

# 2025 Impact Report

## A Year of Pawsitive Impact



This report shares what we learned from our first full year using our new Social Impact Measurement Framework, developed in conjunction with For Purpose Evaluations. Data has been gathered from parents, teachers, and volunteers.



# Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the volunteers, teachers and parents who took the time to collect the data that helps us understand our impact and keep improving.

We are proud to work alongside you to contribute to education and literacy outcomes for children. We know that Story Dogs is only one of many factors contributing to a child's reading success.


We also acknowledge our evaluation partners For-Purpose Evaluations for their professional expertise and collaborative support throughout the process.




For-Purpose Evaluations is an award-winning social-enterprise supporting for-purpose organisations around the world to create and implement social impact measurement, evaluation and learning frameworks. We balance a robust academic approach with a pragmatic understanding of what it is really like to provide high quality supportive programs to people and communities with complex needs.

# Introduction

2024-2025

 In 2024 we developed a Social Impact Measurement Framework to help us gain a deeper understanding of our program, and continuously enhance the program for everyone involved.

 This report shares what we learned from our first full year using our new Social Impact Measurement Framework.

 The report paints a clear picture of the positive changes we are helping create for children, including becoming more confident learners, strengthening literacy skills, and developing a genuine love of reading.

## Story Dogs - What We Do

Story Dogs enables a child and a dog with their volunteer handler a weekly one-on-one reading session held at the child's reading level throughout the course of a school year. The literacy program is based on the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) model.

The READ program has successfully proven the educational benefits of reading to dogs since 1999. Story Dog Volunteers are guided on working with children to go at the child's pace and use the calming presence of the dog to support comprehension during each 20 minute reading session.

Books are chosen to be fun and interesting, and are matched to the literacy level of the student. During a session, the volunteer handler often speaks through the dog.

Adapting the learning environment by involving the dog such as "Simba doesn't understand what is happening on this page, could you help him out?" encourages the child's confidence to navigate 'teaching' the dog in a trusting and shared learning environment



