



Sharing the GOOD News, too!

While it can be motivating to know how much our therapy and R.E.A.D. teams are needed everywhere, it's perhaps even more inspiring to hear the success stories, too. Thanks for sharing them with us!

– *Kathy Klotz*

From Sergej Jonke, R.E.A.D. Instructor in Croatia

Dear R.E.A.D.,

First of all, I would like to wish you all the best in the New Year from me personally and the entire team of the association.

Below, I share an opinion from the **Center for Autism in Zagreb**, with whom we have been collaborating for several years with the R.E.A.D. program.

“Given that I know all of them through many other situations and behaviors, I really have to say that today was absolutely encouraging and positive for everyone. Marko is usually very unpredictable and his teacher expressed doubts that he might not want to read at all, but Marko read fantastically. Ruby was an incredible motivator for him. As you already know about Karolina, she mostly communicates in English, but because of Ruby she will read the entire picture book in Croatian, which is really a great success for her. Everyone was attentive, even following others while they read, so I am very happy. Amela is not a reader, but with a little support from me she got involved and that is encouraging for her. It is great for me to see so many different personalities and those with different needs and difficulties, how they are connected in the desire to show the best of themselves for Ruby and how much Ruby, as you said yourself, relaxed them. We need Ruby more than once a month!”

Greetings to everyone!

Shared by Merilee Kelley, Instructor in Georgia

Merilee received this recently from one of her READ-ing Paws teams:

“When I was getting Buddy, my partner, out of the car this am, a voice from a distance said, ‘Is that the famous Buddy?’

“It was Ren’s (one of my students) dad. We visited a few minutes and he shared this article about Tiger Woods’ experience reading to a dog to overcome stuttering. [See Tiger’s message on the next page.]

“I told Ren it was great to meet his dad.

“That day also, Josh, my very first student, read aloud for the very first time!!! It was a break-thru!

“I told all this to the school librarian, Kelly, and thanked her for her encouragement. Her response:

“**That’s great about Josh—it’s a huge break-thru!! That is exactly why we do this.** I love that Ren’s dad stopped you. It shows what a BIG impact you and Buddy have made on our students!! Thank you for being so patient and kind with the kids. It makes a huge difference to the kids!!!”



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Tiger Woods had a stuttering (speech) disorder as a child, which he worked hard to overcome. He has publicly shared his struggles with stuttering to help and inspire others.

About His Speech Disorder

Condition: Woods experienced a significant stutter throughout his childhood.

Impact: He described the experience of being called on in elementary school as "the most frightening thing you could possibly have happen" because the words would get lost between his brain and mouth.

Overcoming the Challenge: He attended classes for two years and "worked his tail off" to manage it. He also mentioned practicing by talking to his dog, who would listen until falling asleep.

Advocacy: In 2015, he wrote a supportive letter to a young boy who was being bullied for his stutter, sharing his own personal story to offer encouragement and hope.

R.E.A.D. Handler-Authors: Additions to the List

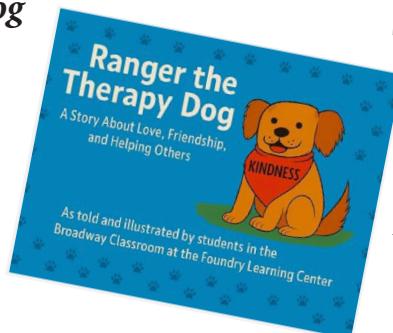
Nancy George-Michalson, director of our ITA affiliate New York Therapy Animals, shared this information about two children's books written by NYTA handlers. I see that Wendy Goldstein already contacted you about "Oscar's Blue Bandana" that is on the ITA site already.

Ranger the Therapy Dog

http://www.bookemon.com/book_read_flip.php?book_id=1064647&check=845edbb-be0c9001058b-ba59fb7487842

Description by Diane Salazar and Michael Rapaport:

This is a heartwarming story created by the students of The Foundry Learning Center in New York City—an incredible group of children with autism or related developmental disorders who share a special bond with Ranger, a registered therapy dog.



Each week, Ranger and his handlers, Michael Rapaport and Diane Salazar, visit schools, hospitals, and wellness events across NYC to bring smiles, comfort, and connection. This book, written and illustrated with the students, celebrates kindness, inclusion, and the joy that comes from friendship with a furry friend.

100 percent of the net proceeds benefit New York Therapy Animals and Advocates for Children of New York, two organizations making a lasting difference in the lives of children and families.

All About Sadie

An alphabet book by Elissa Ruback
(Photo not available)

Elissa says, "Sadie and I have been team volunteers with New York Therapy Animals, an affiliate organization of Intermountain Therapy Animals, and the NYC affiliate of the R.E.A.D. program since 2016. As part of their volunteer activities they have visited schools and had young students read to them (well, mostly to

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Sadie), visited with college students during stressful times, children in mental health hospitals, or older adults in assisted living & memory care situations.

For the past 4 years they have volunteered at the New York School for the Deaf as a R.E.A.D. team. While neither of them speak sign language, with the help of interpreters (and very patient students, teachers and staff members) they are slowly learning.

As an end of year gift to the classrooms, Elissa made this alphabet book, using basic alphabet sign language images so the students can reminisce about their time with Sadie and use their own language. Needless to say it was a big hit.

In their free time they love to bake (Sadie mostly watches), take naps, and explore their neighborhood by going on long walks with Sadie's younger dog sister they adopted a few years ago, Jessie. They both love peanut butter as a special treat, though Sadie takes hers plain and Elissa prefers hers with jelly on toasted bread.



Oscar's Blue Bandana

Another NYTA member, Wendy Goldstein, has written about her Oscar, a playful and talented Havanese dog, who loves to make people smile by showing off his many tricks. When he is given the chance to become a therapy dog, this loving pup is delighted by the idea of spreading even more joy. But on

biggest fear.

Will Oscar be able to overcome the challenge so he can follow his dream?

