

**Let's keep
the pages
turning**

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2025**



**Together we
write the next
chapter.**

01

Welcome



Our Annual Report is a showcase of our achievements, progress and commitment to **our Vision throughout the year, January to December 2025**

Parent feedback

"Coming from a vulnerable background and not being able to have pets in our home, Story Dogs has been therapeutic for his wellbeing and encouraging for his reading."

02

Impact



Volunteer feedback

“Being able to participate in the community and a really nice feeling of having some purpose and value. Being able to give these children time to breathe and have some fun while highlighting the value of reading.”

Teacher feedback

“I can’t speak highly enough of your wonderful volunteers. Every year the students LOVE the program. I think it is an excellent program, and we are extremely lucky at this school.”

**LET’S KEEP
THE PAGES TURNING**



Our Vision

To make reading fun for children so they become confident, lifelong readers.

Our Mission

Create a safe, fun, supportive, non-judgemental environment for primary school aged children needing assistance with literacy.

What we do...

Story Dogs is a free reading support program for primary school students. It was founded in Murwillumbah, NSW, in 2009 because every Australian child deserves to be able to read.

Reading sessions take place in a quiet area of the school grounds, such as the library or outside the classroom. 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 student's reading level. During the session, the Volunteer often speaks through the dog, such as; "Sam doesn't understand what is happening on this page, could you help him out?"

The child becomes the teacher as they help the dog understand and their confidence soars.



Chair's Report

As a writer myself, I have a great passion for children's literacy. There is nothing more special than seeing a child light up when their Story Dog arrives and the books come out. That's truly when the magic happens, and it's those moments that spur me, the Story Dogs Board, and every volunteer, coordinator, and staff member on as we keep the pages turning.

The next chapter for Story Dogs from a strategic perspective is driving towards our 2030 goals. We're aiming to have 1000 Dog Teams, 100 Coordinators, and reach 650 schools, with thousands of reading sessions every week!

I'm pleased to report Story Dogs had a year of solid, sustainable growth in 2025 and we're on track to meet our 2030 goals. Schools and school-aged children eager to have reading sessions with a Story Dog have never been an issue. We have a waiting list of interested schools.

The main challenge I foresee is increasing our Coordinator group and, with them, expanding our Dog Teams. One way we can do this is through increasing our visibility with the Australian public. While we're national and growing, Story Dogs is not yet a household name. The Board, Janine, and I are working towards making this a reality and an important step was the appointment of our Fundraising Coordinator, Raechel.

Raechel brings a wealth of not-for-profit partnerships and fundraising experience, and she has been working closely with our Marketing and Communication expert, Anita, on integrated campaigns that will raise our profile and keep us growing financially.

Another way we can meet our goals is by understanding and sharing our impact. The impact measurement framework project started in late 2024 has been trialled and implemented, and I'm keen for us to share just how much of a difference Story Dogs makes to so many lives in 2026.

As mentioned in the Board overview on the next page, we had a stable Story Dogs Board supported by three committees. The one change of note I want to recognise is the departure of Petra Westphal from the Board in 2025. Petra's service to Story Dogs over many years has been nothing short of inspirational and, while I am sorry to see Petra depart the Board, I am incredibly thankful she continues to support Story Dogs through her other roles. I sincerely thank Petra for her Board and committee service and I look forward to catching up with her, the rest of the Support Central team and Coordinators at the next Story Dogs Leaders' Conference in Adelaide in 2026!

Shane Cummings



Together we write the next chapter.

03

Board Overview

Indicative of Story Dogs' strong and stable financial and non-financial performance in 2025, we had a strong and stable Board. The notable exception was the departure of Petra Westphal from the Board (and the Fundraising, Marketing and Communication Committee) mid-way through the year, which was a huge blow given her unwavering support, vast corporate knowledge, and insightful advice. Petra's basket was overflowing with Story Dogs but, fortunately for the organisation, she remains actively involved as both the Senior Project Manager with Support Central and a valued Coordinator and mentor in South East Queensland.

In 2025, the three committees established the year prior to support the Story Dogs Board really hit their stride. The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee's biggest contribution for 2025 was working with Janine to develop a comprehensive Story Dogs budget. While we've always had robust financial management processes, the budget developed in 2025 allows Janine and the Board to forecast peaks and troughs in revenue and expenditure, which is a huge boost as we look towards our 2030 goals.

As you can imagine from an organisation like Story Dogs that takes good governance seriously, the Governance, Performance and Remuneration Committee conducted a comprehensive review in 2025 of Story Dogs' corporate policies and documents and introduced several new ones that have (or will) increase our professionalism.

