

Her 5th graders it's a lesson in love!



A strong bond of love grows over the year



"The pups and kids have a calming effect on each other," says Holly with her latest furry student, Stella

After years of hosting a school Service Dog Day, veteran teacher Holly Sjögren wanted to do more. So she became a puppy raiser for Guide Dogs of America. But one of the rules was that she couldn't leave her four-legged trainees home alone... the pups would have to come to school with her. It turned out to be a wonderful learning experience—for the kids *and* the pups!

"He's here! He's here!" the group of fifth graders excitedly called out as their teacher, Holly Sjögren, walked with their new classmate across the Hope View Elementary School playground in Huntington Beach, California. New students didn't usually get such a boisterous welcome. But Luka wasn't just any new student. He was a fluffy black Labrador and a Guide Dogs of America puppy in training.

For years, Holly's fifth graders had been raising money for Guide Dogs of America (GDA), ever since a class reader included a story about a blind woman and her guide dog. At the end of each school year, they celebrated Service Dog Day and GDA would visit with some pups and the kids would present their donation.

Then, five years ago, a GDA worker mentioned they could always use more puppy raisers to teach obedience and provide socialization to prepare the pups for their future role helping someone in need.

Holly, a lifelong dog lover, was intrigued. But she had one concern. The pup would have to stay with her at all times. A visit was one thing, but could she have a dog in the classroom all day long, every day?

When Holly asked the principal if it would be possible, he remembered how well the students interacted with the pups. "Let's give it a try," he agreed.

Teacher's pet

"He's not here to play," Holly explained after letting each student pet Luka. "From now on, you need to ask permission before you pet him—especially when he's

raise service pups—

wearing his work vest. He's here to learn, and we need to teach him to be the best dog he can be."

Luka spent much of the day lying at Holly's feet. Then during recess, to help him learn to ignore distractions and follow commands, Holly circled the playground while the kids played. She took him down crowded hallways as the kids rushed to lunch. He also accompanied the class on field trips and sat on the sidelines at soccer games. Luka was always the model of good behavior.

And so were the students.

Being respectful, responsible and helping others—these were ways students earned "Making a Difference" tickets. With 25 tickets, you got your picture taken with Luka. For 30, Holly and the pup visited your classroom, and with 50, you received a special Guide Dogs of America plushie.

That year, acting out and other classroom disruptions dropped significantly throughout the entire school.

This worked out even better than I could have hoped, Holly thought, and helping to train a pup became part of her curriculum.

Community of caring

The following year, the class welcomed a yellow Lab named Harry.

The first few days of class, one student, James, who is on the autism spectrum, isolated himself from his classmates and refused to go near Harry. But after a few days, he timidly patted Harry's head as he walked into class and the nuzzle that he got changed everything. From then on, James was first in line for morning puppy pats.

"He joins in more at home now too," his mom couldn't stop thanking Holly. "You have changed my child's life."

Another little girl was so anxious about school, she tearfully refused to come inside. Until Holly and Keeper, her third trainee, came outside to invite her in. The girl's tears stopped, she dashed inside and later told her mom, "When I get anxious, I look at Keeper and he makes me feel so much calmer."

So far, Holly and her students have worked with four pups, and three other Ocean View District schools and a district administrator also now have pups in training. Meanwhile, Holly and her kids have welcomed their newest pupil, Stella.

"They love her already and can't wait to help her learn," says Holly. "It's a wonderful learning experience—for the kids and the pups! Together, they are making a difference in someone's life!" —*Bill Holton*

"Together, students and the puppies are making a real difference in someone's life"



Science says: Dogs boost success by...

1 Relieving stress!

Spending time with a canine companion creates a dramatic reduction in stress that lasts up to 10 hours, say researchers in the journal *Stress and Health*. They found that even a brief interaction tamps down the production of *cortisol*—the stress hormone that hinders blood sugar—controlling insulin and triggers fat deposits around the belly.

2 Increasing focus!

Scientists have found that the presence of a therapy pet in the classroom has proven to increase engagement and improve memory. In fact, a study at Georgia Southern University found that pups in class leads to improved gross motor skills and higher literacy rates.

3 Jump-starting joy!

A study conducted at the University of Maine found that participants who spent time with a dog experienced boosts of cheerfulness and feelings of well-being. The best part? All it takes is 15 minutes of puppy love to bump up levels of happiness and satisfaction while nixing negativity.



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