

## RESCUE READERS

Kids and animals - they go together. So, one Metro East animal shelter decided to make the most of it!

Helping Strays, a no-kill shelter in Monroe County, IL, started the *Rescue Readers* program. Kids of all ages are welcome to visit the shelter and read to the animals. Individuals or groups show up at designated days and times, bring (or borrow) a good book, and find a shelter friend. Then, the bonding begins.

Younger readers are encouraged to stop by the collection of superhero capes and choose one to wear while they read. "They are like superheroes, super readers!" says Shelter director Bill Dahlkamp. "They get to make themselves stand out in a positive way."

It is a mutually beneficial relationship. The animals love the attention from their special visitors, and the kids enjoy reading to an appreciative and non-judgmental audience. "It's a different way of getting the kids to do something maybe the teacher or a tutor might not be able to do," says Dahlkamp, adding, "It's also great for the animals. Maybe if they were abused, or just shy or lacking confidence - having that repeated exposure helps tear down the walls for the animal."

Mary Potts, also with the shelter, helped start the *Rescue Readers* program. She says it has helped in another critical way. "When you walk through shelters, the animals are excited to see visitors. This program truly helps with teaching them to become calm. It helps socialize our animals, which only helps them get adopted much quicker, which is the main goal."

For more information or to find out how you can help, visit their Facebook page or website: [helpingstrays.org](http://helpingstrays.org).