



Fun Reading  Reading for Life

Our mission is to make reading fun for children,  
so they become confident, lifelong readers.  
No child should be left behind in literacy.

“Education is not the filling of a bucket,  
but the lighting of a fire”

William Butler Yeats

# Volunteer Start-Up Kit



Fun Reading  Reading for Life

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Fun Reading  Reading for Life

# Program Information

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Story Dogs Inc is based on the successful American literacy program Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.). The R.E.A.D program was launched in 1999 in Utah USA, as the first comprehensive literacy program built around the appealing idea of children and young adolescents reading to dogs. Story Dogs Inc improves children's reading and communication skills by employing a powerful method - reading to a dog. But not just any dog. Story Dogs are accredited companion animals who volunteer with their owner/handler as a team, going to schools and libraries.

## Why dogs?

Learning to read is often less about intellectual limitation than about overcoming fears. "Fear can destroy intelligence," says educator William Ayers. Animals are ideal reading companions because they help increase relaxation and lower blood pressure, listen attentively, do not judge, laugh or criticise, allow children to proceed at their own pace, and are less intimidating than peers or adults. (source: [www.therapyanimals.org/read/](http://www.therapyanimals.org/read/))

## Which dogs?

All breeds can be used except for restricted dog breeds. The dog's temperament, obedience, willingness and other training is of utmost importance. Dogs must pass a certification test carried out by a certified Dogs NSW trainer, as well as being immaculately groomed with regular vet checks.

## The handler

The handler of the dog is a volunteer trained in basic literacy education, primarily focused on the Reading Recovery model. This ensures the handler will not judge the child and will be able to help in ways that will best improve the child's chances of better reading. Dog Teams are fully insured and handlers have submitted a Prohibited Employment Declaration.

## Children

The children are usually from Stage 1, primarily Year 2. Students are chosen by the school. Story Dogs does not assess the children in any way as the sessions are designed to be as non-threatening as possible. We rely on assessment results taken throughout the year by the school. Parental consent is required before a child can participate in the program.

## A Story Dog reading session

Reading sessions take place in a quiet area of the school grounds, such as the library or the verandah outside the classroom. A large part of the first session with the dog team is introductions so the child gets to know the dog and handler and vice versa. A reading session is approximately 20 minutes long, where each child is one-on-one with the dog team. Books are chosen to suit the child's reading level. During the session the handler often speaks through the dog, such as; "Lassie doesn't quite understand what is happening on this page could you help him out?" The child becomes the teacher; confidence climbs!

## The magic

The non-judgmental, loving nature of dogs gives this program its magic. Children relax, open up, try harder and **have fun** reading with a dog. Also see [www.therapyanimals.org/read](http://www.therapyanimals.org/read) and [www.sitstayread.com](http://www.sitstayread.com)



# 10 Easy Steps

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## Welcome to Story Dogs

You want to become a Story Dog Volunteer?

There are some very important steps which need to be taken before you can start helping children to become better readers.

### Your dog:

1. Your dog must be at least one year old. If you have rescued or adopted this animal, you must have lived with it for a minimum of six months.
2. Your dog must be registered with your local Council as per the Companion Animals Act 1998. Proof of registration will be necessary.
3. Practise the Story Dog Team Test with your dog. The pass mark is 100% for this test. Does your dog need a bit of training to get 100%? We can help.
4. When you are confident that you and your dog are OK with all aspects of the Dog Team Test let us know and we will organise an accreditation session with our dog trainer.
5. Your dog will have to undergo a vet check. This will look at the dog's overall health, vaccinations , fleas and worming.

### You:

6. As you will be working with children you will have to comply with State legislation. You will have to fill out a Prohibited Employment Declaration form.
7. Training – 3hrs. Introduction to the Story Dogs program. Expectations – What Story Dogs expects from its volunteers and what you should expect from Story Dogs. How to run a Story Dog session. Literacy - how kids learn, how can we best help them.
8. Training - 2hrs. Observing Story Dog sessions with an experienced volunteer.
9. Become a member of Story Dogs Inc
10. With our help; find a sponsor for you and your dog.



# Dog Team Test

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Handler's name \_\_\_\_\_

Dog's name \_\_\_\_\_

Breed \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ MALE / FEMALE

**Successful accreditation?** Yes  No

Evaluator's name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Dog training number \_\_\_\_\_

Team test will involve the following:-

- Dogs are tested on a flat collar (no training collars) and a 4-ft cloth or leather leash (no retractable leashes.)
- No children are present during testing however, handlers are expected to act as if a child is present when required, items 6 & 8.
- Dog and handler are **both** evaluated as a team during the entire test event. The test starts when the team walks in the door.
- Evaluators can include comments on behaviors outside actual test.
- You are encouraged to talk to your dog throughout the test, and give positive reinforcement when appropriate.
- ABSOLUTELY NO: yelling; harsh commands; or negative reinforcement (i.e. jerking on leash).
- At evaluator's discretion, a team may pass the test even if they "Need Work". Safety is the overriding factor.