**2780**

Number of Children helped every week

**399**

Number of schools we have partnered with

**85,350\***

Number of one-on-one reading sessions delivered

\*approx

**Our Achievements in 2025**

**556**

Number of Dog teams

**56**

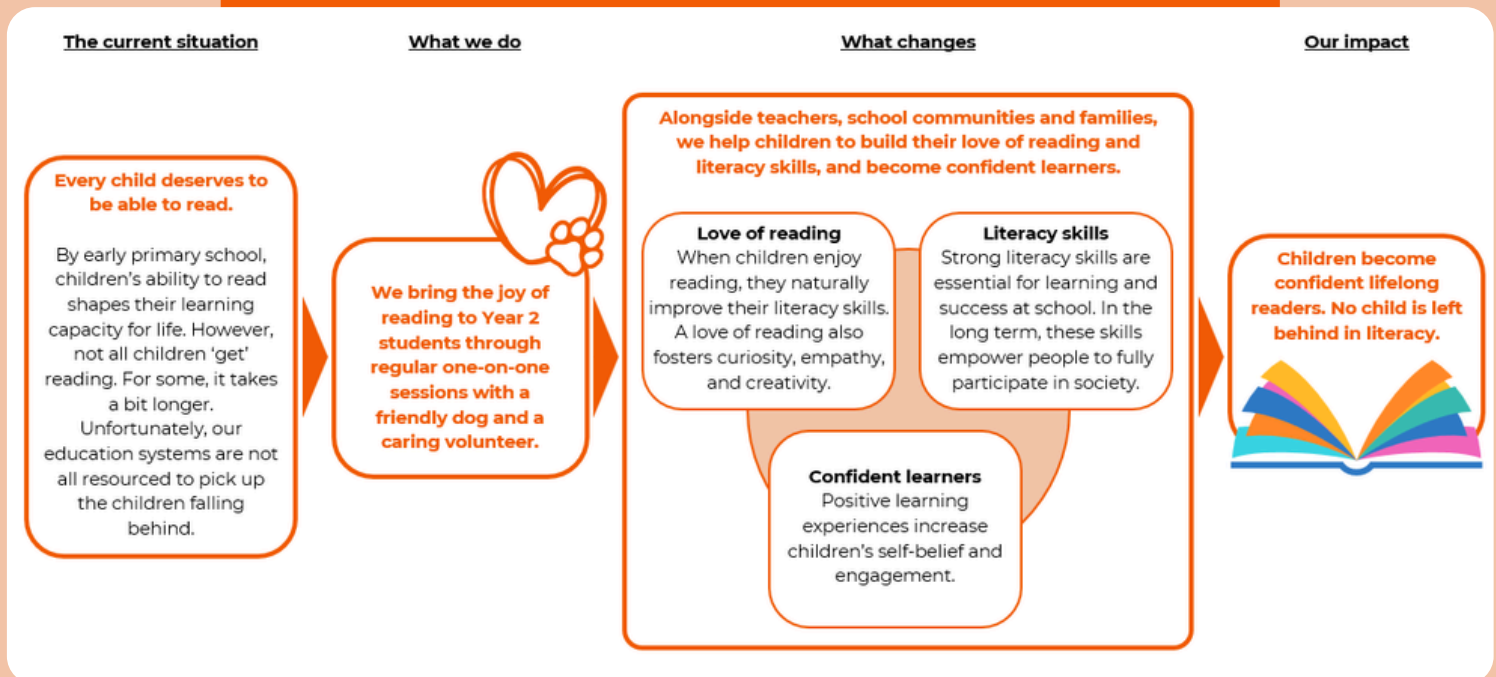
Number of Coordinators

*"My daughter was reluctant to sound the words out in case she got it wrong, but now she is willing to try and is getting it right! She has grown in confidence, and it is wonderful to see her enjoying her reading instead of dreading it." - Parent*

# How we measure our impact

Our Social Impact Measurement Framework includes perspectives from volunteers, teachers, and parents to understand where our work is making a real difference and where we can grow even stronger.

## Our theory of change



**124**

volunteer observations

**86**

school contact / teacher surveys

**72**

parent surveys

# What Changes...

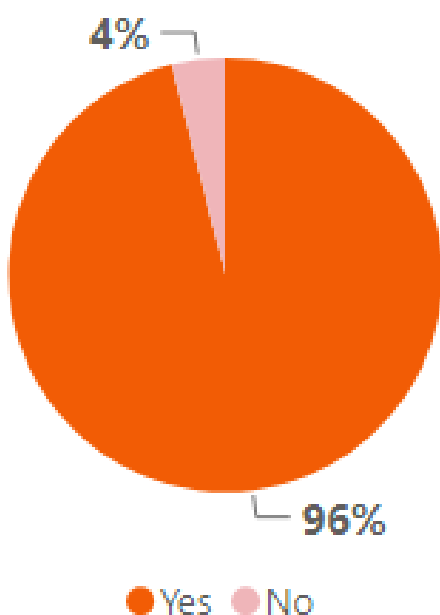
## *Love of reading*

Love of reading is an important part of our theory of change, and an aspect of every child's reading journey that we aim to have an impact on. A love of reading means children enjoy books, feel excited about stories, and see reading as fun. A love of reading opens up imagination, fosters curiosity and empathy, and supports long-term learning.

Story Dogs helps children develop a love of reading by creating joyful, positive reading experiences. Children have fun during sessions, and feel accepted, calm, and safe to make mistakes. These experiences help them build confidence and enjoy reading beyond the sessions.

