

Ready, Set, R.E.A.D.®  
By Maureen Ross, MA

I am sharing the following to shed some light and help others who are considering or are Registered R.E.A.D. teams.

I felt the magic of reading to my dogs as a child and still do. Pure and simple, a dog will listen. That makes me feel special, accepted and loved. As a canine behaviorist, I choose to believe that although my dogs would rather be chasing chipmunks and gnawing on beef bones, they sit and listen anyway. I promise them the beef bone afterward. The mantra is “you do something for me and I’ll do something for you.” It seems to work.

After attending my first Reading Education Assistance Dog Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah in 2005, then again in 2007, I was hooked. The founder of R.E.A.D. is Kathy Klotz. Kathy’s passion is reading education. My passion is dogs and reading. What a good match.

My dogs and I have been registered therapy teams (volunteer and intervention) for awhile. Now, we have the pleasure of teaching others to become Registered Pet Partners. New England Pet Partners, Inc. launched the R.E.A.D. team program about three years ago.

When I completed training and became an official R.E.A.D. team, I was ecstatic. I had my tools and my R.E.A.D. package. My dogs and I had a talk and were ready to roll. Not so everyone else.

I made a few phone calls and talked to a few carefully chosen schools and libraries. I quickly discovered that, although there was a genuine interest, most were confused. Familiar with therapy teams visiting hospitals and nursing homes, there wasn’t an overwhelming response from libraries and schools. The few that did respond came from miles away, too far for us to successfully implement a program.

Often I would catch myself doing one of those Meg Ryan looks like “whAATT”, after leaving a meeting. I’ve heard from others that they drop off information, follow-up, and then wait. The responses range from “how can dogs teach kids to R.E.A.D. to can you join us at a bake sale at the library so the kids can pet the dog.”

As things go, when something is new or people aren’t sure, usually it is because they don’t understand and need more information. Oftentimes, I’ve found, and I’m sharing this so teams will not get discouraged, that people ARE INTERESTED, but the timing is off.

I have had very good experiences with nursing homes, residential care and hospitals. I know it is important for the people involved to be READY & SET to R.E.A.D. The good news is the seeds I planted two years ago are blossoming. Slow to root maybe, but we now invited to our second library program.

If you are interested in becoming a Registered Reading Education Assistance Dog Team, you can journey to [www.therapyanimal.org](http://www.therapyanimal.org). This is the official R.E.A.D.® site. They are resources available include the R.E.A.D. brochure that you can download. You do need to purchase their glossy brochures, which are very nice.

R.E.A.D. is receiving worldwide media attention. More than 80 articles have been published about the R.E.A.D. program, from the Wall Street Journal and national magazines like Time, Parenting, Family Circle and Our Children to National Television (Animal Planet). R.E.A.D. has been featured in a book and journal published by the Association for Childhood Education International.

As a Registered Team I want to encourage all of you to stay motivated. If you are interested in becoming a Registered R.E.A.D. team, the volunteers at New England Pet Partners, Inc. are happy to answer questions and offer resources and guidance. Please make use of the websites and R.E.A.D.

### WHAT IS R.E.A.D.?

Reading to a dog is powerful and empowering, especially if a child is having difficult reading or with self esteem issues. However, even though I read to my dogs as a child, Reading Education Assistance Dog Teams are specially trained to volunteer at schools, libraries and oftentimes, other settings when appropriate.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

R.E.A.D. employs registered therapy teams who have been trained and tested for health, safety, specific skills and temperament. When these dogs come to hear children read, it's fun! That's what makes the difference.

### WHY DOGS?

Learning to read is often less about intellectual limitation than about overcoming fears. Fear can impede learning. Animals are ideal reading companions because they:

- Help increase relaxation and lower blood pressure
- Listen attentively
- Do not judge, laugh or criticize
- Allow children to proceed at their own pace
- Are less intimidating than peers

Having a dog present can relieve anxiety and encourage anticipation. The handler is a skilled facilitator, who works in collaboration with the librarian and/or school teach (always with parental approval) shifting performance pressure off the child, while providing support. The child gets supervised reading practice necessary to build vocabulary, increase understanding of the material, and gain fluency as a reader.

### IMPRESSIVE RESULTS!

Participating children make enormous strides in reading and communication skills. Along the way, they build self-esteem, confidence and social skills. AND, there are bonuses. Performance in other subjects tends to improve, as does attendance and motivation.

When children accomplish goals set in the program, they received incentives designed by the teachers and librarians. They get to pick out new books. The team gives the child a variety of incentives like pawtographs, bookmarks like "I R.E.A.D. with Tate". They can share this at home and with others as their very own accomplishment.

### WHERE?

R.E.A.D. programs are implemented in a variety of environments such as elementary schools, libraries, before and after school programs, healthcare facilities, preschool and childcare facilities, youth detention facilities and boys & girls clubs. Creative new ideas occur all the time.

R.E.A.D. [www.therapyanimals.org](http://www.therapyanimals.org) requires that a team be registered and trained with a program such as Delta Society Pet Partners®. Globally, you can explore many programs. New England Pet Partners, Inc., uses the Pet Partner Team Training Manual. R.E.A.D. has an their own Team Training Manual. You have a choice of attending a workshop or purchasing the manuals from Delta and R.E.A.D. for home study. Currently, both are required to become a Registered R.E.A.D. team.

Journey to [www.deltasociety.org](http://www.deltasociety.org), [www.therapyanimals.org](http://www.therapyanimals.org) and our web site [www.newenglandpetpartners.org](http://www.newenglandpetpartners.org) to learn more.

We encourage this program because it is solid and gives you the necessary resources to effectively connect with potential facilities. Enjoy the Journey! *Maureen and the Teams*