## 1. Greeting behavior and appearance

*HANDLER: Give sit cue; evaluator will approach and shake hands with handler.*

*DOG: Must be calm, take sit cue and stay while evaluator shakes hands and leaves.*

	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Is the dog clean and well groomed?			
Did the dog sit on cue?			
Did the dog hold the sit?			
Was the handler in control?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			

Comments:

Pass  Fail



## Dog Team Test cont.

<b>1. Accepting handling</b>			
<i>HANDLER: Give sit cue; evaluator will pet the dog; tail, ears; hug the dog.</i>			
<i>DOG: Must be under control; take sit command and allow gentle petting &amp; holding. Dog does NOT have to hold the sit after initial petting</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did the dog hold the sit for initial petting on head and back?			
Did the dog accept holding each ear?			
Tail?			
NOTE: Children not allowed to hug dogs, this is only for the test	Did the dog accept a light hug?		
	Did the dog enjoy the handling?		
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			

<b>2. Walking on a loose leash</b>			
<i>HANDLER: Walk dog on a loose leash past other dogs in pattern indicated by evaluator. Stop &amp; sit dog at the end</i>			
<i>DOG: Walks at same pace as handler without pulling. Ignores other dogs. Stops &amp; sits.</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did the dog walk without pulling on the leash?			
Did the dog ignore the other dogs?			
Was the handler in control?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			

<b>3. Relinquish toys</b>			
<i>HANDLER: Dog Team walks within 3 feet of toys on the floor.</i>			
<i>DOG: Must see the toys and walk away on cue from handler</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did the dog walk without pulling on the leash?			
Did the dog try to lunge for the toys?			
Was the handler proactive in keeping dog from toys?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			



## Dog Team Test cont.

4. "Drop It" with toy			
<i>HANDLER: Allow dog to pick-up a toy. Give command to "drop it"..</i>			
<i>DOG: Must release the object willingly and not try to grab it again.</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did the dog drop the toy on cue?			
Did the dog show ANY sign of aggression?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			

5. Program Set-Up			
<i>HANDLER: Walk dog to your space; put blanket on floor; give command for dog to down on blanket; sit on blanket with dog</i>			
<i>DOG: Must be under control at all times and go into a down on cue. Must stay in down position with "child" and handler for 3 minutes.</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did handler bring blanket?			
Was the handler ALWAYS in control of the leash?			
Did the dog down on cue and stay while handler sat down?			
Did the dog stay on the blanket for at least 3 mins?			
Did the handler monitor dog's behavior at all times?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			

6. Reaction to distractions			
<i>HANDLER: Stay seated with dog while a loud noise is made by dropping box of toys and a ball is bounced nearby</i>			
<i>DOG: Dog may react to the distractions but should not panic, try to run away, show aggressiveness or bark. Must regain composure quickly.</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did the dog react calmly to the noise?			
Did the dog lunge for the toys or ball?			
Was the handler proactive in keeping dog from toys & ball?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			



## Dog Team Test cont.

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<b>7. Child/Dog Interactions</b>			
<i>HANDLER: Show the 'child' the correct way to brush a dog. Brush dogs back with a soft brush</i>			
<i>DOG: To remain calm and stay on blanket.</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did handler bring a soft brush?			
Did the handler instruct the child how to brush the dog?			
Did the dog stay calm and on the blanket when being brushed?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			

<b>8. Recall</b>			
<i>HANDLER: Have your dog in a sit or down, give "stay" cue. Walk to the end of the leash. Return to dog. Repeat and, on cue from evaluator, recall your dog</i>			
<i>DOG: Must stay in position until called</i>			
	Pass	Fail	Needs work
Did the dog stay in position until handler returned?			
Did the dog stay in position until called?			
Was the handler proactive in keeping the dog in the stay?			
Did the handler praise and/or reward the dog appropriately?			
Comments:			
Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Fail <input type="checkbox"/>			

NOTE: This test has been compiled from information from the Sit Stay Read program and Dogs NSW.





# Expectations

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Welcome to Story Dogs as a Volunteer. Being part of the Story Dog Team means that there are certain things we (Story Dogs) expect from you and, rightly so, there are things that you, as a volunteer, should expect from Story Dogs.

## Story Dogs expectations of volunteers

**Be prompt and dependable.** Please call at least one day in advance, to let us know you will not be at school at your scheduled time. We can then attempt to have another Dog Team fill that space.

**Sign in and out** upon arrival and departure. Greet teachers and office staff to let them know you have arrived.

**Bring a smile** and your willingness to work.

**Be honest** in your approach and attitude.

**Be patient** when working with children. They may be having difficulties of which you are not aware. Your patience will work wonders.