The new policies provide clarity on matters that were previously decided ad-hoc by the Managing Director or Board. They include a Learning and Development Policy, Leave Policy, Reimbursement Policy, and other documents expected of a forward-thinking 21st century organisation.

The committee also introduced new processes for reviewing our strategic performance, starting with the Managing Director role.

The Fundraising, Marketing and Communication Committee was disbanded in mid 2025 after Raechel's appointment as Fundraising Coordinator. The committee members wanted to empower Raechel's position and reduce any administrative burden, so it was decided to disband the committee and for the Board to provide advice on fundraising and marketing campaigns as they are developed by Raechel and Support Central. However, before the committee was dissolved, it was instrumental in recruiting Raechel to Support Central, recruiting our new grant writer, and providing advice on fundraising initiatives such as the 'Gathered Here' will and bequest service.





Managing Director

The pages do not turn by themselves but need the help of our volunteers who, week after week, turn up at school with their wonderful dogs to help students. The pages are also turned by those who support the volunteers, our Coordinators.

Coordinators are the engine room and leaders of Story Dogs helping to ensure our volunteer Dog Teams are engaged, valued and respected at every point on their volunteer journey with Story Dogs.

Our pages are turned by community help from local Dog Sponsors, donors and supporters.

The pages are also turned by a team of passionate directors and supporters who make up Support Central, the Story Dogs head office. These staff and volunteers look after the financials, the registration of volunteers, the administration around dog sponsorship, governance and making sure the welfare and safety of everyone involved, including the dogs, is paramount.

During 2025 we welcomed 3 part time staff, taking the total staff number to 8 with a FTE of 4.4. We also welcomed one more volunteer to the Support Central Team, taking the total number of members (paid and volunteer) to 17.

Overall a HUGE amount of pages were turned in 2025, with over 85,000 one-on-one reading sessions delivered.

A very strategic change in operations was implemented during 2025. The introduction of a cap of 10 Volunteer Dog Teams per Coordinator. We know that the Coordinator role is a huge volunteer role, entailing many hours of effort. Our goal is to reduce the burden of this role and make the role more attractive, so we have many more Coordinators looking after smaller regions, staying longer and avoiding burn out.

In the short term it means that we are possibly turning away volunteers as a region gets to the level of having 10 Volunteer Dog Teams, thus being capped, but we are hopeful that we find many more Coordinators to split existing regions and thus continue to be able to grow.

We have over 250 schools on our waiting list and more and more students who need our help. It is a big challenge for us but one we are keen to take on.

I am extremely proud to be working alongside so many professional, caring, passionate and hardworking people who make up Story Dogs. Feedback from teachers, parents, schools, sponsors and volunteers is overwhelmingly positive. It has been another fun, fulfilling and successful year.

Bring on 2026! Woof Woof.

Janine Sigley

Together we write the next chapter.

04

2025 Facts



2875

Children being
helped EVERY week



575

Volunteer Dog
Teams



418

Dog Sponsors



412

Schools we are
partnering with



Over 85,000
one-on-one reading
sessions delivered

Together we write the next chapter.

05

Training New Coordinators



“Growing our team of Coordinators allows for matched growth of reading teams which is integral to sustained program growth in line with the Board’s Strategic Plan.

It is a team effort to realise this goal so THANK YOU to everyone in this shared journey!” Amanda Milroy

As part of our new policy of capping the number of Dog Teams per Region to ten we have bedded down our Coordinator Training Program, with Amanda Milroy our paid Coordinator Trainer.

Amanda Milroy - Coordinator Trainer

The interest and number of potential Coordinators has steadily increased throughout 2025, with 11 new Coordinators being fully trained. It may seem like a small number but there are many steps involved and it takes dedication from our mentoring Coordinators to make it happen.

At the end of 2025 we have 19 potential Coordinators in training and another 14 interested. This is the basis of our growth plans as we know that each new region or Coordinator will potentially add another 10 volunteer Dog Teams, and possibly even more as we have seen in Canberra, which has grown from one region to four in just a couple of years!

Watch this space as we bring on online learning and streamline the training even more.

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Volunteer Thoughts



“To see the students’ faces light up when they see ‘Leo’ and the teacher/co-ordinator telling me how they look forward to reading to ‘Leo’.”

“Seeing the children’s faces each week when ‘Rio’ and I arrive and letting them select the book to read, (almost all are doggy books). ‘Rio’ gets so excited when I get our vests out on Tuesday mornings and I enjoy being able to access the school my three children attended over the past 30 years with some staff still there.”

