

Piglet Teaches STC's Early Childhood Class

Southeastern Technical College had a celebrity on campus on March 11, 2024, in Swainsboro's Boatwright Auditorium. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program welcomed Piglet and several of Piglet's Inclusion Pack to teach that day's curriculum – defining diversity and inclusion in terms children can understand.

The Piglet Mindset lesson was about positivity and never giving up. Lesson plans and curriculum were structured around Piglet's story.

Piglet, a chihuahua-dachshund mix, is a blind and deaf dog well-known nationwide. Piglet has been on CBS Evening News with Lester Holt, ABC's Good Morning America, the Hallmark Channel, and other networks. Piglet's story has also been in People Magazine, Psychology Today, Ink Publications, The Bark Magazine, and The Crossroads Magazine – to name a few.

Mrs. Kay Wilson, an Early Childhood Care and Education instructor at STC, connected with Piglet's mother, Dr. Melissa Shapiro, DVM, and was informed that Piglet would be touring from Maryland through Florida. Rather than a web meeting request, Dr. Shapiro generously offered to make a stop at Southeastern Tech's Swainsboro campus.

Dr. Shapiro and her husband, Warren, live in Connecticut and have eight rescued dogs and one rescued parakeet.

"I am very honored to have had Piglet and his brothers and sisters visit STC," said Mrs. Wilson. "Our ECCE students and childcare center have been learning about Piglet's story through his book *"Piglet Comes Home,"* which teaches acceptance, inclusion, and empathy. Piglet's mom is a veterinarian and is also a lifelong animal welfare advocate

who visits classrooms and bookstores with Piglet and their other dogs to teach children about the Piglet Mindset program, which includes CASEL Competencies – The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.”

Piglet Mindset® Educational Program is a collection of lesson plans and educational materials to teach children to:

- Face challenges with a positive attitude
- Build on current skills with determination, resilience, and perseverance
- Accept individuals for who they are and include them despite their differences
- Show empathy and compassion towards others
- Be kind and considerate to all people and animals

Piglet was rescued from a hoarding situation in Georgia, along with his mother and three littermates, in 2017. When Piglet, at only 1.5 pounds, didn't respond to visual or auditory cues, the rescue quickly realized that Piglet was deaf and blind.

The Shapiros planned to foster Piglet until he found a forever home, but they turned into his forever home. Piglet was officially adopted in May 2017.

After months of screaming and severe separation anxiety, Piglet got into a routine of snuggling, playing with his dog siblings, taking walks down the street, traveling to house calls with his mom, and visiting his best human friends at the animal hospital.

In attendance were the Early Childhood Care and Education classes, the three-year-old class from STC's Childcare Center, local Head Start, where some of the ECCE students work, and STC faculty and staff. As part of Piglet's Positive in Pink Tour 2024, the children wore pink shirts and pink headbands to resemble piglet ears.

Piglet demonstrated spunk and showed the audience what it

means to face fears. He uses the three senses he has to live a happy, meaningful life despite his disabilities.

Dr. Shapiro pointed out how Piglet's noise twitches, unlike most dogs, to best use his sense of smell. Piglet's nose also points up because "that's what blind dogs do," she says. She explained that tracking smells is a way Piglet learned to navigate their backyard and spoke of the importance of not adding items to the backyard now that Piglet understands his surroundings. With experience and trust, Piglet can now run and play without crashing into things. He can even find the stairs to their home by feeling the bottom slate with his paws. Once he feels the mat at the top of the stairs, he's using his sense of touch to know the door is there. Dr. Shapiro says Piglet wasn't perfect at this for a while and needed help, but he learned to climb the stairs and get back inside.

Piglet's Inclusion Pack includes Annie, Evie, Zoey, Dean, Susie, Gina, and Lucy, and all were adopted with unique personalities. Georgie is the newest member of the pack and is another deaf and blind rescue.

Once Piglet had an understanding of how kind his new family was, he knew he would be safe. Dr. Shapiro showed the children video clips of how the other dogs have come to accept Piglet being a little unusual. For example, Zoey taps Piglet to let him know when she wants to play.

Piglet's book taught the children that tapping was a way to communicate with Piglet, but they also witnessed how blowing into Piglet's face was a form of communication.

Dr. Shapiro said, "We are having an amazing Southeast Piglet tour. The enthusiasm for our Piglet Mindset program and the warm welcome we have received everywhere we've been is truly humbling. The love for little Piglet and our other dogs is heartwarming. The children we've met love him because he's

adorable and because he teaches them to be positive and kind. Many Piggy friends traveled for hours to meet us. They tell us how our little pink man brightens their day, helps them through illness, and inspires them to move forward from major life obstacles. Piggy is completely energized by all the action. It's beautiful to see him doing his thing!"

Dr. Shapiro made a promise that Piglet would have a meaningful and productive life – and he certainly has! Through Piglet's two books, he was introduced to the world and into classrooms. The Piglet Mindset® Educational Program is a free downloadable curriculum that teaches a growth mindset. The organization also raises awareness and funding for special needs dog rescue groups and other animal welfare causes.

Piglet's visit to Southeastern Tech was funded by Piglet International, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation.

"We have very generous supporters who donate to facilitate Piglet Mindset visits in schools. It's important to give credit and thank those who have contributed to our organization to make this possible," said Dr. Shapiro. "We donate books to classrooms and aim to donate \$1,000 each week to rescue organizations."

Piglet has attracted over 700,000 followers across social media platforms. Please visit www.pigletmindset.org for more information on the Piglet Mindset.

Photo: STC Early Childhood Care & Education Instructor Kay Wilson, Piglet's mother Dr. Shapiro, STC Dean of Business Technologies & Human Services Gina Robison