**Be flexible** in responding to the needs of children and staff.

**Be confidential.** A child's work and behavior in school is to be held in confidence. Discuss problems with the staff, not with other volunteers, parents, or in the community.

**Be a positive role model** for children in attitude, behavior, language and dress. Let your conversations demonstrate respect for others, and avoid language that may be perceived as discriminatory, sexist or offensive.

**Notify a staff member** if a child confides about an abusive situation. Staff will do the necessary follow-up.

**Communicate.** Ask questions, share ideas, get to know the staff and other volunteers. Every problem can be solved with respect and honest communication.

**Protect privacy.** Do not ask for a child's address or phone number. Do not share your address or phone number with the children.

**Follow "safe touch" suggestions.** Volunteers must not *initiate* touching a child (eg. hand-holding, hugs, lap-sitting), but may respond to child's initiation of appropriate touch. Respect a child's right to say "no," volunteers may ask a child if he/she would like a hug.



### **Story Dogs expectations continued**

**Be respectful of children's diversity** of culture, religion, and background. Don't assume the child celebrates the same holidays (Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or even their birthday). Also don't assume the make-up of a child's "family" (eg. size, race or gender). Practice correct pronunciation of the children's names if they are unfamiliar. Show interest in the students' cultures and learn more about those cultures.

**Ensure positive closure.** If you plan on ending your volunteer involvement before the end of the year, please notify us. It is especially important that the children be left with the clear message that you have enjoyed working with them.

**Look after your dog.** Ensure that your dog is clean, well groomed with up-to-date with vaccinations and worming.

**Pick up after your dog.** Always pick up after your dog's toileting.

**A sick dog.** Do not visit if your dog is showing signs of illness, skin lesions or undue stress.

**Photographs.** Please do not take photographs of students.

**Provide feedback.** Provide regular feedback to the classroom teacher, Principal (if appropriate) and Story Dogs regarding the program and/or individual student's progress/behaviour. Please complete our record sheet after each visit. Please contact either Janine or Leah (email or phone) on a regular basis with updates.

**Report incidents.** Report any incident to the school and to Story Dogs and follow any required procedures.

**Professional development.** To attend at least one PD event each year, run by Story Dogs



## **Volunteer expectations of Story Dogs Inc**

We have outlined what we believe you should expect from us and these will be discussed in our training. Any additional expectations you have will be discussed on that day, also.

**Essential tools.** To be provided with the essential items necessary to undertake reading sessions.

**Training.** To be provided with adequate training to equip you with the necessary skills to undertake reading sessions with children. These training sessions will cover:-

- How children learn to read
- How you can prompt children if they are having difficulties
- Expectations of both volunteers and Story Dogs Inc
- How be more aware of your dog and its needs – does s/he need a break? Is s/he hot? Is s/he getting agitated?
- The opportunity to observe a volunteer in a reading session

**Professional development.** To be provided with professional development opportunities at least once a year.

**Dog Training.** To be assisted so that your dog can complete the Dog Team Test satisfactorily.

**Support.** To be given ongoing support in your role as a volunteer.

**Updates.** To be provided with regular updates on the organisation, its policies, its people and its programs

**Be heard.** To have a part in planning, making suggestions, and being shown respect for an honest opinion.

**An equal.** To be treated as an equal, not just free help.



# Volunteer Costs

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At Story Dogs Inc, we will endeavor to make your volunteering experience as close to cost neutral as possible. Generally, we will reimburse any expenses to do with yourself and your dog which directly relate to your activities with Story Dogs. Here is a list of possible expenses you may encounter and who is responsible for them.

Item Description	Responsible for costs	
	Story Dogs	Volunteer
Shirt with logo	✓ (\$20)	✓ (\$20)
Vest for dog with logo & name	✓	
Reading rug and bag	✓	
Insurance	✓	
Initial 6 week basic dog obedience training course - Murwillumbah	✓	
Additional dog training courses if necessary		✓
Accreditation of Dog Team	✓	
Training of Dog Team after accreditation of dog	✓	
Yearly dog health check	✓	
Dog - yearly vaccinations		✓
Dog - worming treatments		✓
Dog - flea treatments		✓
Dog - nail clipping, grooming		✓
Dog - Council registration, including micro chipping		✓
Fuel and vehicle costs		✓





# Application Form

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email:(optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Numbers: (W) \_\_\_\_\_ (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (Mob) \_\_\_\_\_

Dogs' Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dog's breed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dog's age \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you owned the dog? \_\_\_\_\_

Brief employment history: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Qualifications: \_\_\_\_\_

List any skills you have that are relevant to volunteering with Story Dogs: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List any volunteer work you have been involved in: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe why you and your dog would like to be a part of Story Dogs' reading support program:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your interest. Please forward completed form to the contact details below