



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 Information



Version 36.1 July 2026



General Information

Story Dogs 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 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 animals who volunteer with their owner/handler as a team, visiting schools.

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/)

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 an accreditation test carried out by a certified dog trainer, as well as being vaccinated, immaculately groomed and with regular vet checks.

The handler

The handler of the dog is generally the dog's owner and is trained in basic literacy education. 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 passed a Working with Children Check as per State legislation.

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 Dogs 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 that 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. Would you help him out?" The child becomes the teacher; confidence soars!

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.



10 Easy Steps

The commitment expected from Story Dogs volunteers is to visit the school of your choice every week on the same day and time for approximately 2 hours. Students come to rely on their Story Dog Team, so it is very important that you have the available time for at least four school terms.

There are some very important steps which need to be taken before you can start helping children to have fun reading.

Your dog:

1. Your dog must be at least 12 months old. If you have rescued or adopted your dog, you must have lived with it for a minimum of 6 months. If you don't have your own dog you may apply with another person's dog. However, you must know this dog very well, the dog responds to you and the owner will need to give consent.
2. Your dog must be registered with your local council. Proof of registration is required.
3. Your dog's health is very important to us. After a positive Assessment outcome, a Story Dogs Vet Health Check will be required OR proof of your dog's recent vet health check (within the last 3 months). See enclosed Vet Health Check Record Sheet to take to your vet if necessary.
4. Your dog must be vaccinated and proof of vaccination is required OR proof of positive Titre Test is required.
5. Watch the Dog Assessment process ([see Video link](#)) and practice the Dog Team Assessment with your dog. When you are confident that you and your dog are OK with all ten requirements, let us know and we will organise an assessment session with our Dog Team Assessors.
6. If your dog is also your assistance/ support dog or works as a therapy/ visiting dog, please consider the impact the Story Dogs role will have on them and you.
 - a. If your dog is distracted for long periods of time from its primary task, to keep you safe, this could pose a risk to you.
 - b. If your dog is undertaking multiple visits and roles during the week, then this can place them under a lot of pressure/ stress, which is not healthy for your dog.

10 Easy Steps

You:

7. As you will be working with children you will have to comply with State legislation. You will have to complete the necessary background checks / forms depending on what State you will be volunteering in.
8. Attend Training – consisting of an in-person training session with a Coordinator, along with self-guided Learning Modules.
9. Attend In School Training – approx. 2hrs. Being an observer to an experienced Story Dogs volunteer.
10. With our help, find a sponsor for you and your dog.

Please note:

If you are a member of school staff and want to volunteer with your dog in your school, please remember that a Story Dog is not a school dog, in that a Story Dog is not specially trained for therapy work and cannot stay at school all day every day. The welfare of the dog is very important to us and as such we ask that the dog be at the school for a maximum of two hours each week for the reading sessions. You will need to be able to take your dog home so the dog is not at school all day. Additionally, you will need to arrange to have time off in your working hours so you can dedicate time to one on one reading sessions with your dog.





Fun Reading 🐾 Reading for Life

Dog Team Assessment Summary

Dog Team Assessment - These are the main tasks the dog and handler are assessed on.

- Dogs are assessed wearing either a flat collar with a 1-2m webbing lead, a Martingale collar, or a well-fitting harness. It is up to the discretion of the Assessor if the particular harness is suitable for adequate control of the dog at all times.
- No training collars, halties, muzzles, aversive collars or retractable leads are permitted.
- Handlers are encouraged to talk to their dog throughout the assessment, reassure their dog and give positive reinforcement when appropriate.

1. Greeting behaviour and appearance of dog
HANDLER: Give sit cue; Assessor will approach and shake hands with handler. DOG: Must be calm, take sit cue and stay while Assessor shakes hands and leaves.
2. Dog being handled
HANDLER: Give sit cue; Assessor will pat the dog; gently pull tail, ears; and gently hug the dog. DOG: Must be under control; not become anxious or intolerant; take sit cue and allow gentle patting, hugging and holding. Dog does NOT have to hold the sit after initial patting.
3. Walking on a loose leash
HANDLER: Walk dog on loose leash in pattern indicated by Assessor. Stop and sit your dog. DOG: Walks at same pace as handler without pulling. Stops and sits.
4. Walk past toys, balls and food in a lunch box
HANDLER: Dog team walks within one meter of objects and food in a lunch box on the ground. DOG: Must see the toy, balls and objects, not lunge at them. The dog must walk away from the objects when cued.
5. Dog Stay / Recall
HANDLER: Have your dog in a sit or down, give a 'stay' cue. Walk to the end of the leash, pause and return to your dog. Walk to the end of the leash again and on cue from Assessor, recall your dog. DOG: Must stay in a sit / down position until called.
6. Dog held by another person
HANDLER: Have your dog in a sit or down, give a 'stay' cue. The Assessor will then take the lead and stand passively next to your dog. You then move a few meters away from your dog. DOG: Must stay in a sit / down position showing no signs of stress.
7. Resource guarding
HANDLER: Give your dog a toy then take it away. Put some food in a bowl then allow the dog to eat the food while the Assessor comes close to your dog DOG: Must give up the toy easily. Must not growl or become aggressive in any way to the Assessor when eating.
8. Reading session scenario
HANDLER: Assessor will join you and your dog on the reading rug or on chairs next to the rug, with your dog on the rug. The Assessor will leave the reading space and coming in quickly to see if your dog can cope with sudden interruptions. The Assessor will then be an exuberant child and do things to your dog that we would not encourage children to do. This is to make sure your dog can cope if this does happen. DOG: The dog may reposition itself but the handler must be in control and the dog must not be showing signs of undue stress or anxiousness.
9. Dogs reaction to loud noises and distractions
HANDLER: Stay seated with your dog while several loud noises are made, e.g. Dropping of objects, opening an umbrella, blowing a whistle or a ball is bounced nearby. Handler can reassure the dog during this exercise. DOG: The dog may react to the distractions, but should not panic, try to run away, show aggression, growl or bark. Dog must regain composure quickly
10. Walking past other dogs
HANDLER: Dog team walks within a few meters of another dog. Handler should be in control with the dog keeping it close and on a loose lead. DOG: Must see the other dog and not lunge, bark or be aggressive.



Annual Vet Check Record Sheet

(this is a two page form)

This form is to be used by:

1. Potential new volunteers who are seeking to be part of the Story Dogs program who cannot provide evidence of a recent, within 3 months, vet check and,
2. Those current volunteers who have been with the program for more than 12 months.

A partial reimbursement for the costs of the vet check will be provided only to those current volunteers who have been with Story Dogs for over 12 months.

Vet Practice Details:

Practice Name: _____ Phone: _____
Email: _____ Name of Vet: _____
Date: _____

Patient Details:

Name of Dog: _____
First and Last Names of Dog Owner: _____
Breed: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M//F Weight: _____

Is this dog currently a volunteer with Story Dogs? Y/N

Intestinal Parasites/Worms:

In order for a Story Dog to have contact with children it must be on a regular worming program and be wormed appropriately, for the area it is living in. Please confirm the following:-

- The dog is on a regular program of intestinal worming treatment applicable to the area it is living in?
Yes / No
- The dog has received an intestinal worming treatment, including additional treatment for hydatid tapeworm if applicable? **Yes / No**

Vaccinations:

A Story Dog must be up to date with their vaccinations * or have valid Titre, Kennel Cough, Bordatella Bronchiseptica and Canine Parainfluenza tests

Last vaccination date: _____ Vaccination due date: _____

Titre, Kennel Cough, Bordatella Bronchiseptica and Canine Parainfluenza test results (if applicable) – good immunity / poor immunity

*minimum vaccination requirements are: current C5 and annual booster of the Kennel Cough vaccine, which includes Bordatella Bronchiseptica and Canine Parainfluenza.



Annual Vet Check Record Sheet

(this is a two page form)

What does a dog need to do for the Story Dogs program?

Each week the dog and handler visit a school for approx. 2 hours. For the dog the visit will, in most cases, involve a car ride, walking into the school and possibly up stairs, being patted by many people, hearing loud noises such as bells or music and laying on a rug beside a child who may be patting them for approx. 20mins. The dog and handler will see approximately five children one-on-one each week.

Dog's suitability to be a Story Dog:

The welfare of all Story Dogs is paramount. They need to be happy, comfortable, and free of pain and stress whilst performing the tasks required to be a Story Dog.

