Holiday BARK

Los Angeles Public Library, Palms Rancho Park Branch

Children

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Free

Byline

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Children read holiday stories to four dogs from the BARK (Beach Animals Reading with Kids) reading dog program. The dogs (Molly, Nico, Nigel and Destry) came dressed in their holiday finest and enjoyed listening to the stories with their owners. The children in attendance had the opportunity to pet and cuddle with the dogs while reading to them. This program is geared toward pre-readers and readers, children aged 3 to 10.

Advanced Planning

The goal of this program is to encourage and promote literacy. Kids tend to view dogs as non-judgmental and are therefore not intimidated to read aloud to them. According to the BARK website, “A study at UC Davis (Feb 2010) showed that kids in reading dog programs increase their reading skills by 12 percent to 20 percent over kids not in a reading dog program.” The program is supported by parents and educators because it encourages reading out loud, which is crucial to learning.

The dogs from the BARK program have been coming to the Palms-Rancho Park Branch Library approximately every three months since April 2011. Even though the reading dog teams have changed over the years, we usually are able to have about three to five dogs per program. Each time a BARK program is scheduled, a theme or popular dog-related book series is highlighted. Some examples include: Garfield, Henry and Mudge, Scooby-Doo and Snoopy. We also did a Halloween BARK Spooktacular where children read slightly scary stories to dogs in costumes.

In order to get as many teams as possible to attend a program, I email the current BARK volunteers (along with Josie Gavieres, who founded BARK in 2007) about two months ahead of time.

Marketing

Our Holiday BARK program was held Dec. 4, 2015. I advertised the program using in-house marketing, the internet, fliers and a school visit.

About two months before the program, I promoted it on the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) website. I also distributed and posted fliers throughout the library.

Three weeks before the program, I sent emails to two different groups (parents/guardians of storytime and school-aged children). As the date got closer, I sent reminder emails.

Some additional advertising targeted families of one of our local public schools, Clover Elementary, by posting the program on the school's eblast and newsletter. I also did a school visit, where I spoke to an assembly of about 700 people, put fliers in the teachers' boxes and gave them some fliers to send home.

The marketing was very successful. Twenty-one children attended the event, which was the perfect number for this kind of program. Keeping the group around this size allowed all the children the opportunity to spend quality time with each dog team.

Budgeting

This is a free program because BARK is an all-volunteer, nonprofit program offered throughout Los Angeles and Orange County. BARK’s 150 dog-and-handler teams are dedicated to encouraging children to improve their reading skills and build their self-confidence.

Day-of-event Activity

Each reading dog team gets their own station. The stations comprise a rug with chairs around it and a selection of themed books. Although the dogs are certified therapy dogs, it is helpful to separate them from each other. The set-up can be done quite efficiently with only one staff member, but an additional staff member will help make the set-up go faster. **(See photos under Videos and Images at right.)**

Program Execution

For all BARK programs, families are encouraged to come anytime and stay as long as they want during the hour timeframe.

Each dog team has bookmarks with their dog's picture on it; after a child finishes reading to a dog, he or she gets a bookmark. This way, children are encouraged to read with all of the dogs and collect the different bookmarks.

Twelve girls and nine boys attended the Holiday BARK event. This is the perfect amount of attendance because each child was able to get personalized attention and time with their dog(s) of choice. If any of the children in attendance were too young to read on their own, older children or the dog owners would read to them.

Parents/caregivers were asked to sign a BARK liability release sheet and sign a photo release form. **(View the release form under Attachments at right.)**

Advice

This program is an amazing free literacy program for any public library to replicate throughout the country. Since 2011, when I first introduced BARK to LAPL, it has expanded into 20 branches.

Reading dog programs can be implemented in a variety of different ways. For example, a dog team could attend a dog-themed storytime for pre-literacy skills or could be regularly scheduled for private one-on-one sessions for reluctant readers.

If your library is located in Orange or Los Angeles county, you can find out more about BARK at their website. If your library is outside of the area, R.E.A.D. (Reading Education Assistance Dogs) is the nationwide program or just searching for "reading dog" in a search engine can help you find a similar program in your area.

For more information on how to get started, check out the Reading to Dogs website.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document
bark_release_form.doc
Document
bark_flier.pdf
Document
holiday_bark_flier.pdf
Download this Program as a PDF

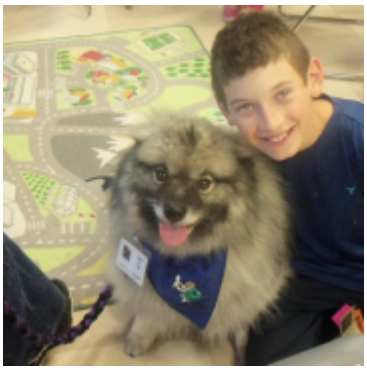
- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images









Image









Image





More Programs

Jul 31, 2012
Children (9 and under)+ |
Image



Early Literacy Programs for Your Community

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Dec 17, 2012
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
Image



Partnerships for Pet Therapy Events

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Apr 4, 2014
Adults (21 and up)+ |
Image



Off Campus Outreach: Lessons from World Spay Day Pet Fair

Audiences:

Audience
Adults (21 and up)
Mar 24, 2015
Children (9 and under)+ | $
Image



Animal Fair

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational