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Purr-fect Readers Children's Program

Introduction

Reading to family pets, or shelter animals, or any animal at different programs that allow it will enhance your child's reading. When we invite children into our shelter to read to our cats, the child has the option of picking a book from our library or bringing their own from home.

Reading to cats not only will help the child with his/her reading skills, it will also help to socialize the cat. The child will have an opportunity to read in a nonjudgmental environment. This won't only help the child with their reading skills, it will also help our cats become more socialized.

Reading sessions can last as long as the parent, guardian, or teachers would like. We prefer the child spends at least 15 minutes in the room of their choice with the cats or kittens of that room. We understand that children read at different levels. If 15 minutes becomes frustrating for the child, the child can work at their own pace and stop when the caretaker feels it is time.

We have three cat rooms. One is the adult cat room, one is the special needs room, and one is the kitten room. The adult cat room has cats that are laid back and calmer. Some like to be left along while others want to sit in your lap. The special needs room has cats or kittens that have special needs and they need their own space, but the reader does have the choice to read in that room. The kitten room is the favorite. The kittens are playful and rambunctious. They like to climb and play. Please pick the room for the child/children in your care that would best suit their needs.

Motivation

When children are constantly being corrected during their reading, their motivation to read plummets. If a child were asked to read aloud and knew their mistakes wouldn't be corrected or that feeling of being judged was nonexistent, their motivation to read would rise. That is exactly what we hope to accomplish by inviting your child/children to read to our cats.

Confidence

Struggling readers lack confidence, especially when reading aloud. When sitting in our cat rooms, the reader can stumble over words, read a little choppy, or take a little longer to read a passage and there are no judgements. The cat becomes a companion, someone who the reader can rely on and eventually the reader will become more confident in reading out loud.

Here are some confidence building books to look into if you feel the need to explore ways to encourage your child in more ways than just reading.

- The Lion Inside by Rachel Bright
- You Can Do It, Stinky Face by Lisa McCourt
- Princess Truly in I Am Truly by Kelly Greenawalt
- I Like Myself by Karen Beaumont
- Big Choo by Stephen Shaskan
- A Bad Case of Strips by David Shannon
- Happy Dreamer by Peter H Reynolds
- I Can Be Anything by Diane Dillon
- Giraffe's Can't Dance by Giles Andrea
- Exclamation Mark by Amy Krouse Rosenthal

Fluency

Reading speed and phrasing improves when children read aloud and practice the same material over and over again. The cats do not care if the reader rereads the same material. The safe environment at our shelter allows a lot of time to get plenty of practice time.

Reading for A Purpose

Reading to our cats will give the readers a sense of purpose. The cats will benefit from having the attention and will love having someone sit in their reading to them. Children also benefit with knowing that they are helping the animals by giving of their time and their attention.

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Research suggests that social, cognitive, and emotional development is enhanced when taking care of an animal. Working with animals from a young age can help develop language and communication skills since kids tend to talk to animals and confide in them.

One Very important lesson that this program hopes to encourage is empathy for others. Learning to show empathy for animals who are completely dependent on people to care for them will in turn help children understand the needs of others and to show empathy towards others as they get older.

Have your reader give reading to animals a try. You will be pleased to see your child's reading - and the animals being read to - flourish.