A love of reading helps build literacy skills. Research shows that children who enjoy reading and feel confident in their abilities tend to develop stronger reading comprehension as they move through primary school.[1]

## Children have fun while reading during the sessions



**96% of parents say that their children talk about Story Dogs at home.**

[1] Hillman, K. (2023, May 16). Reading to learn: Why the PIRLS results matter. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). <https://www.acer.org/au/news/article/reading-to-learn-why-the-pirls-results-matter>

# When children talk about Story Dogs they say:

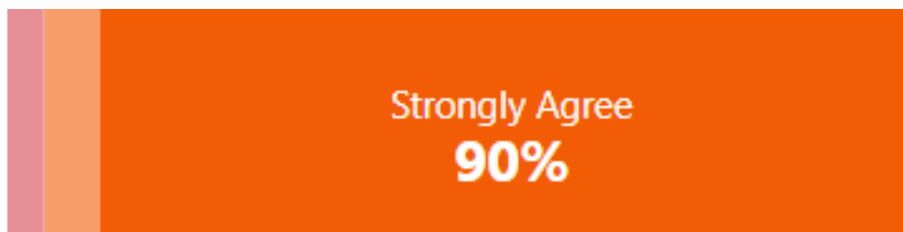


He absolutely loves it  
They have fun during the reading session  
They enjoy reading with the dog  
They like the books they read Started loving dogs  
'I like seeing Frankie' our Story Dog They like the stickers  
Appreciates Molly sitting so still and listening to all her story  
LOVED Murphy the dog She gets to read with people  
Maia looks fwd to it each week  
My child loves reading to his beautiful dog companion

Data is represented in a Word Cloud format, where the largest text indicates the most amount of responses, and smaller text indicates fewer responses.

**90%**

of teachers agree that children have fun during the reading sessions



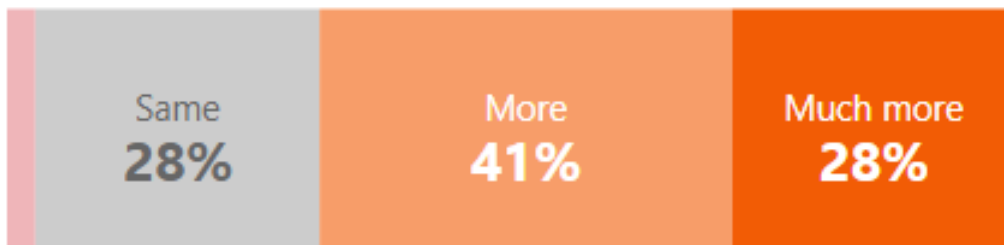
She often tells us on Monday that it is a Story Dogs day and is happy to run into school.

- Parent

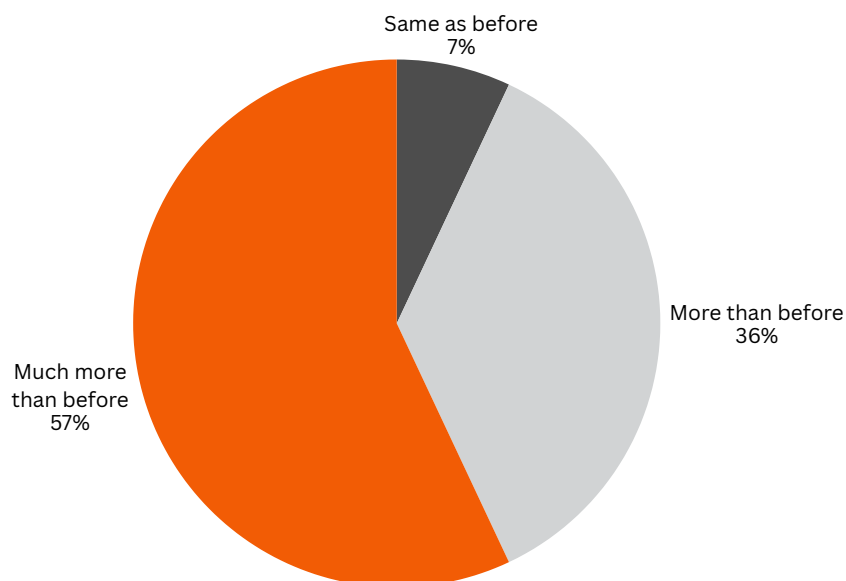
# Children are more confident about their reading

**71%**

A total of 71% of Parents asked; observed that children ask to read harder books more often and much more often.