“At the beginning of our first reading session, one student immediately stated, “I don't read Miss". I asked if he would like me to read to ‘Ruby’ and he can listen and join in if he wanted to. Our sessions began with 'Where's Wally?' and other books to hold the student’s attention. As the year progressed, he wanted to choose books like the other students. His reading progressed and so did his confidence, this being highlighted when, in Term 3, he took the book that he read to ‘Ruby’ (The Wishing Tree) and eagerly showed his teacher. He proudly exclaimed, “I just read this book to ‘Ruby’. At the beginning of the year, Miss had to read it to me!”

07

Volunteers



During 2025 our volunteer Coordinators welcomed another

172
new volunteers

“

Recognition and thanks

On average each volunteer gives us approx. 3 hours of their time every week during school terms which, over a year, is over 100 hrs BUT they also give of their wonderful dog. There would be many hours of grooming, vet visits, walks, training and smooching of the amazing dogs that make up our Volunteer Dog Teams. **THANKS so much for your time!**

Story Dogs has the honour of having many of our volunteers choose to stay with us for numerous years. Here are the numbers for 2025.

Honour list

- 5 & 6 years = 71
- 7 & 8 years = 31
- 9 years = 14
- 10 years = 5
- Over 10 years = 12

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Dogs



A Story Dog is a truly amazing dog giving patience, permission to make mistakes, unconditional love and their ever-present tail wags.



Welfare is paramount

Story Dogs is passionate about the welfare of our dogs.

Annual vet checks and not volunteering on consecutive days are just two of the ways we help to keep our dogs in tip top condition for the students they help.

Memorials

It is with sadness and joy that we remember the dogs that have passed while they were a Story Dog. Sadness that they no longer will be joining the children in their reading sessions and joy for the lovely memories they have left us.

Story Dogs acknowledges the great work all these wonderful dogs have given to help children laugh, smile, relax, play and pat their way through many, many great stories.

Check out the Memorials on our website.

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Partner Schools



At the end of 2025 we were partnering with 412 schools all around Australia. We partner with all sorts of schools, from schools with only 15 students to those with over 1000 students. From private, Catholic, Stiner, Jewish, State, Anglican and Christian schools, we are happy to help students in almost all primary school in Australia.

Dog Assessors

We have 62 expert Dog Team Assessors. These assessors are specialised professionals in the dog training/behaviour field. They assess each Dog Team to ensure everyone is safe and the welfare of the dog is maintained. They all have their own businesses and are an external and impartial resource for Story Dogs.

Thank you for going over and above the basic Dog Team Assessment and helping our volunteers with so much extra time and expertise!

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Partners

Dog Sponsors

Financial sustainability is crucial for a charity to realise its mission, to function and to grow. Dog Sponsors are the bedrock of our financial sustainability. Dog Sponsors, year after year, support all the costs of putting a Dog Team into a school. This means our volunteers do not need to put their hand in their own pocket to make great things happen.

Having over 85% of our Dog Teams sponsored means we can continue to expand and grow into new regions, helping many more students. Thanks to all of our amazing Dog Sponsors!



10 year Sponsors

Woof Woof to these sponsors who have been with us for over 10 years!!!

- Key Produce
- Lions Club of Lismore
- Lions Club of Murwillumbah
- Lions Club of Kingscliff
- Lions Club of Rochedale Springwood
- Middle Brighton Veterinary Centre
- Q Super Centre
- Rotary Club of Brighton North
- Australasian Order of the Old Bastards
- Twin Towns Branch

09

Philanthropic Supporters

Emorgo Foundation

The Emorgo Foundation has been supporting Story Dogs for 10 years! We are extremely appreciative of their continued support, providing untied funds, essential for us to keep the pages turning.



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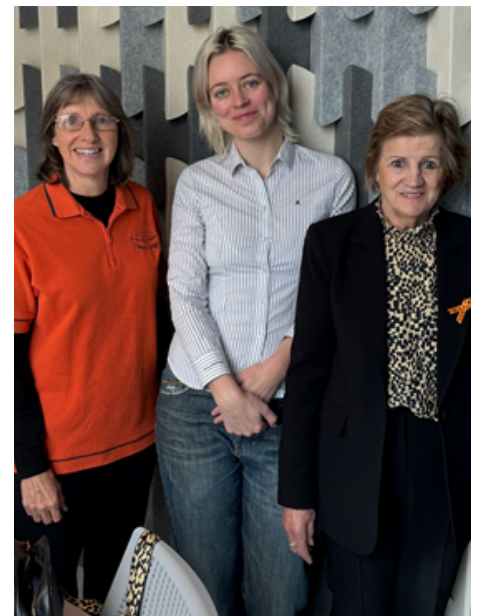
Philanthropic Supporters



Pressroom Partners / The Phil Taylor Foundation

Another bumper year for Story Dogs receiving the support of Pressroom Partners and the Phil Taylor Foundation. They have provided printed resources for us to recognise our volunteers for National Volunteering Week and for end of year volunteer recognitions. They recorded, edited and published a 30 min podcast for us and filmed, edited and published the 12 Dogs of Christmas video. It is so much fun working with Peter, Phil, Claudia, Alex and James.

