

## For the Love of Riley

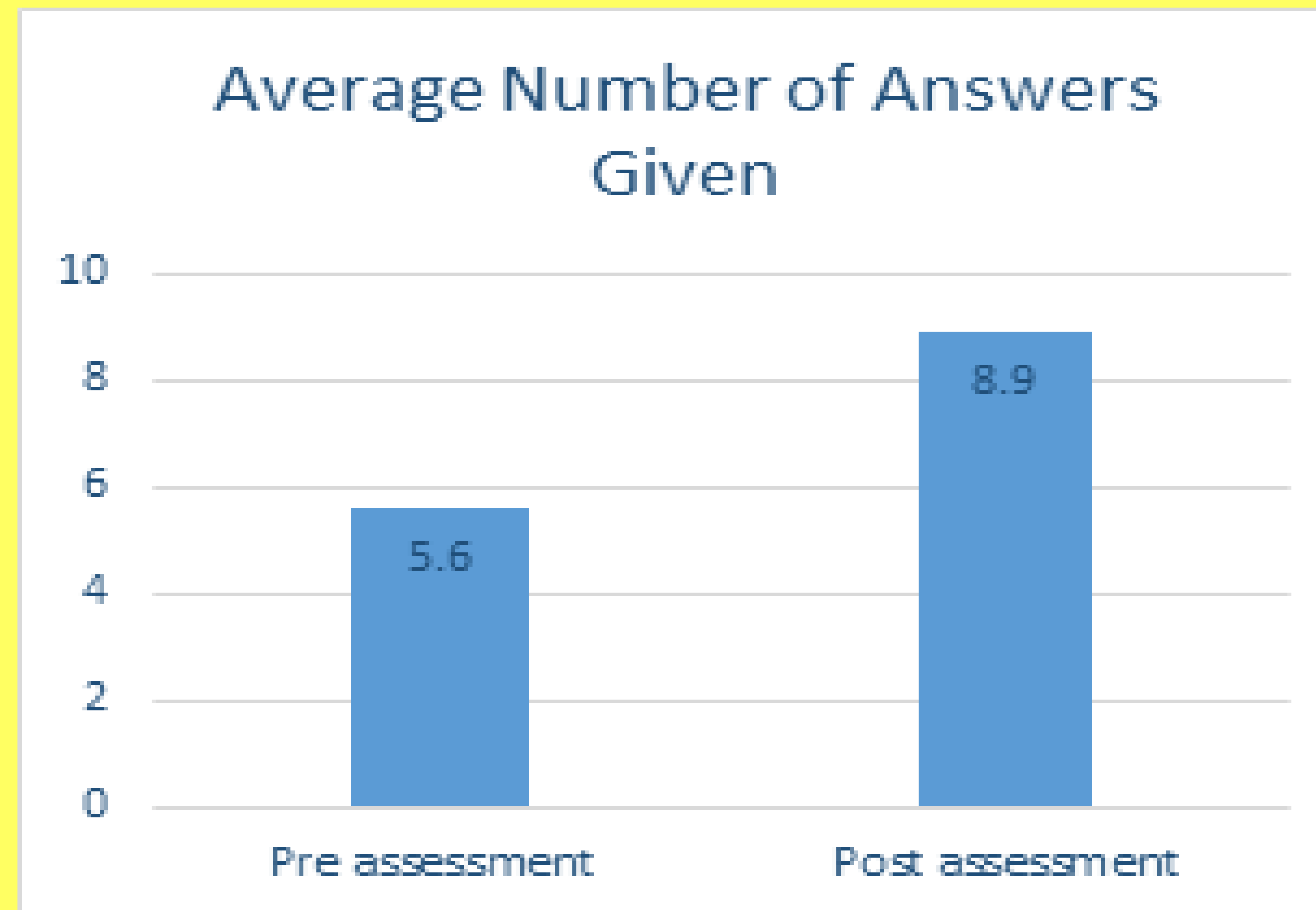
A study of the impact of animal interactions in the development of empathy in children

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3-5-year-old children were presented with pet care curriculum centering on the physical and emotional needs of, Riley, a live dog. Children interacted with the researcher/teachers and Riley twice per week; and they were given open-ended opportunities to engage with pet-themed props allowing them to “play out their internal dialogs”.

**“It’s not that he tells us, it’s just that he ‘tells’ us.”**



Children’s social and emotional behavior was assessed using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment© (DECA) both before and after the 6 week research period. Children were also asked pre and post assessment questions about a fictional dog “Daisy” and what she would need or want to be happy and healthy.

**Pre: “Snacks and drinks napping”**  
**Post: "a leash, a dog collar with her name and Miss Rachel's name"**

Interview data showed gains in the number and complexity of children’s answers about what “Daisy” would need or want to be happy and healthy; direct observation of children’s play behavior provided anecdotal evidence of enhanced “humane” behavior with their pet care props; no significant difference was seen through the DECA assessment (which was expected as no children were determined to be “at risk” regarding social and emotional development).



Respectful Interactions with Pet → Empathy Building → Humane Dispositions and Behavior