Paws for Youth
AMAZING PETS. AMAZING OUTCOMES.

PET THERAPY **PUP**DATE

NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2026

When Students Fall Behind in Reading

Alex smiles when he sees his new friend Carmel, a golden Australian Shepherd mix. He pets her soft fur and gives her a high five.

Then he makes a startling announcement: He read a whole book to his little brother at home.

Alex's story could have gone differently.

A shy boy, the first grader would retreat even further into himself anytime his teacher pulled out a book. And with 20 other students in class, the teacher couldn't spend much one-on-one time with him.

But supporters like you stepped up.

Educators say first through third grade is for "learning to read," and fourth grade is for "reading to learn." The literacy skills youth build early often determine how they perform later — and whether they graduate. But **only 36%* of Arizona third graders read at grade level.**

Thanks to your generous support, Paws for Youth provided Alex with a supportive, one-on-one space to read aloud to a trained therapy pet and dedicated volunteer.

When he first arrived at our program, he revealed he didn't know how to read — and showed no interest in books or Carmel. By the end, he eagerly picked out books, scooting up beside her for story time.

Thank you for helping Arizona youth like Alex meet their full potential. We couldn't do it without you!

*Source: Center for the Future of Arizona. (2025). Arizona Progress Meters: Third grade reading by subgroup.

INSIDE | CELEBRATING LIVES CHANGED IN 2025!

Your 2025 Impact at a Glance

Served

16,778 youth

enough to nearly fill Footprint Center

Completed

1,702 program visits

by 163 volunteers and 147 registered therapy pets

Partnered

with 101 schools, nonprofits, & behavioral health facilities in central and southern Arizona

Improving Accountability to Our Donors

By Cara Kiggins, *Chief Programs Officer*

Over the last two school years, Paws for Youth has made huge strides in improving the way we measure program effectiveness. **We can now report with greater confidence that our programs do produce the trauma-informed outcomes for which they are designed.**

Prior to the 2024-2025 school year, our data gathering was inconsistent across different programs and we relied heavily on one end-of-semester volunteer and partner survey. Program measurement has to start somewhere, but with the right support I knew we could improve it.

We have since rebuilt our measurement system around the trauma-informed framework that guides our programs. The core of the new system is a **structured visit report that volunteers complete after every visit.** The report captures behavior observations and lets us track change over time for youth from their first session to their last.

The visit report is paired with two other data sources: youth feedback gathered at the end of each Paws for Resilience session, and end-of-semester evaluations completed by partner teachers, site staff, and volunteers. Now more frequent data aggregation and an annual review mean we can adjust volunteer training, partner support, and program design to better meet emerging needs.

Your faithful giving and technical assistance from Jessica Flowers and A Creative Leap made this advancement possible!

Sample Program Metrics for 2025

Animals, Books & Children

Point-in-time snapshot: Percentage of partner programs that report significant or moderate improvement

READING CONFIDENCE: 92%	READING MOTIVATION: 97%

Paws for Resilience

Point-in-time snapshot: Percentage of visits where most, nearly all, or all youth showed improvement

STRESS RELIEF: 89%	COMFORT: 97%

Change over time: Share of visits where behavior was rated most or all

	FIRST VISIT	LAST VISIT	PERCENTAGE CHANGE*
RESILIENCE	74%	97%	+31%

**Percentage Change reflects the proportional increase compared to the original number (first visit), rather than the raw difference between the numbers.*

Paws for Youth

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What percent of AZ 3rd graders read proficiently?

Answer inside!

About Paws for Youth

Paws for Youth (formerly Gabriel's Angels) provides ongoing pet therapy services to children and teens ages 6-18 who are recovering from traumatic events.

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pawsforyouth.org

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