Thank you.



Janine Sigley (L) and Megan Morgan (R) from Story Dogs with Claudia from Pressroom after recording the podcast

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Philanthropic Supporters



Story Dogs was fortunate to be chosen as one of only two charities to be showcased as Petstock's Christmas partners.



Our matching partner for our Christmas Campaign was the Elston Foundation. This gave us a huge boost in our campaign. Thanks!



A very generous donation to enable the purchase of over 1000 quality, new children's books.

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Impact Measurement

Purpose of the Impact Measurement Framework

The purpose of the Story Dogs SIM Framework is to tell a clear, evidenced based story about the outcomes that Story Dogs contributes to for children and volunteers. This evidence will support communication to all stakeholders including current and potential sponsors and schools, volunteer dog teams and coordinators, and potential volunteers. The framework will also support Story Dogs to understand whether and to what extent Story Dogs is contributing to the intended positive impact.

Our Theory of Change

Every child deserves to be able to read. By early primary school, children's ability to read shapes their learning capacity for life. However, not all children 'get' reading. For some, it takes a bit longer. Unfortunately, our education systems are not always resourced to pick up the children falling behind.

We bring the joy of reading to Year 2 students through regular one-on-one sessions with a friendly dog and a caring volunteer.

Alongside teachers, school communities and families, we help children to build their love of reading and literacy skills, and become confident learners.

Children become confident lifelong readers. No child is left behind in literacy.

In 2024 Story Dogs partnered with *For Purpose Evaluations* to develop our Theory of Change and to measure our impact.

In 2025 we rolled out four new data collection tools and collected 834 responses.

Data collection tools used were:

- Parent survey x 1 in November
- Teacher Survey x 1 in November
- Volunteer survey x 1 in November
- Volunteer observation survey x 2, June and November for target students only
- Volunteer feedback and stories – ad hoc throughout the year.
- Total of 834 responses in 2025

In addition, two existing volunteer surveys were introduced to the dashboard. These surveys have been ongoing for a number of years.

They are:

- Volunteer Leaving survey – sent to all volunteers who leave Story Dogs
- New Volunteer Survey – sent to all volunteers 3 months after their start date

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Impact Measurement

The four domains of Impact Measurement outcomes for Story Dogs are:

1. Confident Learners
2. Love of Reading
3. Literacy Skills
4. Volunteers

Here are some of the results.

Confident Learners

Parents think that Story Dogs has helped improve their child's reading and / or confidence

Improved
20%

Greatly improved
80%

School contacts / teachers observe that Story Dogs contributes to improvements in children's attitudes to reading

Agree
32%

Strongly Agree
63%

Love of Reading

Literacy Skills

Parents observe that children read at home more

Same
12%

More
39%

Much more
48%

Volunteers say they see the children they work with making progress

Agree
35%

Strongly Agree
59%

Volunteers

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Online Leaders Conference

In September we held an online Leaders Conference with the theme of “Let’s Keep the Pages Turning”. It was such a hit that it has become the theme of this report. The conference was attended by 51 of our 75 person leadership team.

Leaders were treated to our keynote speaker, Melanie von Bertouch, a Speech Language Pathologist, who gave us insights on how children learn to read and also the many ways in which our volunteers can do small things to help the children they see to become confident lifelong readers.



WONDER WORDS
What actions do you take to make your volunteers feel engaged? Type in chat



There was a lot of fun around the choice of participants’ favourite children’s book and the ensuing wonderful creative hats and head dresses. A lot of time was spent on exploring why books were chosen and the benefits to the program. An outcome was a revised book list from which we can purchase books and our volunteers can use.

Leaders took part in a series of activities around supporting our volunteers by sharing ideas around how our volunteers can feel engaged, valued and respected. Insights into volunteer support were explored.

Overall, an entertaining and educational four hours.

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Out 'n' About

Our amazing Volunteers are so passionate about the Story Dogs program that they dive into many and varied events during the year. Here are just some.