Parents observed that children enjoyed reading outside of the sessions



# What Changes...

## *Literacy skills*



Literacy skills are a key component of our theory of change. Our work aims to support and contribute to efforts by teachers, parents and carers, and other contributors to improve literacy. Literacy skills include the ability to understand and interpret text, recognise words, and read fluently. Strong literacy skills are essential for learning and success at school. Early support for students who find reading challenging helps them stay on track as learning increasingly relies on reading.[1]

Story Dogs helps children build literacy skills by creating a calm, non-judgemental space where reading feels safer and more enjoyable, so children are more willing to try, practise, persist, and build skills over time.

In the long term, literacy skills are critical for job opportunities, health outcomes, community engagement and lifelong learning. These skills empower people to access and understand information, communicate effectively, and fully participate in society.



## Children want to learn to read and are willing to try during the sessions

“As she has got to know us she has become more confident. At the start if she wasn't sure of a word she wouldn't say anything. Now she'll have a guess as she knows we're not judgmental.”  
- Volunteer

## Children practice reading more

**88%**

A total of 88% of parents say that children read more and much more at home



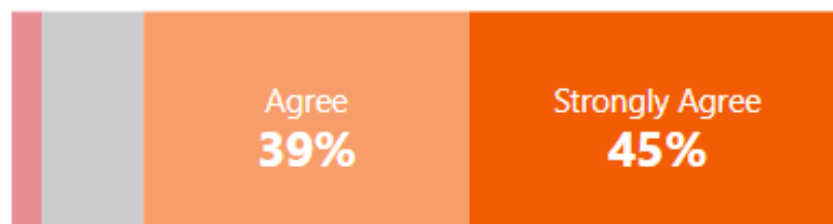
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“The change has been phenomenal! Our daughter is wandering around the house, always reading. She finishes a full 150-page book in a couple of days” - Parent

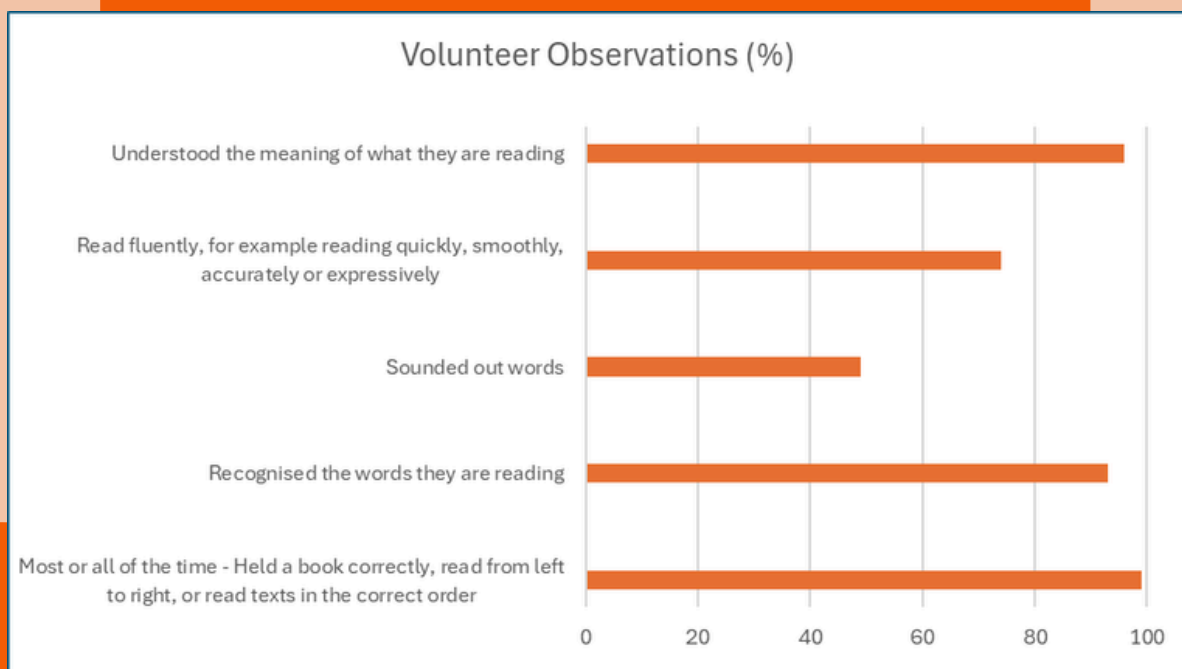
# Children improve their literacy skills

