

Volunteer Spotlight

Carolyn Miller



Carrie Miller grew up in Southern California. As an adult she and her son moved to Northern California where she lived on a ranch and raised horses. Carrie became a dedicated foster mother and eventually adopted four daughters. After some time in Northern California, Carrie moved to Roseburg, Oregon so her children could be closer to her other family members who had relocated north. Carrie now has eight grandchildren and two more on the way. She met her husband and moved to Hillsboro where she decided to begin doing volunteer work with her dog Bogz.

Carrie and her dog have been Montebello Homework Club volunteers with Bienestar for about one year. Carrie felt that Bienestar was the best fit for Bogz, but it is not the only place where they volunteer together. Bogz is a certified Therapy Dog trained to make people feel good. “Just the sight of an animal can have positive effects for people in stressful or lonely situations,” says Carrie, “and it also encourages the children to read.” Bogz has to renew his Therapy Dog certification every two years.

Registered therapy dogs and their handlers can be a very helpful in advancing the literacy skills of children. They help kids’ improve their reading skills in a way that is fun and different for the children. They are also effectual in encouraging children to read out loud who are below the reading level of their peers. Children who are not confident readers are often more likely to feel less reluctant to work with an animal than a person. Before Bogz started coming to Homework Club, Impact NW came to Bienestar with a puppeteer troupe called Kids on the Block to teach the children how to behave around dogs. Because there are no dogs allowed in buildings, many resident children don’t get the chance to be around them. The children were taught how to treat, approach, and pet



the dogs. They also brought a therapy dog for the children to spend time with, although some were too frightened.

When Bogz started coming to read with the children, reading sessions were held in the Bienestar office separate from Homework Club. One child was too scared at first to read with Bogz, or even to come close to him. After time and patience on the part of Carrie and Bogz, she began to feel more comfortable and eventually started to read with them regularly.

Carrie and Bogz come to read with the children Mondays and Wednesdays. The children enjoy reading to the dog and there is always a line to read with Carrie. Reading to a dog is a great motivation for the children. While they are reading with Carrie and Bogz they are focused and calm. Recently Carrie has started training her other dog Lucy Liu to become a therapy dog and she gets to practice at Homework Club.

Carrie not only donates her time to Homework Club, she has also helped Bienestar to receive book, food, and game donations. Recently she has begun doing some bead work with the Homework Club Kids as well. Her hard and noble work has helped to make the Montebello Homework Club successful.