Please indicate the ability of the dog to perform various tasks:

- Walk upstairs: poor / satisfactory / excellent / unsure
- Lay on a rug: poor / satisfactory / excellent / unsure
- Happy to be patted on all of its body:
poor / satisfactory / excellent / unsure

Presence of arthritis: Y / N

If yes, would the presence of arthritis affect the dog's ability to:

- be patted by children Y / N
- get in and out of a car Y / N
- move around the school Y / N

Health check outcome:

In my professional opinion as at the date of this assessment; (circle appropriate answer below)

Poor – I would not recommend that this dog volunteers with the Story Dogs program.

Reasons/comments:

Satisfactory - I would recommend that this dog volunteers with the Story Dogs program but with some modifications to its medication or handling and management.

Suggested changes/comments:

Excellent - I would recommend that this dog volunteers with the Story Dogs program.

Signature: _____ Registration #: _____

Expectations

Welcome to Story Dogs as a Volunteer. Being part of a 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

Story Dogs is committed to the values of Safety, Respect, Kindness and Joy. These Values are to be embraced and upheld in all aspects of your activities with Story Dogs.

Communicate regularly with your Coordinator and or Story Dogs Support Central. Be open to communication and reply to communication when received. You and your dog's wellbeing is important to us. Thus, open and regular contact is important for all involved.

Be prompt and dependable. Please call your Coordinator at least one day in advance, if you will not be at school at your scheduled time.

Find a sponsor. We can help you to find a sponsor for you and your dog.

Sponsor Updates. When requested, supply Story Dogs Support Central with some information about your dog's experience with the reading sessions we can pass on to their sponsor.

Continuous Improvement To ensure the effectiveness of the Story Dogs program and to assist with improving the service, you may be asked to complete an anonymous, standardised survey or observation tool. It won't take much of your time but will provide Story Dogs with valuable information.

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

Be flexible in responding to the needs of children and the often changing school schedules.

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 school staff member if a child confides about an abusive situation. School staff will do the necessary follow-up.

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

Expectations

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 (e.g. handholding, hugs, lap-sitting). Rather than you receiving or giving hugs, encourage the child to pat or stroke your dog.

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” (e.g. size, race or gender). Practice correct pronunciation of the children’s names if they are unfamiliar.

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 vaccinations and worming. Annual vet checks will be required for every year whilst with Story Dogs.

Welfare of your dog. The maximum number of Story Dogs visits per week is 2 x 2-hour sessions on non-consecutive days.

Control of your dog. Your dog must be on a lead at all times, with you hanging on to the lead. If you would like to let the child walk your dog you can clip on a second lead.

Pick up after your dog. Always pick up after your dog’s toileting.

Treats for your dog. A child must never give your dog a treat from their hand. Always put the treat on the ground or in a special small bowl and allow the child to cue your dog to take the treat.

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

Report incidents. Report any incident to the school and to Story Dogs and follow any required procedures. Please report any near misses to Story Dogs so we can all learn.

Volunteer Catch Ups. Attend end of term volunteer catch ups. This is when book bags are swapped, additional training may occur and vital feedback about the program is given.

Ongoing training. Be open to participating in ongoing training that Story Dogs provides.

Pats not Hugs. Be proactive with making sure students only pat your dog, not give hugs.

Expectations

Volunteer expectations of Story Dogs

We have outlined what we believe you should expect from us and these will be discussed in our training. Any additional expectations you have of Story Dogs will also be discussed on that day. This is some of the support you can expect from Story Dogs.

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
- How to be more aware of your dog and its needs – Do they need a break? Are they hot? Are they getting agitated? Do they need a drink?
- The opportunity to observe a volunteer in a reading session

Sponsor. Help from your coordinator to ask a local business, local services club, such as Lions or another organisation who knows you and your dog for sponsorship. We have many very diverse sponsors who appreciate the opportunity of giving back to their local community through the Story Dogs program.

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 program.

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

Ongoing Training. To be given the opportunity to continue to learn.