**84%**

A total of 84% of teachers agree and strongly agree that Story Dogs contributes to improvements in children's literacy skills.



Volunteer observations of children's key literacy skills at the end of the year.



“When this child commenced school this year they explained that they did not know the alphabet well and could not read. Now they are sounding out words and reading books.”

– Volunteer

# What Changes...

## *Confident learners*



An important part of our theory of change is helping to inspire confident learners. This not only contributes to improvements in reading and literacy, but has positive flow on effects both inside and out of the classroom. Many children with reading challenges feel anxious and judged. Story Dogs creates a calm, supportive space where they feel safe, relaxed and able to enjoy learning. Reading with the dog helps them focus, build confidence and form positive connections.

Confidence supports persistence, participation, and willingness to try new learning tasks. Research shows that students who feel confident and engaged during reading lessons tend to demonstrate stronger literacy skills.[1] Positive learning experiences increase children's self-belief and school engagement, and encourage them to take on new challenges, at school and beyond.

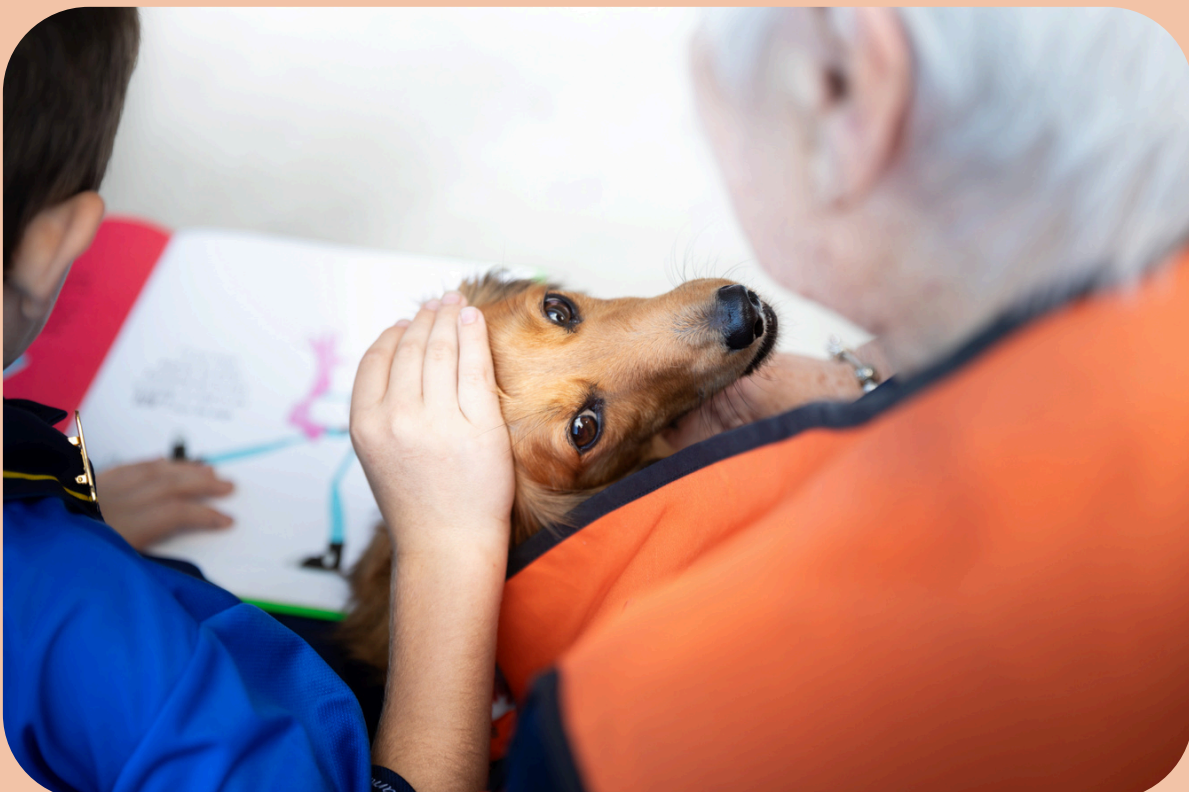
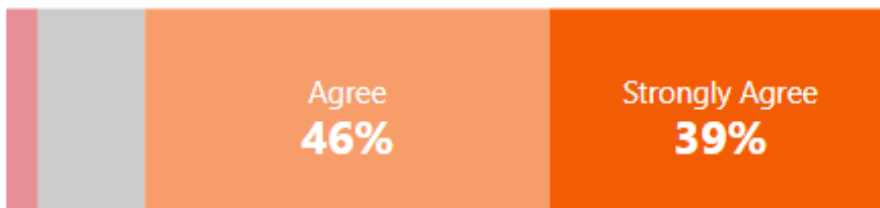


