



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 23, 2022

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## **Hand in Paw Offers Free Summer Reading Program and Debuts Little Library to Help Prevent Summer Learning Loss**

**Birmingham, AL:** For the first time ever, Hand in Paw hosted a summer reading program for K-5<sup>th</sup> grade students at their campus every Tuesday and Thursday in June and July. To encourage even more reading, the nonprofit recently held a small ribbon cutting ceremony for their new Little Library which is open to the public 24/7.

During the summer months, many school children experience what is commonly called the “summer slide” and return to school having lost some of the knowledge they gained the previous school year. To help combat this learning loss, Hand in Paw offered free 30-minute one-on-one reading sessions with their Therapy Teams this Summer. The program was called *Come, Sit, Stay Read!* and was open to the public every Tuesday and Thursday in June and July at Hand in Paw’s campus.

Students who participated in the program experienced the joy and positive motivation that reading to a nonjudgmental furry friend provides. In addition, all kids received a Hand in Paw reading activity bag and bookmark punch card. Students who attended 3 sessions or more received a “pawtographed” book from a Hand in Paw therapy dog!

Heather Messer, local 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher and mother states, *“This was a wonderful program to get struggling readers to come out of their shell. Even a child who doesn’t love to read will enjoy this activity. I saw my own two children and was in awe watching the joy reading to Fletcher brought to them. They don’t even realize how beneficial this is!”*

Another way Hand in Paw promoted reading this Summer was by debuting their very own Little Library which was generously designed and built by Hand in Paw volunteer, John Bassler. The library is dedicated in memory of Allie Foster, the beloved dog of Hand in Paw Development Director from 2018-2021, Ashley Foster.

The Little Library is located at Hand in Paw’s campus entrance and hosts books of all reading levels. Local children and families are encouraged to take books home to read any time and leave books in the library for other kids as well! John plans to build more Little Libraries to be placed at different Hand in Paw program partners.

To commemorate this new reading initiative and to debut the Little Library to Ashley Foster, Hand in Paw hosted a small ribbon cutting ceremony on July 25. Ashley notes, *“I am blown away by the generosity of Therapy Team volunteer John Bassler and the Hand in Paw staff. HIP will always have a special place in my heart, and I can’t think of a better way to honor my dog Allie’s life. She loved Hand in Paw and now she will be a part of HIP’s mission forever!”*

By engaging local students and families in educational activities this Summer, Hand in Paw hopes students started the school year on the right paw!

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#### ABOUT HAND IN PAW

With a mission to improve human health & well-being, Hand in Paw is Alabama's premier Animal-Assisted Therapy provider and a national leader in this growing field. Hand in Paw's professionally-trained volunteer handler and animal Therapy Teams help improve people's day to day lives in several medical centers, schools, and human service organizations throughout North Central Alabama and Tuscaloosa. Our volunteer teams make thousands of beneficial visits through community events and participating facilities each year, helping countless children with special needs, at-risk youth, struggling students, and people with chronic and terminal illnesses. At no time has Hand in Paw charged for its services. For more information, visit [www.handinpaw.org](http://www.handinpaw.org).