

## Dogs Encourage Kids to Read

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JACKSONVILLE, FL -- Have you ever watched a child interact with a dog? It's almost as though that child has a special connection with the dog, hidden to the adult world. You can count on witnessing a full-fledged conversation between the two, and it seems they actually understand each other. It's this camaraderie that has, in part, pushed the popularity of the national R.E.A.D. program (Reading Assistance Dog program). The organization sends dogs and their handlers to local schools, libraries, bookstores -- places they can meet with young students who need extra help with their reading skills. It's a one-on-one experience that has proven

so vital, explains Kelly Blackburn. She runs Pawsitive Pets, the Jacksonville chapter of R.E.A.D. When we caught up with the R.E.A.D. team of Bentley and handler Terri Neely, we met children with different reading needs at Twin Lakes Elementary School. For some involved in the program, English is a second language. For others, reading has never been their strongest school subject. For all of them county wide, Pawsitive Pets boasts a rate of improvement around 80 percent. Blackburn tells me they can't keep up with all the requests from area schools, and are in need of donations and more R.E.A.D. teams. There are more than a dozen here in Jacksonville.

You can see many of them by visiting [pawsitivepets.org](http://pawsitivepets.org). If your dog is attentive and loves kids, you could qualify to become a read team and help the more than 27 school on the waiting list. That's more than 800 local children in whose lives you could make a difference -- all it takes is the "Power of 1."