# Children build their social skills

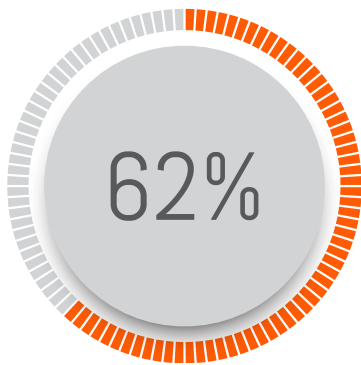
“The Story Dogs program is absolutely amazing!!!! If only every child could have the opportunity. It is so helpful, not only for the reading, but also for the child's positive social and emotional growth and development.” - Parent

**85%**

A total of 85% of teachers agree and strongly agree that Story Dogs contributes to improvements in children's social skills.



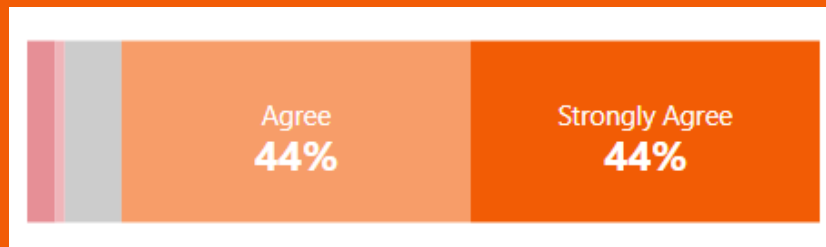
# Children attend school more



Two thirds (62%) of parents say that children show more interest in school since being part of the Story Dogs program.

# 88%

A total 88% of teachers agree and strongly agree that Story Dogs contributes to improvements in children's engagement in school.



# “

“All the students who have participated have had such a positive attitude and excitement about coming to school on the days they have Story Dogs.” - Teacher



# Children have more self-belief

92%

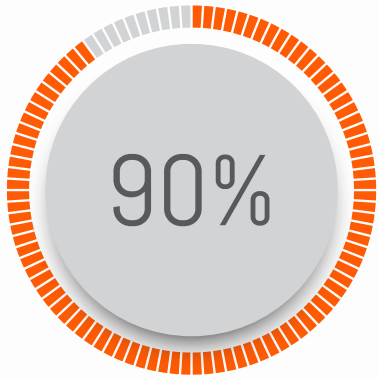
A total of 92% of teachers agree and strongly agree that Story Dogs contributes to improvements in children's general confidence.