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





Volunteer Costs

At Story Dogs, we will endeavour 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 that directly relates 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
Volunteer Vest with logo (suitable to wear in summer and winter)	✓	
Dog Vest with logo	✓	
Training Kit – including reading rug, training manual, book bag and weekly folder	✓	
Polo shirt with logo (optional)		✓
Volunteer vaccinations which may be necessary to enter schools		✓
Working With Children Check – State fees		✓
Green Collar accreditation if an ex racing Greyhound		✓
Insurance	✓	
Additional dog training courses if necessary		✓
Accreditation of Dog Team	✓	
Training of Dog Team after accreditation of dog	✓	
Dog - Initial Vet Health Check (pre start)		✓
Dog - Annual Vet Health Check	✓ (\$50)*	
Dog - Vaccinations		✓
Dog - Worming treatments		✓
Dog - Flea treatments		✓
Dog - Nail clipping and grooming		✓
Dog - Council registration, including micro chipping		✓
Fuel & vehicle costs		✓

*this is the amount you will be reimbursed regardless of what your Vet charges



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Application Form

If you would like to complete this form online please go to our website and click the 'Volunteer' tab <https://www.storydogs.org.au/how-to-volunteer>

PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Name: _____
2. Date of Birth: (this is necessary for linking your Working with Children Check details to us): _____
3. Address: _____ Post Code: _____
4. Postal Address if different from above: _____

5. Email: _____
6. Phone Number: _____ Do you prefer (please circle) Text message, phone calls, or email
7. Emergency Contact:- Name: _____ Phone: _____
8. Do you have a current Working with Children Check card? Y / N
Number: _____ Expiry date: _____
Full name that appears on the card: _____
9. Do you have a preferred school you would like to volunteer at? Y / N
Name of School: _____
10. Brief employment history: _____

11. Qualifications: _____
12. List any skills you have that are relevant to volunteering with Story Dogs: _____

13. List any volunteer work you have been involved in: _____

14. Describe why you would like to be a part of Story Dogs' reading support program: _____

15. I acknowledge that I can commit for 2 - 3hrs at the same time each week during school terms: ☐
16. Would you consider being a team leader and helping coordinate other Story Dog Volunteers (circle appropriate answer)
No - Never. "I just want to volunteer myself"
Yes - "Leading others is what I want to do"
Maybe - "I never say never. Down the track I may like to do this"



Application Form

DETAILS ABOUT YOUR DOG

These details will be passed on to our independent Dog Assessor so that they have a better understanding of your dog before the Dog Team Assessment. Your personal information and emergency contact details will not be passed on.

1. Name of dog: _____ 2. Breed: _____

3. Age: _____ Male / Female Desexed? Y / N 4. How long have you owned your dog? _____

5. Is your dog registered with a local council? Y / N

Council Name: _____ Date of council registration expiry: _____

6. Is your dog working or volunteering as a Therapy, Assistance, Support or Visiting Dog? Y / N

Written authorisation from the certifying organisation may be required before your dog can be considered for the Story Dogs program. If you answered Yes to the above question, please acknowledge the following.

☐ I acknowledge that schools are a stressful environment for dogs and that my dog will be asked to prioritise the one-on-one support for students during reading sessions. My dog is unlikely to be able to support me in the typical capacity.

7. Is your dog used to being around children? Y / N Children outside your family? Y / N

8. Is your dog socialised with other dogs? Y / N

9. Generally do you trust your dog with all dogs they meet? Y / N If No, please give situations and potential reasons: _____

10. Has your dog ever snapped/snarled/growled at anyone? Y / N If Yes, please give situations and potential reasons: _____

11. Has your dog ever bitten anyone? Y / N If Yes, please give situations and potential reasons: _____

13. Is your dog trained in basic obedience/pet manners, to a reasonable standard? Y / N

14. Is your dog vaccinated? Y / N (we do accept a Titre test)

15. Is your dog regularly wormed? Y / N If Yes, how frequently: _____

16. If you do not own the dog you intend to use for Story Dogs, please fill out the following:

Name of dogs' owner: _____ How long have you known the dog? _____

Your relationship with the owner (e.g. neighbour, friend, family member): _____

Please list your involvement with the dog and the frequency (e.g. walk dog every day, dog visits every week, dog sit once a month, etc.): _____

Thank you for your application and interest in the Story Dogs program.

Please post or scan and email to the address below.

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Address: PO Box 1076 Bonalbo NSW 2469



www.storydogs.org.au



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