of 2008, Samantha Hagar, Consultant for the Colorado State Publications Library, requested information on therapeutic reading programs and reading education assistant dogs from the Libnet listserv. Samantha Hagar posted this to the listserv:

"I just received an inquiry from a patron who has a therapy dog. She is wondering how to become involved in therapeutic reading programs in Denver area libraries. My initial search turned up two organizations that pet handlers can join for referrals to facilities needing visits: Denver Pet Partners (www.denverpetpartners.org), and Rocky Mountain R.E.A.D. (www.rockymountainread.org). My question is: If your library has a "canine reading buddy" program, do you use these organizations to team up with dogs and their handlers? Or does the library work directly with dog owners in the area? If your library has a reading program involving dogs, I would love to hear from you."

The following is a compilation of the responses Samantha Hagar received.

Bemis has a "PAWS to Read" program. We use Denver Pet Partners and R.E.A.D. The advantages to using these organizations are (1) you are assured of getting properly trained animals and handlers and (2) they make sure you always have animals/handlers show up for your sessions. Otherwise, you would have to do all the legwork to make sure someone shows up to work with the kids. We take reservations for 20-minute slots. There is a 10-minute break for the handler to take the dog for a walk in between. Call Val Fetters here at Bemis if you need additional information - 303-795-3961.

Margery Smith, Director
Bemis/Littleton Public Library

Douglas County Libraries has "Bark For Books" program that is very similar to the Bemis and Aurora programs. Our dogs are certified through Intermountain Pet Therapy Animals and R.E.A.D. All our R.E.A.D. teams are managed through Randi Bolton, our volunteer coordinator and our children's staff. We are in great need of more R.E.A.D. teams, as we have waiting lists of children wanting to read to a dog. Our programs are at Highlands Ranch Library, Lone Tree Library, Parker Library, Philip S. Miller Library in Castle Rock and Roxborough. If anyone in our area is interested, please call or email me for more information.

Priscilla Queen, Literacy Department
Douglas County Libraries

Mamie Doud Eisenhower in Broomfield also has this type of program. Our program is fairly small, with just two sessions each month where kids can read to a dog. Our dog is certified through Therapy Dogs International and is covered by their insurance. Each participating child reads for ten minutes with the dog and her owner. Ten minutes seems to be plenty for these young readers. We only hold the program for an hour, so no break between kids. If anyone would like more information, please contact me.

Lesley Clayton, Manager of Children's Services
Mamie Doud Eisenhower Public Library

Arapahoe Library District has the program Doggie Tales. We partner with Have Paws Will Travel, the Guide Dog Puppy Raising Club of Arapahoe County. I work with one person from the group who schedules a program each month for two hours in the months of Jan-Apr and then again in Aug-Dec. He usually schedules four handlers who travel to the different libraries with their dogs. The kids get to read to the dog for 30 minutes.

The website for this club is: <http://www.hpwtdogmom.org/>

Feel free to contact me if you have additional questions.

Cindy Mares, Program Coordinator
Arapahoe Library District

The Lafayette Public Library has sponsored a "Paws to Read" program for the last five summers. Our dog/volunteer teams are affiliated with two organizations: Colorado Therapy Animals and the Delta Society Pet Partners. We have an average of ten teams and several subs who volunteer from the beginning of June until the end of July. We offer young readers (you must have finished kindergarten to participate) 20 minute time slots to read aloud to their favorite dogs. "Paws to Read" requires advanced sign-up, but we do have a team dedicated to walk-ins at each session. Sessions are on Monday mornings and Thursday evenings each week.

The quality of the volunteers and their dogs is outstanding - they have helped create a program that is extremely popular and always in demand. More information about Colorado Therapy Animals can be found at their website: www.coloradotherapyanimals.org. If I can answer any questions or be of any assistance please contact me at 303-665-5200 ext. 3852 or my email address.

Susan Nagle, Coordinator of Volunteer Services
Lafayette Public Library

The Aurora Public Library's award-winning Wagging Tales program can be viewed at the following site:

http://auroralibrary.org/screens/programs/reading_programs/readingWag.html

We've probably done this for 7 - 8 years. Our staff liaison is Janie Clark. Not in my office right now and can't quite remember her exact phone number, so call me at 303-739-6594 and I'll connect you.

Patti Bateman, Manager
Library Services Division
City of Aurora

Hi! I worked directly with several therapy dog organizations and the owners to set up our Paws to Read program here. We've been doing it for the past 2.5 years and it's been wonderful. It goes through stages of ebb and flow, but there are still occasional regular patrons who attend. Carbon Valley Regional Library down in Firestone just started up their own Paws to Read program and they're a bit closer to Denver than I am. Your therapy dog owner can volunteer regularly at that library, if they're so inclined. If you have any other questions, let me know! I did a presentation on our Paws to Read program for the Rocky Mountain Children's Literature conference a bit over a year ago.

[A PDF of the PowerPoint presentation used for that conference can be found here (the file size is about 4MB):

http://www.lrs.org/documents/field_stats/paws_to_read_presentation.pdf]

Some of [the dog owners contact the library directly]. When I was starting the program, though, I contacted Therapy Dogs Inc and HABIC for a list of owners I could call and see if they'd be willing to volunteer regularly at the library. The Greeley Tribune has come by and done an article on our program a few times and thereafter I'd usually get more people contacting me about the Therapy dog program from the dog owner's side than the target patron side! Most of them were interested in finding out about the therapy dog program and how to get their dogs registered, but I've had several contact me who were already therapy dog owners who were able to provide their license and thereafter became regular volunteers. After 2.5 years of doing the program, we have about 4 owners who come every month and a list of people we can call for backup if a dog is sick or an owner is unavailable.

Kristi Madron, Children's Librarian
Centennial Park Library
High Plains Library District

Hi, Samantha,

We do "read to a dog" programs for reluctant readers here. We contact the dog owners directly to recruit easy going dogs that are used to kids. If you'd like more info, Elizabeth Tracy, our Youth Services Manager, can help. etracy@telluridelibrary.org
Good luck.

Barbara Brattin, Library Director
San Miguel County Public Library District #1

Samantha

Both Denver Pet Partners and Rocky Mountain Read are excellent organizations. We use the latter here at Douglas. I actually went through the training with Denver Pet Partners and took my dog to visit nursing homes for a number of years. You need one of these organizations because of the excellent training, network and follow up that they do. Going directly to a pet owner doesn't guarantee that both the owner and the dog have been properly trained.

Rochelle Logan, Associate Director of Research and Collections
Douglas County Libraries

Samantha,

We use the Boulder Humane Society. They provide us with trained therapy dogs that we use for our Read to Rover Program. We are contacted by their coordinator and then we speak with the dog owners who are interested in coming to Louisville and set up a schedule.

Denise Brooks, Children's Services Supervisor
Louisville Public Library

(Since responding to this posting, the Louisville Public Library has added a dog to their Read to Rover Program. They now have two dogs.)