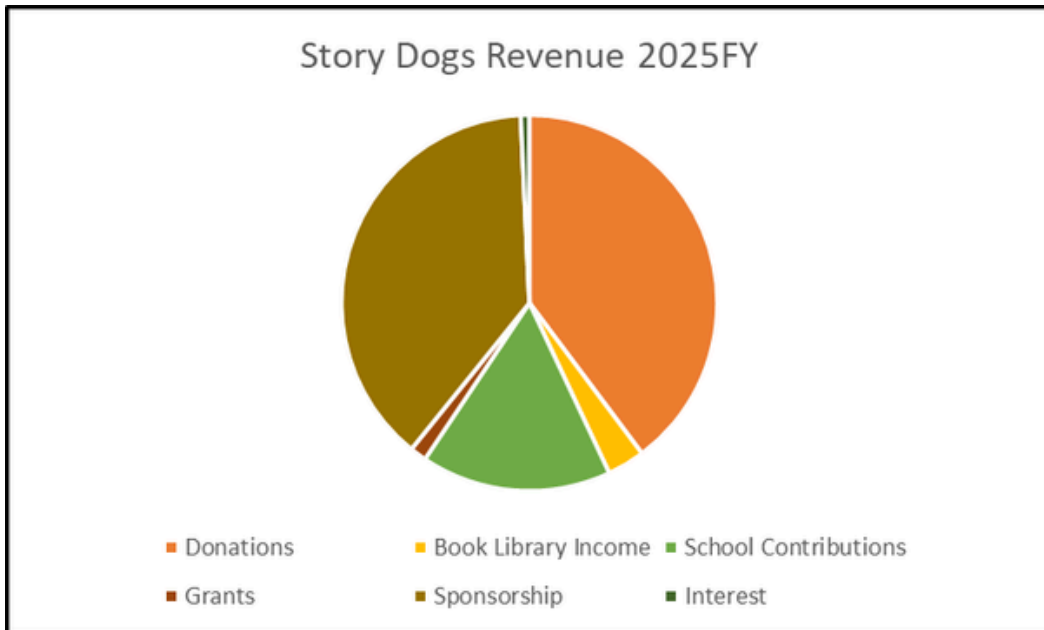


Visits to Ronald McDonald House
Christmas Wrapping at Southlands
Write around the Murray - Writers Festival, Albury, NSW
Coolum (QLD) Art event
Fullers Bookshop event - TAS
Westfield Local Hero - Leanne Murphy - Westfield SA
Petstock store visits

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Financials 2025FY

Item	2025	2024
Revenue	664,860	525,925
Administration Expenses	-34,304	-9,680
Operating Expenses	-117,379	-110,834
Employee related expenses	-350,519	-333,816
Operating Result	162,658	71,595



[Link here to full report](#)

The audited financial report
New auditor - Flegg Kehlet Wagner, Chartered Accountants.
Registered Company Auditor Number: 433830

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Writing the next chapter



2026 goals

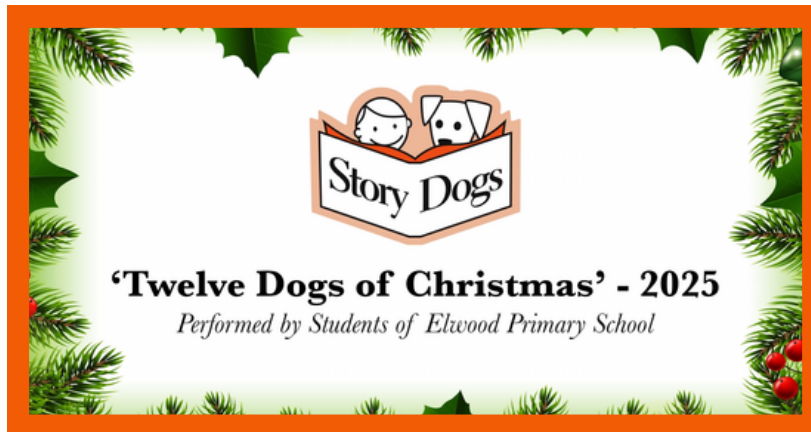
- **605 Dog Teams**
(increase of 49)
- **71 Coordinators**
(increase of 15)
- **433 schools**
(increase of 34)
- **85% dog sponsorship**
(maintain current levels even though our Dog Team numbers will grow)

Woof Woof!
Let's give it a go!

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12 Dogs of Christmas



The 12 Dogs of Christmas was all about FUN! Thank you to Megan Morgan, Pressroom Partners, Karen Knuckey and Elwood Primary School



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LIKE FOLLOW SHARE!

Contact Us

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