

Classroom dogs

Therapy dogs teach without speaking Monday, March 1, 2010



By:

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CLEVELAND, Tenn. — Daryl and Larry know a lot about Helping Paws, Healing Hearts.

The pair, a set of Labrador mixes, are canine partners in the program that Amy Hicks began five years ago to inspire children to respect others, behave and face even really tough times.

“We provide educational, social and therapeutic programming,” Ms. Hicks said Friday during a program at Blythe-Bower Elementary School.

Fifth-grade teacher Tammy Dale said Larry and Daryl bring a calming effect to the classroom.

“It truly opens up (students’) creativity and lets them think,” she said as her students began a writing lesson.

Daryl lay on the floor, accepting petting from students who answered questions correctly. Larry had pulled the early shift that day, and Daryl took over after lunch.

Ms. Hicks said the dogs also work with her during individual counseling and on character education topics.

Ms. Dale said some of the children have known Daryl and Larry since preschool.

Some of the fifth-graders said Friday they have a favorite, but most liked Daryl and Larry equally.

“They are both kind and loving creatures,” said Nathaniel Benton as he, John Samayoa and Tanner Owensby joined their classmates to learn about writing.

“I like both because they are friendly and help out,” said Taylor Branson as she and Eddie Shalchick, Leo Garrison and Meagan Thurmond concentrated on their writing.

Helping Paws, Healing Hearts began as one of the many programs funded by Cleveland’s federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. That grant ended last year, and Ms. Hicks now plans to seek another source for grants.

The Cleveland City Council last week voted unanimously to support the program.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Helping Paws, Healing Hearts is a nonprofit program certified through Therapy Dogs International offering educational and therapeutic programs for schools, after-school programs, churches, juvenile facilities and Head Start. More information is online at www.helpingpawshealinghearts.com



Staff Photo by Randall Higgins/Chattanooga Times Free Press

Amy Hicks makes a point about writing as Daryl the dog, Taylor Branson, center, and Leo Garrison pay attention during a fifth-grade class at Blythe-Bower Elementary School.

1970s vs. today