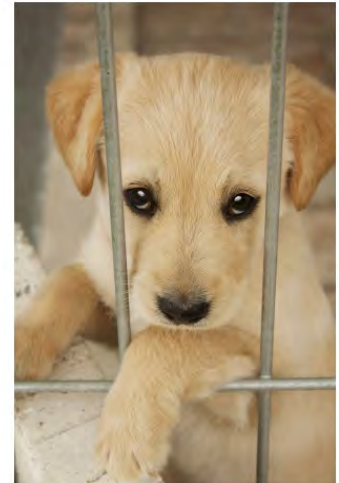


## Success Story: Children's Reading Scores "Off The Charts"

*How a program that was intended to help animals ALSO helped young children have a much brighter future, taught them compassion, boosted reading scores, and tripled reading minutes*



Several years ago, we began working on strategies to help children that hated reading and were currently failing at school. They now love to read. We also worked on strategies to help save the lives of many dogs at the overcrowded animal shelters.

The project was highly successful because children that previously hated reading were now reading every night to help save the lives of these scared dogs that were scheduled to be euthanized at these overcrowded shelters, unless they were adopted very soon.

Our strategy was built upon the groundbreaking research of leading animal health researchers, including Lori Kogan, Ph.D. a psychologist and professor of clinical sciences, and the chair of the human-animal interaction section of the American Psychological Association and editor-in-chief of the Human-Animal Interaction Journal. She found that many scared dogs calmed down as they listened to certain audio sounds.

We performed a spectral audio analysis of these calming sounds and quickly discovered the sounds that calmed these scared dogs had very similar audio characteristics to our audio samples of children reading books. Our strategy was evaluated at shelters across the nation, including the Kanawha-Charleston Humane Association. Previously, the survival rate for this shelter was less than 50%, sometimes even as low as 31%. Now, less than 1% of their dogs are euthanized for aggression.

When these shelter dogs listened to recordings of children reading books, they had much lower stress levels. They were only stressed 26.39% of the time. Previously, an average dog at the shelter was stressed 75.92% of the time. We further confirmed this success at many animal shelters across the nation.

This project was successful because an animal shelter is a very scary place for a dog. Everyone, and everything, they have ever known is now gone. They are locked in a cage. They can't play and run. They don't know what will happen next, or if they can ever trust anyone again. Most are afraid and stressed. This can lead to cowering in a corner, jumping, barking, and lunging when people come to look for a dog to adopt. Since most people will not adopt a dog that displays these behaviors, high stress levels can be deadly.

Simply by allowing the dogs to listen to recordings of children reading books, it saved the lives of many scared dogs.

We wondered if encouraging young children to record themselves reading books to the scared dogs would result in the children reading more books and help improve the reading levels for many at-risk, under-served children.

Since many children across the nation still do not have reliable home Internet access and/or computers, we needed an educational equity program that could help ALL children. So, we created a phone based solution. Unlike Internet service, the government considers telephone service a utility. Therefore, low-cost or free phone service is available in every community through government programs.

We also needed to create systems that were very simple and easy to use because most animal shelters are significantly overworked and understaffed. We also created a system that children could call by phone that was so easy to use, even kindergarten students could use without needing parent assistance. This simpler system actually worked.

Shelters told us that something amazing had happened. Animal shelters reported that it was now much quieter at night. Many scared dogs stopped barking. They loved it when the recordings of the children reading books were playing.

Everything is super easy for both children and animal shelters. The children simply pick up a phone and call the educational phone number provided by their teacher. Even kindergarten students are using the system without any help. The system has many educational programs and resources, but the "Read To A Dog" has been the most popular. The system asks the student to say the name of their book, and then asks the student to read their book. The system then processes the recordings to remove noise,

gaps of silence, and handles sound level processing for our soft-spoken readers. Since most animal shelters request multi-hour book reading sessions, the system combines multiple student's recordings.

All students are completely anonymous for student privacy. The educational phone system only asks the children to read their book. The system does not ask for student identifiable information, such as names.

The project was highly successful. The children loved the fact that they could easily record books to help animals, anytime and anywhere. Many young children start their reading sessions by saying, “Hello Doggie ... I’m going to read you a book to help you stay calm”. Many also end their reading sessions with, “Good night Doggie ... stay calm ... I’m going to call you again tomorrow!!!”.

The results have been amazing. We have students that are reading at home, every day, even on weekends, holidays, and school breaks. Overall reading minutes have tripled and their reading growth scores are not only far above the national averages ... they are “off the charts”. We are even seeing children that were ranked the lowest in the nation (bottom 25%) have now reached the top reading levels (top 25%) nationwide, simply by reading to the scared dogs by phone every day.

We also analyzed the long-term benefits the children will receive because of their outstanding reading growth.

Economically disadvantaged cities now have a new strategy for achieving long-term economic growth. The children are also on track to become happy, healthy, millionaires.

New research has found that children that can improve their reading level by one standard deviation should earn at least an extra \$1 to \$9 million during their careers because they have the academic skills necessary to qualify for higher paying careers and compound growth on saving from those higher wages, when compared to other children with lower reading levels. Their long-term health level estimates are 37% to 59% higher. Their average life expectancy is 7 to 15 years longer. Also, long-term estimates for lifetime happiness levels have increased between 34% to 87%.

The dogs are now happier, have less stress, and have a much higher chance of being adopted by someone who will provide them with love at their new forever home.

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