

## LIFE WITH LITTLE ONES

## SHORE FAMILY FUN

# Read aloud to Rover

New Staten Island OutLOUD program links children, therapy dogs to promote reading

**ALL SHORES** — Getting your kids to read during the summer months is usually a challenge for most parents.

Knowing how important it is to strengthen a child's reading skills, even if school is out of session, Staten Island OutLOUD founder, **Beth Gorrie**, has launched a new program to help parents get their kids turning pages. "Paws and Read OutLOUD for Kidz," a recurring event, aims to encourage Island youngsters to read books, poems and short stories — not to themselves, but to non-judgmental listeners — therapy dogs.

"Well, I cannot completely take credit for this because **Doris Nielsen** and **Carol Belmonte**, two of our most active volunteers, first thought about the idea. We were sitting here in the Nature Center with their dogs, **Sweetie Pie** and **Gracie**, who are also active participants of Staten Island OutLOUD, and they had the brilliant idea that kids should read to dogs," said Ms. Gorrie.

Last Thursday, the Paws



SHERRINA NAVANI

The kids, however, got the entertainment coming and going. Those who read enjoyed building their reading skills and being more in tune with reading to an audience that was very engrossed — the dogs. Gracie believes she's human, and according to Ms. Belmonte that's what makes the pint-sized Dachshund so special.

"Children, they all want to touch her. It is just wonderful to see how it brings the look of joy to their faces, and the kids really enjoy petting her because she is so silky smooth," said Ms. Belmonte.

**Jada Harper**, 9, from Stapleton, could not stop talking about how much she now loves to read to

gory.

This is the reason why Ms. Nielsen brought her dog, Sweetie Pie. Ms. Nielsen knew that her beautiful boxer, rescued from the street, would bring joy to the faces of many kids and adults.

"Well I could see that Sweetie Pie was going to be a great therapy dog and I always wanted one," she said.

The three dogs passed a rigorous test to qualify as therapy dogs. The exam tests a dog's ability to be gentle in the face of large crowds of strangers, unusually loud noise and exposure to food.

Staten Island OutLOUD's mission to spread the love of literature, Islandwide, continues to thrive thanks to special events like "Paws and Read Aloud for Kidz." Their next scheduled kids reading session is tomorrow, at 1 p.m. at the Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. The program is free and it is a different, dynamic way to take your child's reading skills to a new level.

If you are interested in



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHERRINA NAVANI

**Jada Harper**, 9, of Stapleton, reads to a dachshund named Gracie as part of the "Paws and Read OutLOUD for Kidz" event sponsored by Staten Island OutLOUD.