

Dog Scouts of America's SIRIUS Reader Program



S.I.R.I.U.S. stands for "Scouts Improve Reading Interest, Understanding, and Skill." In other words, with the help of this program using Scout "Tutors," you will see an improvement in the child's reading ability, comprehension, and overall interest in books. It is a program geared toward reading improvement by using dogs to facilitate children's desire to read. Sirius is, of course, also the name of the Dog Star in the constellation, Canis Major. There are already other successful programs in place here and there, which use dogs as

reading "tutors." The results achieved with a dog assisted reading program are measurable and phenomenal.

In the past, children have been graduating from school with insufficient reading levels. With the dog facilitated reading programs, the children's reading and MEAP scores have improved dramatically. The reason for the success is that the Dog Scout "Tutor" is loving and non-judgmental. The dog doesn't snicker if the child pronounces a word wrong. The dog just lies there, happily listening, and the child begins to look forward to reading exercises.



By making reading a painless and fun experience for kids, it makes kids better readers. Dog Scouts of America is in a good position to help with this type of program nationwide, because there are Dog Scouts all over the country. A Dog Scout is a team consisting of a responsible dog owner and a dog which has passed a test for exemplary behavior and friendliness around people. Many of these Dog/Handler teams already perform valuable community service, like the Reading Project, around the country. They're already creating lots of STARS (Scout Tutor-Assisted Readers). And most Scouts have been additionally certified through a Therapy organization, further attesting to the fact that they have the skills to work with children or adults in schools or hospitals.



Dog Scout, Triscuit tutors a child in the Kalamazoo school system

The reading projects take place mostly in after-school programs, or on weekends at a school or the local library. All of our Scout Tutors are non-compensated volunteers. Some of our volunteers have written children's books, like "Excerpts from Triscuit's Diary" to use to read to young children, or to hand out for older children to read to their Scout Tutors. Anyone can become a member of Dog Scouts, join a troop, and become involved in the SIRIUS Reader Program. The volunteers need only to have a well-trained, obedient Therapy Dog who is friendly with kids.

The handler just sits there and lets the child read to the Scout Tutor, one-on-one. Handlers might make comments about how much they think the dog is enjoying the story. They might offer non-critical help, but they mostly just sit there and let the child read to the dog.



Dog Scout, Mattie helps kids learn to love reading at a Chicago library

Dog Scouts of America is currently underwriting the costs for bookmarks, handouts and other materials, such as the section of our web site dedicated to all teachers and volunteers, with resource information on how to get involved in dog facilitated education. As a publicly supported non-profit organization, we are in need of funds for this worthwhile community service project. All donations to DSA are a tax deductible contribution, and you can earmark the money to be used for the SIRIUS Reader Project.



Mattie in an after school program

You may wonder why a bunch of dog people are interested in improving children's reading skills. The very presence of the well-mannered and intelligent dogs is a positive experience for kids. Studies have shown that early positive association with dogs builds a child's self esteem. This is a lesson in "nonviolence" education in itself. Children are more likely to develop a nurturing attitude toward dogs, animals and people, when they see how much we love and care for our dogs, and when they see how helpful and loving dogs can be. They will grow up to respect other living things, will be more responsible dog owners, and probably even become better parents, eventually, because of the experience. We're trying to make the world a better place for people and dogs.

