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LIBRARIES NOW!
INSPIRING
SURPRISING
EMPOWERING

My mission is to listen: Read to a dog - but not just any dog

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Meeting:

160 — *Surprising Library!* — Public Libraries, Libraries for Children and Young Adults and School Libraries and Resource Centers

Abstract:

Dogs are ideal reading companions because they do not judge or laugh or criticize and they allow children to read at their own pace. R.E.A.D® program was started in 1999 in U.S.A. as the first comprehensive literacy program build around the appealing idea of reading to a dog. The reading moment with a trained dog like read-dog/Lukukoira Börje at Sello Library should always be relaxed and comfortable. It must be and is also very safe and non-judgmental. It is empowering and most of all very much fun. The results are wonderful. Börje has been working at Sello Library since 6/1/11. The dog's owner and facilitator is a special librarian.

(Google: Lukukoira, Börje, Sello Library, R.E.A.D.)

A little over a year ago a small Bichon Maltese dog moved in to my household at the age of 5 months. I have been working with children and youth for over a decade before this library work I nowadays do. Soon it was obvious what the mission of this little white fluffy dog was. His mission was to listen. He was to become a Reading Educational Assistance Dog. Pure R.E.A.D®

1 Reading in Finland

In my country Finland illiteracy is not a big problem. But it is considered a handicap when you are not able to understand what you read or your reading is not good enough for taking part in learning processes, social issues and discussions. This kind of a difficulty is often silently hidden. You do not want to show that for eg. your social media skills are poor because

of your reading skills. First time ever in Finland literacy has taken a dive in international statistics (PISA, OECD). The statistics tell us that changes are minimal but it sure is important to react to it.

Reading books is not very popular hobby anymore. 1/10 of teenagers in Finland have difficulties in filling the forms and reading mail sent by the authorities. Many of them admit they have never read fiction. To manage and live a good life in nowadays society as a full plenipotentiary member is difficult if you are illiterate. That is why this kind of library work with a help of a reading assistance dog is so welcomed.

You can learn to read only by reading.

2 Public library and reading service

Maltese dog Honeycoat's Beverly Hills Beau aka Börje started to work at Sello Library in June 2011. The goal with this kind of library work is to improve children's reading and communication skills by a very powerful method: reading to a dog at Sello library. Very soon it became obvious that there were adults that were in need of this kind of service. This is not a question of gender, age, cultural or language boundaries. Börje cannot read but he can listen and his way of being present creates an inviting and motivating environment for anyone who wants to read a book for him. Helping someone is said to make you happier. If you help somebody twice a week it doubles your happiness in life. There have been scientific researches about this so you better believe!

Read dogs, such as Börje, are trained to encourage young readers with a gentle nudge to keep going, or a paw placed on a page to offer support. The reading moment with a trained dog like Börje is always nice relaxed and comfortable. It must be and is also very safe and nonjudgmental. It is empowering and most of all very much fun. Reading to a dog and practicing your reading skills without noticing the hard work of learning is the most wonderful thing in this kind of work. Many of the children are also convinced that the dogs understand the stories they are reading.

How is it possible that this kind of work helps children? Well, it is no magic. When you read to a dog it lowers your blood-pressure and heart beat. It relaxes you. Reading difficulties very seldom are about intellectual limitations. It is all about overcoming your fears. Reading to Börje is encouraging and it gives you back your self-esteem and with that your confidence. Börje helps you win your fears when reading aloud or for yourself. It is all between the reader and the dog. A dog does not criticize or walk away or insult you. It is your friend and loves to listen to you.

3 R.E.A.D® and Intermountain Therapy animals (ITA)

ITA is a Utah, U.S.A. nonprofit organization that was founded in 1993. The mission of this organization is to enhance quality of life through the human-animal bond.
(www.TherapyAnimals.org)

R.E.A.D® program was started in 1999 as the first comprehensive literacy program build around the appealing idea of reading to a dog. This program has been spreading very fast and happily ever since. Börje is now a member number 3365 since 2/16/12 and with his handler they are together working as a group named 'Lukukoira'. Lukea means to read and Koira is a dog in Finnish language. Lukukoira = read dog. No-one has said the ears must be dog's ears. Why not a cat or a rabbit or a hamster? They can also listen and encourage a little reader.

How to get trained if you live outside United States? You can get the training package from I.T.A. by email and You Tube. The training material and tests are pdf-documents and video clips. You must also have a good dog school to rely on. And then you practice and you practice and you know it take its time and you need patience. We beam when doing things we believe in and these things are measured by the wideness of smiles on faces.

4 Future

As dogs are ideal reading companions because they do not judge or laugh or criticize and they allow children to read at their own pace, it is obvious this kind of work is to become a part of weekly service at many libraries. Today Honeycoat's Beverly Hills Beau is the only trained R.E.A.D in Scandinavia and Finland but we are waiting there to be many more. Meanwhile we love the idea of having other kind of library dogs visiting libraries for reading. Let's keep contact. See you in social medias.

Google: Lukukoira, Börje, Sello Library, R.E.A.D.