

Dogs play key role by supporting young, old and people with special needs

# Paws for great cause

Shleigh Tullis

have heard of guide dogs, you have heard of therapy dogs but you heard of dogs helping to overcome a child's literacy?

Arliemere's Paws Pet Therapy has secured sponsorship for its pet reading program, but is seeking more to introduce and maintain the program at Picton Library.

Paws Pet Therapy is a charitable organisation that trains volunteers their dogs to provide special-therapy to people with special

needs. Paws Pet Therapy president Sharon Stewart said 'Paws n' Tales' volunteers and their dogs help children with reading difficulties increase their literacy skills and confidence.

The dog creates a nice, calm and judgmental environment and can teach the dogs tricks like giving a child's finger when they are reading.

'Paws n' Tales is the first Reading Assistance Education Dogs program, developed in the US, to be introduced in Australia.

The pilot program began at Picton Library in April this year and targets children aged four to eight.

The program was launched at Picton Library late next year.

Stewart said she was looking for volunteers and sponsors to keep the program going and so no child would be charged for their session.

The program has received \$10,000 from the Real Insurance's Real Community Grants Program. Volunteers and dogs visit people



Helping paws: RJ (dog on left) with volunteer Maria Morton and Sharon Stewart with her dog Hudson from Paws'n Tales helping Arianna Phillips practise reading. Picture: Jeff de Pasquale

who have a disability, are frail-aged, have dementia, are children, have challenging behaviours, are undergoing chemotherapy treatment, are taking part in rehabilitation programs, are lonely, are on the autism spectrum and those terminally ill.

Buxton's Maria Morton volunteers at Paws Pet Therapy with her pug (beagle cross pug) RJ at an oncology ward and aged-care facility once or twice a week. "[Seeing RJ] brings a smile to the patients' faces, takes their minds off

the treatment and makes them feel special," Ms Morton said. "I get the satisfaction of taking the dog out, they get satisfaction of spending time with the dog and he enjoys it because he loves the attention." Ms Burton said she would become

involved in the literacy program because she wanted to see children who were self-conscious or were left behind in system learn to read with a dog's help.

Details: Sharon Stewart, 0418 869 181.