“

“The Story Dogs program enabled the students who were a little reserved to experience one on one time with the dog and the volunteer. This has contributed to an improvement in their self esteem.” - Teacher

# Children have more self-belief



90% of parents say that children believe in themselves and their abilities more.



“

“He seems more confident in trying to read, he is quite proud of his efforts in reading. He’s just more confident all round.” - Parent

# Volunteer outcomes

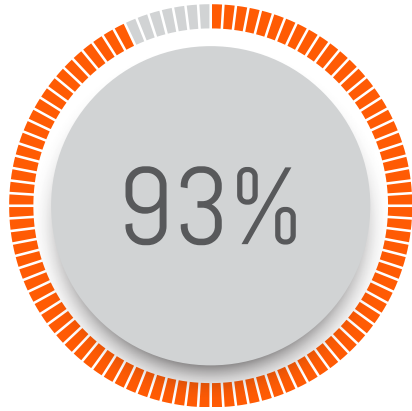


Many people want to contribute to their community in a way that feels practical, positive, and aligned with their everyday life. Story Dogs supports this by training and supporting volunteer Dog Teams to deliver weekly one-on-one reading sessions in local primary schools. Through this role, volunteers use their time with their dog to help children practise reading in a calm, non-judgemental setting. They strengthen their own social connections, and build a sense of purpose and contribution.

The majority of volunteers are older and therefore participating in Story Dogs creates opportunities to maintain community participation and social connections.



# What our volunteers have found valuable about their work with Story Dogs



93% of Volunteers feel more able to meaningfully contribute to their community because of Story Dogs



“

“Getting to know the children, and being able to make a difference to each and every one of them in some way. Giving my dog something she loves doing (being with children), although I think all the pats, cuddles and treats may have something to do with it!!!”  
- Volunteer

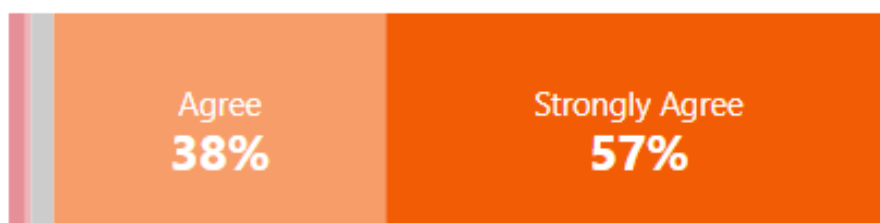
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“Have a child successfully and confidently read a book at the end of the year that he couldn't read at the start of the year. Also having teachers say they notice the improvement in the children's reading.” - Volunteer

## What our volunteers have found valuable about their work with Story Dogs

# 95%

A total of 95% of volunteers agree and strongly agree that the children they work with are making progress



“It's such a beneficial program - the kids love it and it's such a pleasure to see them progress over the year. But it is also such a positive thing to do for your own mental health. 2 hours of being present and in the moment, doing something totally different. Not to mention my dog loves it too and everyone at school loves him. It's win win all round!”

- Volunteer



# Our impact in the future

This is our first impact report using our new Social Impact Measurement Framework. We believe this is a solid step towards better understanding our impact for our students, volunteers and supporters. We will continue to collect data with our framework and report on our impact, to share with our volunteers, schools, dog sponsors, donors and corporate partners.

## What we can do better

As a result of implementing our data collection tools in 2025 we have learnt a lot. Here are some key learnings for 2026 and beyond.

1

Focusing on collecting more volunteer observations at regular intervals, to more fully capture the change that students experience throughout the school year when engaging with Story Dogs.

2

Ensuring that data collection does not become a burden on our volunteers and that we keep the focus on FUN in the reading sessions.

3

Moving the 'work' associated with data collection from the Coordinators to Support Central is a key adjustment from the learnings and feedback of data collection in 2025.

**Thank you to all those involved in this report and those that participated in the surveys or provided your crucial feedback.**