



Bronx kids enjoy peers and pets summer program

By Amy Yensi | August 9, 2018 @8:41 AM

There are two types of teachers at the Summer Arts Day Camp at PS./M.S.218.

Some walk on two-legs, others walk on four.

Faith J., just 10 years old, says interacting with the pets at the free five week camp helps her self-esteem.

"The bad things I think about myself have gone away because the dogs calm me down and it's like me going around talking to dogs it helps me," she said.

WHEDCO, a community organization for women and children, started the program this year.

It gives about a dozen elementary school students in Concourse Village, the unique assignment of training therapy dogs.

Program director Jamie Yellen says the goal is to teach kids that they do not have to act out to get attention.

She says the dogs are used to teach children positive ways to express their feelings.

"They are already walking away just more confident in themselves, just calmer. We have seen some kids that normally don't like to talk very much and are very closed off and we've seen a big change in that they are feeling more outgoing with their peers but also with adults," Yellen said.

The children work together to help the dogs get through several obstacle courses. They're encouraged to talk out their problems and find solutions.

The peers and pets are also here to lend an ear.

Nine year old Nasir B. says on days when talking it out is tough, having the dogs around makes it easier.

"If there was anything that you thought was your fault, when you think about the dogs and you play with them, you know that it wasn't your fault because you feel happy. You feel positive and all that negative energy that you had, goes away," he said.

Next week the children will visit an animal shelter to see dogs in need of forever homes and to learn about empathy.

Link: <http://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2018/08/09/bronx-kids-enjoy-peers-and-pets-program#>