

'The kids become more confident from reading to the dogs. Dogs don't judge them as they are reading.'

MICHELLE STOVER, CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN AT GREEN ROAD LIBRARY

Dogs lend ears to young readers

BY JENNIFER GREGORY
CORRESPONDENT

Six-year-old Georgianna Williams stood in front of Wilson, a 130-pound Great Dane, and showed him pictures while she read him a story.

Across the room, Jada Williams read to another dog, Freddie, while he rested his head on her lap.

Reading to dogs? That's right. On the first Thursday of each month, children visit the Green Road Library and read books to certified pet therapy dogs. Because dogs are not correcting their reading ability, children often feel more comfortable reading to them than to adults or classmates.

"The kids become more confident from reading to the dogs," said Michelle Stover, one of the children's librarians at Green Road. "Dogs don't judge them as they are reading."

Rebecca Hirschfield is founder of See Spot Read, a group of volunteers who take their dogs to Wake County Libraries and local schools for children to read to. She said many of the kids are at the age where they believe the dog is really listening to their story and understands what is going on. The volunteer sits next to the dog while the child is reading and helps the child only if he or she needs it.

Kids who are not reading yet pretend they are, and make up stories about the book. The children often ask questions about the dog, such as how often they get a bath and what the dog eats for breakfast.

"I liked reading to the dog and feeding him a treat after I was done," said Chelsea Omile, 7. "Wilson laid down with me and I got to pet him."

Hirschfield's dog, Freddie, gets excited when she pulls into the Green

GET INVOLVED

See Spot Read is looking for more volunteers whose dogs have received their pet therapy certification.

For information, visit seespotread.com/join-us

Road Library parking lot for the reading sessions.

"When we get out of the car, his tail is wagging and he is ready to go," Hirschfield said. "He likes to put his paw on the counter of the library when we walk in the door to show he is ready to read with the kids."

Freddie and his friends have also helped ease the fears of youngsters who aren't often exposed to dogs. Allison deSeife, a children's librarian at Green Road, said when the program started many kids would leave the children's area because they were nervous. Over time, she has seen many of the kids become more comfortable with the dogs and cozy up next to them.

Two years ago, Hirschfield had just completed the pet therapy certification with Freddie and was looking for an opportunity to work with children. After she founded the See Spot Read group, she approached Green Road Library about holding reading sessions. She also began volunteering with children at the Boys and Girls Club in Brentwood.

The group now has about 50 active volunteers and dogs and about 25 to 30 reading opportunities each month. See Spot Read makes monthly visits to 10 libraries in Wake County and twice monthly visits to six area schools.

"Anything that gets kids comfortable with books and dogs is great," Hirschfield said.



Jada Williams, 11, reads to Freddie at Green Road Library in Raleigh. The program is offered on the first Thursday of every month.

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