

A Puppy Tale

On the surface, Puppy appears to be the average stuffed pooch; however, when on Lea Silverburg's hand, Puppy transforms from lifeless plaything to interactive teaching tool.

Silverburg, facilitator for the Families First agency in Salisbury, North Carolina, is the proud owner of Puppy. The volunteer totes Puppy to various elementary schools across the county, teaching valuable lessons on conflict as she goes.

Puppy educates students on how to interact with peers and others in healthy and productive ways. Students are encouraged to use their words and to control their anger impulses.

To Silverburg's surprise, this stuffed pup is not only a hot conversation topic at school but also in students' homes. Many students love relaying Puppy's adventures to their families.

While out in the community, many students have approached Silverburg regarding Puppy. Silverburg says one of the funniest student run-ins was at a local laundromat. Two young girls approached her asking about Puppy's whereabouts. Luckily, Puppy was in Silverburg's car so she happily brought the pooch in for the girls to play with.

One of the girls' mother approached Silverburg. "So you're the puppy lady," the woman said laughing. "I have a daughter in the first grade, and I have heard about you every week for a year and a half. My daughter loves you, and she loves Puppy. She always tells me if I get upset that I need to put my hands on my tummy and say, 'Calm down.'"

The woman also spoke of the song Silverburg and Puppy taught the Kindergartners the previous year. "My daughter has taught that song to me," the woman continued. "You're doing a great job. The kids are learning so much, and everybody loves you."

Sufficed to say, Silverburg left the laundromat beaming. Who would have thought that a stuffed animal, encouraging words and thoughtful lessons would impact children this greatly.